

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Fishing on Lake Titicaca," by Christina Bustinza, age 11, Peru

FORT CUNICULUS

In Australia, a battle is brewing between the rabbits and the foxes

POSEIDON

Lydia's father is reluctant to take her to sea with him, but he has no choice

Also: Illustrations by Emily Rappleye and Ashley Burke

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005

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The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 34, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2005

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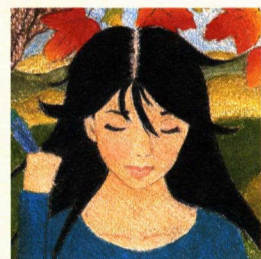
Shusha is old enough to join her mother's secret group



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GERRY MANDEL
WILLIAM RUBEL
Editors

Laurie Gabriel
Subscriptions

Jim MacKenzie
Design and Production

Barbara Harker
Administrative Assistant

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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: "Fishing on Lake Titicaca" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the Museum for Children's Art, in Aalsmeer, the Netherlands. The museum has a collection of beautiful children's art from over 40 countries, and they conduct art exchanges with children all over the world. Special thanks to curator Annefje van Itterzon.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I faithfully read your magazine with every publication, indulging myself with the beautifully written stories. I was especially impressed with the story “Roses on the Water,” by Katie Sinclair [May/June 2005]. I was first drawn to the piece by the exceptional illustration by Thea Green. I was in awe of the colors and textures in her art. From the moment I began reading, I loved the story. Imagery was concise, the plot was clear, and the ideas were wonderful! I agree completely with Sinclair’s view of life and its lessons, and feel truly thankful for her words. This magazine is truly a gift.

MADELEINE RUTH, 12
Harleysville, Pennsylvania

I really enjoyed the January/February issue. I especially enjoyed the illustration for the story “Hermione and Leafy.” At first, I thought it was just an ordinary picture, but after I read the story I was amazed. It was all so real. I felt like I was really there. The expressions on their faces let me know exactly how they felt. I love the way the illustrator, Rachel Stanley, put what was in the girl’s imagination in the picture. The illustrator put in every little detail, even the tiny leaf on the driveway. I hope that she will continue to draw, and that you will publish more of her wonderful work.

FRANCES BRUMLEY, 10
Lafayette, Louisiana

Rachel’s new story and illustration are on page 5 of this issue.

Hooray for *Stone Soup*! It’s the best magazine I’ve read. Who cares if all my submissions were rejected? The selection is fine and all the stories are great. I especially like “The Thief of Bubastis”

[January/February 2005] and “In the Knights’ Absence” [July/August 2004]. Writers who got published—congrats, who didn’t (like me)—hard luck, keep trying. Three cheers for *Stone Soup*.

GIRISH ANANTH, 13
Kochi, Kerala, India

Thank you for the opportunity you give our children to tap their talents and dream about their future careers! I have been working as the elementary librarian at the American School of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for 33 years and have enjoyed your subscription since 1991. I love reading aloud your stories and sharing the beautiful illustrations with our students. Once, one of our students had his poem published and received from *Stone Soup* a check of \$10 for his publication. The boy was a fifth-grader, our electrician’s son, whose life is very simple and whose father struggles to give a good education for his son. Being published in such an important magazine inspired him to write more and, ever since, he has been winning writing contests!

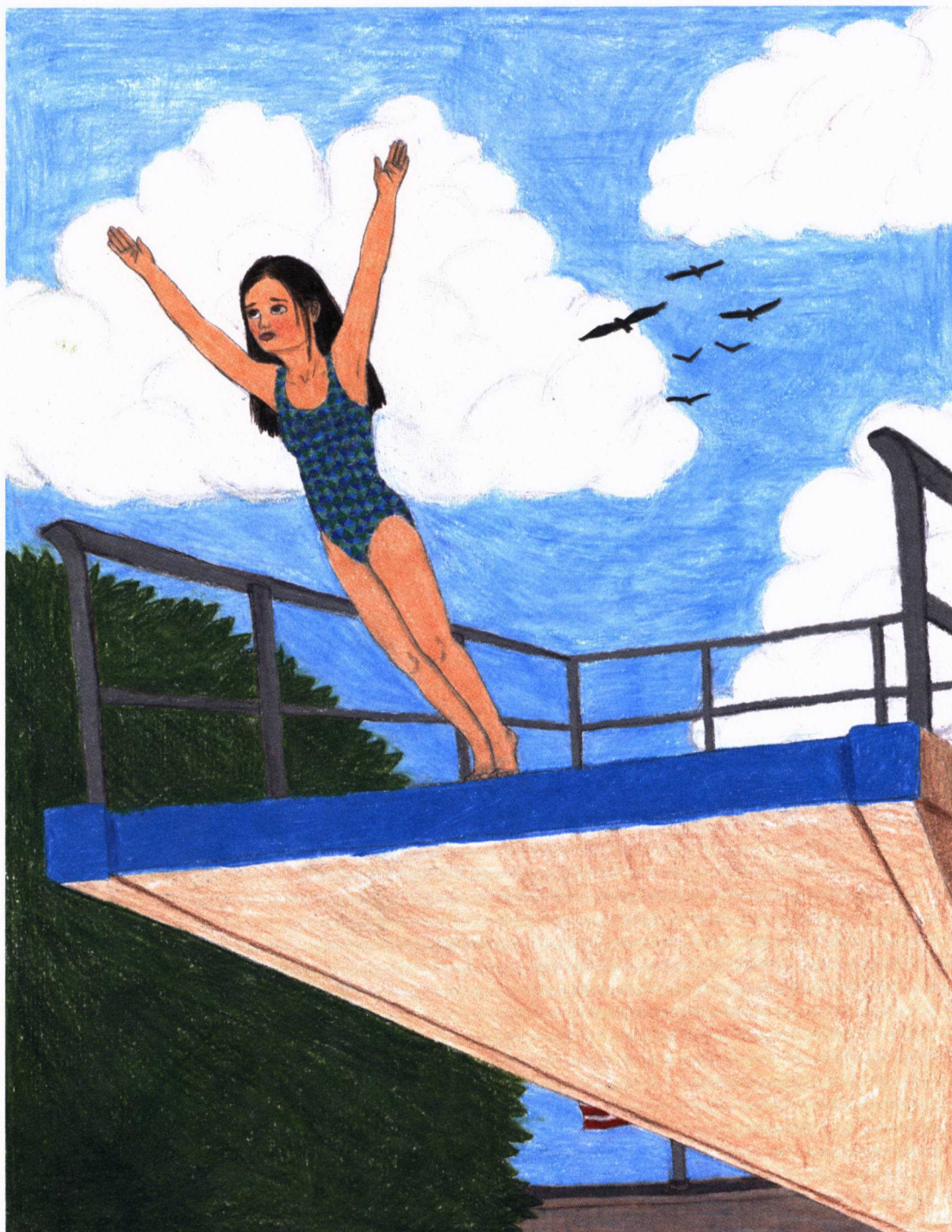
BETH FREITAS, LIBRARIAN
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

I really enjoyed reading the poem “Grandpa’s Memories” by Mushka Bogomilsky [May/June 2005]. It really moved me. In my class, we are studying World War II and the Nazis when they took over countries. The poem was very flowing, and I want to thank Mushka for writing such a great poem!

EMILY OZER, 11
Arden, Delaware

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 rose on her tiptoes and let herself fall forward

Diver

By Rachel Stanley

Illustrated by the author

JUSTINE STARTED UP the steep, blue-painted platform stairs. Her bare feet plodded through cold, chlorine-laced puddles that gathered on the narrow steps. Every time her foot landed in one of them, water rippled away from her feet, and droplets cascaded down the side of the stair, glistening as they fell to the deck below.

She clutched the metal handrail tightly and stepped onto the 5-meter platform. Often she would stop here and go out to the edge, where she would perform backward and forward dives, flips, and sometimes even inward dives. But today, she kept climbing—up the next flight of stairs toward the 7.5-meter platform.

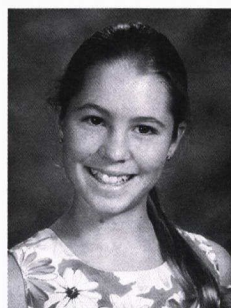
Turn around. Don't do this, her instincts told her.

But I want to! her mind shouted back. Justine kept climbing. She refused to look down, though her eyes wanted to take their focus off that intimidating goal. The 10-meter platform.

Her heart thudded in her chest. She felt lost in the roar of her breathing. As she passed the 7.5-meter mark, she was aware of how far away the splashes of the other divers seemed, how distant the lifeguard's whistle and the swim team's hands slapping the water in the other pool were. She tried to ignore the sounds.

Justine's mind spun as she stumbled up the last flight of stairs, gripping the handrail as if her life depended on it. Her foot finally touched the top step, and she felt terribly alone on the vast platform.

Inching around the wide post at the top of the platform tower, she finally peered over the railing and looked down.



Rachel Stanley, 13
Seal Beach, California

Through the maze of stairs and posts and platforms, she caught glimpses of the rough, gray-brown pool deck below and dark, wet heads with bare shoulders, moving back and forth. Inhaling through her nose, she turned and walked stiffly toward the edge of the platform. She felt like a zombie.

Finally reaching the edge, she knelt and then shifted onto her stomach to look down. A large, fluffy cloud drifted across the sun. Justine shivered. She could feel the breeze much more up here. With the sun's reflection gone from the surface of the water, she could see clearly to the bottom of the pool. Her throat tightened, and butterflies suddenly filled her stomach. She stood up again and paced back and forth, stopping every now and then to peek over the railing.

She was frustrated. Her head felt as if it would explode with all her anxiety of diving off and her annoyance with the coach for making her wait so long. The more time she spent up there, the more nervous she got.

At last, after what seemed like hours, she looked down again and saw the coach yelling up at her, "It's clear, Justine. You can dive now."


OK. This is it. Justine took a deep breath to slow her heartbeat, then considered. Did she really want to dive? She'd seen the other kids do it plenty of times, but she was so high . . . On the other hand, diving off here would be the same as diving off the 5-meter platform. The only difference was that she'd fall farther.

Almost without thinking, Justine slowly raised her arms. She paused a moment; then, bringing her arms down quickly and back up, she rose on her tiptoes and let herself fall forward.

As she dropped rapidly toward the water, she took in everything: the blue sky, the shimmering pools, the coaches, lifeguards, and swim instructors pacing the deck, the splashes of the swimmers and the other divers, the birds flying overhead, the springboards bouncing, the sun on her face, the wind in her hair . . . Wow! It was almost like flying.

Suddenly Justine didn't want this moment to end. She felt as if she could soar away with the birds, if only the water wasn't rushing up at her so fast . . .

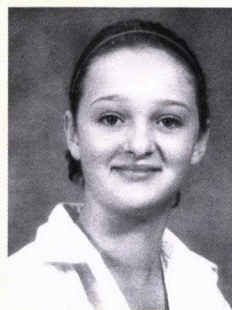
Splash!

Justine entered the water perfectly straight and smooth, the image of an Olympic diver doing a perfect dive. 

Peeling Apples

By Katie Ferman

Carefully, warily,
Sitting with my mom at the kitchen table.
She peels quickly: in a few swift moments
One twisted apple peel sits on the cutting board.
I try to copy her, but no—
The knife slips and
Cuts off a small chip of the red peel.
Trying again, I get lost in the smell of the ripening fruit
(Sweet, almost sickly sweet),
Filling the room with a scent like my grandma's house.
And I start to remember the first time
The first time I had *her* apple pie—
I wrinkled my nose and said, "Too sweet!"
(Now it's my favorite dessert.)
The first time I buttoned up my coat
To keep out the cold on an October day,
The first time I read a book
To my mother in broken, unsteady words,
The first time I tied my shoe
After hours of torture and trial—
And as I think of this,
I barely notice the one, perfect apple peel
Sitting on the cutting board in front of me.



Katie Ferman, 12
Three Lakes, Wisconsin



Just then the Rose appeared with her rosellas

Fort Cuniculus

By **Ralphie Kabo**

Illustrated by **Cameron Osteen**

BRUMM WAS WOKEN by the distant thumping sound of the sentry's back paws. He was lying in a small, warm chamber with his twin brother, Trumm. He lifted one of his ears and listened more closely to the sound. It wasn't urgent, just the thump that told the residents of Fort Cuniculus that the sun was two ear-lengths from the horizon. Brumm yawned widely and hopped out into one of the fort's many corridors. The main residents of Fort Cuniculus were rabbits, most of whom were still sleeping, but the temporary residents, hares, were up and about, mainly for an early meal. Hares were always hungry. Brumm chuckled to himself and hopped out of the underground area into the open rabbit city. To the left of his tunnel was the main square at the base of the hill, but he hopped the opposite way, towards some dusty grass clumps.

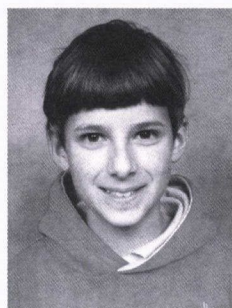
Suddenly another rabbit hopped out to him. "Drumthro wants to talk to you. Come on."

Brumm hopped after the rabbit, wondering why the leader of Fort Cuniculus wanted to talk to a regular soldier.

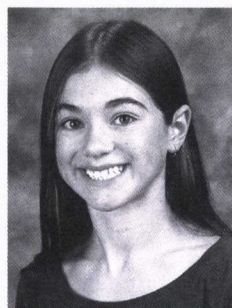
The large, muscly rabbit was sitting in a large chamber at the end of Fort Cuniculus's main tunnel.

"I have noticed your fighting talent and bravery in the last skirmish with the foxes. You are very resourceful and smart. Also, you have a good sense of humor. Because of this I have made you a senior officer."

Brumm could not believe his ears. The first thing he managed to say was, "Really?" but then he composed himself and said,



Ralphie Kabo, 11
Kingston, Canberra, Australia



Cameron Osteen, 13
Steamboat Springs, Colorado

"Thank you, sir. Do you want me to do anything for you, sir?"

"Yes, I do. One of our patrols thought he saw fox tracks west of here. I have a feeling they are up to something, and by the ear, if foxes are up to something, they are always up to no good. Get some soldiers and find the rosellas. Ask them to scout the area all around Fort Cuniculus, especially to the west. Report straight to me. Off you go."

Soon Brumm with five soldiers was on another hill, opposite the fort. Normally this was the resting and feeding place of the rosellas and their queen, Rose. She wasn't there, so Brumm decided to wait for her.

Suddenly a sound resembling a small earthquake broke the midsummer morning. Two kangaroos jumped up to the fort and started jumping on one of the tunnels, making it collapse. One of the kangaroos shouted out, "Hah, there goes one of your precious tunnels. But that is only the start of our revenge. You invaders eating our Australian grass is bad enough, but you eat the roots too! You will turn the whole of Australia into a dust bowl!"

And the kangaroos jumped off. Brumm reminiscently chewed a grass shoot together with root and snorted. Honestly, patriots. There were hundreds of tunnels in the fort; it would take the kangaroos all year to block them all up.

Just then the Rose appeared with her rosellas. They were a jolly lot, always ready to help the rabbits and even readier to play a practical joke on them. Brumm

explained their predicament to Rose, the "most beautiful and bright rosella to fly the skies," according to her mate, Rosso. She immediately sent a couple of rosellas to scout around and invited the rabbits to a lunch of berries in nectar, seed, grass and flower salad and a rosella speciality, nut crunch. The news spoiled their appetites immediately—a very large army of foxes, gathered from the surrounding countryside for miles around, about thirty animals, was advancing on the rabbits and kangaroos.

Brumm refused Rose's tea menu and went straight to the fort. He told the news to Drumthro, who looked really worried. "With the kangaroo threat, although not very dangerous but still looming, and the food stocks down low, we really need help. Listen, do a large sweep of the area and try to find some other animals to help us. Take Brigade 4, you are now officially its commander."

Drumthro handed a badge with a tiny emerald on it and the number 4 to Brumm.

AT EXACTLY five ear-lengths the fourth brigade departed from the fort. They set off north. Soon they heard a wailing and then a voice, "Help, please help, someone! I'm stuck! Ahoooooooooooo!"

Brumm told the brigade to wait and went ahead with a reconnaissance party. The noise was coming from a deep pit beneath a tree. In the pit was a large dingo. He had clearly fallen in and got stuck in the mud that collected at the bottom. Brumm sized up the situation and then

called out to the dingo, "Don't move. We'll get you out if you promise not to harm us."

"OK, I promise, but hurry!"

The efficient rabbit called the brigade to him and organized one party to dig a tunnel to the bottom of the pit, and another to dig out the steep walls closest to the dingo and the supposed tunnel exit. Soon the dingo was in the tunnel, and then on the ground. He bowed slightly to Brumm and said, "I am the king of all the dingo packs here. I fell into the pit when chasing foxes. My pack had gone the other way and did not hear me. If you had not gotten me out of there, I would have perished. How could I ever repay you?"

"Firstly, you could agree on a truce between yourself and Fort Cuniculus. The dingoes will never harm any hare or rabbit from the fort. And secondly, you said you have a pack. How big is it? We need an army to defeat the foxes attacking us, and a reliable defense against the kangaroos."

"I agree to the truce. My dingoes will never harm any creature from your fort. About my pack, we are twenty in number and sworn enemies of the foxes. We are ready to help you."

In the meeting chamber of Fort Cuniculus Drumthro, Rose and Rosso, the two generals, and the six senior officers, including Brumm (the dingo king Wouvar was listening through a window, being too big to squeeze in) were holding a council of war. Rose agreed to send regular patrols to check on the move-

ment of the fox horde. Wouvar organized his pack into four groups and Drumthro enlisted four officers to command the vicious-looking wild dogs. The kangaroo problem was solved immediately—one of the dingo groups was posted at strategic points around the fort. Drumthro sent scouting parties to check out the lay of the land and personally checked that the rabbits and hares were well armored. Fort Cuniculus was gearing itself up for the inevitable war.

A FEW DAYS had passed. The rosellas were bringing in reports that got steadily worse—the foxes had killed a family of field mice, a kookaburra was ambushed and killed, one of the rosellas had just escaped the claws of an extremely agile fox. And finally, the fox army had attacked the kangaroo mob. Rose did not know if there were any survivors. On the same day, later that afternoon, the dingo sentry on the west side saw a kangaroo approaching. It was waving a white leaf, and asked the dingo if it could speak with someone of authority. A small party, headed by Brumm and Drumthro, came up to meet the dangerous behemoth.

"What do you want?" shouted Brumm.

The kangaroo's answer completely flabbergasted him.

"We need your help."

"You *what*?"

"Our mob of six was ambushed by the foxes and their leader, Grashal. They took our only young one and killed him. As we are both battling the same enemy,



"Grarr, defeating those puny bunnies will be easy, all we need is a good plan"

we thought we could help you, and," he added with a hint of a smile, "please leave *some* roots for us."

"We agree to your offer. Bring the kangaroos here immediately."

GRASHAL THE FOX was basking in the sun. His army was camped behind the forest near which Brumm had found the dingo. He was a real villainous warrior, as were all in his army.

"Grarr, defeating those puny bunnies will be easy, all we need is a good plan—

their fort is well defended," he said to his counselor and wife, Aashra. "Aarr, what is your idea, my sly-brained fox?"

"I suggest we attack in a pincer movement, with half our army on the north side, and half on the south. Then we move in and forward to the main base," replied Aashra.

"Krrrr, I hope this idea works better than the last one; we lost over a quarter of our old army to them. If it doesn't, you can give your ideas to me in the afterlife." He stalked off.

BRUMM HAD asked a favor of Drumthro—could Trumm be the officer who was in charge of the kangaroo mob? He was larger than most rabbits and even some hares, so speaking to them would be easier. Drumthro agreed. He also made Brumm the general who commanded the dingoes, kangaroos and fourth brigade. Brumm could only say, “I don’t believe it,” for half an hour and Drumthro was chuckling to himself whenever Brumm came in sight.

The next day was to be remembered in the whole of animal history as the Day of the Great Battle. Rose’s scouts had brought in the last report—twenty-six foxes were moving towards Fort Cuniculus. They would be in full view of the fort in six ear-lengths. Drumthro moved seventy hares and rabbits, twenty dingoes and five kangaroos onto a small field just under Rose’s hill. The rabbits dug deep pits at the sides and front of the field and covered them with leaves. The kangaroos were in the middle of the field; the rabbits were on either side of the kangaroos and the dingoes at the sides.

“Dingoes, ready?”

“Yoooooooooooo!”

“I’ll take that for a yes. Kangaroos?”

“As ready as we’ll ever be, Brumm.”

“OK, now we wait.”

THE FOXES crested a small hill in front of the field.

“Arrr, gragrama!” growled Grashal. (No use translating this as kids aren’t supposed to read swear words.)

“What is it, Lord?” asked Aashra.

“Those rosellas must have been spying for the bunnies!”

“You forgot to say ‘Aarr,’” commented someone from the band. A bad sentence to end a life on.

“As I was saying,” said Grashal, throwing the dead fox away, “we lost the element of surprise, and they have got themselves an army!”

“Oh dear,” replied Aashra.

“Draaar, is that all you can say! Don’t tell me the poor little foxy is scared!”

“I’m not scared, just cautious.”

“Kaaar, well, any other brilliant ideas?”

“Smash the center of the army, breaking it into two. The main thing is to split the kangaroos and dingoes. They can’t fight without each other. And the rabbits will probably die of heart failure without them.” She should have known better.

“Harrr, vixen, this is your last chance. Army, rally to me!” and the foxes shot down the hill.

“RIGHT, LET’S GO!” shouted Drumthro. The battle of the foxes and the animals of Fort Cuniculus had begun.

GRASHAL HAD wisely let the main army go past him because he had already seen the traps, and the front-row foxes, including Aashra, disappear into the ground. Then he decided that today was not his lucky day—the kangaroo mob, like a colossal juggernaut, rammed into the army, completely spoiling his attack plan. They kicked, punched and smashed the

foxes into nonexistence. They were having their revenge, and enjoying it. Then he changed his mind as one of the kangaroos toppled to the ground with a crash. He could still win! Grashal was already in the thick of the battle when suddenly the kangaroos left bounded towards him. He could not run back because of the foxes behind him, so he ran to the side of the kangaroos. But not fast enough. A massive kangaroo hind leg rammed into the fox in front of him, making them both fly into the air. He hit the ground, and the world exploded into a firework of multi-colored stars, and then there was blackness.

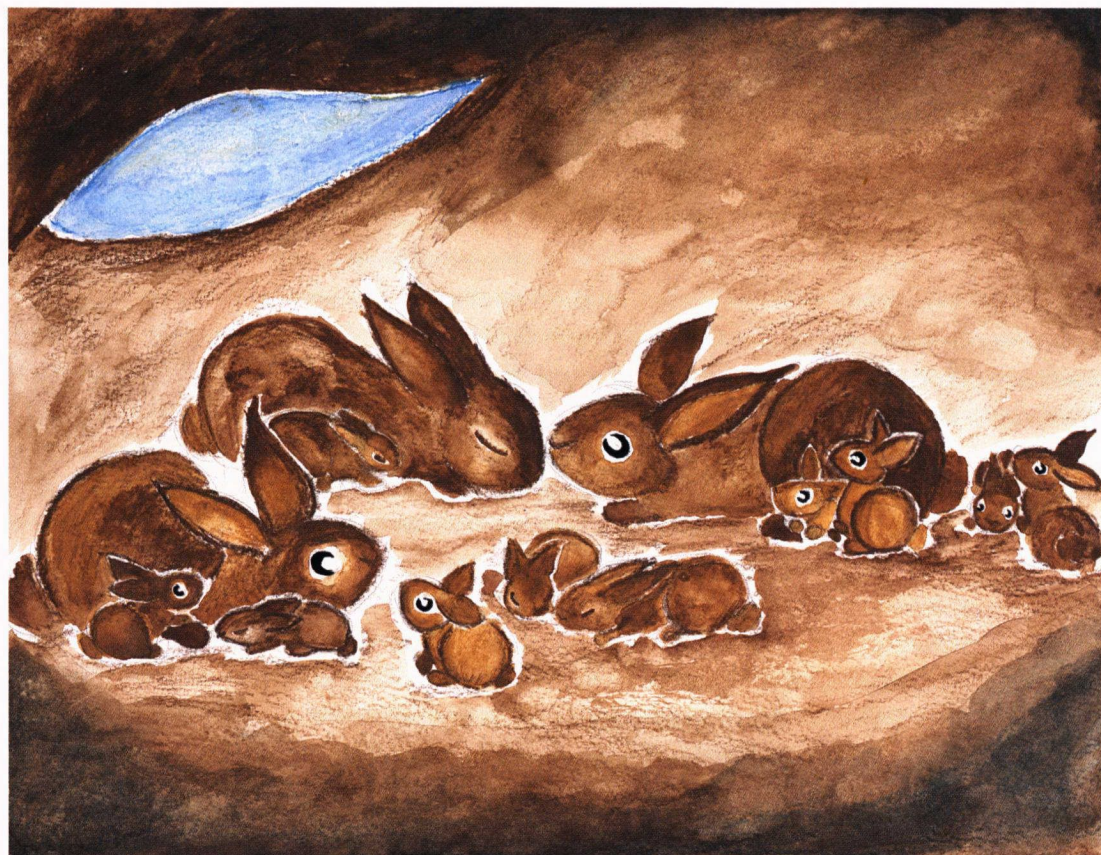
TRUMM WAS running in front of the kangaroos, kicking any fox that came into range with his long muscly hind legs. Suddenly a fox-to-end-all-foxes loomed in front of him. Trumm's legs shot out, but two sinewy paws grabbed a leg and smashed Trumm into the ground. The rabbit threw sand into his attacker's face, and kicked the fox's stomach with his good leg. The fox, though completely winded, was still dangerous. It butted Trumm, and then jumped onto him, raking with its claws. Trumm did a 360-degree twist and helped the fox into the ground with a backward flick. Suddenly his leg gave way and he knew no more. The fox, after thirty seconds of admiring a sweaty patch of earth, clambered up, looked carefully at the rabbit and, deciding he was dead, jumped away and finished its life in mid-air. The kangaroo that killed the fox, unfortunately, did not notice Trumm.

The rabbits were already fighting for their lives and the enemy was beginning to see a glimmer of hope. To confirm that, the rabbits and kangaroos retreated to their former positions for some reason. The dingoes were waiting for this. The sides closed in, making an unbreakable circle. Screaming war cries, they battered the foxes into the kangaroos, which did something that resembled doing open-heart surgery with a bulldozer to them. The foxes left alive ran off to find some easier prey somewhere else. The battle had been won!

Back in the fort, the casualty list was put up—twenty rabbits dead, ten injured and three unaccounted for. Drumthro had also valiantly given up his life to save his friend, Wouvar. Trumm could not be found, but the fox leader, Grashal, was caught still alive. He promised by the bushland oath that his foxes would never harm any rabbit, dingo, hare or kangaroo, and he was let go. He left muttering that he would never even want to pick a fight with bunny rabbits ever again.


Brumm was made commander of Fort Cuniculus, and the dingoes and kangaroos could always visit the fort whenever they wanted. Brumm, however, was not happy. He could not live without knowing that his brother was found, dead or alive.

Then, on Midsummer's Day, Trumm was found! He was barely alive, but when he recovered, he told of his heroic battle against the great fox. Brumm made him a senior officer because of his great bravery and fighting skills (and humor).



His twin brother, Trumm, his wife, Drimma, and their sixteen children were there too

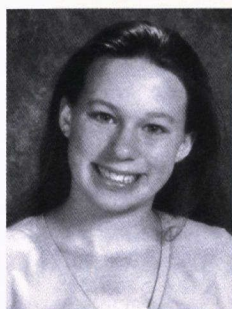
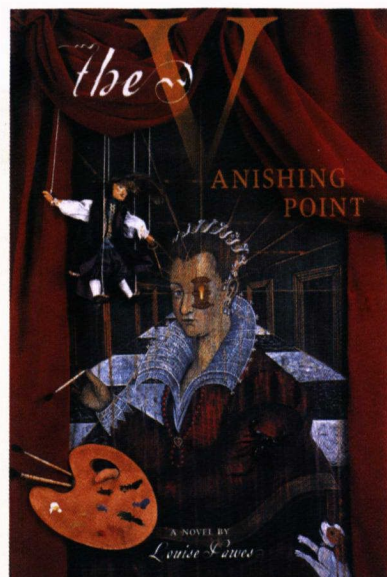
IT WAS THE END of summer. Brumm woke up in his spacious chamber in the main tunnel of Fort Cuniculus. His twin brother, Trumm, his wife, Drimma, and their sixteen children were there

too. He listened to the thumping of the sentry's back paws. The sound was just telling the residents of the fort that the sun was two ear-lengths away from the horizon. 

Book Review

By Chloe Miller

The Vanishing Point, by Louise Hawes;
Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston,
2004; \$17



Chloe Miller, 12
Anchorage, Alaska

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT if the only thing you loved to do was something that was reserved for males, and you had a close-to-zero chance of ever being allowed to pursue the life you wanted? If you are anything like me, it would seem unfair and extremely aggravating. It might make me go slightly crazy, especially if it was something that any girl can do as well as any boy.

This is the scenario for Lavinia Fontana, Vini for short. In *The Vanishing Point*, Vini is a teenage girl from Bologna, Italy, during the mid-sixteenth century. She is the daughter of the semi-famous Renaissance artist and teacher, Prospero Fontana. Though Vini's father is a learned and experienced artist and art is everywhere in their home, she is not allowed to paint. Actually, her father never even considered the idea. He says that painting is always a male's profession; something that females could never do. Secretly, Vini hates hearing him say this because painting and drawing are her main loves and talents.

Behind her parents' back, Vini has been sneaking paper, pencil, and paint from her father's studio with the help of Paolo, one of her father's apprentices. Paolo pretends the paintings are his and shows them to Vini's father to get feedback. He then shares the criticism with Vini, so she can learn more. While

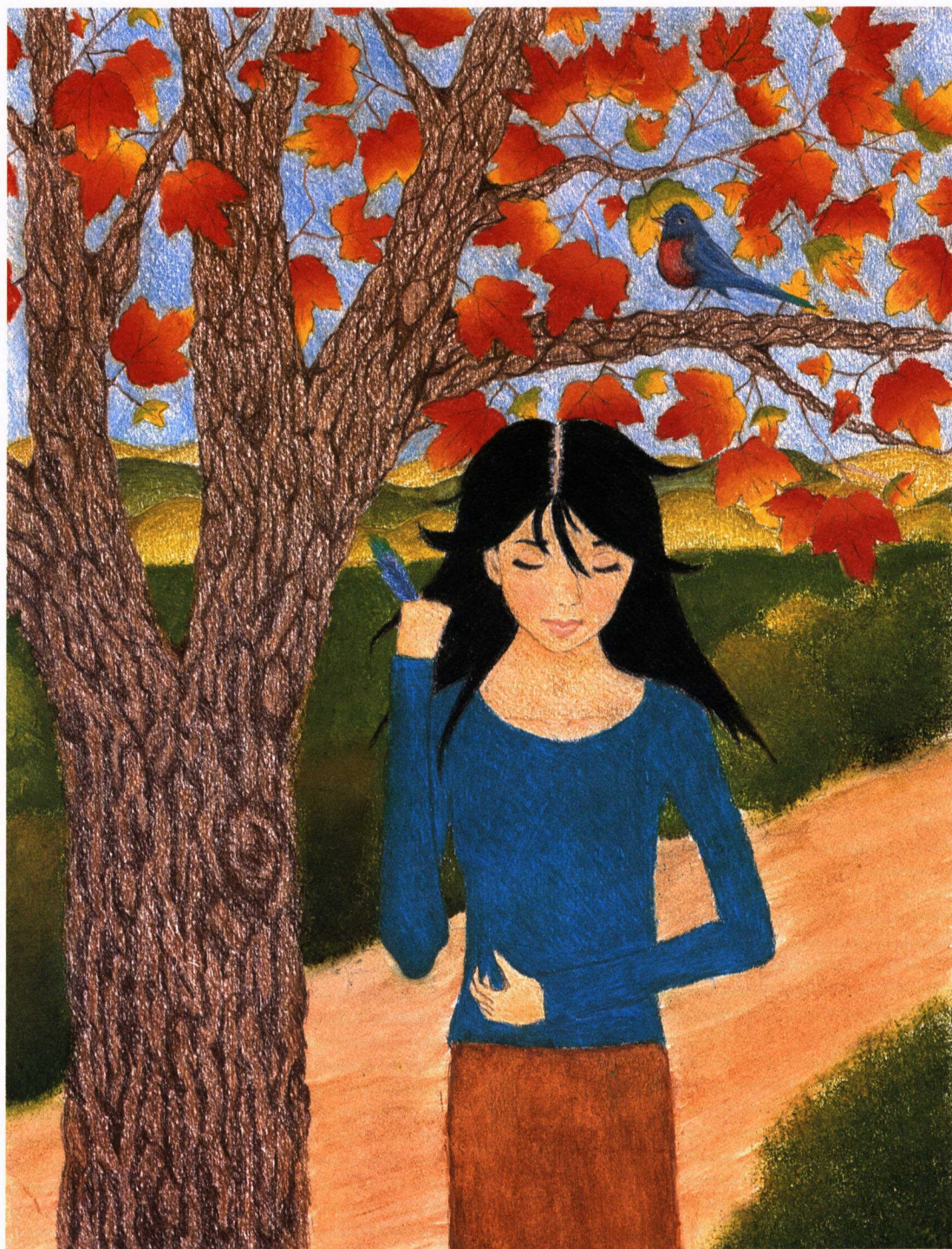
Vini is doing her painting in secret, she also has to deal with her mother's illness and her parents' fighting. There are several things going on at once, so while reading, you never get bored.

I really felt like I was living there alongside Vini through her battles with her painting (hiding it, then getting discovered and having to tell the truth about her love for it), her father (who constantly complains for a son instead of a "worthless daughter" like Vini), and her secret romance with an apprentice.

I can relate to some of the things Vini was going through during this time, and that is one of the reasons I liked the book so much. Since Vini's father constantly complains about not having a son, Vini feels very useless and unwanted. I'm sure everyone has felt like that at some time or another. I know there are days when I feel like I can't do anything right, or that nobody wants me, and so on. Imagine having your father saying outright that he considered you worthless and a burden to him. I was moved by Vini's determination and willingness to do what she wanted. It gave me an inspiration to never give up until I have achieved what I aim for. This is a life lesson everyone hears many, many times, but it is rare to find someone who is as dedicated as Vini. She had every hurdle in her way, but she persisted and figured out a way to paint against all the odds, even when she was ill and faced the chance that she could never paint again.

Even though this book is fictional, it is based on real people and events. Lavinia Fontana was a real artist, who went on to experience more fame than any female artist before her. Her paintings still hang in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. Historical fiction is my favorite genre because I can learn so much. It seems like I am killing two birds with one stone because I am enjoying myself and learning, too.

The Vanishing Point is a wonderful book. Anybody who reads it will be drawn in and unable to stop reading about Vini's life. I think it deserves five stars. ❀



I closed my eyes and breathed in the lightly fragrant aroma of its music

Forever Untitled

By Margaret Bryan

Illustrated by Ashley Burke

THE FEATHER FLUTTERED to the ground. I looked about me, as if affirming that no one would deprive me of this precious trinket. A red-breasted robin broke out in song. I closed my eyes and breathed in the lightly fragrant aroma of its music.

Music. One of the few things in life that can't be described in words.

I relished the robin's tune for a few short minutes, clutching the feather (which had a texture of raw silk) for the whole experience. The tender autumn air rustled my hair ever so slightly, like that of the first sunshine of spring.

The sensation of autumn flooded through me, and "Forever Untitled," as I had decided to call the robin's melody, rang through my veins. It seemed as if this day of bliss would never come to an end.

But there were other things to be done that day. I slowly strolled home, not wanting to pop the magical bubble which nature had conjured.

Upon arriving home, I was greeted with a terse "do the dishes." Not wanting to get in trouble with my parents for neglecting my duties, I reached for a dirty plate, leaving my feather of remembrance upon my desk.

The rest of the day seemed like awakening from a dream of perfection. I felt lost and guilty that I had abandoned nature's beauty and indescribable music. My freshly scoured hands, cloaked in dishwashing liquid, longingly reached out the kitchen



Margaret Bryan, 10
Holden, Maine



Ashley Burke, 12
Cedar Park, Texas

window. I pinched a small piece of air, oh so light and wonderful. My hands brushed absently against the foliage scented with the fruitful smell of honeysuckle.

Finally I was done. I shook my hands briskly to dry them.

I had not been done one minute when five crisp, snow-white envelopes were thrown carelessly on the kitchen table. I swept my locks of raven-black hair out of my eyes and examined each envelope attentively. The first two were of no surprise. An electric bill and a note informing us of the cost of the new door. I sighed. Electric bills were common additions to our postage. My family had a reputation for wasting electricity. In truth I was not to blame, as I spent most of my time in the comforting luxury of the outdoors.

A resounding shriek caused me to pause during the process of opening the third envelope (which was addressed to me from my most devoted friend, Loretta). I couldn't help but smile; I knew what it was to feel triumphant.

My eight-year-old sister, Marion, shuffled towards me happily.

"Alex, look!" she said, barely breathing in her excitement. She presented me with a large, circular object. I paused, both shocked and a bit horrified. A beautiful mask was before me, scattered with (I gulped) the sad remains of a robin's feather.

"It, well," I said slowly, "it's lovely."

Marion looked at me blankly for a few moments, and I knew that my remark was not as praising as she would have hoped. I knew that she could tell from my tone

that I was unsatisfied.

"You don't like it," she said finally, crestfallen.

"Oh, no, it is not that!" I exclaimed. "I think it is beautiful. I'm just wondering where you got the materials."

"You're wondering about the feather, aren't you?" my sibling said, reading my thoughts. "It was the one on your desk. I thought you wouldn't mind, as there are plenty of feathers to go around."

In my mind I shuddered. I tried to convince myself that it was just a feather, a recent token representing my love of the things around me, but I couldn't. However, I managed to give my sister a dishonest smile and say heartily, "Oh. Well, it's beautiful."

My disappointment was short-lived though, and time had soon consumed any feelings of anger towards my sister.

It was 5:30 P.M. Suppertime. I quickly grabbed five mismatched forks and hurried to the dining room. My brother, Reginald, my senior by two years, was already at the table. Soon my other family members had entered.

The dinner was uneventful. Instant rice dinner and stuffed apples were passed silently along the table, while glasses of chilled ice water were sipped with lack of ceremony. After the meal I slipped upstairs unnoticed. The moment my head hit the pillow I fell asleep.

THE NEXT MORNING the sun shone bright and I awoke with no traces of straggling fatigue.



The sound of magic filled the room

When I entered the kitchen a flood of rock music filled my ears. I glanced at my sister, then at the radio, which was shaking so violently I feared it would fall off the shelf supporting it.

I groped for the cornflakes box. "Not this early in the morning, Marion." I now opened the fridge, looking for the milk. Marion switched off the music immediately.

After breakfast I washed the dishes and Marion took out her violin, intending to play me a jaunty tune. When I told

her no, and perhaps some classical, she seemed obviously puzzled, but nevertheless obeyed my request.

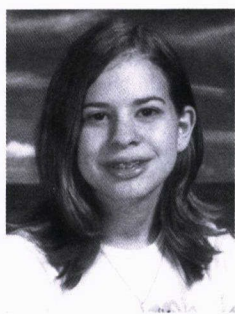
The sound of magic filled the room. I was entranced by the spell that the simple wooden instrument had conjured. Of course, all music had its magic, but to savor its full flavor you had to sit down and enjoy it. At this moment there were only two words to describe the sensation. A name that was not really a name.

"Forever Untitled," I murmured, and the robins broke out in chorus. ❁

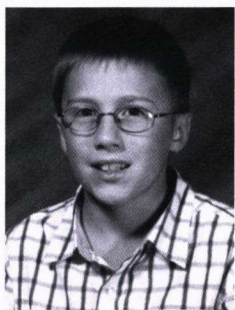
The Last Dragon

By Veronica Engler

Illustrated by Ben Wisniewski



Veronica Engler, 13
Gilbert, Arizona



Ben Wisniewski, 12
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I GAZE OUT ACROSS THE VALLEY from my perch on the cold, gray cliff. I watch a band of knights ride toward me, scarlet flags embossed with white lions flying defiantly in the light breeze. They are followed by a crowd of villagers eager to view my slaying. I close my eyes for a moment, digging deep inside my fiery heart, and then I lift my head, letting a flame twenty yards long stream from my mouth.

I see the knights look up, pointing at me, and I can hear the word shouted and whispered from each human's lips. *Dragon.* I spread my wings, each the span of twenty feet and cloaked in deep sapphire and sparkling silver. I rise up, my great snake-like body impressive in the misty morning air. With my hawk's vision, I find the lead knight and fix upon him the glare of my color-shifting eyes and let loose another flame. *Dragon.*

The villagers begin to shout, as do the knights, and a few of both begin to turn back. I smile, revealing teeth sharp as swords. I turn and begin down the mountainside, planning to meet the slaughter party at its base.

As I walk, my wings pulsing and my tail lashing against protruding stones, shattering them into a thousand flying pieces, I think about the cause of this confrontation. I have done nothing. Nothing—it is merely my size and my power that frightens them into the thought that I must be annihilated. But really, I am nothing compared to some dragons. Like Keicro, with his beautiful amber skin and deep crimson wings he seemed to have the sunset painted onto his scales . . .



I rise up, my great snake-like body impressive in the misty morning air

I shut out the thought, gritting my teeth into a grotesque grin. After what they did to Keicro, after what those humans did to my family—to condemn me to death for an imagined crime—after the mass slaughter of those I loved...

I glare ahead, the crowd of people com-

ing into view. I will think of my family as I battle—of the great scaly beasts who dropped from the skies like stones and the blank eyes of those who had already passed into the next world while swords flashed like silver death. Banners flew in tatters as arrows rained down on the re-

mainder of us. Yes, I will think of them in battle and it will give me strength.

I step into the valley and the knights step back while the villagers flee to hide behind the boulders scattered throughout the lush green vegetation of the valley. I let loose a ground-shaking roar, my rage echoing in each vibration. The leader of the knights slides off his horse and draws his sword, stepping bravely to fight me. I glower at him through the morning mist, my eyes shifting from smoky shadows to glittering turquoise to intense amethyst. The knight glares back at me with bronze eyes. Bronze eyes I recognize. Suddenly I see a scene play before my eyes. Keicro lies on the blood-stained ground, eyes closed, his last breath escaping his lips. A knight pulls his sword from my brother's heaving side and as he turns I can see his eyes. They are a gleaming bronze. The knight turns away and wipes his blade on the grass.

I cannot control the rage boiling inside me and release it in a stream of fire. The warrior dodges and narrowly avoids the licking red and gold. I snort with annoyance. I lift my wings, spreading them so wide they block the rising sun, throwing the cowering humans into darkness. I roar and beat my wings. I rise into the air, feeling my ally the wind help me mount the sky. I take a deep breath, feeling the winged beast stir in my blood. I feel at ease off the ground, the spaciousness of the air. I open my eyes and turn to the knight. I swoop down on him, seeing nothing but the man who murdered my brother.

The bronze-eyed warrior takes a swipe at me with his sword, but I knock it away and catch him in my iron claws, pinning him against the grass. He looks up at me. I smile, my teeth white and long.

How does it feel? I want to ask him. *How does it feel to be small and helpless?* *How does it feel? Does it feel terrible, like a cold wind that races through your blood and chills your heart? Do you feel the terror?*

I look deep into his eyes, and I am surprised. In this man's eyes—this man, who I have hated for years for the death of my brother—I see fear, not for himself but for his family. I am drawn into his mind by my natural power of telepathy and I see a woman with blond hair falling in waves down her back and by her feet a small human. The small human only comes up to the woman's knee and its eyes are bronze also, curiosity and innocence swirling within. And then I see the woman, obviously the knight's mate, lying on a bed, sweating from fever and crying out. I see his little girl crying, afraid for her mother.

I stare at this man and realize that, while I have lost my family, he is in danger of losing his. I try to convince myself that it is what he deserves, but I just cannot. No one—*no one*—should ever have to lose their loved ones. Never.

I lift my claw to release him but as I do, I feel a pain in my foreleg and turn to see another knight attacking me. I roar and bat him away, but another knight attacks me and then another and another. Suddenly I am surrounded by yelling humans wielding swords and sinking them

into my flesh. I roar and swipe at them, but they keep coming back at me.

I try to burn them with another flame but my aim is compromised as a human manages to pierce my stomach, and I bellow as I go down. And then they are all upon me, the noise and screaming bringing me back to the bloodbath they initiated so many years ago. I see my family members fall before my eyes and realize that it is now my turn to die . . .

Suddenly the onslaught stops and all is quiet. I hear the breathing of the horses, the pounding hearts of the villagers watching. I hear the wind whispering to me in the voices of my lost family and I ease my eyes open. Standing before me is the knight with the bronze eyes. He takes a step toward me cautiously, and when I do not try to cremate him, he takes another step.

Soon he is right beside me. Carefully, he lays his hand on my face, looking into my eyes. He whispers something to me, but I cannot understand his language. Instead I look into his eyes and there is a question. I think a moment, and then nod.

Yes, I think, feeling that I could cry if I had not exhausted my tears years ago. *I am the last dragon.*

He leans forward and lays his head on my cheek and whispers again. I cannot understand the words, but I understand the feeling of sorrow and the rhythm of the words is so comforting. I close my eyes and I see the Keicro. He says something, though I cannot hear him. A white light engulfs me and the faces of my fam-

ily appear around me. They are all saying the same thing and at last I can hear the words.

Come home, Liljuka. Come home to your family.

I smile, tears falling down my cheeks as I fly to meet them. I do not have to be alone anymore. I do not have to be angry in that lonely existence ever again.

THE KNIGHT STANDS, looking down at the ground. He is too late. The sun reflects off azure scales in a mockery of life, but the dragon is already gone. The knight wipes the wetness from his eyes and turns back to his men. He walks silently to his horse, mounts and rides back toward the village.

The villagers and knights watch him leave with silent confusion. This should be a moment of triumph—of celebration—but the air is weighted down with sorrow and regret. The great dragon lies still, lifeless and sad. Soon the crowd begins to leave, trying to escape this scene.

THE BRONZE-EYED knight plods along on his horse, thoughts of his wife and child swirling in his mind. He sighs so heavily it is almost a sob. He feels a cool breeze on his back and looks up. The morning mist is almost completely gone, but as he looks up at the sun he sees a shadowy image pass through the remaining mist. The shape is familiar . . .

He smiles when he sees a flash of blue and silver through the haze.

Dragon.





Lydia could tell what her father was trying to avoid doing, and she smoldered inside

Poseidon

By Lauren Tompkins

Illustrated by Rachel Cohen

“**Y**OUR MOTHER? GONE?” Lydia’s father asked.

Lydia twisted her fingers around the edge of her battered suitcase and nodded. She didn’t open her mouth for fear she would say something she would regret.

“Fever, Mr. Wainscot. She had it for months,” Sister Engels murmured, standing behind the eleven-year-old.

“Months? Why wasn’t I informed?”

Sister Engels put a wrinkled hand on Lydia’s shoulder. “Forgive me, sir, you were away for, how long, dear?”

“Seven years,” Lydia whispered, looking down. Her shoes, polished the night before to be ready for this dull occasion, were now tarnished from her long walk to the church’s gate. The borrowed shirt and skirt she wore felt itchy and uncomfortable in the day’s heat.

“Understandably, we would love to keep her here, but we are a church, not a convent,” Sister Engels continued.

Lydia’s father put a hand to his forehead, tanned from days in the sun, and addressed the nun with a hint of politeness. “Could you yourself take her in?”

Lydia could tell what her father was trying to avoid doing, and she smoldered inside.

“No, sir.” Sister Engels’s grip on Lydia’s shoulder tightened slightly. “She could go with you on your ship, wherever it is you go. I’m afraid there are no other options.”

Lydia’s tall father picked up Lydia’s suitcase and put it over his shoulder. He tried hard to disguise the look of distaste



Lauren Tompkins, 13
Kneeland, California



Rachel Cohen, 11
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

upon his face.

"Lydia, follow me." He was so tall that Lydia had to take several extra steps to match his long strides. When he paused to open the gate, he seemed to sway from side to side, as if blown each direction by the breeze. Lydia hunched her shoulders and kept it to herself. No words were uttered as they walked down the steep hill that the church was perched upon, to where a ship was docked. There, her father indicated the ship with a wave of his hand and spoke in a clipped voice that Lydia supposed was his usual tone.

"This is the *Poseidon*. Walk anywhere you wish, but keep out of the way of Mr. Briggs and myself."

"Mr. Briggs?" Lydia ventured.

"My first mate. I am the captain of the *Poseidon*. Thankfully, we only need two men," he put emphasis on the last word before continuing, "to steer the ship."

"It's . . ." Lydia took in the entire ship in mere seconds. It had two masts, but was barely twenty feet across. It was painted a bright turquoise with white trim. Lydia finished her sentence. "It's . . . it's rather small, isn't it?"

"No," Lydia's father said curtly. "You may bunk in the extra cot on the floor of the cabin below. Get aboard quickly. I don't want to miss the tide."

Miss the tide? You could miss the tide in so few minutes? Lydia thought to herself, but she walked up the thin board that served as a gangplank for the ship without arguing.

IN THE CABIN, Lydia found a cot underneath a table made of smooth wood. On the table there were rolls of paper, and boxes of charcoal, stubs of pencils, and a set of moldy-looking watercolors alongside a frayed horsehair brush. In the corner of the room there was a stove with a bag of coal beside it. There were two hammocks strung on opposite sides of the room. Studying them, it was easy to tell which one of the hammocks belonged to Lydia's father. Her father's smelled like salt and seaweed—something Lydia would come to recognize as the smell of the sea itself. Her father's hammock had a lumpy and stained pillow at the top, and underneath that, a heavy wool blanket that Lydia's mother had given him before he left seven years ago.

Lydia turned to the other hammock, the one she knew belonged to the barely-mentioned Mr. Briggs. Although she had not yet met the man, she could tell what kind of habits he carried. His pillow had been fluffed, his blanket had been carefully and meticulously folded. A pair of pants and a shirt were folded beside that, and underneath Lydia saw a book's spine peeking out.

However, there was nothing on Lydia's new bunk that showed any signs of caring. Why should it? No one had expected her, after all. Lydia set her suitcase down, and sat dejectedly on the cot, the events of the past months threatening to overwhelm her. No sooner had she sat down than the whole world seemed to tip to one side, sending all loose objects in the room slid-

ing. Lydia herself gave a shriek as she was tossed out of her cot and into the adjacent wall. The ship tilted back, sending a few objects rolling.

At last, Lydia stood and stooped to pick up the supplies that had fallen. The first thing her fingers met was the book she had seen on the first mate's hammock. The book flipped open unexpectedly, and a key slipped out onto the floor. Lydia put the key back in the book and walked across the room, placing it where it had been on the hammock.

The door swung open and Lydia stumbled back. There in the doorway stood Lydia's father and Mr. Briggs, who was exactly as Lydia had imagined him: short, clean-shaven, tan, and very neat.

"Did you do all this?" her father boomed, taking in the chaos before him in the messy cabin.

"No! No, I was sitting down and there was a shuddering . . ." Lydia paused, watching Mr. Briggs. He had strode to his hammock and felt inside the book for the key. Strange, she thought. Very strange.

"You were saying?"

"And . . . and everything fell," she finished lamely.

"Then you wouldn't mind helping Mr. Briggs pick everything up while I make dinner."

Her father turned to one of the cabinets on the wall. The cabinet was held closed by a heavy metal lock. "Briggs," he said suddenly, "you don't happen to know where the key is, do you?"

"No, Mr. Wainscot."

Lydia's father scratched his head. "I suppose it will turn up. But where could it have gone? It was just here . . ." he felt along the top of the cabinet " . . . and we'll need those maps that are in there later on. Lydia, what are you standing there for?"

Lydia was standing stock-still, feeling as if there was a draft in the cabin, making her shiver with the cold. Eyes wide, she looked at Mr. Briggs. His eyes were as hard as stone.

"I . . . no reason . . ."

Shaking his head, her father opened the other cabinet and selected cans of food. The ship tilted again.

"That's the second time! There's a gale on its way . . . I should have known the warm weather would lead to this!" Lydia's father slammed down the cans of food and hastened to the door. "Briggs, come with me, we must try to outrun this storm."

"But we have no maps, sir." Briggs protested.

"The stars. The stars always show the way." Lydia's father opened a drawer, and fumbled for something. "Briggs, the sextant! Where is it?"

THE WORD SEXTANT Lydia remembered from a long time ago. She knew that it was a way of lining up the stars, or something of the sort. Something to do with sailing, her mother had said.

"Sextant, sir? You dropped it overboard."

Lydia's father looked confused. "I certainly did not! I had it here yesterday! I put it in the cabinet . . ."

"And lost the key," Briggs remarked.

"You have the key!" Lydia burst out suddenly.

They both turned to look at her, as if they had forgotten she was there. "Briggs, Briggs has the key! It's in his book. I saw it!"

THERE WAS a moment of confusion. Both men turned to look at each other, Briggs's face revealing the truth, and her father's darkened and disbelieving. At the same moment, both men lunged for the book that lay on the first mate's hammock. Lydia's father touched the book first, his fingers barely brushing the spine, but Briggs snatched the book away. In a heartbeat Briggs had slipped his fingers inside, drawn out the key, and snapped it in half. Had the key been made of iron, this would have been hard to do, but the key was rusted, and snapped easily, crumbling in Briggs's fist. In that moment, everything seemed to halt. Lydia was once again rooted to the spot, and her father stood in very much the same way. Briggs, however, was triumphant.

"You wanted the money for yourself, from those maps," Lydia's father accused, wide-eyed.

"Yes, I did! It's just as well that neither of us have them."

There was a kind of cruel sense in what Briggs had said.

"Get off," Lydia's father said, "my ship. Take the emergency raft, and go. I don't want to see you here ever." Briggs had already backed out of the cabin, and was

hoisting a raft overboard. Briggs jumped overboard onto the raft, and began paddling desperately.

Mr. Wainscot turned to Lydia. "Stay here." He started across the cabin to the door. Lydia's brain was a whirlwind of events. Things had happened so fast it was hard for her to believe them, but of one thing was Lydia certain.

"Wait!" Lydia called. "I'm coming. I'll help with the ship."

Lydia's father turned to regard his defiant daughter, as she stood, arms crossed, and Lydia watched a slow smile spread across his face, his teeth very white next to his sun-tanned skin.

RAIN LASHED at the deck, the waves roared inside Lydia's ears. Within seconds Lydia and her father were soaked. "We can't possibly get through this!" Lydia shouted.

"*Poseidon* will!" said her father, and laughed. "We may not."

Lydia didn't have time to ponder what that meant. "Get to the wheel!" he called, pointing to the wheel at the front of the ship. Lydia ran to it and grasped its spindle-like handles.

"I can't steer a ship!" Lydia shouted, terrified as the ship bucked like a wild horse on the waves.

"A child of ten could do it! Watch out for rocks." What he had said might have been laughable if the situation wasn't so frightening to Lydia. Putting a knife in between his teeth, pirate fashion, Lydia's father scaled the mast by ropes. The wheel

spun in Lydia's hands, and it took all of her strength to push it back to where it had been before. Pushing rain-wet hair back from her forehead, Lydia looked at the sea ahead.

Waves crashed and swelled, their white caps menacing, like the teeth of a fierce creature. The waves broke and began again, and didn't look so innocent as they had a few minutes ago. It was as if they were whispering to Lydia of all the lives they had taken. Lydia closed her eyes to clear her head. When she opened them, she saw it, a huge rock sticking out of the waves. And the *Poseidon* was heading straight for it. Lydia grasped the spindles of the wheel and heaved to the side, spinning the wheel halfway. Perhaps too hard. The ship seemed to keel over on its side, and Lydia moved to straighten it.

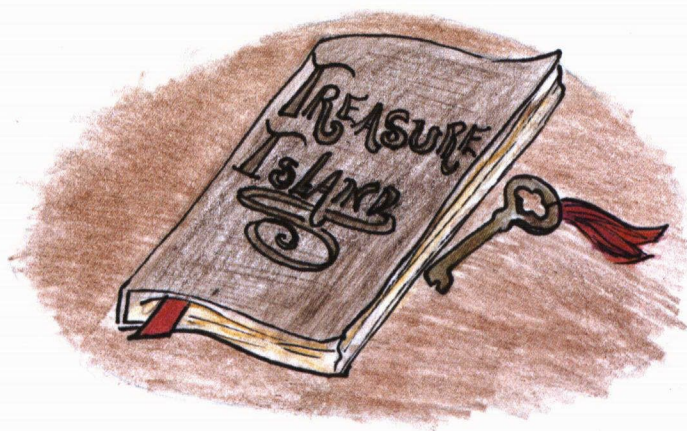
Terror gripped her heart as she saw more rocks ahead. For the second time

that day, Lydia was rooted to the spot where she stood, unable to move.

Smoothly, warm, large hands covered her own on the wheel, muscled arms shadowed her smaller arms.

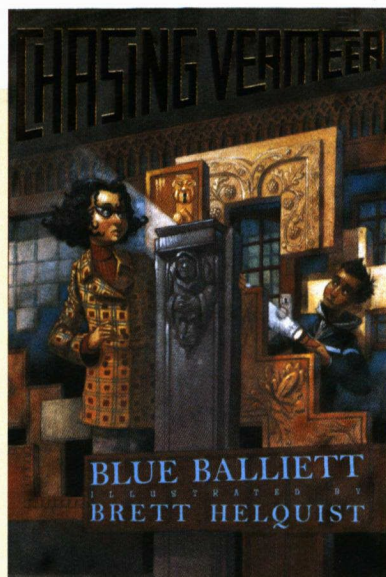
"You're doing fine," a clipped voice said, and Lydia's father helped her turn the wheel, and guide the ship out of the storm.

LYDIA COULDN'T have been more glad when the ship was beyond the stormy clouds and the waves began to slow until the water was smooth as glass. Both Lydia and her father stood back from the wheel and regarded the waters, the sky, the now calm world around them. Lydia's father once again put his hand over his daughter's, this time giving it a firm shake. His eyes had a twinkle in them, and his lips were turned up at the corners as he told her, "Welcome to the crew." ❁



Book Review

By Juliet A. Martone



Juliet A. Martone, 8
Princeton, New Jersey


Chasing Vermeer, by Blue Balliett;
Scholastic Press: New York, 2004; \$16.95

HAVE YOU EVER gotten a letter that changed your life? Well, it was an amazing letter that started Petra and Calder, two classmates, on a great adventure searching for a stolen Vermeer painting. In this story, their teacher, Ms. Hussey, led her class to explore different ways of communicating. While Petra enjoyed writing, most of her classmates like Calder didn't, saying "What about numbers? What about pictures? What about plain old talking?" I can relate to this because I do many of the arts, like dance, music, acting and painting. When I dance, I communicate with motion and movement, with music I communicate with sound and rhythm, with acting I communicate with words and emotions, and with painting I communicate with the feelings I put into images.

Ms. Hussey reminds me of many of my arts teachers because she has many unusual and unique ways of thinking and making up solutions. I feel that I relate to her student Petra because we both have wild hair, we are always up for action, and we like to discover a lot. We are creative, love writing, and want to do

things our own way whether people like it or not. Also, we like to keep to ourselves, and we are very modest.

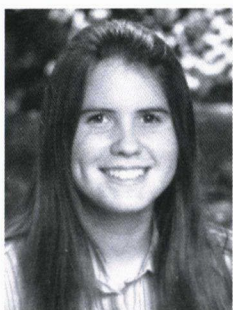
In this book, Calder uses some little figures called pentominoes, which are shapes that you can put together in different ways to make a rectangle, and that can represent letters. Calder would carry pentominoes with him everywhere he would go. He would pull one out, and the first word that came to mind beginning with the letter that the pentomino stood for would always somehow help him. Calder used pentominoes as one way of communicating, and part of the mystery of this story is that there is a pentomino code hidden in this book.

The action in *Chasing Vermeer* goes on and off like a light switch. It starts calmly, then the story zooms and you are right in the action. The author brings you to the edge of the cliff and then it ends just as it started, calmly and peacefully. The book reminds me of *Harry Potter* and *Eragon* because it is so mysterious and exciting, and because you never know what is going to happen next. When I first opened the book, I didn't understand what a pentomino was. I got frustrated and I didn't want to read it. But then, I checked the Web site, www.scholastic.com/chasingvermeer, which really helped! And now I love it! The Web site also has a great pentomino game. Before long, I noticed a lot of things in the illustrations that I didn't see before, like hidden pentomino pieces and a hidden animal figure. I highly recommend this book, but it is a difficult book to follow and probably not good for younger readers. This book is an amazing and challenging adventure. 

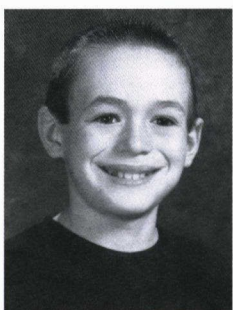
Fairy Ship

By Emma Kilgore Hine

Illustrated by Bryan Merte



Emma Kilgore Hine, 13
Austin, Texas



Bryan Merte, 11
Wappingers Falls, New York

LET MY HAND TRAIL in the cool, clear water of the New Mexican mountain stream. It trickles like liquid crystal through my fingers, sending shivers up my back. Despite the pulsing warmth of the glowing July sun, the water has a sharp nip. I shift my position on the bank of the stream, letting my toes dip in the water. Lightly, I press one toe against a rock, rubbing the thick, moist moss. The soft, dark green is penetrated in places by tiny yellow stars, blooming from the damp velvet. Beside the mossy stone lies a piece of bark, soggy and worn by its time in the water. I bend over, careful to keep my balance, and touch it, surprised at its soft, porous feel. Struck with an idea, I glance around, noticing the long, waving grasses, the smooth, shiny river stones, rid by time of any past flaws. A lone magpie shatters the peace with her harsh "Queg queg! Queg queg!" as she streaks through the cool mountain air, flashing white and black. Across the creek a slick brown frog paddles upstream, searching for an unwary bug. Little minnows, curious at the strange pink presence in their water, nibble and nudge at my foot. With a whirl of tiny wings, a shimmering hummingbird flits across my vision like a whispered hint of a dream. A bee drones sleepily as it inspects a sprig of pale pink wildflowers nestled in a halo of luscious green leaves. Quietly, I reach over, careful not to disturb the bee, and pluck several pink blossoms. Using a length of grass, I fasten them to the bark, along with a handful of the bright leaves. Gently, I lower the little boat into the water, then watch as it drifts



Gently, I lower the little boat into the water, then watch as it drifts slowly out of sight

slowly out of sight. The fairy craft spins and twirls, gathering speed, then with one final surge dances away and around a curve in the stream, forever out of view, racing into the mist like a ship into the dawn, flower sails at full tilt. I smile sadly and struggle to my feet, then, invigorated by the crisp mountain air and sweet scent of flowers, I run, letting my long, loose

hair whip behind me. My bare feet pound over the grassy field, sinking into the earth still moist after yesterday's storm. The skies are clear now, though. As I slow and come to a halt I can see Hermit's Peak towering behind the pines, craggy features distorted by only a thin wisp of cloud, blank eyes forever gazing into the heavens. ❁



I jog up the field as that checkered orb lightly dances in front of my feet

Second Try

By Adara Robbins

Illustrated by Natalie Chin

THE PLEASING AROMA of freshly cut grass wafts through my nostrils as I step out onto the rectangular field, surrounded by the sounds of night with only the glowing field lights to accompany me. My toe kicks forward the round orb; its black and white checkers become blurred as the ball rolls dizzily towards the goal. That white frame is like a beacon to me . . . a destination far away and nearly out of reach. It's been a while since I've been on a soccer field. I can still hear the sounds of fellow players running down the field, shoes kicking up mud and tufts of grass. For a moment, I see my coach standing on the sidelines, but I blink a few times and the image dissolves like a mirage in the desert. I remember the years of effort and the tryouts and the failures. I remember my last effort, my last push to success. And I remember that phone call, the coach who said I was number sixteen out of fifteen players who got accepted. After that, my memories blur—I never touched a soccer ball again, never set foot on a field again. I looked longingly for years at the players who made it and thought about where I could have been if . . . if . . . it was always what if . . .

I shake my head, clearing the painful memories away like dusting out an attic filled with spidery cobwebs. I still have not laid the soccer in me to rest and tonight, with the cool night air, feels like someone reopening a raw wound. My vow never to play again seems meaningless to me now as I stand, alone, on the gigantic expanse of green turf. I kick the ball again, picking up the pace now as I dribble a few yards more towards that bea-



Adara Robbins, 13
Osprey, Florida

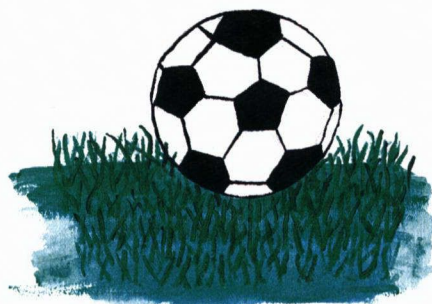


Natalie Chin, 13
Bellevue, Washington

con of white in the distance. I even try a few fancy moves, imagining an opposing player in front of me trying to steal away the precious ball. The chirps of the crickets seem to mock me as I ask myself what I'm doing here, on a night when I should be having fun with my friends. Instead, I'm practicing a sport at which I have no chance of succeeding or even making a team. In response, my feet start moving automatically—performing warm-ups that have been drilled into my mind so many years ago. I didn't even realize I had remembered them. I go faster now, my feet weaving around the ball, lightly touching its shiny surface as they perform those familiar movements. I hear the voice of the coach in my ear, telling me to bend lower and move faster. I speed up even more, any trace of self-doubt gone by now.

I soon graduate on to full-scale dribbling. I jog up the field as that checkered orb lightly dances in front of my feet. The wind rushes in my ears and I forget all about those painful memories. Right now, I'm just playing for myself and only me—not for anyone else. I finally reach the

penalty box whose stark white lines stand out like a bright color among a sea of dark. Suddenly, that seemingly unreachable destination of the goal and its net doesn't seem so unreachable anymore. I push the ball out to the side, just like I've been taught, and snap my knee and foot as the ball goes slamming into the goal. I'm out of breath and sit down in front of the goal on that memorable ground, overwhelmed by the emotions that rush through me like a train speeding through the countryside. I feel tears coming and, embarrassed, I wipe them away. I didn't know I felt so strongly about soccer. When I feel ready, I get up again and perform every drill I know. I don't think about technique or speed, I just marvel at my grace and the fluidity of my motions. After what seems like a minute, I check my sports watch and realize a full hour has gone by since I decided to make this emotional journey. The crickets still chirp and the wind still blows tiny specks of grass across the lonely field as I pick up my treasured soccer ball and walk slowly off the field. I vow to return again tomorrow. ❁



Traveling Light in the Andes

By Canyon Woodward

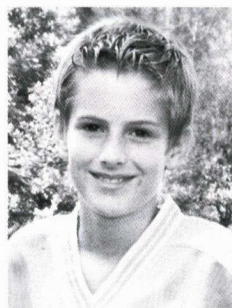
Illustrated by Jean Hope Sack

“WILL YOU LOOK at that?” I said, tugging on Mom’s sleeve and pointing down from the balcony at the lady walking in through the gate, being helped by Jose Luiz and his siblings. “If ever there was a typical American tourist! She must have at least eight suitcases. Jose Luiz is too kind. She should have to carry her own things if she’s going to bring all of that stuff. That is just ridiculous!”

“Oh my gosh! She doesn’t belong in a hostel, she needs a three-room hotel suite!” agreed my thirteen-year-old sister, Summer. We watched the lady walk towards her room, with her bags preceding her.

Just the other day my own family had made the long train ride to Ollantaytambo, Peru, in the sacred valley of the Incas. The mountains of the Andes towered high around us, the ancient city of Machu Picchu lying far to the east. Also tumbling through the valley was the wild Urabamba River, its raging waters swelled by recent rains. We considered ourselves fortunate to run across this warm and friendly hostel run by Jose Luiz and his family. I was also excited that we might visit a Quechua village higher in the Andes and see the beautiful weavings we had heard so much about.

JANET, TIRED FROM her long trip, greeted Jose Luiz and his little sister Pamela with a happy heart, thinking of the last time she had seen them. It had been at least a year. Pamela was only four then, and Eva had just given birth to their third son, Core.



Canyon Woodward, 12
Franklin, North Carolina



Jean Hope Sack, 13
Eureka, California



Janet, tired from her long trip, greeted Jose Luiz and his little sister Pamela with a happy heart

Jose Luiz and his sister helped Janet to unload her suitcases as the rest of the Pinado Bara family showed up. She was delighted as all of them but the very youngest came up to hug her and help with the luggage. Walking up the familiar cobblestone street towards the hostel, Janet smiled to herself.

As she carried two of her suitcases across the grassy courtyard towards the stairway, Janet couldn't help but notice an American family on the balcony outside their room.

That must be a wealthy family, she thought to herself. You've got to have a lot

of money to travel with five people outside the U.S. Their only girl was running around in shorts. She probably goes into town like that too, Janet thought. This is definitely their first time in this kind of place. They should know how offensive it is for a girl to have her legs completely exposed like that.

Then she climbed up the steps and disappeared into her room not too far away, leaving her suitcases just outside the door.

"DO YOU MIND?" Dad said, trying to step over the suitcases that were lying right in the way, blocking the stairs.



As I sat in front of one of the looms, my gaze strayed to the weaver's hands

He tripped over one and tumbled to the deck. "Could you move your bags?" he snapped, throwing a dark look into her room, then spun around and marched down the stairs with my brother, Nick, trailing after him. As we were getting ready to go to the village of Huilloc, I saw Jose Luiz pick up Janet's bags and carry them into his house.

Our hike up to the small Quechua village turned out to be a lot longer than we had bargained for. Mudslides loosed by the torrential rains had blocked the narrow cliff-hanging road high up in the Andes. Otherwise we could have gotten

within a mile of the village in a van that the hostel owned. After an exhausting uphill climb we finally entered the village with Jose Luiz as our guide. The first thing we saw was six weavers dressed in the colors of their village, working away in their yards, children running, playing and shouting all around them.

"This is Huilloc," said Jose Luiz in his nearly perfect English. "I think you will all have fun exploring around here. The people are very friendly. I'm going to go down to the river and get some water. I'll come find you in a couple of hours. Good?"

"Yeah, that'll be great, thanks so much,"

answered my mom as Jose Luiz lifted Nick off of his shoulders. "We really want to see the women working on the weavings, so you'll probably find us wherever anybody is doing that." My mom smiled, looking around. Then we all turned back towards the village.

"Adios!" I said in my limited Spanish as we departed. As we neared one of the huts I noticed several roosters walking on the thatched roof, pecking away for a meal of delicious bugs.

"I'd like to go for a little hike further up the mountain," said Summer, to my utter dismay.

"That's fine, just as long as you don't force us to go with you," I said, not wanting to walk any longer on my aching legs.

The kids in the village were very friendly, but a little bit shy when it came to having their pictures taken. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring Huilloc. We met a lot of very kind families, but what fascinated me the most were their wooden looms. One end of the loom had been driven into the ground, while the other end of the loom rested in the weaver's lap. The weavings produced were more beautiful than I ever could have imagined. They contained a rich array of colors from deep purple all the way to bright yellow, each one as appealing as the next. As I sat in front of one of the looms, my gaze strayed to the weaver's hands. They moved with what seemed impossible speed over the fabric, but without losing the precision of decades of practice. Before we left we

bought two small weavings, one that had been made by an elder in the village who looked about sixty.

The hike down from the village was a lot of fun thanks to Jose Luiz's great humor and knowledge of the plants and birds. I noticed one plant as we hiked that seemed very common in this region: it was an ugly purplish green and had heart-shaped leaves. When I asked him about it later, he showed me that it was edible. I tried a leaf and scrunched up my face as the bitter juices squirted out onto my tongue, but once the first shock was gone it seemed almost sweet.

AS JANET OPENED her door she thought of how rude that wealthy family had been to her when she had barely arrived with her luggage. But as she looked into the courtyard she saw an unexpected sight. There was this same family washing their clothes by hand in a couple of buckets and hanging them out to dry in the warm morning sun.

"I'm going into town with Yudit for a while," she heard the girl calling to her dad. "We'll be back in time for lunch." The girl turned to leave.

"Summer, wait one second, honey," her mom said, coming out of the room. "You can't go out dressed like that. Put on long pants or a dress please, it's bad manners to walk around in shorts in the rural villages."

As a few more days passed Janet came to see other little things that made her realize that this family might not be quite as rich and out of touch as she had first

assumed. She noticed they never went to eat out, that a lot of their meals consisted of just bread and jelly bought from the local shop, and the Pinado Bara children seemed to enjoy having more kids their age around and really took to the family.

“YUDITT HAS asked us to her fifteenth birthday party,” Summer said, walking into the bedroom.

“Her fifteenth birthday!” Mom exclaimed. “That’s such a special time for a girl. What an honor for her to ask us.”

It ended up that we all went, and had a great time. There was lively music and everyone was in good spirits.

The next morning I was playing soccer in the courtyard with my brother, Nick. Around noon we saw Jose Luiz coming in the gate. Behind him were six Quechua women, each carrying more weavings than I thought possible. Janet came out into the middle of the courtyard and greeted them with outstretched arms. After talking for a few minutes in Quechua, they sat down on the grass and started displaying their weavings.

Jose Luiz was just leaving but my dad caught him and asked, “What are they doing over there?” pointing in the direction of Janet and the Quechua women.

Jose Luiz answered, “I thought you knew. Janet buys weavings from the

Quechua to sell in her shop back in Texas.”

I was very surprised to hear this but I still thought Janet had to be doing something bad. “I bet she rips them off, doesn’t she?” I asked Jose Luiz.

“No, no, no. She buys them for almost twice what they are willing to sell them for. She gives them a very good deal.” When we told Mom about this she was just as shocked as I was.

“But she still doesn’t need all of those suitcases,” I said critically. “Even if she does buy their weavings she doesn’t have to have all of that luggage. I wonder what’s in them. Probably just a bunch of food and makeup and stuff.”

My parents didn’t say anything. They knew I was probably right and there wasn’t much they could say. We went out and watched the end of the exchange as the sun shone down on the weavings. Their elegant beauty was brought out even more. Jose Luiz reappeared, carrying many big bundles of clothing. He gave the clothing to the six women who thanked Janet graciously. After the women had gone, Mom went up to Jose Luiz and asked him where all the clothes had come from.

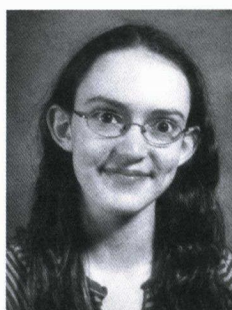
He answered simply. “Janet always brings clothes for the children.” He looked at our disbelieving faces. “Why do you think she was lugging all of those suitcases around with her?”



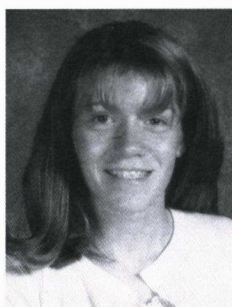
Fridays Are for Tea

By **Natalia M. Thompson**

Illustrated by **Emily Rappleye**



Natalia M. Thompson, 13
Madison, Wisconsin



Emily Rappleye, 13
Barrington, Illinois

THE STREETS ECHO with Farsi, reverberate with the sounds of decaying cars wallowing down the road, ring in the calls of vendors. In the old parts of the city, calls to prayer drift down the streets. The sun is beginning to set, flushing the white high-rise buildings lining Tehran's skyline with pinks and oranges. And beyond the city . . . well, the city never ends. It continues, choppy outcroppings of businesslike buildings punctuating long, alley-traced neighborhoods. The city goes to the edge of the world, then disappears into an indistinguishable tan haze.

As Tehran fades with the sunset, it mirrors the waning of the sweltering thirty-five-degree Celsius heat. When I was little, Mamma would take me out to our balcony at sunset. As the sun sank down in the sky, we would watch the murals of the ayatollahs on every block disappearing into the darkness. By day, their stern eyes watched the city from fifteen-meter heights, and by night, they vanished. "Someday," she would tell me, "those murals won't even be there, watching us by day. Someday, when we are free." That's what I think of at sunset.

Today is Friday, bringing welcome relief from the tedious hours of studying that Saturday through Thursday encompass. It is the day my mother takes off of work from her editing job; my father leaves his office. We have Fridays off for prayer, a religious holiday. The streets fill up today, more than usual, the numbers of bright vending stands increasing, more people milling, more life.



The truth is, it has never been just tea

I'm sixteen, old enough to go to pre-university soon, after high school. Old enough to vote in the elections this year—but Mamma says voting doesn't really matter anyway. Elections are irrelevant. Religion dominates by rule. Mamma has told me this since I was little, her calm

voice merging with twinges of bitterness.

Today I spent the day with my friends, playing tennis in the park. But Friday nights are our most special. My father and brothers leave to pray, returning at eight for dinner. Since I was thirteen, Mamma has invited a group of her friends over

during late afternoon. "For tea," Mamma explains to my father when he asks. "Just tea." The truth is, it has never just been tea. There is always tea, yes, but only to serve as a disguise for those who stop by without warning.

I remember when Mamma first told me about the group. I was eleven, still in elementary school. She was folding my hijab for me, freshly washed, black and soft. "Shusha," she had said, "haven't you ever wished you didn't wear the hijab each day?" Of course I didn't want to wear it. I wanted to run limitless, play soccer and tennis, free of the awkward cloth.

"I haven't always wanted to wear it, Mamma. Not always."

Her fingers stroked the soft cloth, reminiscent but rough. I had always noticed that she treated her own veil roughly, not taking the same pride in the covering as she took in her other possessions. "I wouldn't wear the veil if I didn't have to," Mamma told me. "If the clerics didn't enforce it as a sign of purity. If I could be safe without it." Mamma's soft voice was strangely frank, distorted to fit the voice of a stranger, confiding in me as she never had before. I was unaccustomed to this new version of Mamma, treating me as if I was an important adult, as important as her intellectual friends, the filmmakers and writers she socialized with. "Shusha," she said, her eyes deep and sincere below her sharp eyebrows. "Would you like to come with me this afternoon to have tea with my friends? We're meeting at Gelareh's home."

Mamma left every Friday afternoon to meet with her friends, women who treated me like the little girl I was. I had never been interested. "I don't know, Mamma," I answered, trying to be polite. I didn't want to go.

She smoothed my sleeve absentmindedly. "Shusha, we do not go just to chat, just for tea. It is a political group. A secret group."

"Oh." Why was it secret? Mamma had told Baba about it every Friday at dinner. "Yes, I enjoyed myself this afternoon," she would tell Baba, her voice polite. Or, "We talked about Sattareh's new movie." I had never once heard Mamma lie.

"Why don't you come, Shusha?"

"All right, Mamma." I smiled with my eyes, but my mouth was frozen. A secret group?

"Good girl. But if Baba asks you anything about it, you mustn't mention what we talk about. Say the tea was good."

"Yes, Mamma." Mamma shouldn't have talked to me this way, showing disrespect for my father. I knew Baba didn't always like what Mamma wrote about in her women's magazine. But she didn't lie; she didn't do things Baba wouldn't approve of.

That was the first time she had told me about the group. I had gone that night, to the gathering at Gelareh's house, feeling uncomfortable and shy and brave. I had gone the week after, and the week after that, until I wanted to go, not just because Mamma wanted me there. I had become a member of the group, talking, organizing, writing. And I had always told Baba the tea

was good. He was proud of me, proud that I was joining my mother's circle of friends. Eventually, the meetings were moved to our house, conveniently held during my father and brother's prayer time.

That was five years ago. And today, I keep walking home, hurrying to make it home before it gets too dark. By darkness, our neighborhood is like a graveyard, only bearing the residue of the day's busy activities. The only life that leaks onto the street is from houses, small amounts of light and noise that drift out into the cool evening air.

Finally, our block comes into view, cars dispersed along the street near our home. I'm the last to arrive. I let myself in through the front. It's cooler inside the house. Refreshing, like the subtle taste of lemon in a chilled glass of water. "Salam," I call out, hello. "It's me, Shusha." I know they will be relieved to hear it is I, not someone else intruding onto their privacy. I leave my shoes at the door and pad down the hall.

"Salam," they chorus. "Chetor é?" How are you?

I shrug. "Alhamdolellah." Fine.

They are gathered at the back of the house, in the sitting room. Tonight, the group isn't as big as usual. Only six or seven. The teapot sits as the focal point, resting on a pedestal centered in the room. Mamma motions to the seat beside her. "Better not be out late again." She gives me a kiss. "Where were you, Shusha?"

"With my friends. Tennis. Internet café."

Mamma frowns. "Those Internet cafes. I don't like them." When we're alone, Mamma calls them self-deprivation caves of endless computers.

Mamma turns back to the group. "Bebakhshid. Mahnaz, you were saying . . ."

Mahnaz's words begin the way everyone else's do, "Someday, when we are free . . ." Speculating, planning, fantasizing, believing.

And I am once again taken back to my childhood, to Mamma's words in my ear at sunset. Her breath catches my wispy hair, blowing it into my ear, tickling. Someday, when we are free. ❁



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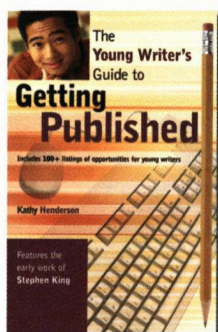
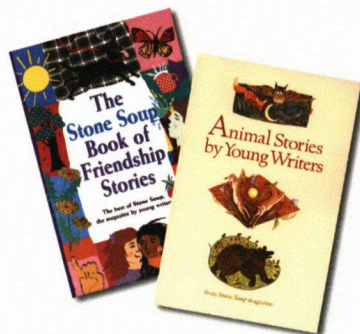
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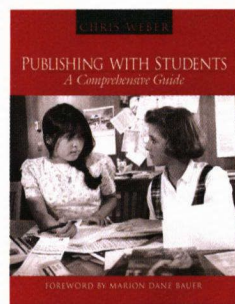
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