

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Courtney Lam, age 13, from "Second Chance Ride," page 23

POMPEII'S LAST DAY

It's a normal day in ancient Rome, until Mount Vesuvius erupts

SECOND CHANCE RIDE

A young man is wrongfully accused; how can he clear his name?

Also: Illustrations by Jasmin Bowers

MAY/JUNE 2005

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The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 5
MAY/JUNE 2005

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site at www.stonesoup.com.

Story and poem authors: Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us in four to six weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

Book reviewers: If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write editor Gerry Mandel. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. Enclose an SASE for her reply.

Artists: If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what you like to draw most. Enclose an SASE for her reply. We need artists who can draw or paint complete scenes in color. Please send color copies of your work, not originals.

All contributors: Send us writing and art about the things you feel most strongly about! Whether your work is about imaginary situations or real ones, use your own experiences and observations to give your work depth and a sense of reality. Send your work to *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address and phone number.

Cover: Courtney Lam, of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, likes to draw and paint scenes with people and animals, especially horses. In addition to her beautiful illustrations for "Second Chance Ride" (page 23), Courtney also illustrated "Good Night, Son" for our November/December 2004 issue.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I would just like to say that I *thoroughly* enjoyed Marian Homans-Turnbull's "Water All Around" [September/October 2004]. The plot was very realistic, and I almost thought, after being drawn into the story, that it had truly happened. Additionally, I thought the illustrations by Jasmin Bowers for Sophia Veltfort's "The Sea Lion Waltz" [November/December 2004] were captivating. Anthony Cali's book review of *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* [September/October 2004] inspired me to read the books. Congratulations!

WHIT ALEXANDER, 9
Washington, Maine

New illustrations by Jasmin Bowers appear with the story on page 5 of this issue.

"Losing Grip" [January/February 2005] was unbelievable! When Julia Duchesne talked about Corey almost falling, my heart leapt and I felt as if I were one of the characters, striving to help her. Carolyn Burnett drew wonderfully and really captured the moment. I felt the fear and the relief of Marisa, Alex, Corey and their parents. Julia and Carolyn, you deserve two thumbs up!

TESS WEINER, 11
Wilmette, Illinois

I really enjoyed Nicole Guenther's poem, "Neverland," in the September/October 2004 edition. It was so beautiful, and it flowed together so well. It really hit me as a masterpiece. I hope in the future I will be able to read more of Nicole's creations.

TESS PLANT-THOMAS, 13
San Diego, California

Nicole's new poem, "Frog Song," is on page 32 of this issue.

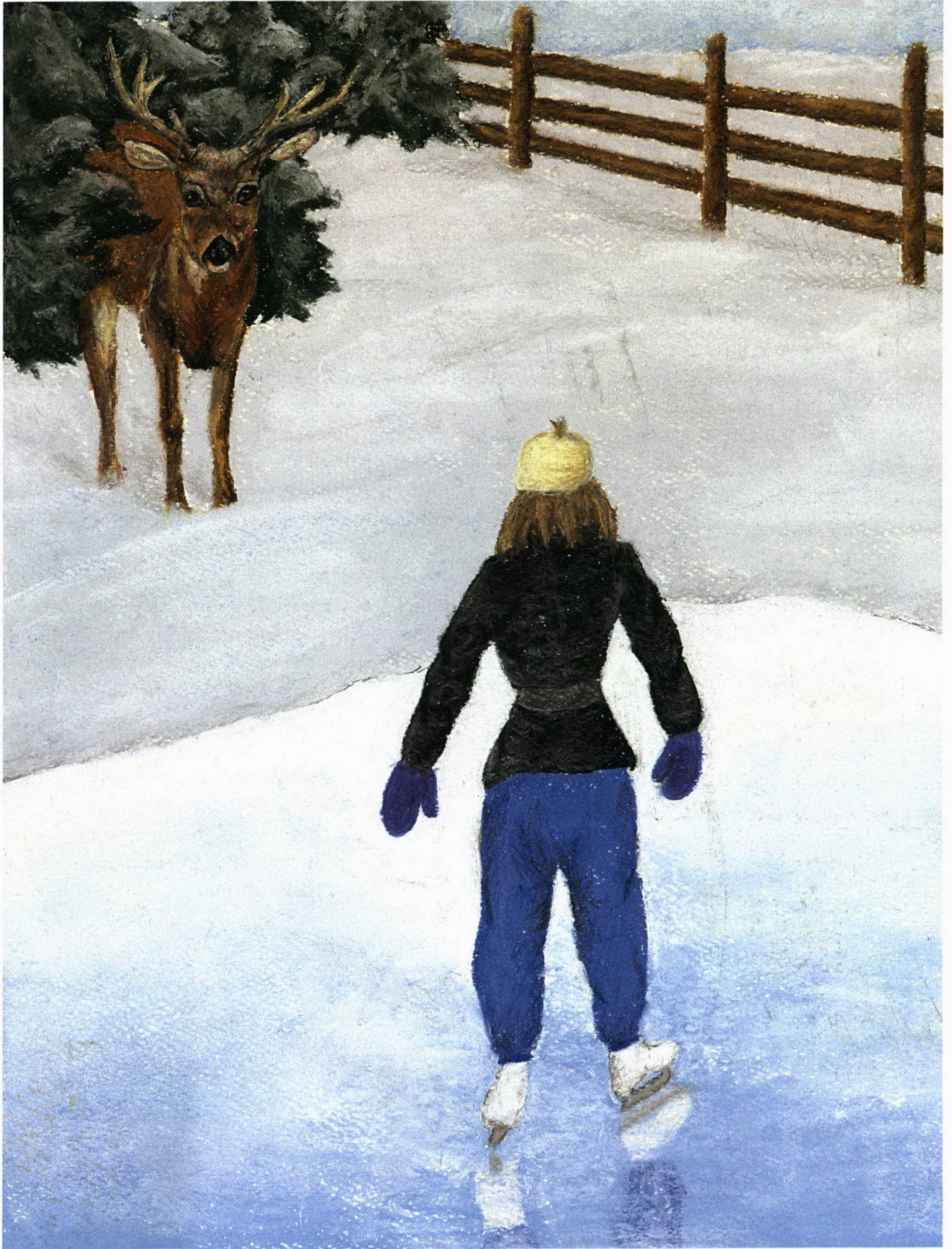
I live in probably one of the smallest towns in the USA—Three Lakes, Wisconsin. And when you live in a town like this, where the nearest mall can be found three hours away and you practically know the local disc jockey, you need a few things to keep you connected with the world beyond what you know to be true right there, right then. *Stone Soup* does that. In fact, I look forward to checking the mail each day to see if I have received a new issue. My whole family takes turns reading it, and we all like the art and the poems and the stories and the reviews. Even though I enjoy reading everything, I believe my favorite story appeared in the November/December 2004 issue—"Good Night, Son," by Felix Zhang. It almost made me start shedding tears onto the pages. I also enjoyed "Star of David" by Emily E. Hogstead, in the 30th anniversary edition [May/June 2003]. Good job, Emily! A few of my favorite artists are Dara Green, Laura Walker, Claire Neviaser (I liked your picture on the cover of the July/August 2004 magazine especially), Martin Taylor, Jessie Hennen, Nina Prader, Chloe Scheffe, Jasmin Bowers, Sheri Park, and Devon Cole. Keep putting together magazines, *Stone Soup*. You really do a good job of helping young artists follow their dreams!

KATIE FERMAN, 12
Three Lakes, Wisconsin

Katie's poem, "You . . . and Your Dad," appeared in our May/June 2004 issue.

All the work mentioned in The Mailbox can be found on our Web site: www.stonesoup.com.

Note to our readers: Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We'd also like to receive anecdotes (150 words or less) about interesting experiences you'd like to share with our readers. Send letters to The Mailbox, Stone Soup, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, address, and phone number.



She knew she was to go with him, follow him

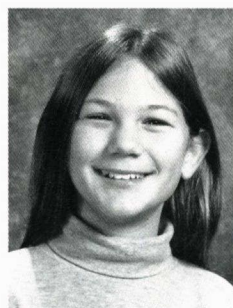
Samantha and the Stag

By **Laura Booth**

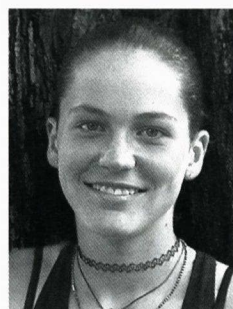
Illustrated by **Jasmin Bowers**

A WHITE TAIL BOBBED in the bushes and Samantha's ice-skate skidded to a messy stop. The girl made no sudden moves. Slowly, she lifted her head and took a cautious step towards the edge of the pond, which lay in the center of the pasture. The animal before her, a cinnamon-colored stag, stood motionless. She wished to gape openly, to move towards him and stroke his flawless coat, fondle his large ears, touch his immense antlers and follow him wherever he would lead her. She felt somehow connected to the creature, and wanted to be nearer to him. Instead, for fear of frightening the animal, she tore her gaze from his form and advanced another step, gliding smoothly towards the edge of the ice.

The deer looked as though he was preparing to bound away, but he could not seem to decide whether or not to stay or go. He stood, frozen for a few more moments of indecision, swaying one way as if to say "I will leave," and the other way as if to say "I will go." Samantha, trying to avoid looking at the creature and afraid to move any further in his direction, clicked the blade of her ice-skate on the ice. The deer turned his delicate head and shook his antlers vigorously at her. The one small crime she had committed, the clicking of her ice-skate blade, had led him to a decision. He pivoted towards the woods, springing over the field's rear gate. Trotting a few graceful, prancing steps, he halted and swung around to face her, willing her towards him, pawing the ground for emphasis. She knew she was to go with him, follow him. He wanted to take her somewhere, and the



Laura Booth, 11
Coatesville, Pennsylvania



Jasmin Bowers, 13
Washburn, Wisconsin

connection she felt to him was strong. She ripped her focus away, briefly reminding the panicking part of her, the part of her that said the buck would not stay, that she would return soon. If she was wrong, the deer would have fled by the time she got back and she could forget she had ever seen him, or even pretend he had been a figment of her infamous wild imagination.

Purposefully, she strode up to the fence on the opposite edge of the pond enclosure, climbing over it and stepping into her paddock. A spotted pony with mischief in his eyes stared at her plaintively. He was looking for food or a treat and saw no reason he should be subtle about his begging. Sam ignored him and gathered a bridle and riding hat off hooks in the small stable. She put the bridle on, fastening the straps and buckles with the ease of many years of practice. Then she fed the pony a sugar cube from her slushy pocket. He eyed the sugar analytically, and extracted it from her palm. Apparently he did not think highly of wet sugar. Carefully, she walked him to the place she had last seen the stag. There he was, holding his head gallantly, as if posing for a photograph he had waited ages to have taken. Sam got as close as she dared and swiftly mounted her pony.

This was enough to startle the buck and off he dashed, leaving a trail behind him as he made his way through the stiff grasses of winter. Sam felt an urge she could not control. She had to follow him! The connection she felt to the animal strained,

and, with a wave of her arms, Samantha and her pony were chasing after him. They hightailed it over the field fence and raced across the next pasture, following the trail the stag left. Astonishingly, the buck allowed the pair to get increasingly closer. Soon they were inching up alongside him, getting nearer every second. Finally, when they were running nose to nose, the deer distanced himself slightly. Samantha took the hint. The deer did want his own margin of personal space, but did want them to follow him. Sam understood and continued along peaceably behind him. She had a creeping sensation, however, that the comfortable pace wouldn't last long.

Soon enough, she found her unpleasant assumption to be true. She, the pony, and the buck were headed directly for a frozen stream. This posed great danger for the threesome. The stream could not be trusted with their weight! Obviously the deer did not see it, and even with much patience and an enormous amount of coaxing, her pony refused to slow. She wanted to explain the danger, but couldn't! Her pony was dipping into a peril he could not see, a peril he could not even acknowledge, as he didn't know it was there! In a panic, Sam yanked on the reins, snapping them from side to side. With her pony's attention captured, she leaned back and dragged her reins above her head, lifting her pony into a half-rear; the only sensible way to help him recover his footing and keep him out of trouble. The buck, seeing the stream only as he

came upon it, made a scrambling effort to stop but failed. His front legs slid off the bank and onto the surface that was the frozen creek. His haunches groped through the snow, searching for a grip, but, over all of the protests of the rest of his body, momentum slid his rear onto the ice as well. Now he had to muster all his strength and any balance he possessed to stand. With a strangling grunt and a heave he was on all fours once more.

Before Sam could take note of what was happening, the stag was racing along the creek. With much splaying of his legs and many close calls, the buck made his way along the stream, somehow managing to stay upright. The girl, astonished at these proceedings, sprang into action. She snapped her reins from left to right and achieved a quicker pace. The clever pony, although wary for their safety, was curious. A mischievous ripple sped through his body and, disregarding the instructions he had been given earlier, which mentioned none of what he was about to do, he leapt off the bank of the stream. The pony landed, spinning and falling onto one side. However, he regained his balance quickly and swiftly pushed himself along to catch up with the buck.

Samantha found herself in a fury. She was appalled at her pony's lack of obedience, which had put them in a tight spot and sacrificed their safety. She was just sorting out her plan of action, a way to discipline her pony, when her thoughts were interrupted. Under her the ice was moaning and groaning. What would have

been a deep pool, had it not been frozen, was cracking beneath their feet. With a tremendous creak the ice started to toss them from one side to the other, throwing them terribly off balance. The girl shrieked in panic and tried desperately to grasp her bearings. Her pony, sensing her indecision, bounded towards the stream's edge and sailed onto the ground. The deer followed effortlessly behind them, showing off his astounding ability for jumping.

Now that they were safe, the girl glanced back at what had been a solid surface under them only seconds ago. A gray torrent of water was rushing its way along the creek, straining its way over rocks and under branches to reach the faraway place where its journey would come to an end. Sam cringed and turned from the sight, unable to watch or think about what could have happened to them had they been stolen by that stream's powerful current. Instead of lingering, Samantha followed the rather bedraggled deer as he led his way from the stream. Encouraged by the buck's fearless stride, the girl and pony were led along for a while more, chasing the stag enough to dry them from their wet encounter. They tumbled along through the underbrush, plunging over logs and leaving a trail of eddying autumn leaves behind them. Samantha's whoops echoed through the forest. Finally, the buck showed signs of slowing. Although neither the pony nor his rider noticed the stag's subtle signs between gallop and canter, they did notice when he slowed until they themselves had to downgrade their



Samantha and her pony sidled nearer to the buck, just enough to see what he saw

pace. Suddenly, they were halted altogether, the deer having stopped to perch on his hooves like he was preparing to take flight. He was peering at something Samantha failed to see, and his ears were pricked towards the woods that lay ahead.

Samantha and her pony sidled nearer to the buck, just enough to see what he saw. When they did, she and the pony stopped, awed to a halt by the magnificent sight. In front of them was a large clearing. A slope led to a stand of pines that in turn spread from the far end of the place all the way around. The area, filled by the pines with the scent of winter, a clear, crisp fragrance, was a long oval. A large pond lay at its center. The entire clearing was covered in a glittering layer of snow Samantha had not noticed falling. Off to one side was a pointed stone that gracefully left the ground to come to a point at its peak. She entered the beautiful space, trudging up the perfect sledding hill at one end so she would have the full view of the spot. She wished only to see its beauty fully, to admire the spot in its glorious entirety.

Having forgotten the deer, she glanced over to where she had last seen him. To her great surprise, the stag had vanished! She turned around as far as she could, searching for his sleek form, but finding it nowhere. Samantha and her pony walked down the hill, rather bewildered at the sudden disappearance of the buck. They walked down the opposite side from

which they had come, stumping past the large pointed stone.

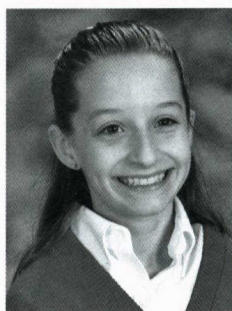
Something on the rock caught her eye, a series of markings scratched into letters. She slid off her pony to read the words engraved so artfully. "You have completed a small journey not many are chosen for. It has been hard but enjoyable as well. If no one claims this place for theirs, it is yours." Samantha looked around. In a gesture that seemed rather pointless but meaningful, she opened her arms; "Does anyone claim this spot for their own?" She laughed at her own silliness, but quieted when the wind blew in what sounded very much like "No." Fluidly hopping on her pony's back, Sam and he raced around the large place once. It was theirs now, and deservedly so. She was determined to make sure all creatures that resided in these woods knew it. Halting at the entrance to this place, this place that was now hers, she pondered all the wonderful moments she would have in this place.

It would be her place to think, a place to be calm, a place to play and a place to rest. She and her friends would sled down the hill, skate and swim on the pond, and find all the adventures they could in this spot. She let out a whoop and turned towards the path home. Before charging away, the girl glanced back to her secret haven, her sanctuary. Where the pointed stone had been moments before, she saw a finely carved stag. Samantha smiled. ❁

Pompeii's Last Day

By Rosalie Stoner

Illustrated by William Gwaltney



Rosalie Stoner, 11
Gretna, Louisiana



William Gwaltney, 9
Englewood, Colorado

SYLVIA WIPED HER SWEATY BROW with the back of her hand. She dipped her fingertips into the marble fountain and relieved her discomfort by plunging both feet into the refreshing water. How she longed to be able to swim on this hot day. It wasn't fair that her four brothers got all the fun.

"Sylvia! Oh Sylvia!" came a loud voice. "Help me with the babies! Do you not want some lunch?" A middle-aged frowning woman strode out, juggling two small children whose angry voices raged like the thunderstorms that often poured out their rage on the city of Pompeii.

It was August of 79 AD and a miserable time to be alive. The heat was unbearable, at least to the young girls, who were not old enough to frequent the public baths alone. As she shouldered Lucius and Marcella, her young brother and niece, Sylvia thought of how nice a bath would be just now. She tried to banish the thoughts of cool water and a quiet atmosphere as the two babies began howling again.

"Hello, Sylvia!"

Sylvia spun round. "Flavia!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been?"

Flavia relieved her friend of Marcella and answered laughingly, "Visiting my uncle. He has received an import of fine silks and would like your opinion!"

Sylvia flashed a brilliant smile. "All right," she said happily. "When shall I come over?"

"Right now, of course!"

Marcus Flavius Primus, Flavia's only uncle. Old Helen, his faithful servant, came out to greet them and bore off the now-smiling babies to play in the garden. Sylvia and Flavia hugged Flavia's Uncle Marcus and followed him into a dimly lit shop. "I have just received some fine silks from Persia!" he said. "They ought to bring a good price. What do you girls think of them?"

Sylvia blushed and said happily, "I think they are the most lovely in all Pompeii!" Suddenly, she stumbled backwards against the rolls of cloth, upsetting one.

Flavia and her uncle laughed.

"Sylvia, you silly thing! The finest silks in Pompeii will be ruined at that rate!"

But they were not laughing long. Flavia lurched suddenly and fell to the ground. Then her uncle was thrown from his feet.

"Not another earthquake!" said Marcus.

Sylvia heard the babies crying. Her first thought was of them. She got to her feet with difficulty and staggered out of the room. Clutching furniture and walls, Sylvia managed to make it to the kitchen where old Helen was curled up in the corner with Marcella and Lucius. "Helen!" she whispered, fearfully. "What's happening?"

Helen shook her head. "We'll be all right. It will soon stop." Marcella whimpered quietly.

Flavia came crawling into the room, her rosy complexion hidden by a rag which she held to her face. "Sylvia! Helen!" she coughed, grabbing Lucius. "Mount Vesuvius! Hurry! Come see! Hurry! We

must get away!" With another fit of coughing, Flavia stumbled out of the room.

Helen's lip began to tremble and her face to drain color. "Come on!" shouted Sylvia. "No time to waste!" She led the trembling old nurse outside along with the howling babies.

But neither Sylvia nor the nurse was prepared for what they saw next.

A violent tremor shook the ground, and Sylvia lost her breath as she hit the hard ground. Stinging pains were pounding her back and legs and the smell of smoke nearly choked her. Her brown curls were filled with what seemed to be little round stones. Then she looked up.

Sylvia stifled a gasp. Men, women, children were running, some without clothes, some dripping wet, others covered with ash and soot. The fruit vendor from early that morning was racing past her. Two soldiers, eyes wide in fear, fled down the street. Her own mother and aunt were rushing past now, turning every now and then to look back. Her father, Uncle Marcus, and a priest from the temple were fleeing with all their might. They didn't even notice her lying on the side of the road. The family chickens were winging their way through all the commotion. Everyone was running, running towards the harbor.

She noticed that the sky was dark and full of smoke that seemed to be rolling ever closer. But when she lowered her eyes, the worst sight of all met her eyes. Mount Vesuvius, the huge mountain be-

neath which the town was nestled, was spewing ash and pumice all over the place, and it showed no signs of ceasing.

Sylvia screamed as small bits of pumice came hailing down on her from above. Where was Flavia? Where were the babies? Where was Helen? What would she do? She curled up on the corner of the street, her heart filled with terror. It will stop sometime, she reassured herself. It will stop sometime.

Suddenly, a strong arm grabbed her by the shoulder and jerked her to her feet. "Come on, little girl. It isn't safe here. You'll be buried alive!" Sylvia shrank back in fear. The man hurried on. Sylvia, by some instinct, began to run also.


Amidst the cries of horror and astonishment, Sylvia heard a dismal wail from the other side of the street. "Help! Help!" it cried. "My mother is gone!" Sylvia was touched with pity for the child. She stopped running and turned to the direction of the voice. The crowds of people had become even thicker and the stampede was even more awful.

Dodging between the frantic multitude, Sylvia made her way to a small boy in a white tunic, rubbing his eyes and sobbing disconsolately. Sylvia stooped down. The boy still didn't take notice. She enveloped him in her arms. "Don't cry. I won't hurt you. Come here, I'll take you to your mother."

She tore a small piece of cloth from her dress and covered the boy's face to pro-

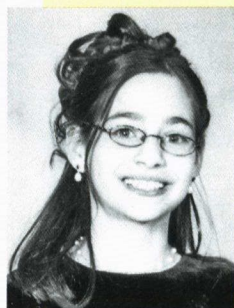
tect it from the ash. Then, mustering all her strength, lifted him up to her shoulder and began to run again. The boy, who was no more than a baby, really, beat his fists against Sylvia. "Put me down! Put me down!" he cried, kicking at the same time. Sylvia took no notice. She knew that if she heeded his pleas, he would never see his mother again.

Once a terrified slave, blindly running, knocked her down and sent her sprawling. He ran on without so much as a glance downward, his only thought to get to the harbor. Sylvia rolled over and got up, keeping her pace. But gradually, her strength began to fade. Her arms were weakening and the child was getting heavier every minute. Her legs shook, her pace slowed, her head throbbed. Finally, she dropped in the streets, too exhausted to continue.

Sylvia never knew what happened between that time and when she woke up in a cool bedroom. Maybe it was all a dream, a nightmare too awful to think about. But no, a gray blanket of ash still covered her body. Sylvia dismally recalled the terrible adventure. With a sigh, she rolled over and hid her face in the fresh sheets. She heard someone murmur, "She's awake," and a familiar voice saying, "Poor dear! What an awful experience for one so young!" She sat up in bed with a jerk, and recognized Helen, Uncle Marcus, Flavia, and family. Then, with a smile she saw the little boy and a young woman. Somehow, she knew everything would be all right. 

Grandpa's Memories

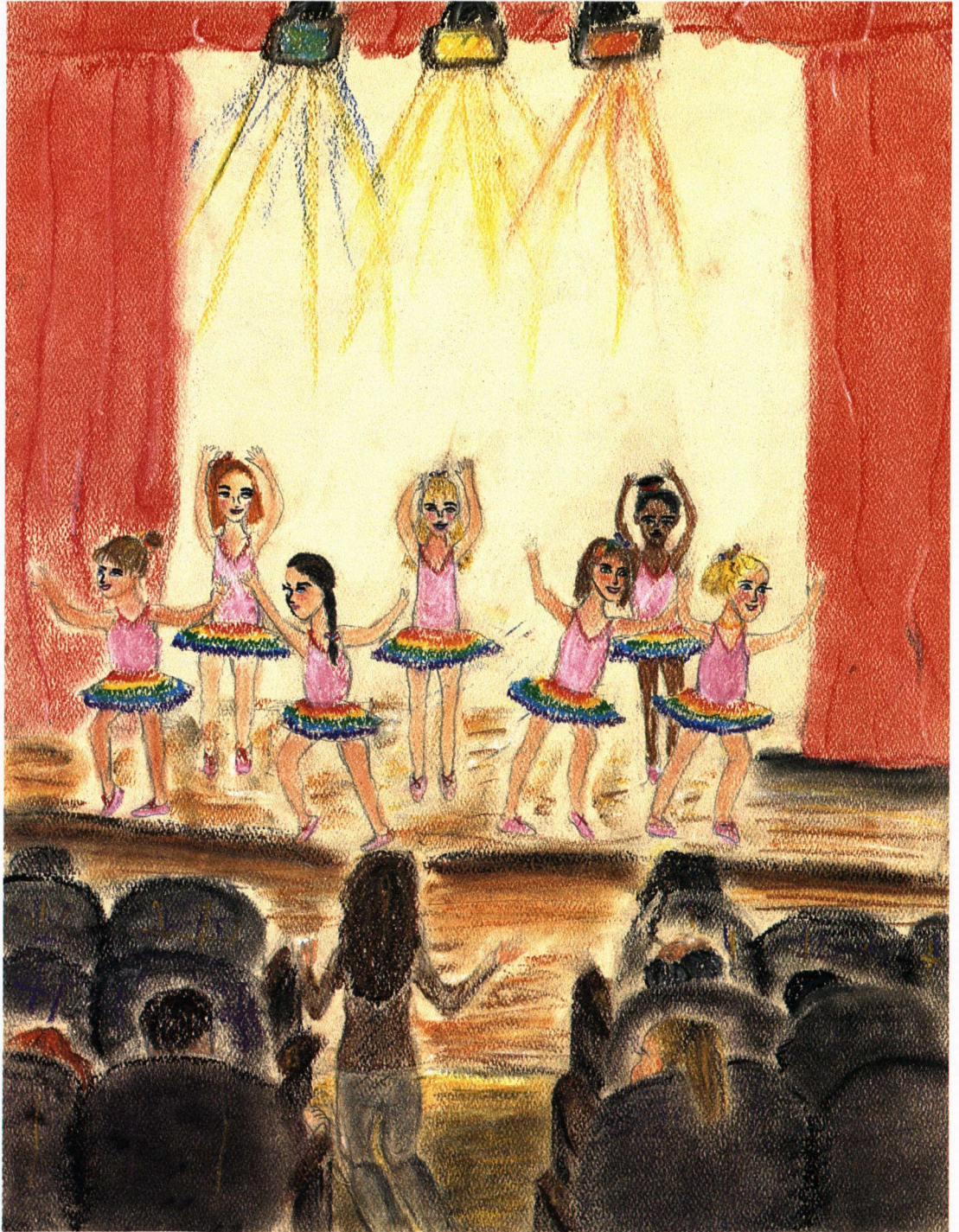
By Mushka Bogomilsky



Mushka Bogomilsky, 10
Millburn, New Jersey

One day my grandpa
gathered me in his arms and said,
"Come, sweetie, let me tell you something."
And he got a faraway look in his eyes
as he told me of life with Hitler in power.
He told me of being rounded up
and separated from his family
when he was still young;
to the left, or to the right;
to death, or to life.
He told of working hard, every day,
getting only a crust of bread
and a bowl of watery soup,
and of lying awake, every night, in fear.
He told of the nightmares, the killing,
the round-ups, the death.
He told of the lice, the typhus,
the sickness, the fear.
He told of the hatred for a nation,
and of praying for only the best.

He told of watching his friends and family die,
their ashes rising from the chimneys,
and not being able to do anything about it.
He told of hiking in the winter snow,
and the summer heat,
shoved by rifle butts
to an unknown destination.
He told of the Nazis' defeat,
and the Russians' triumph.
He told of the joy of being free,
and the sorrow of the knowledge
of being the only one to survive.
He told of going on,
despite the painful memories.
And when he finished,
he was in tears.
And all I could do was hug him.



I hope that Mother is proud of me

A Bouquet

By **Esther Lyon**

Illustrated by **Leslie Osmont**

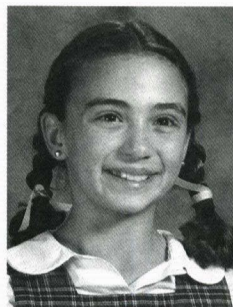
THE OILY PASTE ON MY LIPS tastes like dried lotion as my tongue shapes the outside of my shocking red lips. My grandmother applies the red tube that was once hers when she was my age. As she carefully brightens the pink shade of skin that covers my teeth, I feel grown up and professional, like a businesswoman or better yet, like a prima ballerina. Then I skip off backstage.

As the soft, soothing music fades, the perfectly postured ten-year-olds tiptoe off the stage. Behind them trails a mysterious blackness as the deep red curtains slide to meet the hard wooden stage. The teacher rushes my class of five-year-olds into two parallel lines. In front of me lies the empty stage, inviting me and my fellow ballerinas to dominate, within seconds. The uncomfortable feeling of the lipstick fades and the butterflies begin to settle in, fluttering as if they are contained in my stomach, and will do anything to escape. In the back of my mind, I hear the hushes and last-minute fixings of costumes.

One ballet slipper brushes in front of the other in time with the soft music playing throughout the high school auditorium. I look out into the audience in search of my mother and grandmother. All I can see is black, except for the occasional flash of a loving parent's camera capturing the moment of their child's first ballet recital. My body wants to dance. I don't have to think about what the next step will be. I let my body take control of my mind. The familiar face of my ballet teacher is visible. She is perched on her knees right in front of the stage. Her pink



Esther Lyon, 13
Newton, Massachusetts



Leslie Osmont, 13
Tinton Falls, New Jersey

cheeks, thick blue eye shadow and bright-colored lipstick stand out in the darkness. She motions the next step with her hands in case we forget. She raises her two pointer fingers up to her pink cheeks and emphasizes her cheesy smile. I know that I can't smile any wider. The smile on my face is twice as broad as hers.

What could make a five-year-old dancer any happier? I have my mother's full attention, I am wearing makeup like a big girl, and I am dressed in a pink leotard with a rainbow ribbon in my hair to match my tutu. A burst of satisfaction shudders from my pointed toes to my dirty-blond hair as a chill goes up my spine. I am so happy. I hope that Mother is proud of me. The music makes a subtle conclusion and I flutter off the stage like the big ten-year-old ballerinas did before me.

The whole dance feels like a blur, like when you look at your reflection in still water. As I step backstage, the smell of gooey chocolate-chip cookies fills the air. As I go to join my friends, my mind is at ease. I can't wait to see Mommy and Grandmother's faces; they will be so proud of me, their big girl ballerina.

Grandparents, mothers, fathers, siblings and friends start to pour into the room. Hugs are received. All I can see is pink and red roses, yellow daisies, sunflowers, buttercups, green stems and purple lilacs. The flowers perfume the theater like the smell of a spring day.

My eyes search wildly for my proud mother and grandmother. All around me I see each pink ballerina cradling her bou-

quet of flowers like a mother holding her precious child.

A sudden rush of panic fills my eyes. "Esther." I hear my name being called.

"Mommy," I reply, rushing into her arms as if I am a puppy running to receive a treat. My eyes glance over to my grandmother. Her hands are empty except for her handbag, which holds the makeup. My mother smells of citrus lotion, but the familiar smell of flowers is missing. There are no flowers. Was I not good enough? Did I mess up? Why didn't I get flowers? Do Mommy and Grandmother not love me? As these questions flow through my head, it feels like a big apple is beginning to form in my throat. The tears begin to stream down my pink cheeks. Each drop tastes like a salty glass of water. My arms are empty; I have no baby to cradle.

"Esther, sweetie, what's the matter? You were so good on stage, why are you crying?"

"Flowers," I said, as I started to sob uncontrollably. "Flowers, how come you don't have any flowers for me? Where are my flowers?" My disappointment shuddered throughout my body. I could hear the calm voice of my grandmother as she told me that she didn't know to bring flowers because it was her first time at one of my recitals; she just didn't know. Her words went in one ear and out the other. My mother also was upset and said that this was the first recital in our family and so she did not know about this tradition. She wished that the teacher or a friend

had told her beforehand. Why didn't they sell bouquets of flowers in the lobby? My mother scooped me into her arms. My tears got absorbed into her green knitted sweater as if it was a sponge.

As we walked out to the car to go home, my grandmother secretly picked a bouquet of flowers from the blooming rhododendron bushes on the manicured grounds. She told me that I was her perfect ballerina. This made the waterfall on my face run even faster. All that mattered at the moment was that I was the only performer who did not have any flowers.

As I look back on that day of my first dance recital, I realize that the bouquet my grandmother had picked for me was

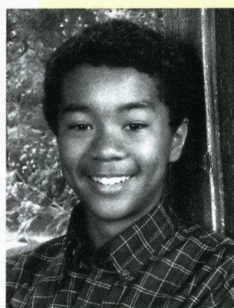
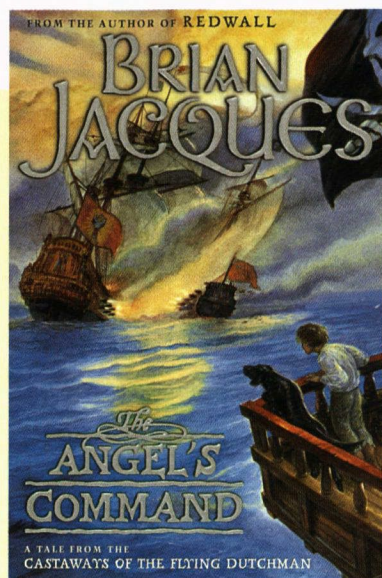
the most meaningful and loving bouquet that I would ever receive. Each flower that she picked was a flower of love. Ever since that day, my mother never attended a recital without a bouquet of flowers for me. I always accept the flowers knowing that they are in my arms because my family loves and cares about me, and wants me to be happy. I love cradling those bouquets. And if they should ever forget to bring flowers, I won't mind. I will appreciate that they enjoy watching me perform at something I love so much. The flowers in time droop and die, but those smiling, proud faces and complimentary words of love and admiration will remain in my heart and mind forever. ❀



Book Review

By Alexander J. Gore

The Angel's Command by Brian Jacques;
Philomel Books: New York, 2003; \$23.99



Alexander J. Gore, 13
Wheat Ridge, Colorado


I WAS EXCITED YET WORRIED throughout most of this book. When the *La Petite Marie* first set sail they were being followed by the *Diablo Del Mar*. I thought at first that the *La Petite Marie* was going to be caught, and then they might have been sunk. The little boy named Ben was a very smart person. Even though his body did not get older, he did. He was very wise and it was easy to see throughout the story. I always get told that I am very mature for my age. I tend to get along with older kids better than kids that are my age, so in a way I kind of act like Ben. I thought it was interesting when he thought of the idea for the *La Petite Marie* to sail into the rocks off course at nighttime to avoid getting captured by the *Diablo Del Mar*. When I went to a mountain training camp in September, we played Capture the Flag in the woods at night. It started to rain and it was hard to see. I found a little ditch that I could crawl in to get to the other team's side without being noticed. It worked for a while but I was eventually captured. What Ben did reminded me of that.

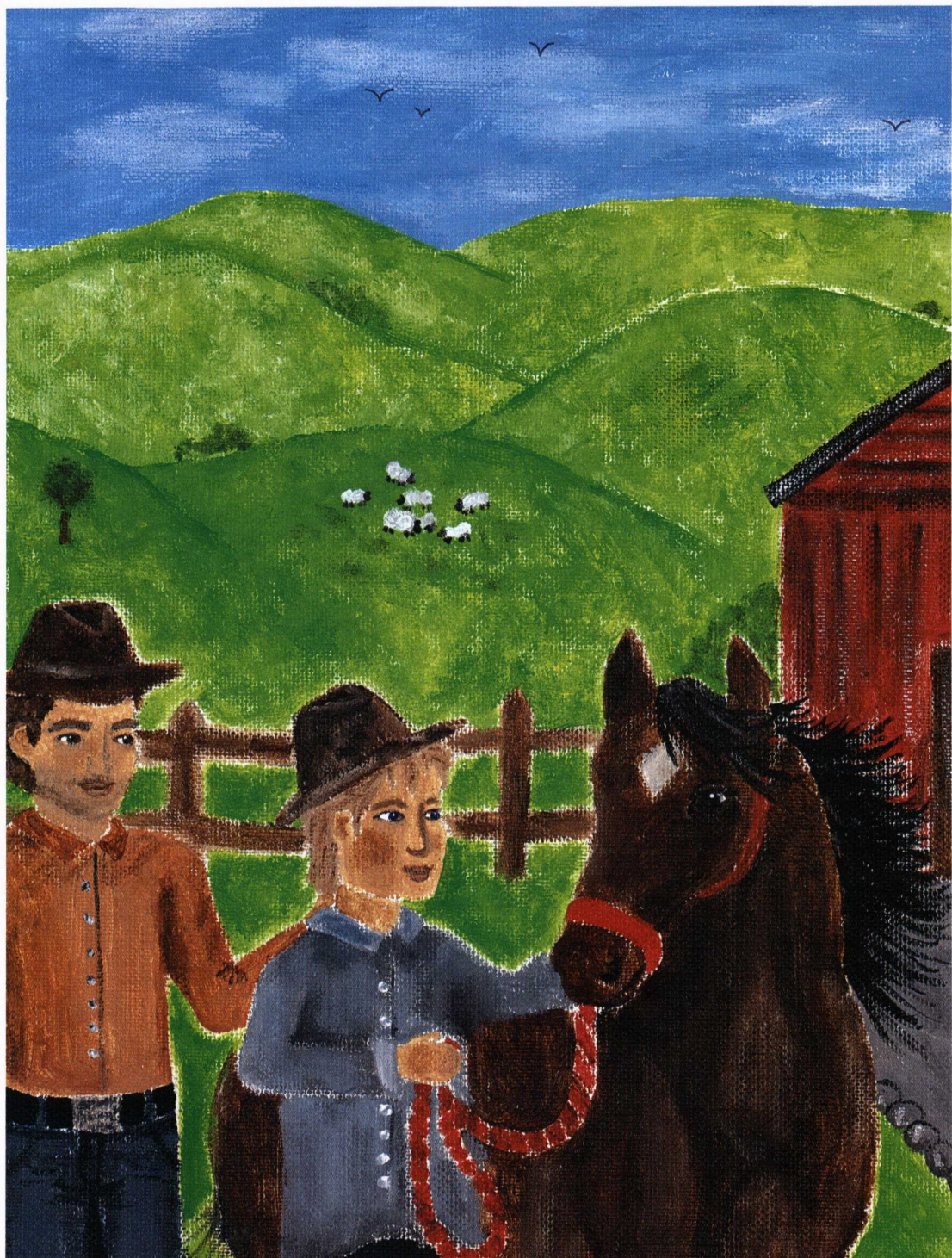
One of the most exciting parts of the story was when the *La Petite Marie* was attacked by the British privateer. I thought that the *La Petite Marie* would be sunk, but they managed to get away. The rear of the ship was blown away and a few men were

killed. The captain, Ned, and Ben were still alive. This reminded me of when America invaded Iraq. Many men died, including Americans. My brother went to that war and now he's safe at home.

My favorite character in the story was the dog, Ned. He was a grown black Labrador that was very intelligent. I admired Ned because he watched over Ben and was very protective. Ned and Ben had a bond that was like two brothers. They had the ability to communicate with each other telepathically. My brother and I live with separate parents, but we still get along just like two brothers normally do. I think we get along just like Ben and Ned.

Another one of my favorite characters was Thuron. He was the captain of the *La Petite Marie*. He was a kind captain who believed Ned and Ben were good luck. When he was in a bar, he was getting tricked by the captain of the *Diablo Del Mar*. When Ned and Ben walked in, Ben saw that the captain was being tricked so he put up all of his gold. Thuron won the bet, and that's why he thought Ben and Ned were lucky. He even yelled at his crew members if they yelled at Ben or Ned. He reminded me of my science teacher because my science teacher is the nicest teacher I have, and he respects all of his students equally.

Overall, I thought this was one of the most interesting books I have ever read. The characters were well thought-out and each had unique personalities, especially Ben and Ned. The characters remind me of people I know, so I was able to relate to them very well. I like how they have a brotherly bond which keeps them together. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading adventure stories. This story holds the reader's attention all the way to the end. 



"Paul, this is Jackie, one of our most trusted riding horses"

Second Chance Ride

By Elyse Nicholson

Illustrated by Courtney Lam

“YOU’RE FIRED!!!” Mr. Douglas said to Paul Greenhorn, a nineteen-year-old boy, after his barn had caught fire and burned to ashes. “I never want to see you on my ranch ever again!!!” he said as he walked off towards the house.

“But Mr. Douglas,” Paul said as he ran after Mr. Douglas, “please give me another chance.”

“No!” Mr. Douglas said, as he kept walking towards the house.

“But it was an accident,” Paul said.

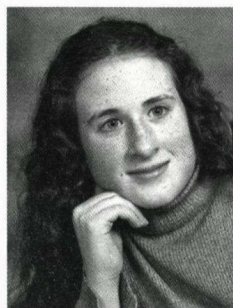
“No!”

“But I need this job,” Paul mumbled.

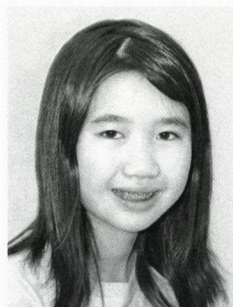
Mr. Douglas turned around real quick and said, “No! Now get off my ranch before I have you arrested for trespassing!” He then walked into the house.

Paul had no car or horse, so he just began to walk down the road. When he worked for Mr. Douglas he used one of his horses, but now he had nothing. Paul had light brown hair and stood six feet tall. His skin was tan and he wore blue jeans and a white shirt. His parents were killed in a plane crash, so Paul lived by himself. When he worked for Mr. Douglas, he always slept in the barn. He didn’t like sleeping in a house. He liked to be by himself.

Paul walked alongside the road a ways until he stumbled upon a ranch, with a sign on a fence that read, “In Need of Ranch Hands.” He walked up to the house and knocked on the door. A man answered the door and asked, “Can I help you?”



Elyse Nicholson, 13
Metamora, Illinois



Courtney Lam, 13
Vancouver, British Columbia,
Canada

"Yeah, I'm looking for a job and I heard you were hiring," Paul said.

"Oh, that's true. What's your name, son?" the man asked.

"Paul, Paul Greenhorn," Paul said.

"Paul Greenhorn! Sorry, son, I don't hire barn burners," he said as he slammed the door in Paul's face.

Paul then went on to more ranches but it was the same thing; they didn't trust Paul. Paul went to one more ranch and saw another sign that read, "Need Ranch Hands, Talk to Mr. Wade Sullivan." He walked up the driveway, walked inside the barn, and saw a man stacking hay. Paul walked up to the man and asked, "Mr. Sullivan?"

The man turned around and replied, "Why, yes. What can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for a job," Paul said.

"Well, you've come to the right place. Have you had any experience in this line of work?" Wade asked.

"Yes sir. I worked down the road for Mr. Douglas," Paul said.

"Didn't his barn just recently burn down?"

"Yeah, so I guess you heard. And guess you also heard that people said I caused it."

"Maybe."

"Well I'll be leaving now. With all you've heard you probably think I did it too," Paul said as he turned around.

"You're hired," Mr. Sullivan said.

Paul quickly turned around and said, "But Mr. Sullivan, don't you care I burned down a whole barn?"

"So?"

"So, that same thing might happen to you."

"Son, let me tell you something. I don't care what you've done. As long as you can put in a good day's work. It doesn't matter to me at all."

"Thanks, Mr. Sullivan."

"Please call me Wade."

"Thanks, Wade," Paul said as he turned around and started to walk away.

"Wait a minute. I don't even know your name."

Paul quickly turned around. "Oh, Paul, Paul Greenhorn."

"Say, do you have a horse?"

"No sir."

"Well I'll have to get you one from the pasture. Come on," Wade said as he walked out of the barn. Paul quickly ran after him. As they were walking out to the pasture, Paul noticed all of the trees and fields. He noticed how big the ranch was. And there weren't just horses at the ranch. Paul saw little chickens running around. He heard the cattle mooing from the field. He saw goats and sheep. In addition, he even saw a couple of pigs slopping around in the mud. When they reached the pasture Paul saw many horses running around. Two of the geldings were fighting and rearing up. It was neat. There were blacks, bays, and pinto-colored horses. He had Arabians, quarter horses, retired racehorses, and big draft horses on his ranch. Paul thought the ranch was amazing. Wade opened the gate and walked up to one of the Arabians, put on a halter and

lead rope, and brought her to Paul.

"Paul, this is Jackie, one of our most trusted riding horses," Wade said. Paul walked to Jackie and petted her on the neck. Jackie was a bay with black hoofs and black socks. She had a little white star on her head. Her mane and tail were long. When she walked, she walked gracefully.

"She's beautiful," Paul said.

"Come on, I'll show you where the saddles are," Wade said as he led Jackie into the barn. Paul couldn't believe how nice Wade was. Wade had it all; a nice farm, sweet horses and many animals. What more could a guy want? Wade took Jackie into the barn and tied her up to the stall.

"The saddles are in the little room over there," Wade said, pointing towards a little room next to the hay. "When you've saddled her up follow that trail over there. It will lead you to some broken fences. You'll find some new poles and wire there too. Good luck," Wade said as he walked out of the barn.

"OK, Jackie. Let's saddle you up," Paul said. Paul went into the tack room and came back out with a brush. He took the brush and brushed all the dirt off Jackie's back. He then went back into the tack room and brought out a saddle, a saddle blanket, a bridle and bit, and a pair of reins. He took the saddle blanket and placed it on Jackie's back, he then took the saddle and put it on top of the saddle blanket. He grabbed the bridle, put the bit in her mouth, and then slid the bridle up her head. He then took the reins and hooked them onto the end of the bit.

He tightened the saddle, untied her, and started down the trail. Along the trail, he saw many birds chirping away. The trail was full of trees. There were also little creatures, like rabbits and chipmunks. Paul was surprised when a snake slithered by and Jackie did nothing. He thought Jackie would be scared or something.

Paul rode down the trail a ways and then found the fences that Wade was talking about. Paul dismounted and tied Jackie to a tree. He walked over to the fence and found all the materials. He started by taking off some of the wire and then taking out the posts. He picked up a new one, put it in the hole, and tamped it in. He took the new wire and put it in the place of the old one. He then went on to the next broken pole, replaced that one, and then started stringing the wire again.

It took him the whole day, but he got all the fences fixed. After Paul had finished he untied Jackie and was about to mount up when he saw Wade riding in the distance. Wade rode up to him and said, "Hey, you want to come back to the house with me for supper? My wife can't wait to meet you."

"Sure," Paul said.

"Great. See you at the house," Wade said as he rode off. Paul mounted up and rode off. As Paul was riding along, he looked up and could see the sun starting to set. When he reached the house the sun was much lower. He rode up to the house, took Jackie into the barn, and unsaddled her. He put her in her stall and then put the tack away. He walked up to

the house and knocked on the door. Paul was expecting Wade to answer, but instead a beautiful lady came to the door and opened it, and asked, "What can I do for you?"

Paul removed his hat that he was wearing and said, "I'm looking for Wade Sullivan."

"Oh, you must be Paul. I'm Heather, Wade's wife. Come in," Heather said as she opened the door for Paul.

"Thank you," Paul said as he put his hat back on. Paul couldn't believe how big the house was. There were two cats lying on the stairs. The stairs led up to a big upstairs. Paul then walked into a large room with a big-screen TV and furniture. The last room he was in was the dining room; there he saw Wade sitting in a chair at the head of the table. The dining room wasn't very big, but it was bigger than what Paul had ever seen. The tablecloth was pretty and there were pots of flowers everywhere. Wade was dressed very nice. It made Paul feel a little uncomfortable.

Wade got up from his chair and said, "Well, Paul, sit down."

Paul sat down and said, "Thank you."

"So did you fix all of the fences?" Wade asked.

"Yeah, I did," Paul said. While they were talking Heather walked in and put some food on the table.

"You see, honey, that's what I like about him," Wade said to Heather as she sat down at the table.

"Well, shall we begin?" Wade asked.

"Honey, would you like to say grace?"

Heather asked.

"Sure," Wade said as he folded his hands and closed his eyes. "Dear God, we thank you for this food and we thank you for Paul Greenhorn, our new ranch hand. Please bless this food to our body. Amen." After Wade prayed Heather began to pass the food. That night for supper, they had fried chicken and mashed potatoes. They had a wonderful meal. For dessert they had homemade apple pie. After the meal Paul helped out in the kitchen with the dishes.

"You know, Mrs. Sullivan, I don't know when I've had such a wonderful meal," Paul said.

"Oh, please call me Heather," Heather said.

"All right, Heather, that was a wonderful meal. But I really must be going now," Paul said.

"OK, thank you for helping me," Heather said.

"You're welcome," Paul said as he walked out of the kitchen. After Paul left the house, he really wasn't sure where to go. He decided the best place was to go sleep in the barn. Paul never did have a home. At Mr. Douglas's ranch he just always slept in the barn because he felt most comfortable there.

WHEN MORNING came, Wade went out to the barn and found that all the horses had already been put out and all the other animals were outside too. The stalls were cleaned and the barn had been swept out. Wade couldn't believe his



"You see, honey, that's what I like about him," Wade said to Heather as she sat down at the table

eyes. He looked around and couldn't find Paul anywhere. So he saddled up a horse and rode out on one of the trails. He rode awhile and then saw Paul helping a little calf out of the mud. After Paul was done he was a big mess. Wade rode up to him and said, "I can see you've been busy."

"Yes, sir, I have," Paul said.

"I knew you were just what this ranch needed. You'll be receiving a raise at the end of the week," Wade said.

"Well, thank you, sir."

"No, thank you. Now I need to get back to the house. Keep up the good work,"

Wade said as he rode off. Weeks went by and even though the ranch was perfect already, somehow it looked a lot better than perfect.

ONE DAY WHEN Paul was unloading a wagon of hay, Mr. Douglas drove up in his fancy car. He stepped out of the car, took one look at Paul, and asked, "What in the world are you doing here?"

"I work here," Paul said.

"Oh you do, do you. Well, we'll just have to see about that," Mr. Douglas said as he walked up to the house and knocked

on the door. Wade answered the door and Mr. Douglas walked in. They walked into the family room and sat down.

"What can I do for you?" Wade asked.

"I'm going to be straight with you; why is Paul Greenhorn working for you?" Mr. Douglas asked.

"He asked for a job and I gave it to him."

"Did he tell you why I fired him?"

"Yeah, something about a fire."

"Exactly."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Douglas, I don't understand."

"He's set my barn on fire and he shouldn't be given the chance to do it again."

"That was just one time. Besides, it was an accident."

"Oh, one time? After my barn burned to ashes, I did a little research on your hired hand and it seems he's done it before."

"Was there any proof?"

"Except for the fact that he worked there, but isn't that enough?"

"I'm sorry, but all you've got is nothing. Now I suggest you leave."

"You can throw me out, but I won't rest until I've caught him. You'll be sorry," Mr. Douglas said as he left. After Mr. Douglas left, Wade went out to talk to Paul.

"Hey, Paul, could you come here for a sec, I need to talk to you," Wade said.

Paul jumped off the wagon and asked, "Yeah?"

"Mr. Douglas was just here to see me," Wade said.

"Yeah, I saw," Paul said.

"He said his barn wasn't the first barn you burned. Is that true?"

"No, it is all a lie. I can prove it. And his barn was an accident."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"And you're not lying?"

"No."

"OK, get back to work, we'll talk about this later," Wade said as he walked back in the house.

"Thank you," Paul said as he jumped back on the wagon. Paul felt a little worried. He might have to leave and he didn't want to leave such a nice ranch. Paul finished unloading the hay and then brought the animals in and fed them. All except the goats, which he left outside for the night. After all the animals were bedded down for the night, Paul went to sleep also. But while he was sleeping a small man dressed in black snuck into the barn. He looked around for Paul and found him sleeping on some hay.

He walked over to the hay and tripped over a bucket. Paul was quickly awakened, but didn't see anything. He looked around the barn, but then was hit over the head by the man in black. The man in black spread oil everywhere and then lit a match. In seconds the hay became a big flame of fire. Paul, who lying right next to the fire, jumped up. He got the horses and tried to put the fire out. The fire got bigger and bigger. Paul saw a telephone on the wall, ran over there, and called 9-1-1. While Paul was waiting for the fire truck he opened the stalls and some of the



Paul had just about had enough; he jumped up onto Jackie and rode off as fast as Jackie would run

horses ran out but others he had to blindfold and lead them out. He almost had all the horses out except for Jackie. Jackie wouldn't come out. He finally got behind her and smacked her on the rear and out she ran. Just as Paul was about to leave the barn, because the barn was full of flames, boards of fire came down in front of the door. Paul looked for another way out but he couldn't find anything. Just when Paul gave up all hope, he heard sirens and

firemen ran out of their trucks and started spraying water everywhere. Boards were falling all around them, but they quickly got Paul out. When Paul walked out he saw all of the horses, including Jackie, standing around like nothing was happening. By that time Wade and Heather were outside the house looking around. They began asking the firemen about Paul. But Heather quickly spotted him. They ran over to him and asked, "Are you OK?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," Paul said.

"How did this start?" Wade asked.

"I don't know," Paul said. Just then Mr. Douglas sped into the driveway.

"Oh no, here comes trouble," Wade said.

Mr. Douglas walked over to them and said, "I told you so. I knew that boy was trouble."

"Now just hold on, we don't know who or what started it," Wade said.

"Well, maybe you don't, but I do! It was him and you know it! I say we turn him over to the sheriff," Mr. Douglas said, pointing to Paul. Paul had just about had enough; he jumped up onto Jackie and rode off as fast as Jackie would run.

"Paul! Come back!" Wade yelled.

"What did I tell you, that boy's trouble," Mr. Douglas said.

"You know, why don't you just leave. You've caused enough trouble!" Wade yelled at Mr. Douglas. Mr. Douglas got mad and drove off. Later, Wade went looking for Paul. He searched the only trail Paul knew, but saw nothing. He looked on other trails, but still found nothing.

Meanwhile, Mr. Douglas was out riding around Wade's fields when he saw Paul riding around from a distance. Mr. Douglas took out his lasso and kicked his horse real hard, and off they went. Paul heard him, but not soon enough, for Mr. Douglas had already swung his lasso around him and pulled him off his horse. Paul quickly stood up and tried to take the rope off, but Mr. Douglas pulled it real tight and pulled him closer to him and

said, "Well, now look what I've got here."

"Let me go!" Paul yelled.

Mr. Douglas got off his horse and said, "Now you've got two choices. I can either take this rope off you and you can mount up and we'll ride to the sheriff together, or I can tie you to that horse and take you to the sheriff. Now what's it going to be?"

"I'll go with you," Paul said.

"Now that's better," Mr. Douglas said. He removed the rope and Paul mounted up, but before Mr. Douglas could get on his horse Paul kicked Jackie real hard and rode off. "Hey boy! Come back!" But it was too late. Paul was long gone.

MEANWHILE, back at Wade's place, Wade had just returned and decided to look around what was left of his barn. When he walked over to the barn he saw that most of the barn was still there. It still had a roof and walls.

He walked inside it and saw all the stalls still standing, except for Jackie's stall, which was burned to a crisp. That puzzled Wade. He looked around for any clues. He found a cigarette lighter with the name Kent Craig on it. He thought maybe it belonged to whoever burned the barn. He went inside to his computer and looked up all the barns that Paul supposedly burned and found that the one man that always worked at the barns was Kent Craig. He knew it must have been him and ran outside, mounted up on his horse and rode out to the Douglas ranch. But on his way he saw Paul, who galloped by with Mr. Douglas galloping behind. Wade

galloped after them. Paul turned into the Douglas ranch and Mr. Douglas and Wade followed behind. He dismounted and ran into Mr. Douglas's other barn, up the loft, and hid in the loft. Mr. Douglas and Wade ran into the barn.

"Paul! Paul, come down! We want to talk to you," Wade said. Paul was hiding in the corner on the loft. He heard something at the other end and walked over there. But little did he know that it was Kent Craig, the same guy who was in the barn when Wade's barn caught fire. Kent walked up to him and punched Paul in the jaw, making him fall on the loft floor. Kent walked to the end of the loft and yelled, "I found him, Mr. Douglas!"

"Good. Now send him down," Mr. Douglas said. Kent was going to take him to Mr. Douglas, but Paul quickly got up and pushed Kent onto a big hay pile that was just below the loft. Paul quickly ran down the ladder and said, "That's him! He's the one who keeps setting the barns

on fire. That's Kent Craig."

"I know, he works for me," Mr. Douglas said, "but he didn't set any fires."

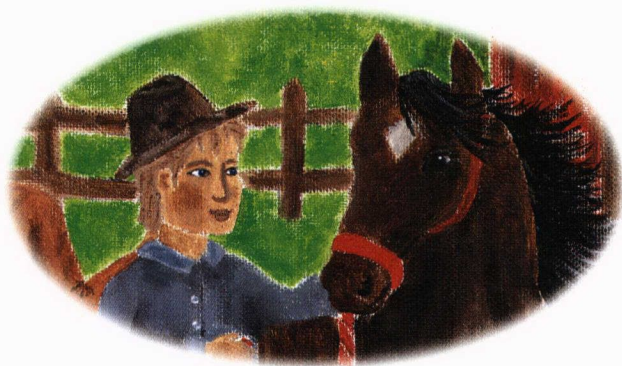
"Well, I looked it up and it seems that both Paul and Kent were at all of the barns that burnt," Wade said.

"Well . . ." Mr. Douglas said.

"Why don't we just have the law handle this?" Wade said.

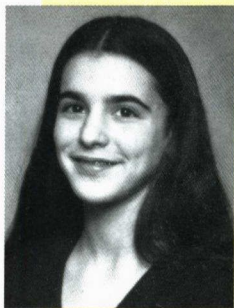
"Yeah," Mr. Douglas said.

SO THE SHERIFF launched an investigation, and in the end it was indeed Kent that set the fires, except for the fire at the Douglas ranch, where it was proven that it was an accident that set the fire. Because it was an accident, Paul was free to go. Free from all those people who never believed him. After it was over, all the ranchers who turned Paul down for a job, came by and offered him a job. But he just said, "No thanks. I've got a job. A job working for a man who gave me a second chance ride."



Frog Song

By Nicole Guenther



Nicole Guenther, 13
Vancouver, Washington

I step out into the clouded dusk
the dark light pushes up
against my skin

the steady contribution
of frog song
pours into the air,
making the measuring cup
of the night
overflow.

the rock is cold
beneath me, reminds
me to shiver.

the last light
swiftly falls
underneath the trees
and I capture it
in angular lines on this paper.

the air grows
darker
and huddles nearer.
stirs, exhales in one
gust of breath, anticipates
the night.

the last strip
of gold is disappearing
and here, on the outskirts
of the sanctuary
of the porch light,
my shadow is huge
on the ground.
slapped across
my page, the dark
mimic of my pencil
waves.

now the sun remains
only as a half-inch-wide
ribbon of dull orange
beyond the trees

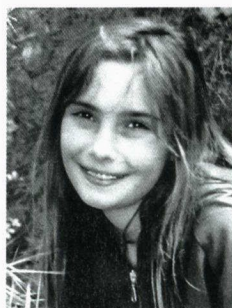
and the frogs announce
the sun will set
tomorrow, too.

but I am hunched
here on the edge
of the world,
and the sun just fell
off.

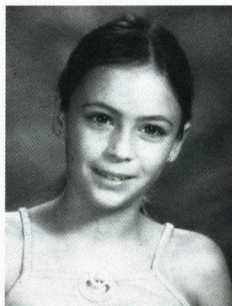
My Piano

By **Brittany Newell**

Illustrated by **Joanna Stanley**



Brittany Newell, 10
Belvedere, California



Joanna Stanley, 11
Seal Beach, California

I SIT AT MY PIANO. It lies in my family's living room, covered in dust. Not the neglected type of dust, but the vintage, rustic type of dust, the dust that gives the piano a cozy, charming feeling. I run my fingers over the old white keys. Now I run my hand over the old chestnut top, getting a handful of dust. Rain knocks at the windows and I can hear Kelsey crying in her crib. Kelsey is my baby sister. I do get jealous of her, but I can do something she can't; play the piano. I open the parchment pages of my music book and, all at once, my fingers fly. Dancing on their ivory carpet, my fingertips can't stop and there is no need for my music book, but I can't tear my hands away from the piano to take it down. I'm flying, soaring, away from Kelsey's crying, the pounding of the rain, the rustling of the angry trees outside. All I can hear is the sweet hum of my piano's breath, and I can almost imagine myself in a white-and-black-checkerboard room, with only me and my piano. And now my prancing fingers, cantering across the creamy white road, like ten brown horses, pulling the purple carriage of my sweater sleeve, have come to their destination. The black notes are gone from the paper, the song has ended. I rest my hands and breathe in the smell of the dust that has risen from the movement of my ten steeds, pounding the road, leaving tiny footprints of dust. I sigh, and carefully turn the pages of my music book, preparing for my next routine. Slowly, I place my hands on the board, and suddenly, there are no hands, but two fluttering tan sparrows. Their little calls match with the sighs of my piano, and again all



Obviously, Daddy has already announced that I am going to play, because the audience claps loudly

I can hear is the singing from the chestnut base. The sparrows flutter from key to key, without any movement; just sweet, free flight. This song is shorter than the first, and my birds land soon, landing by the edge of my denim jean lake. I would've started another journey to that checkerboard room, my fingertips ready to turn yet another page in my music, but Momma comes in, Kelsey in her arms, wrapped up in her little pink Polartec babysuit.

Momma smiles and says to me, "That was good practicing, Brandi. I heard you from Kelsey's nursery. Do you want to take a walk with us?"

"You're taking Kelsey out in this rain?" I ask.

Momma nods and says with exasperation, "I can't get her to sleep, so I'm hoping maybe a walk will tire her out. Are you coming?" I nod and pull on my coat, boots, and scarf. Then, I run to get my umbrella. Passing the living room, I silently bid my old piano goodbye, and my toffee-colored horses crawl back into their fleece stables, my pockets, and rest. My piano is my friend.

The piano is not my only friend. My best friend is Paula Leigh, although I just call her Paul, like everyone calls me Brandi, even though my real name is Brianna May. Momma and Daddy named me that because Daddy liked the name Brie and Momma liked May, and they both liked Anna. So my name is actually three combined. Anyway, Paul is my best friend, and also my neighbor. She's three years older than me, but we're like sisters.

Sometimes she chaffs my love of piano, especially when we can't play because of practice. I don't mind though, because I can razz Paul about her love for trumpet, and she practices just as much as I do. We are friends because we both understand each other's love for music. We both know how important music can be, to two kids like us, at least. The piano is my key to friendship.

After Momma, Kelsey, and I are home from our walk, it is 11:12. Kelsey is asleep. After Momma puts her in her crib, she asks me if I want to go shopping with her.

"No," I say as I pour myself a glass of orange juice.

She just smiles and says, "Too bad, hon. You have to come. It's for a surprise." So I put on my coat, hat, scarf, and boots again and we go into the car. Momma drives us to the mall and she leads me inside.

"What's the surprise?" I ask, for I love surprises. Momma smiles again and shakes her head. Finally, we stop in front of a little shop that says Dresses and Suits for the Little Folk. We go here every year to get a Christmas dress for me, and now Kelsey. I know this is only part of the surprise. When I follow Momma in, I see frills and bows and frou-frous. Two tall, chattering ladies come over immediately. They talk so fast that I cannot understand them. Eventually, they lead Momma and me to a tiny dressing room. It is amazing that we can all fit. One woman has a pile of dresses in her hands, and the other has a hairbrush, a mirror, and a pile of hair ribbons. Now the ladies pull off my sweater

and my pants. I stand there in my underwear and undershirt, and I feel like a doll. The two woman are pulling dresses over my head, and then pulling them off. I'm so glad when they leave, that I don't even see what dress they are ringing up.

Momma smiles and says, "Well, as soon as we get the dress, I can tell you what your surprise is!" So we go up front and the ladies hand us the dress. As soon as we get out of the store, I pounce on Momma, "What's the surprise?! The surprise?!!"

Momma smiles knowingly and says, "You're going to perform a song on your piano for the Christmas party on Christmas Eve. Your piano teacher thinks you should play 'Angel's Carol.'"

Every Christmas, my family has a Christmas party for nearly the whole neighborhood. We kids get together about four days before the party and conduct a play. Paul and I are usually the directors. Last year we did "Noah's Ark," and before that we did "The Nutcracker," and even before that we did "Sophia and the Toy Box." Usually I sing something for the party, but never have I considered playing on my beloved piano. Now that I think about it, it seems like a brilliant idea. I love my piano, and it'll be easy. The piano is my passion.

IT IS CHRISTMAS EVE at six-thirty. Our party starts at seven, and goes to about ten-thirty. I am in my room changing. I still haven't seen my Christmas dress, and it lies on my bed, still in its bag. I walk over and pull out the dress. It is light leaf

green and made out of satin. It goes a little past my knees and it is sleeveless. The thin straps are gold with green and red designs on them. It comes with a small jacket, just barely touching the bottom of my rib cage, with white fur on the edges. The dress has a full skirt, perfect for twirling, and the jacket is warm. I love it. I put it on with my white tights and my baby blue mary-janes with the bows. Just for the sake of it, I start twirling round and round, on the tiptoes of my periwinkle shoes. Suddenly, Daddy pokes his head in.

"You look lovely, Brandi!" he exclaims, and twirls me in the air. Then he tells me to go downstairs soon. So I walk down, and Momma puts a matching blue hair ribbon around my dark braid, then goes upstairs to get Kelsey. When they come down, I smile. I can't help it! Kelsey looks like a little baby doll. She has on a lacy white dress and has white sandals on her tiny feet. Her eyes are shining with laughter and her tiny little mouth is smiling. She has a white hair band around her head, and her cheeks are pink with delight. Her eyes sparkle. I rush to her and embrace her, and then I tickle her tummy. Kelsey giggles helplessly. I do get jealous of her, but she really is sweet. Then we hear a knock at the door, which brings me back to reality. Soon I would be playing my piano, in front of about twenty grown-ups. But I know I will play well, with honor and dignity. The piano is my pride.

As soon as everyone arrives, we start the play, which is "Mary and Joseph." I am

Mary and Kelsey is Jesus. She really does look like an angel, curled up in her basket, which was the manger bed. She has her fingers in her mouth and is fast asleep, not moving. Just when I go to pick her up, Kelsey opens her big, blue eyes. I fall to pieces, with her curled up in my arms, and so does the audience. They "ooh," and "ahhh" and exclaim "Adorable!" "Angelic!" and "Beautiful!"

After the play, Momma tells me that it is time for my piano. I go into the bathroom, change out of my Mary costume and into my Christmas dress, and walk into the living room. Obviously, Daddy has already announced that I am going to play, because the audience claps loudly. I march like a soldier to my piano. My beloved piano. Slowly, with shaking hands, I put up the music. I take a deep breath and eye the first note. And out prance the brown-coated horses. They fly wildly across the keys, racing against time. Soaring across the rainy sky, I fly, finally seeing where my fingertips go when they dive into the piano. I am inside the piano,

I can hear every note being played. I jump upon my loyal horses. There is no need for a harness or saddle, for my fingers know the board by heart. They are soaring sparrows, they are prancing horses, they are dancers in the Arabian sun, they are my hands. I can feel my voice come out from inside. I cannot help it; I start singing to my music. To the birds, my singing is the call of another bird, an oriole or blackbird. To the horses, my singing is the desperate blowing of the hot breeze, rustling dry plants. To the dancers, my singing is their music; the hot rays of the sun glaring, the splashing of the cold ocean humming, and the loud whispers of people calling. But to me, my fingers are my fingers, and my croaking is my singing. But I am not "me." I am not Brianna May Ambersen. I am my piano, my glorious piano. All too quickly, my hands slowly fall off the dusty piano. I can barely hear the shouts and applause of the people. My piano is my friend, the piano is my key to friendship, my piano is my passion, my piano is my pride, my piano is mine. My piano is mine. 🍀



Roses on the Water

By **Katie Sinclair**

Illustrated by **Thea Green**

TWO GIRLS WERE WALKING along, in sweatshirts, jeans and flip-flops, discussing the meaning of life.

"... now, lip gloss needs to be applied liberally, every few hours or so. Do you think this eye shadow is too bright? Omigosh, I saw the cutest pair of jeans in that shop. Are those new earrings?"

I didn't answer my friend, just basked in her flow of words and the sea breeze blowing in from the west, glad that it wasn't freezing, raining, or both. Having both finished a giant essay, we were ready to enjoy what remained of the Sunday afternoon, walking down to the beach for some ice cream from the Creamery. A seagull flew overhead, a splash of white against the gray sky.

"What d'you think, Kate?" asked Meg.

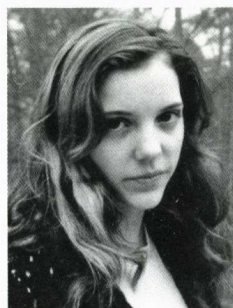
"Mm. What? Oh, right. You should go with the pink," I answered.

Thunk-skip, swish, thunk-skip swish, two pairs of flip-flops flopping against the pavement. We walked down the waterfront and to the pier, planning to visit the aquarium and our favorite shark, Rosie, who was approximately three centuries old and counting. The bell over the door tinkled softly as we went in. Meg headed straight toward the touch tank. She scooped up Pickle, the sea cucumber, and planted a large kiss on him. I stared.

"You know, if you wanted to kiss something that badly, I'm sure Willy would be happy to oblige."



Katie Sinclair, 13
Manhattan Beach, California



Thea Green, 13
Marshall, Virginia

Meg sighed. "It's not for that, stupid. Sea cucumbers are for good luck. I need all the help I can get. That final on the Renaissance is next week!"

"Oh. OK then." I hesitantly brushed my lips against Pickle's slimy back, smelling salt water. I gently put him back in the water. Pickle, being rather intelligent for a sea cucumber, started squirming away, as fast as any sea cucumber could, from the edge of the tank.

Next, we went to the shark tank, amused at the little five-year-old who was putting his hand against the tank until a shark swam under it, and running away, shrieking with delight, then coming back to do it again.

"Hello, Rosie," said Meg, addressing a rather stately-looking shark in the back, who was looking, I could've sworn, irritably at the five-year-old.

We drifted from tank to tank, observing the stately sharks, elegant anemones, and courageous crabs battling with their large claws. Things were mostly quiet except for the hum of the water pumps. The air smelled like old seaweed and a fish market. Over to my right a large fish surged forward to nab that last chunk of fish food before it settled at the bottom, to be eaten by the little mollusks that were employed for just that purpose; their role in life to simply clean up after these giant, messy eaters who left their scraps lying around to be picked up by smaller beings on the food chain. Sure enough, the gluttonous fish had dropped some of its snack, and, sure enough, a competent-

looking snail wandered to the spot to clean up.

Keep going, little snail. It's your turn for dinner, I thought. The snail's pearly white shell moved forward, ambling along at its own place, having no need to rush.

Outside, the breeze picked up. A gust of cold air swept through the roundhouse, startling me. I stepped back, stepping on Meg's foot.

"Hey! Watch it!" She poked me. "Let's get out of here; there might be dolphins out. Besides," she wrinkled her nose, "it smells like cat food in here."

So we left the aquarium, leaving our Piscean acquaintances, to walk on the pier. A wave hit the stone pillar, making the whole jetty sway. Sea spray hit my face, salty and sweet at the same time. Meg was scanning the horizon, looking for the gray shadow and splash of white that signaled a dolphin pod. She grinned and nudged me. Where? Oh, right, over there. The dolphins leapt over the waves, too far out to swim, but close enough to view from the pier. A foolhardy surfer was getting ready to try and ride a huge wave. I shivered; that wave was huge, and it was not exactly warm on land, so it must have been freezing in the Pacific Ocean.

The surfer was successful, turning his board skillfully, yet compared with the dolphins he looked rather stupid, depending on a piece of fiberglass, while the dolphins managed well enough with what they already had. Still, it was an admirable effort, and the surfer was almost to land before he fell off spectacularly, right into the



Red? What was red doing among the grays and tans, greens and blues, of the beach?

sand. Meg and I started laughing. I looked out to the west, and saw a flash of red.

Red? What was red doing among the grays and tans, greens and blues, of the beach? I leaned out over the railing, and saw that the red was actually a bundle of roses, drifting along on the current. Meg had noticed it too. We stood, looking for a long time, as it floated away.

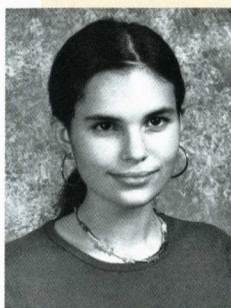
And that day, though what was actually required for an education had been com-

pleted, I learned something: Even among an ancient shark, two girls, the ocean, and a surfer, there is something that breaks the pattern, some slight inconsistency. Red roses from someone's beautiful garden, maybe from some greenhouse in Indiana, can end up floating on the Pacific Ocean. And that makes me wonder, sometimes, if writing new words, changing the tune, or breaking the pattern can be a good thing after all. ❀

Book Review

By Reina Gattuso

The Blue Roan Child by Jamieson Findlay;
Scholastic, Inc.: New York, 2004; \$16.95



Reina Gattuso, 12
Milford, New Jersey

IMAGINE THIS: YOU ARE an orphan and you work in a horse stable owned by Kind Hulvere. A fierce wild horse and her two colts are brought to the stable. Then the two colts are stolen. It is now up to you, with the help of the wild horse, to save her colts from the powerful Lord Ran. Are you up to the challenge?

Well, Syeira was! With nothing but the shirt on her back and the wild horse Arwin she set off to save the colts. Along the way, she and Arwin meet many friends, a few dangerous foes, and tons of adventure!

When I first looked at this book, I knew I was going to enjoy it because it was about horses. I have been riding horses for about six years and I love horses and horse books. After the first few pages I was hooked, because *The Blue Roan Child* combined horses with mystery, magic, adventure, and wonderful writing.

One of my favorite parts is when Syeira and Arwin have to travel through the Forest of Deire. In it they meet a man named Sir Gemynd who drinks a concoction made out of a plant called Pale Madeleine. The Pale Madeleine makes him live in memories. Syeira eats some of this memory plant and she sees her mother's little yellow bird and hears her mother weeping. But she can't find her mother, and the bird disappears. They are lost

with the Pale Madeleine. They are lost in the past.

That part made me think. What would it be like to stop living in the present and live only in memories? If I was Syeira, would I be tempted to try some Pale Madeleine? Would Syeira ever be the same? I could understand why Syeira would want to eat the Pale Madeleine. She longed for the mother she could barely remember. That made me think about how lucky I am to have both of my parents alive today. I have never felt anything like Syeira's yearning for her mother, and I am thankful. Even so, the Pale Madeleine was not good. It made Syeira sick and delayed her from her mission. To me, Pale Madeleine symbolizes temptation to do what's wrong. Even though doing the wrong thing might seem fun or easy at the time, it will always come back to hurt you and will distract you from what you need to do.

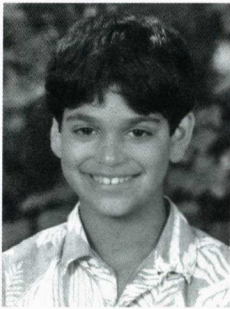
In this story you can see all sorts of symbols. For instance, I think the yellow bird is a symbol of Syeira's mother's love. It gives Syeira strength and courage. Flying horses also appear in this book. I think they are a symbol of Syeira's dreams, and when they fly to attack King Ran's city, Syeira's dreams are flying along with them. The Weerlings, horses damaged by war, represent how horrible war really is. And Arwin. Arwin was Syeira's way out of a lonely childhood. I think she is a symbol of the type of freedom one can only have galloping on a horse, flying as if you were riding one of Syeira's dreams.

The Blue Roan Child has a satisfying ending in which Syeira finds out what she is meant to do with her life. Everything adds up to a believable and involving story that will draw you in. I loved *The Blue Roan Child*, and I definitely recommend it to anyone who likes horses, adventure, or just plain good stories. ❁

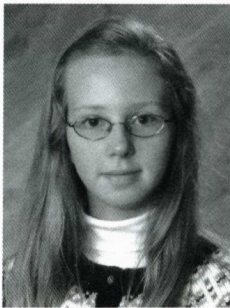
Maikua

By Josh Miller

Illustrated by Laura Alexandra Gould



Josh Miller, 10
Portland, Oregon



Laura Alexandra Gould, 12
Charleston, West Virginia

ONCE THERE WAS A STRONG WOMAN who was great at hunting, fishing, and all the other manly things. But she didn't have the patience to learn the delicate art of sewing baskets, dyeing clothes, or any of the things the women did.

Her name was Maikua.

Maikua had flowing black hair, and brown eyes and skin.

None of the men liked Maikua. When she went hunting with them, they would say, "We don't need your help. Why don't you go home."

Maikua never listened to these men. She would go out and catch as many birds as she could carry. When they got home, the other men and women would fill their stomachs with her catch and leave the scraps for her.

The other women didn't think much of her either. Whenever she stayed home when the men were hunting (which wasn't very often), the women would say, "Why aren't you out hunting? Maybe if you tried harder you could catch a piece of fur."

Maikua would just ignore them, and go on shooting her bows and arrows at a practice target.

One day Maikua went out fishing. She caught eight fish, and put them in her basket. When she returned to the village, though, the usual commotion was no more. In fact, she couldn't see anybody for miles. "Is anybody here?" she called out.

The response was, "Is anybody here?" It was just an echo.

Maikua realized that everybody had left. She went back to



When the last drop of water was finished, the stairway reached all the way to the tip of the clouds

her hut and ate the fresh fish. Then she thought. "Maybe I should go to the mystic mountain," she said to herself.

She set out at dawn. The mountain reached out over the treetops.

Maikua started walking. She swam across a river. She swung on vines and she leapt over roots. Finally the mountain lay before her: glowing green trees, gray rocks, and pure white snow.

Maikua got out her spear. She sighted a mountain lion in the distance. She crept up the mountainside, and then hid behind a boulder so the lion couldn't see her. She took a piece of meat out of her basket, and put it out in front of the boulder. The lion ran over and clamped its teeth around the meat. As soon as he did so Maikua had the spear through his head.

Maikua had a good lunch and then was on her way.

When Maikua got to the top of the mountain, she found a bear. The bear gave her a cup made out of leaves. The bear said, "Drink the water that lies in the cup."

As she drank, a stairway started forming. When the last drop of water was finished, the stairway reached all the way to the tip of the clouds. The bear motioned for her to climb the stairs.

When Maikua got to the top of the stairs, she couldn't speak. Not just because there was a village before her; but because in this village, she saw women coming home with fish and deer, and men sitting in their huts weaving baskets and taking care of the young ones.

A woman walked over to Maikua.

"Who are you?" Maikua asked.

"I am Korto, the head of our village," the woman answered. "Let me show you around."

Korto showed Maikua her hut and the meat storage room and more. After the tour Maikua asked, "Why are things so different here?"

"This is the way it has always been," Korto said, "for as long as I can remember. Now you should get some sleep. You look very tired."

Maikua walked slowly back to her hut. She was thinking about this strange yet wonderful village as she climbed through the door of the hut and curled up on her bed.

After a week Maikua was already a hero. The men adored her, and the women looked up to her. She filled the meat storage room with fish and game she had caught, and was happier than she had ever been. But a few weeks later, she announced that it was time to leave.

The night before Maikua was to leave there was a big celebration. The finest meats were prepared, and toasts were made. There was singing and dancing. The noise was very powerful. At the end of the evening, Korto called everyone to attention. Everyone stood in a circle, facing Korto. She sat straight in her chair, and then said, "I think we owe Maikua a wish." Everyone cheered.

Maikua was stunned.

"What is your wish?" Korto asked.

Maikua thought for a moment, then exclaimed, "I know what I want. I want to

never run out of arrows.”

“Everlasting arrows, eh. I’ll see what I can do,” Korto smiled. Then she pointed her finger at Maikua and a bag appeared on Maikua’s shoulder—a bag filled with arrows.

Maikua thanked everybody and went back to her hut. She went to sleep. But around midnight she snuck out of bed with the bag on her shoulders, and headed back down the stairway out of the clouds.

When she came out of the clouds back into her own world, the first thing she saw was smoke coming out of the treetops. Maikua ran as fast as she could down the mountain and into a forest. She came into

a clearing and saw people. They were her people, her town in rags, sitting around a fire.

When the people saw her they were so happy they crowded around her, hugging her.

“You’re back!” they shouted.

“What’s happening?” Maikua asked.

A man came up to her and said, “We need you. Your skills keep us alive.”

Maikua didn’t know what to say. She was so happy that they had accepted her. All the women and the men apologized and welcomed Maikua back.

From then on, hunting was valued in men and in women. ❁



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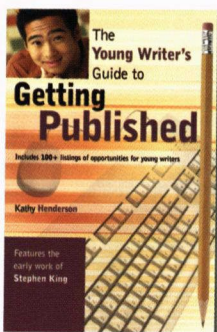
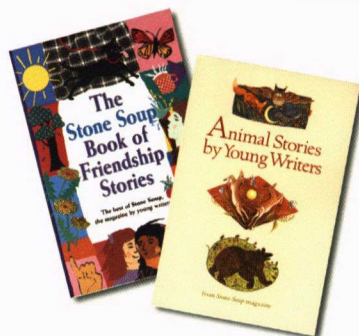
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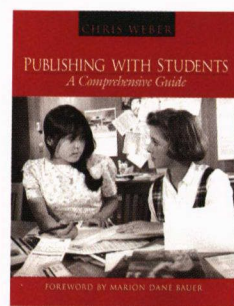
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