

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Family Portrait," by Adrian Alarilla, age 11, The Philippines

MIRACLE

Tom's father and brother have joined Grant's army

MOUSE

A mysterious book gives Roey hope her sister will get better one day

Also: Illustrations by William Gwaltney and Emma Kim Burbage

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2006

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VOLUME 34, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2006

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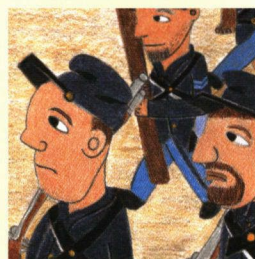
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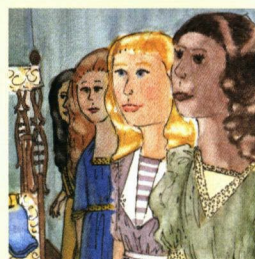
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Stone Soup

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 three 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: "Family Portrait" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy of Menlo Park, California. For over 25 years, Paintbrush Diplomacy has worked to promote children's artistic expression around the world and to raise awareness of children's causes. Special thanks to Louise Valeur and Char Pribuss.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I'd like to thank Veronica Engler for her stories. They are the best! I especially like "The Last Dragon" [September/October 2005]. It was very moving—I was actually crying when I read it. You get involved in the story, you are Liljuka. I was rooting for her all the way, but the ending somehow was peaceful. I liked how Veronica ended the story with a simple word. Keep writing, and if you become a famous author, I'll be sure to read all your books.

ANNA LUECK, 8
Vashon, Washington

You can read all of Veronica's stories at stonesoup.com. Click on Writing, then Hall of Fame.

I'm writing about Rosalie Stoner's "Pompeii's Last Day" [May/June 2005]. Though it was written beautifully, the ending was extremely unrealistic. Pompeii is famous because every living thing in the city was wiped out by the lava and ash. Stoner's character, Sylvia, had zero chance of surviving. It was even more unlikely that the rest of her family survived and ended up in a nice cool room. Though it is a good story, it does not reflect the horror or reality of Pompeii.

SUSANNAH BENJAMIN, 12
Greenwich, Connecticut

First of all I love everything that you publish. I really would like to comment about your story, "Stranded," by Joshua Mandell [July/August 2005]. It was amazing. I couldn't believe that a kid had written this story. Furthermore, I think that Carolyn Burnett's illustrations for this story were also amazing. Keep on writing and illustrating, Joshua and Carolyn.

ADIEL SCHMIDT, 11
New York, New York

Recently, I stumbled into a tiny bookstore while visiting my grandparents in a quaint little town nestled between the Northern California Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. I had the good fortune to happen upon your magazine. Whoever came up with the idea for *Stone Soup*, I commend you! Also, I'd like to pass on my compliments about "Forever Untitled" [September/October 2005]. When I read it, I couldn't believe how the author got the perfect balance of every quality, especially the plot going from the heart-pounding moments spent alone in nature, back to (comparatively) ugly everyday life. But when matched with the illustrator's vibrant colors and clean lines, it reminded me of another really neat story, "Storm Dancer" [July/August 2005]. They both possess wild, magical, free-thinking rhythms, which made me love and enjoy both tales.

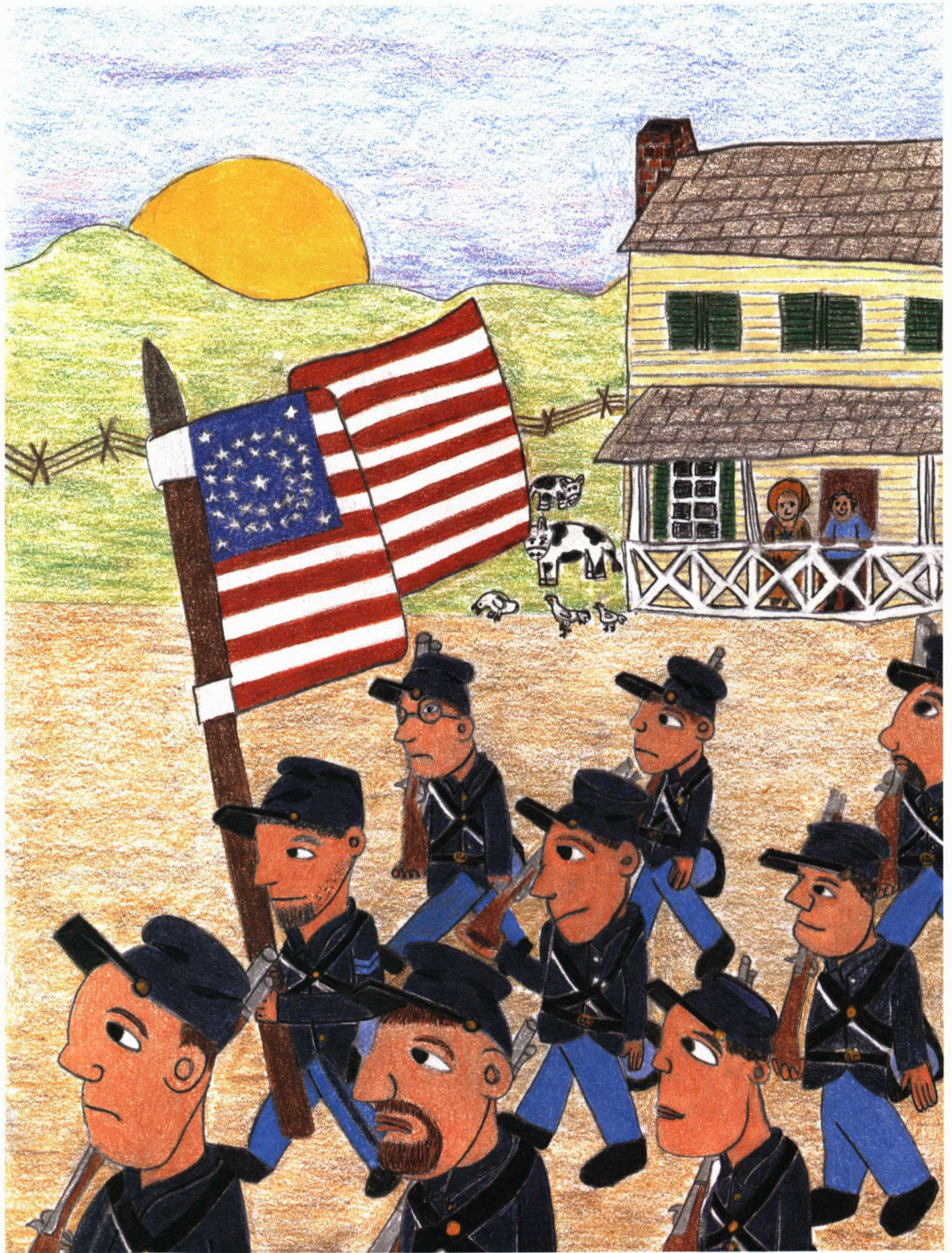
EMMA LOPATA, 12
San Diego, California

I would like to acknowledge the story printed in the May/June 2005 edition, "Samantha and the Stag." When I read it my whole mind and soul got sucked into it and flowed along next to the stag. It was so vivid and lifelike I sat there for a moment after reading it and pondered how such a young writer could accomplish such a beautiful piece. I actually thought that I myself was Samantha, yearning to follow the stag. The story was so detailed and the girl's feelings were so profound that when it ended I could not believe it didn't occur.

MEAGAN ROPPO, 13
Sewickley, Pennsylvania

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.



Right in front of their house was Grant's army, its flag billowing in the breeze

Miracle

By Joshua Heaps

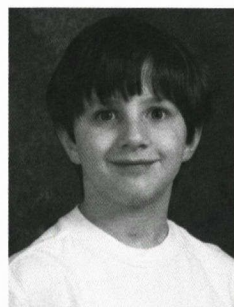
Illustrated by William Gwaltney

A LARGE HAND WIPED the tears from Tom's small red eyes. "Don't worry, son," he smiled, "I swear we'll come back." Tom hoped so, with all of his eight-year-old heart. But it still hurt so much to watch his father and brother go off to war. Even though President Lincoln needed soldiers, Tom still puzzled over why it had to be his family.

"Why not John or Mary's? Why did my father and sixteen-year-old brother Stephen have to go to war?" he asked himself. This terrible war. Why, thought Tom, why?

For three long years Tom believed his father and brother were coming back. He still did but he felt his poor mom was losing hope. He heard it in the way she spoke and the way she acted. But life went on. Tom's mind grew faster than his body. At age nine he was only three-and-a-half feet tall. Now at the young age of eleven he had barely grown a foot from the last measurement. He was pushed and bullied by schoolmates and teachers alike, most likely because of his size but also maybe because he was so smart. So instead of playing outside like everyone else, he dedicated his life to reading and learning just like his biggest heroes, his dad and brother. He thought about them more than ever as the years went on.

The old pages crinkled as the wind blew the yellow dog-eared book. Tom sighed. Even with his few savings, made from selling wild blackberries, his mother wouldn't let him buy a new book. I'm sorry Tom, but money's too tight. Save it for something useful, yak yak, blah blah, Tom thought scornfully. To him, reading



Joshua Heaps, 11
Montclair, New Jersey



William Gwaltney, 10
Englewood, Colorado

was very important. Though he knew he had to help support his mother, sometimes he wanted to be like his other hero: Lewis Carroll. Almost no one around there ever heard of him. It made Tom crazy to think that Carroll was unknown. It was an outrage. Don't they know who's creating modern literature? he angrily thought. All that mattered to everyone else was strength and appearance. But now he barely had time to read. He had to do chores like go into town on errands, feed the animals and so much more. His days were full. As much as he wanted, his reading time was becoming shorter and shorter. How come no one believed in being smart?

Tom shut his book. He took a deep shaky breath. Inhale, he thought, careful now, exhale. He was bored and grouchy as he thought about his life. His mom had stopped his schooling, which was the only thing that made him happy (apart from learning in books and thinking about the old times with his dad and brother). She made him chop wood or hunt or feed the animals or harvest the crops. Tom knew she missed his dad and brother as much as he did but she tried not to show it. She was a strong brave woman, like a mom should be, but was very stern. And when she got angry, you did not want to be there . . .

Every week Tom would go into town with her. They would go to the general store and, every week, Tom would ask Mr. Cameron, the owner, if any letters had come. None ever did! Where can his

father and brother be? he thought. Tom puzzled over this question as he had a hundred times before. He knew that joining the army was the right thing to do but a war was very scary. Now the idea of them dead was circling in his mind, getting closer and closer to his believing it. "Get out," he silently screamed at the horrible thought, "out! out!" He clenched his teeth and balled his hand. "OUT!!" he screamed out. His shout even surprised himself.

In an instant his mom raced through the door. "What happened, Tom?" she yelled, her small face slowly turning white. "Are you hurt?"

Tom silently looked up at his mom, her small figure layered with patched and ragged clothes. Tom wiped his black hair from his eyes. "Nothing," he muttered in sadness, "nothing."

Her face relaxed. She understood how he felt. She took a seat at the fire while Tom looked out the window, slowly watching the snowfall. "No letters came?" she nervously asked.

"None at all," he sighed. "None at all."

She adjusted her dirty bonnet. "It's time to go home," she said.

Life on the farm without Father and Stephen was hard and stressful. Aside from the extra work he now had to do, he missed their friendship. While his mother was kind and loved him very much, there was something special that connected his father and brother to him. Maybe because they were all men. Plus there was no one around to help, or teach him many of the chores Tom was now forced to do,

like how to shoot or how to cut down trees. No man could ever support a family or just a mother without learning these skills. It was impossible! Although Tom was not that big or strong he believed that with enough practice, skill and knowledge would come. Every day, with his spare time, he practiced everything he needed to know. It might take time but he was convinced he could be like his father and brother. But even when they had been there, the family barely got along with so little money. Between the bad crop seasons and the poor game, they were forced to stop buying many of the things they wanted. Tom thought this was unfair. All his other friends were as poor as him, but at least they had their whole family. Worst of all, after his dad left, his mom asked Tom to quit schooling so he could work. Tom missed it terribly.

As a young child, he was already eager to go to school and learn. His parents thought that this phase would end after he started but they sure were wrong! He whizzed and aced every test and grade. His report card showed how smart he was. His mom believed he could become a famous politician or somebody rich. But Tom didn't want money. He wanted wisdom and, of course, all the books in the world. What he wanted even more was his whole family back together. In history class he read stories about Indians and redcoats, and while he always hoped he would never have to use a gun, he now understood how bad war really was. Both his and his mother's hope faded as their situ-

ation got worse.

Two weeks later at midnight, BANNNNNNG!! Tom and his mother jumped out of bed as the sound of the gunshot echoed through the sky. KAPOW BAM! Three more shots into the cold brisk night air. Faster than you could scream, they were hiding in the cellar, not making a noise. Scarcely breathing, hoping, praying, crouching into a ball, crying . . . It was a Confederate surprise attack!

As his mom silently prayed, Tom quietly loaded his rifle. I'm the man of the house, he thought. I must protect it. As they listened they heard footsteps outside.

"Check all the houses! Steal any valuables. Kill anyone you see!" yelled the commander of the troop, in a thick heavy voice, like bricks grinding together. "Disperse!"

Tom and his mother squeezed their eyes and tightened their hands, ready for anything! After ten minutes of silence, Tom sighed in relief and exhaustion. He was about to get up when he heard a sound. It was the door opening slowly and a man saying, "Search the house." It was low and quiet but Tom heard it and he knew that voice. It was the commander.

Tom cocked his musket slowly and quietly. "Please make sure I don't have to use this," he prayed to any god who would listen, "please please."

"Check the cellar," the commander yelled. "Kill the traitors!"

No! Tom thought as tears streaked down his face, No! He slowly aimed his

gun at the door where the soldier would show up. It shined and glinted in the little light from the small window. He looked at his mother. She was just as scared as he was. Her eyes were big and white. Down tramped the graycoat. Would he spot them behind the logs? Hopefully not.

Tom lightly pulled the trigger halfway. It creaked and whined as if telling him to pull it. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't bring himself to kill this man. He dropped his gun in sadness. It clanked loudly on the floor. Whoops, thought Tom, big mistake. His mom gave him a pitying look. The rebel stopped abruptly as the sound echoed in the small dank room. He slowly and softly stalked across the room. He had spotted the log pile!

As the soldier was about to kick over the pile of logs with his highly polished boots, he stopped. Outside there was yelling. "Retreat!" yelled a scared voice. The

soldier took off abruptly, forgetting all about the pile of logs. As they heard the door slam with a crash they sighed in relief. They embraced and rushed outside to see the commotion. Right in front of their house was Grant's army, its flag billowing in the breeze. But the biggest surprise of all was standing in front of them. It was Pa and Stephen, their faces shining with happiness. It was almost too much to believe! They were home at last!!! It was 1865, the Union had won!

EPILOGUE

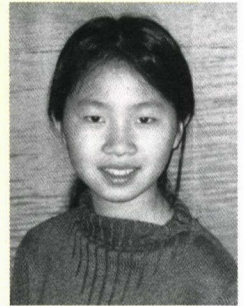
TOM WENT back to school and then on to university where he taught history for many years. He visited his parents and his brother whenever he could and, while his life had changed in many ways, he never forgot what it was to be alone and scared or what it was to have a loved one come home. ❁



Dawn

By Wujun Ke

The first shaft of luminous light
travels, its speed unthinkable
Over the horizon, through the trees,
And into my open eyes.
Birds hop about, like people,
Trying to find a good
Perch, branch, position
In life. Satisfied, they begin their
Throaty chorusing, declaring
only the best.
Window open, the maple and oak
Scent drifts like it has done
For millions of years, a crisp
Beginning to the significance
Of the day, three hundred and
Sixty-five rotations a year,
Time's luck which decides so much.
As after a rainstorm,
Water has never smelled so sweet.
During the time between dreams
And reality, air has never
Tasted so good.



Wujun Ke, 13
Chapel Hill, North Carolina



She noticed my tears and said softly, "Look at the sky"

The Snowflake Lady

By Katie Woodward

Illustrated by Hoang-Mai Davis

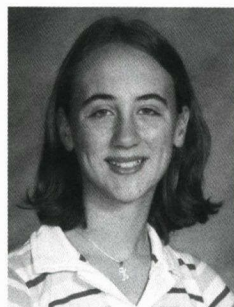
I REMEMBER THE DAYS before Ms. Brown. That was all before everything, with the snow, the stories, and the grove on Grady Hill. Those were the times when school was the hardest, and the days stretched on like counting down the minutes till New Year's. But as I flip through film reels reading things like "Mattie's First Birthday—1945" and "Christmas—1952" those times seem like just yesterday.

The winter of 1957 was dragging by just like the last twelve winters of my life had. The boarding house my parents ran was slowly emptying out for the winter, for no one liked spending the holidays in a cold place like Jefferson, Ohio.

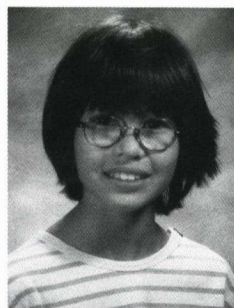
But just because it was cold, it didn't mean it was snowing. In fact, it hadn't snowed in Jefferson for over twenty years. Little did we all know, that was about to change.

On a cold day in late November, I was rocking back and forth on the creaky swing on our front porch. All of a sudden, an old lady dressed in a deerskin coat and carrying a beaten-up suitcase appeared out of nowhere. She came up to me and asked in a small, soft voice if there were any rooms for rent. I told her, cautiously, that there were. Then I ran inside to get my parents.

As it turned out, the lady's name was Johanna Brown, and she was going to stay with us till late spring. Ms. Brown slid into our normal routine with ease, and we didn't see her from breakfast till dinner. No one knew where she went, and no one worried. In school, things went the same way they had since my best friend, Sophie, moved to Chicago. I went to school, got teased



Katie Woodward, 12
Las Vegas, Nevada



Hoang-Mai Davis, 12
Sceaux, France

before the bell, had spitballs blown at me throughout the first half of the day, and then went to lunch to sit by myself. Afterwards, I'd go to the swings and play there. Alone. Why everyone suddenly resented me, I can't figure out. But sometimes it just felt like no one cared.

So a few weeks after Ms. Brown arrived, I was on the swing and all of a sudden, the swing broke. I landed on my arm with a crunch. I looked up and between the stars flying around my head saw Johnny Revere grinning at me from atop the swing set. That grin was enough to bring all the pain shooting through my body to a reality. I heard laughing and turned to see my classmates standing in a huddle, pointing at my now grapefruit-sized arm. I decided it wasn't worth the pain and humiliation to stay the rest of the day.

So I ran away. Not home, but to my secret spot on top of Grady Hill. Ever since Sophie moved away, I'd needed a place of my own. I went on a hunt and discovered this beautiful grove surrounded by firs and pine overlooking Jefferson. I thought I never had to worry about anyone finding it, but this time I sensed someone else was there.

Slowly, I stepped out of the trees. "Excuse me?" I asked. "Hello? What are you doing?" I couldn't tell who it was, but the person was leaning over a fire, throwing stuff in the air and murmuring chants. She turned around—it was Ms. Brown! I had hardly recognized her!

I stepped closer. "Hi, sweetie," she said in that soft voice of hers. I glanced

at her face and noticed something I had never seen before. Blended into her gray wisps of hair were strands of solid black. I stared, and between her hair, her high cheekbones, and her solid black eyes, I realized what I should have guessed—Ms. Brown was actually an Indian!

Ms. Brown, as it turned out, was performing an old Cherokee ritual. She wouldn't tell me what it was; she said it was a surprise. But that afternoon, I was introduced to a side of Ms. Brown, originally Daughter of the Snow, I thought I would never get to know.

I soon discovered that when she was talking about her Cherokee beliefs and stories, Ms. Brown went from her disguised self to her true form, a lady I began to know as the Snowflake Lady. We developed an amazing friendship, and every day after school we would meet in the grove and she would tell me stories of her childhood on the Cherokee Indian reservation. Sometimes she would make a remedy or do a ritual. One of my favorite memories was when she called a dozen white doves to the grove, and while the Snowflake Lady did a dance and chant, the doves rested on my arms and shoulders.

One day, after a particularly bad day at school, I went to the grove crying. Ms. Brown was already there, sitting on a fallen fir overlooking Jefferson. She noticed my tears and said softly, "Look at the sky."

Absentmindedly, I glanced up and let out a small gasp. Hundreds of small, delicate snowflakes were slowly drifting down

from the cloudy sky. "Snow," I whispered, "it's snowing!"

The Snowflake Lady whispered back, "There's an old Cherokee legend that says for every snowflake that chooses you as its resting place, someone out there," she gestured over the valley, "is making a wish for you." And as she spoke these kind words, a tiny, perfect snowflake landed gracefully on my arm. The snow continued to fall throughout the night, and the next day school was cancelled for the first time in my life. Next door to the boarding house, a new family trudged back and forth through the snow, carrying odds and ends. My mom stood next to me in the door and suggested we invite them over for dinner. I jumped at the chance for a new friend, and agreed.

What I didn't count on was getting two new friends. The Jacksons had twin daughters, Alice and Helen. We seemed to get along well, and when I introduced them to the Snowflake Lady, she agreed. With a sleepy smile she said, "Good for you, Mattie," and she padded up the stairs for the night.

The next morning my mom woke me up with a start. "Mattie, your friend, Ms.

Brown, she died during the night, baby." I sat up. "The doctor says she was very old, ninety or so, her heart just stopped. I'm sorry, hon." My parents couldn't understand my grief; they had just never known her the way I had.

Walking home from her funeral, it started to snow. By the time we arrived home, my whole head was covered with snow. Only then did I realize the gift the Snowflake Lady had given me. The day I met her in the grove, she was doing that ritual for me. She gave me Alice and Helen; it was her way of telling me, people do love me.

I set the film box back on the shelf, and smiled at the photo of Ms. Brown and me on the porch swing. I heard a set of knocks on the door and ran to greet Helen and Alice. "Come on!" they said excitedly. "It's gonna snow soon!"

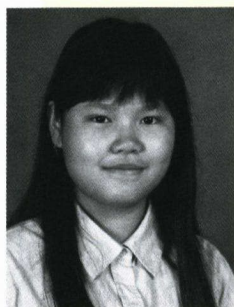
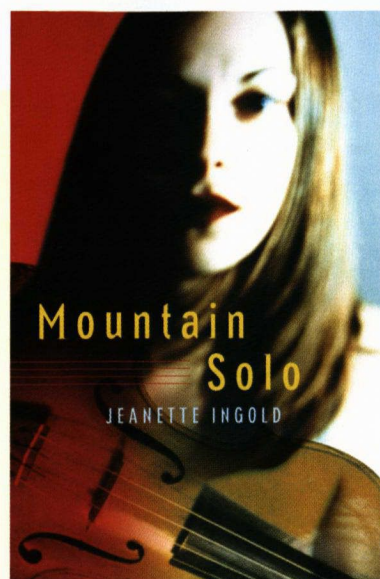
I grabbed my coat and gloves. Together, we all walked up Grady Hill to the grove. We all sat down on the very log the Snowflake Lady and I had sat on two years ago, the day she gave me the hope and love I used to carry on. I sat there, remembering, and as Helen and Alice stared at the sky, it started to snow. ❄



Book Review

By Sohee Kim

Mountain Solo, by Jeanette Ingold;
Harcourt, Inc.: New York, 2003; \$17



Sohee Kim, 12
Scarsdale, New York

WHEN I FIRST READ the back cover of the book, I was so thrilled. Since I began playing the cello seriously, I have been looking for a book that describes the life and feelings of an instrumental soloist.

Jeanette Ingold's main character does not play the cello, but violin was close enough to get me excited. The author wove such an interesting and emotional story of a girl that I read the book in one sitting. I remember not budging for several hours to finish that 300-page book that I just could not put down.

Tess Thaler has lived as a virtuoso-to-be since she first picked up the violin at age three. When she is twelve, Tess moves, with her mom, from her hometown in Montana to New York City to attend a prestigious music school for even more vigorous training.

When I read that part, I thought of how hard it must be to be separated from your dad. Like Tess, I'm as close to my dad as I am to my mom.

When Tess is sixteen, her mom encourages her to participate in a contest for the chance to perform with one of Germany's finest orchestras. After winning the competition, she makes a debut in front of thousands in Germany. Unfortunately, Tess was not ready; it was her mom's idea, not hers. Her first note comes out wrong, and that one mistake leads to many others throughout the piece.

I think that any person who ever performed on any kind of stage knows how Tess felt at that debut. It reminds me of my audition for a special music school; how I was so nervous my hands were turning all numb and blue, how I could hardly play my cello, and how, like Tess, my first mistake led to another, and another.

After her would-be debut, Tess throws away all the glamour, practice, and years of hard work and returns to her dad and step-family in Montana without her mom.

I would think that many people would not be able to understand why Tess would have done this, but I know. Sometimes, after a bad concert or audition, I feel so frustrated and disappointed in myself that I want to renounce the cello.

Even though the absence of violin had left Tess with time to spare, her days were soon filled with finding the lost homestead of a pioneer named Frederick Bottner who, like Tess, played the violin. With her archaeologist stepmother, Tess visits Frederick's surviving daughter in the hospital and quickly gets entangled in searching for the key to the pioneer's life.

Tess draws the inspiration to pick up the violin again through this mysterious pioneer who lived more than a century ago. She finds out that the people who came to her concert had not wanted to hear her play; they just wanted to hear the music. She also figures out that her mother didn't force her to do anything. Tess just wanted someone to blame. She denied that she had made mistakes, which everyone does.

But by admitting to her mistakes, Tess eventually matures to show us that we shouldn't be afraid to try again after we slip.

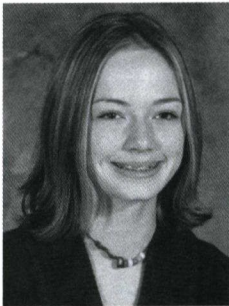
Through this book, I learned that the greatness of a musician is never determined by their technical ability or how many competitions they win, but how much love for music that person has.

Mountain Solo by Jeanette Ingold is a highly entertaining book that I think everyone would enjoy, musician or not. ❀

To Be But a Child

By Julia Soderholm

Illustrated by Annalise Nurme



Julia Soderholm, 13
Rockwood, Ontario, Canada



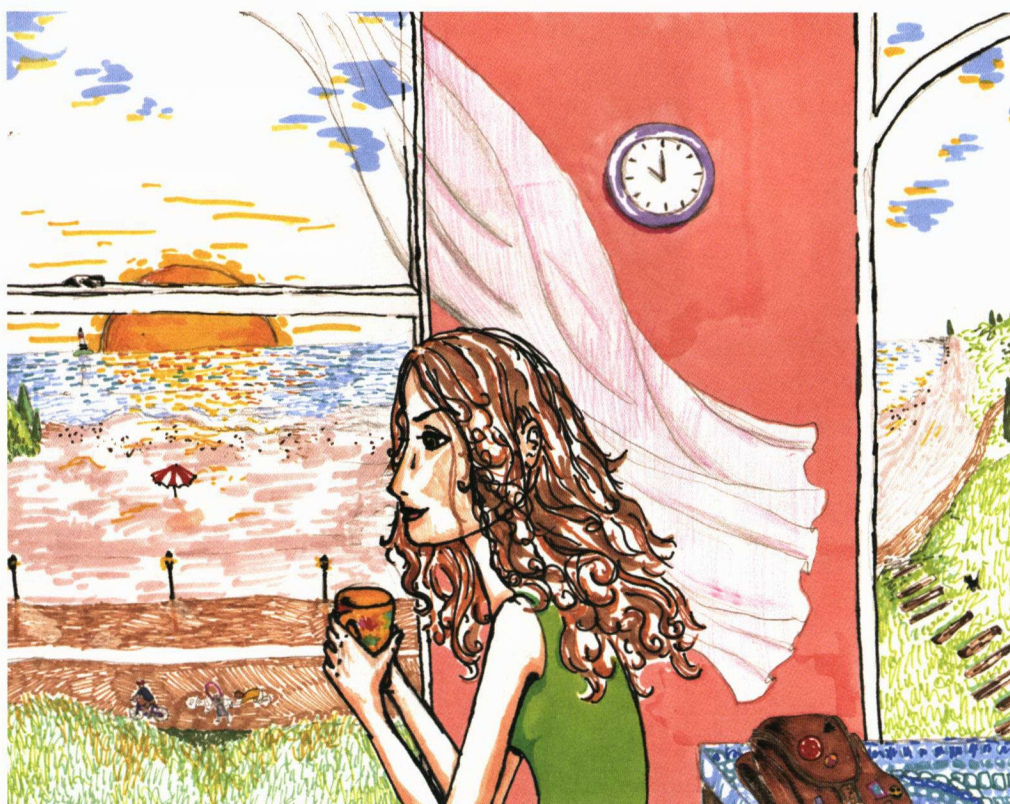
Annalise Nurme, 12
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

MAE TRILLIAN has always lived a fairly simple life. Nothing brought her more pleasure than perfect, small simplicities—a tall glass of cold, crystalline water full of chinking ice cubes, the noise of a lead pencil as it scratched the surface of a crisp sheet of paper. The sound of the wind amongst a forest of stately trees and the perfect poise of a single flower as it makes its incredible journey from tiny seed to glorious blossom brought the greatest joy to Mae's heart. That, and of course the delightful thing called writing where one can pour out one's soul onto a piece of paper. Where intricate worlds are created by the touch of a pencil's tip, and characters' lives unfold into brilliant stories of intrigue and romance.

Sighing, Mae sat quietly on a wooden stool that stood before the large bay window dominating the eastern wall of her minute kitchen. Her delicate image was reflected in the window's translucent pane; her thin lips were slightly parted and moved as though she were speaking, although no noise escaped her mouth. Tawny curls spilled down across a pale forehead, where slender brows arched above eyes of the deepest emerald.

She silently watched the street before her quaint home, where children played; their shouts of joyous laughter filtered in with golden rays of luminescent sun.

*And to be but a child;
Their cares light as motes of dust
Drifting silently, only to filter out of
All existence*



Morning had always fascinated Mae

The poem escaped the young woman's lips; her bright eyes softened as her mouth slowly formed a tender smile.

A salty breeze drifted in through the partially opened window; the sea's crested waves crashed onto the pebbly beach merely a ten-minute walk from Mae's diminutive home.

Still smiling slightly, she stood and moved across the kitchen's tiled floor to her countertop: a beauteous mosaic of aquamarine, turquoise, and cerulean pieces forming the image of a rising wave. She ran one hand over the magnificent icon and brushed a stray ringlet from her eyes

with the other. The morning light brought the fabulous colors to life; Mae could almost taste the salty ocean water and hear the crash of the waves as they broke onto the jagged rocks with a powerful grace.

Morning had always fascinated Mae. The watery sunlight slanting across her scrubbed kitchen tabletop and the dappled patterns it made as it shone through the trees. She adored the birds' joyous songs, exulting in the beginning of another splendid day. No matter how divine the moon's silver gleam could be, or how perfect the glistening stars, morning was a time of birth and renewal.

Reaching for the kettle, Mae ran the water from her creaky, silver faucet. Her favorite mug, a saffron-colored dish splashed with shapes and patterns of every color of the rainbow's spectrum, stood beside a battered, corduroy knapsack, festooned with key chains and bright patches. That bag was Mae's pride and joy, a collection of souvenirs that painted a picture of her rich, young life.

Moving away from the sink, Mae carefully sliced two pieces of freshly-baked cheese-bread, buttering them with cream held in her great-grandmother's cut-glass butter tray.

Taking a quick glance at the violet clock that hung above the fridge, Mae speechlessly willed the water to boil quickly. It was already ten o'clock, and now that she was shaken from her early morning reverie, she wanted to leave as quickly as she possibly could. The beach would become crowded around noon, when young families, happy couples, and noisy groups of friends would break the morning tranquility with their shouting and laughter.

Not, Mae thought, as she carefully wrapped her breakfast in wax paper, that laughter is a bad thing. It is in fact a thing of great beauty and delight! But peace and quiet is a rare gift these days, and one must learn to take advantage of it when they can.


As the kettle began to shriek, Mae pulled herself away from her rambling thoughts and unplugged it as quickly as she could, pouring the steaming liquid into her mug. Dropping an Earl Grey tea

bag into the water, she slipped her feet into a pair of worn leather sandals and grabbed her breakfast, a notebook, and a sharpened pencil, jamming all but her mug into the corduroy bag. Slinging it over her shoulders, she stepped out of her kitchen's side door and strolled across her lawn.

Waving at Mrs. Winkleby, who smiled at her from her rocker perched on the woman's large, wrap-around veranda, Mae turned left and continued to walk towards the beach, sipping her tea as she went.

Arriving there, she noticed that few others had pulled in—ten o'clock was still early for those who spent their summer in these parts. Kicking off her sandals, Mae proceeded to walk the beach barefoot, as she headed towards her usual spot down the west end. There, the dunes were plentiful, and their dips and crests provided shade and a pleasant seating area.

Settling down at the foot of a mighty dune, Mae leaned against a bleached piece of driftwood and languidly stretched out, wiggling her toes amongst the millions of tiny, golden grains. The air smelled pleasantly of salt and the gulls' raucous cries somehow pleased her, as they circled over top the water, hunting for their breakfast.

Taking another sip of tea, Mae carefully slid her leather-bound notebook from the bag, and held the pencil carefully between three fingers, poised just above the blank page. The day was young and bright, and full of potential. Taking a deep breath, Mae settled back and looked at her page. And she began to write. 

Truth-Telling

By Katie Sinclair

Illustrated by Mona Cao

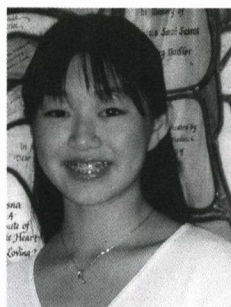
WE WERE LYING in a circle, curled up on a den of sleeping bags, pillows and blankets. Popcorn and candy wrappers were scattered all around, remnants of that night's feeding fest, while we had, oblivious to all else, watched our movie selection, comprised mostly of films featuring Orlando Bloom. But now the TV was silent, and most of us had migrated off the couch and living room chairs to our sleeping bags. We lounged around, nonchalant, waiting for the quietest part of night when the hostess's brother was sure to be asleep.

Some of us had iPod headphones screwed into their ears, the other end handed obligingly to the person next to them, heads bobbing in unison, looking in the almost-darkness like some sort of musically inclined two-headed animal. Some of us were eating the last remainders of candy, salvaged from the hostess's dog when the coffee table had been tipped over during a particularly dramatic reenactment of *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The said dog was snuffling inconspicuously in the corner, nosing hopefully in an empty pizza box, looking for that last overlooked piece of pizza.

We were quiet for some time, except for the occasional whispered conversation. We looked at the clock perched on top of the TV. 10:47 PM. The hostess nodded, and, in the long-continued tradition of sleepovers, we rearranged our sleeping bags into the designated circle for a game of Truth or Dare, for our first one had been more or less decimated, as we had all branched off into our own little sub-circles, centered on the lucky one with



Katie Sinclair, 13
Manhattan Beach, California



Mona Cao, 13
Freehold, New Jersey



It was the time for us all to spill our guts or suffer the wrath of a Dare

the iPod or in current possession of the candy bag.

But, irresistibly, the sleeping-bag planets being orbited by frizzy-haired, tired-eyed (but of course no one would admit it) moons, were being drawn by gravity into a larger circle focused on the last precious remains of popcorn, serving as our sun in our own personal galaxy.

"So . . ." someone said, balanced precariously on top of a small Mount Everest made of sleeping bags and pillows.

So. We all knew what that one little syl-

lable meant. It was Circle Time, where, as most of the girls in the world who have ever partaken in a slumber party knew, it was the time for us all to spill our guts or suffer the wrath of a Dare.

Of course, now that we were at the (we thought) great age of thirteen, we rather scaled back on the Dare. First of all, there just weren't very many sufficiently mortifying things left to set for each other to do. Most of us had friends who were boys now, some of us even had boyfriends, so getting dared to call so-and-so wasn't such

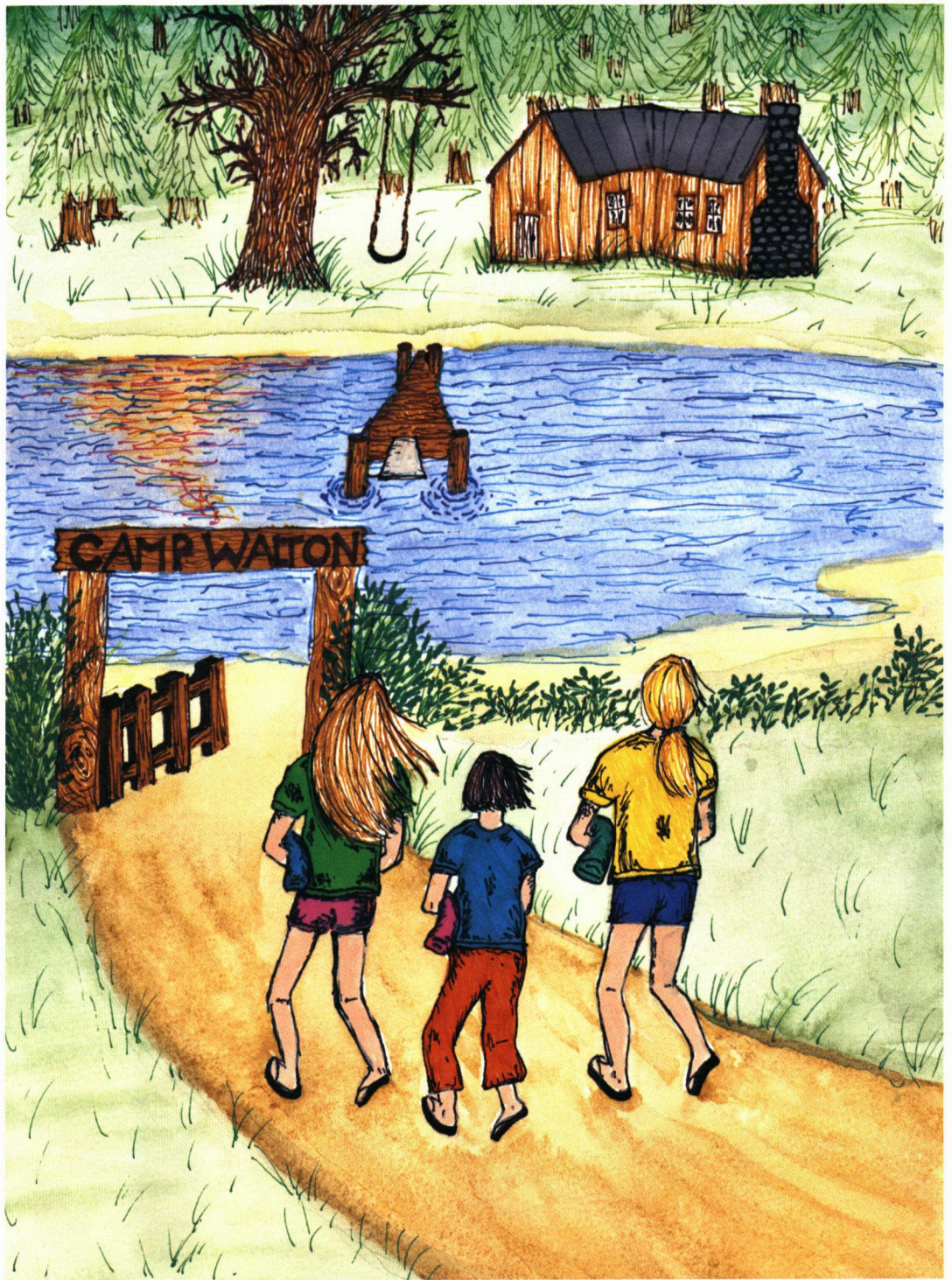
a big deal anymore. And, since we were virtually locked in the living room, running outside at two o'clock in the morning in one's underwear singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" at the top of one's lungs was not particularly practical either.

We had also almost entirely abandoned the age-old question, "Who do you like?" as well. Sure, it was always interesting to know, but in our tight circle of friends, most of us knew already, and those who didn't were probably going to get around to asking about it one of these days, but for the most part it was not such a tantalizing question as it had been when we were seven.

Instead, we started off with a round of "What do you fear most?" and had to resort to using the Magic Manatee somewhat earlier than intended, (usually we bring the manatee out when we get to Most Embarrassing Moment) to stop us all from interrupting each other and waking the parents. (In case you have never heard of the Magic Manatee, it is a stuffed manatee attained at Sea World nearly eight years ago, which serves as a method to acquire some semblance of order. The basic principle is this: You can't talk unless you are holding the manatee, and if someone would like to add something to

the discussion, then they must wave their hand wildly in the air, frantically mouth "manatee," and be able to catch the marine mammal when it is tossed in their general direction. If one fails to subscribe to this rule, and interrupts anyway, that unlucky soul will be barred from our circle and made to go to bed before seven o'clock in the morning.)

We whispered late into the night. Dragging in sea anemones, basic principals of philosophy, theology, and physics, that math teacher from sixth grade, that incident regarding the ice cream, the so-called scandal from fifth grade, in which *he* pushed *her* from the swings when it was widely believed that *she* had a crush on *him*, where we are, and where we want to end up, government conspiracies involving Area 51 and where we go when we die, we all managed to weave it into our own story, between the trivial and terrific, we told the tale of our friendship, our hopes and dreams and fears from the past years, knowing that it would last for many more, but when the first rays of dawn shown on the horizon, even the most steadfast "I'm-staying-up-all-night"-ers fell asleep. And the last question we asked was indeed, "Who do you like?" After all, we were not as grown up as we thought we were. ❀



"I'm warning you, when I took the swim test, I almost froze"

The Swim Test

By Samantha Cecil

Illustrated by Caley Liptak

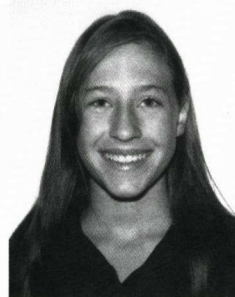
IT'S GOING TO BE COLD," laughed Riley. "I'm warning you, when I took the swim test, I almost froze. They had to defrost me."

"Thank you for sharing that wonderful piece of moral support with me," I snapped. Riley had been coming to Camp Walton's Grizzly Lodge for seven years now, since she was five. It was my first year. All the first-year campers had to take the swim test, to be able to swim outside the four-foot line and to go waterskiing and wakeboarding. I definitely had to take that swim test.

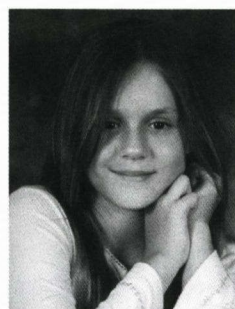
I had no worries about the test until I met Riley (actually, only twenty minutes ago). I was on the swim team at my school, so the four laps would be a piece of cake. (So I'm in the slowest lane; I can still swim, can't I?) And treading water for thirty seconds would be no problem, since I was a goalie for my school's water polo team. (It was my first year, making me the worst goalie, so I had to have more training, but everyone at Walton's doesn't know that, do they?)

We walked down to the edge of the lake, along with Riley's little sister, Quinn. Riley was silent because she knew she'd scared me about the whole swim test thing. Pools were *heated*. Lakes *weren't*. Finally, as we neared the opening to the sandy beach near the lake's edge, I said, "Riley, it can't be that bad. I mean, they wouldn't make us swim in forty-degree water. Your memory must be malfunctioning."

"Then take it from me," said Quinn, talking for Riley. "I only took it four years ago. The lake is *cold*. You'll die as soon as . . ."



Samantha Cecil, 12
San Carlos, California



Caley Liptak, 10
Harleyville, South Carolina

"Quinn, we are here for moral support," interrupted Riley, shushing her sister. "Do not frighten her to death."

"No, that's what *you're* here for," grumbled Quinn irritably, but Riley didn't answer as we entered through the small gate between the overgrown bushes. Everything *looked* normal; the sand was fine-grained, yellow, and easily got between your flip-flop and your foot. The lifeguard, Brian, and another bored-looking boy of about fifteen were manning the swim area. Brian was sitting cross-legged on the diving board. And beyond him, the water looked anything but deadly. It was deep azure and sparkling as the sun's rays danced on it. Everything looked fine to me.

Upon seeing us, Brian jumped up and exclaimed, "Finally, people are here! What are your names?"

I said, "Samantha, or Sam."

Riley answered, "We are here to hold Sam's towel and attempt to save her when she dies of hypothermia."

"Moral support?" muttered Quinn.

Brian smiled. "Don't listen to them. Just swim four laps, there, back, there, back," he indicated with his clipboard, "and then tread water for thirty seconds."

"Good luck!" said Riley. "We'll cheer you on if you start to develop swimming difficulties."

"I told you, I was on swim team, and a water polo goalie," I said, stepping out of my shorts and T-shirt to reveal a blue bathing suit with hibiscuses all over it. "How hard can this be?"

If only I knew. My first step into the

water wasn't that bad. My toes kind of curled back, like when you step into the shower and the water isn't quite warm yet. Then my next step brought me underwater to my knees. My calves tensed. That was kind of cold. A shiver ran up my spine. Then I stepped further, up to my waist. My legs were *cold*. Oh, they were cold. The next step brought me considerable shock and pain. I was all the way up to my collar. It was as if a giant eel wrapped around me and shocked cold waves all through my body. I was frozen. My breath came out short and ragged. I could feel my blood temperature dropping rapidly.

I turned around and mouthed soundlessly to Riley and Quinn. What I meant to say is, "How did you survive this? I'm going to freeze! Pull me out now, before it's too late!" but I guess my voice box wasn't connected to my lips.

"I can't help you now," said Riley, as if she understood me perfectly. "Just get it over with is the best advice I can give you. Go on."

I nodded, turned around, kicked my feet out from the muck I was standing in, and was off.

I have swum in swim meets before. You dive off a diving board and keep your head underwater. You move your arms and legs as fast as you can to get to the other side. That was not how I swam in the lake. I kept my head above water, swinging my arms in front of me as if to grab the water and pull myself along. I tried kicking like in freestyle, but it ended up being a cross between a scissor kick and a breaststroke

kick, a sort of jab at the water that I repeated again and again to get myself to the other side.

When I reached the other side, I was shivering uncontrollably. I was afraid to go back across, but it seemed I had no other alternative. Halfway across the second lap, my chest started to seize. I felt like the giant eel was back again, squeezing my ribs together and allowing no air to come out. I had to stop dead. I gasped for air. Panic was filling me, taking the place of all my energy. It weighed in my stomach like a cold lump of steel, dragging down not only my physical body but my sanity and chances to get to the other side. Fear was coming in now, filling my mind with horrible possibilities, and taking over that part of my brain that makes decisions. Fear was the blackness growing at the edges of my brain, eating me away. My body was growing numb. The world started to spin. Vaguely, I heard girls' voices shouting, but I couldn't really pay attention. My brain was having a seizure and my heart was going to explode.

It was at that point that somewhere, deep inside my body, a little passage opened. That passage held the only energy left in my body. I spurred myself on, throwing myself at the water and hurling myself forward. My brain cleared. The world stopped spinning. I gulped down air the best that I could. When I reached the other side, I quickly stood up in the muck that was the lake's bottom. The giant eel disappeared. I gasped and choked, and spit out water. Riley, Quinn, and Brian

were cheering. Brian said, "You're halfway there. Good job. I bet it's cold."

"You don't even know," I murmured, and dove back in.

Gasp, choke, thrust legs, pull with arms. Gasp, choke, thrust legs, pull with arms. I moved like a frog with a broken leg. But if I kept breathing evenly, the giant eel couldn't get me. I still vaguely felt my chest being squeezed, and air was definitely harder to breathe, but I just endured. If I made it through, I never had to do this again. If I didn't—well, let's just say the giant eel would take me.

After the third lap, I think part of me knew I was on the final stretch. I looked up one time and saw about a dozen kids, along with Brian, Quinn, and Riley, cheering me on. Four other kids, wrapped in towels, watched me intently, to see whether I was dead yet. No doubt Riley gave them a great dose of her famous moral support. At this point, I didn't care. I just wanted to get out of this Arctic wasteland and erase it from my memory. I actually kicked my legs. I moved my arms more syncopated, instead of flailing them together. When I reached the diving board Brian was crouching on, he smiled at my shuddery breaths and odd swim stroke—part freestyle, part breaststroke, part doggy paddle. He said, "Good job. You're done with the laps. How're you feeling?"

It may be a standard question, but did he notice that my face was practically blue? "Cold," I squeaked.

"Well, just tread water for me and you'll be out of the cold."



I gasped and choked, and spit out water. Riley, Quinn, and Brian were cheering

I had never been so glad for the hours of grueling training I went through. Because it was my first year as goalie in water polo, I had to adjust to something called an eggbeater, a fancier way of treading water. You pretend like you're sitting in a chair and move each leg in a circle and at a different time, like an eggbeater. I spent practice after practice with Nikki, the best water polo goalie in high school water polo that year, and she had me practice and perfect my eggbeater. Now here, in the freezing lake, when Brian said the words "tread water," I began eggbeater-ing. Just like that. I didn't even know what I was doing at first, because it had become so natural to me during water polo season. It gave me enough time to look around at the other kids, who were eyeing the water rather apprehensively. I didn't blame them one bit.

"All right, Miss Sam, 3-2-1, done! You passed," Brian informed me. "I liked the eggbeater-ing. It was done well."

"After hours of it every day, it would become natural to you too," I snapped, trying to communicate to my muscles that I could get out of this melted ice trap.

When I finally managed to get out of the lake, Riley handed me my towel, grinning. The air was actually burning my skin, and I remember it being rather chilly down by that lake. "You passed that when you were five?" I asked, massaging my goosebump-sprinkled arms. "I almost froze. I was afraid you were going to have to chip me out of a block of ice!"

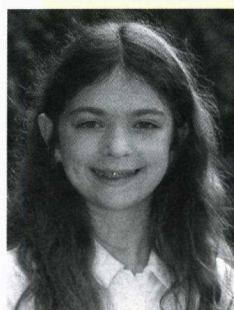
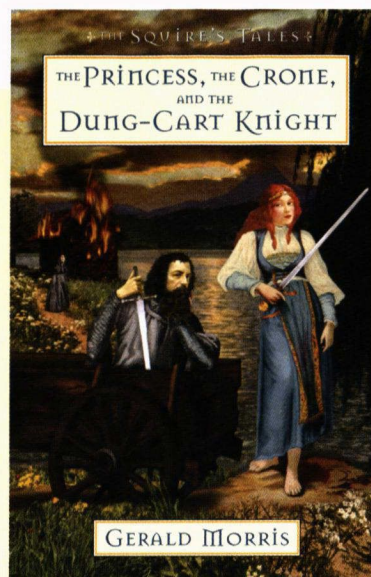
"It took me about forty minutes to pass," Riley replied. She took my hand and pressed it against her cheek. "Oh my goodness that's cold!" she screamed. "I forgot exactly how cold it was!" She led me over to a reluctant-looking little girl by the water's edge. "This is how cold you'll be after you get in there," she said, pulling my hand to the girl's cheek. I yanked it away.

"Remember, Riley," I teased. "You're supposed to be here for *moral support*." ❁

Book Review

By Eliza Kirby

The Princess, the Crone, and the Dung-Cart Knight,
by Gerald Morris; Houghton Mifflin Company:
New York, 2004; \$16



Eliza Kirby, 12
Ridgefield, Connecticut

MEDIEVAL TIMES are full of knights in shining armor rescuing damsels in distress from gruesome fates and bringing them back to glorious kingdoms. Almost unheard of are medieval tales with women as saviors. However, Gerald Morris puts a spin on the ordinary Arthurian legend in *The Princess, the Crone, and the Dung-Cart Knight*.

Unlike most stories in medieval times, *The Princess, the Crone, and the Dung-Cart Knight* features a girl, Sarah, a poor orphan who, with the help of a few familiar characters like Sir Lancelot, and a few unfamiliar like Ariel the faerie, rescues Queen Guinevere and Sir Kai from the clutches of the evil Lord Meliagant. What I love about Sarah's general personality is her zeal for fighting until the end and her thirst to prove she is more than "just a girl." Besides her determination, Sarah's character has everything that makes for a thrilling story. She is smart enough to outwit those much bigger and stronger than she and has the bravery within her to fight even the most skilled swordsmen. Sarah also comes through for Ariel and Sir Lancelot countless times. As soon as Sarah came to the rescue when anybody was in danger, relief would flood through me for I knew everything would be all right. Sarah gives off a sense of individuality; she is probably the only girl in the land to carry a

sword that she has used against innumerable enemies. In fact, many characters think that Sarah's swordsmanship is what makes her special.

The sword itself turns out to be special, which was the one aspect of this story that constantly nagged at the back of my mind as I read the book. Sarah's sword was actually a magical weapon crafted by faeries. You may wonder how this could be a bad thing. The fact that Sarah possessed a sword that crushes anything it connects with takes away from her heroism. This point aggravated me because, if the weapon was the reason for all of Sarah's talent in swordsmanship, it would mean she didn't do anything at all. If you ask me, in a way, Sarah had far too much help from the sword for this to be considered a book about the strength of women.

I tend to find that books are more absorbing when you can connect with the characters. This is one reason I couldn't put this book down. Sarah was frustrated with the world for being so centered on the power of men. She saw no reason for men to be considered stronger than women, and I agree. I, too, am irritated when people treat others like inferior beings for no real reason. Like Sarah, I feel it just doesn't make sense. I realize now that Sarah probably had an even harder time fighting her way to the top because in her time, a girl saving the day was simply unheard of. Today, it is easier for women to be important, although people who believe women are the weaker sex are not gone from the world. Even though it is better for women now than in Sarah's lifetime, there still hasn't been a woman President or Vice President in the United States, a sign that women are still not considered completely equal to men.

The Princess, the Crone, and the Dung-Cart Knight is a page-turner that receives my highest recommendation. Its intriguing plotline, beautifully chosen words, and thoroughly satisfying closure make this a necessity on every bookshelf. ❁



"How can you care about the stupid trophy when two dogs died so you could have it?!"

My Great Adventure

By Isabelle Edwards

Illustrated by Jana Bernard

LOUD, EXCITED BARKING came from the front yard. He must be home, I thought. I opened the front door and walked outside. I took in the group at a glance.

"Where are Swiftfoot and Mak?" I asked, suddenly afraid.

"It's no matter," he said dismissively, and continued to lead the dogs to their kennels around the back of the house.

"Dad?" I called, my voice rising.

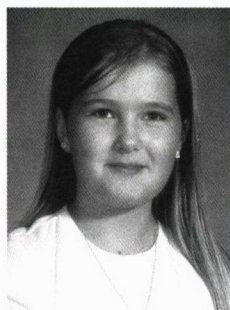
He didn't stop. He just said gruffly, without looking at me, "They could not stand up to the Iditarod, but it does not matter—because I won again."

I felt still and cold. Those dogs had been my friends for years—faithful, cheerful, always glad to see me, always willing to run in any weather in order to please. Now I had lost them to the Iditarod, the thing I hated most in the entire world! I still had enough sense to realize I couldn't confront my father. There had been so many fights about the Iditarod and the dogs throughout the years, and I knew he would just get mad and say I had to "Harden up!" and "Get used to it," in order to "Follow in his footsteps."

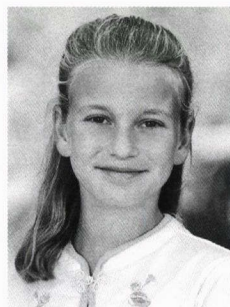
"Here, let me do that," I said, taking the leather leashes out of his hands. He jerked them back.

"I may be fifty, but I can still take care of business myself!" he snapped. "And I have a new trophy to prove it!"

That did it. I couldn't stand it any longer. "How can you act so . . . so . . . *normal*?!" I shouted. "How can you care about the stupid trophy when two dogs *died* so you could have it?!"



Isabelle Edwards, 10
Seattle, Washington



Jana Bernard, 10
Far Hills, New Jersey

"Why don't you grow up?!" he retorted. "Lots of dogs die in the race; dogs die every year, it's not as if it's just mine."

"That just makes it *worse!*" I cried, and my voice was suddenly high and shrill and I was afraid I was going to cry. There was so much I could have said, but I couldn't trust myself. And I had said it all so many times before.

Dad turned around and stood squarely in front of me. His face was now an ugly red color, but he spoke in a deadly quiet voice.

"I'm sick of this!" he said. "You happen to be all I have. You've always known you'd be taking over from me in the race some day, so you'd better start getting used to it!"

I WAS STILL for a moment. My lower lip shook trying to hold back tears. I turned and ran into the backyard where the older, retired dogs and the puppies were housed. I went straight to two special kennels. Bluemoon scampered out of the first; Icewalker stepped quietly out of the second. I knew they would help me calm down, these two dear companions who were so different. I loved them both so much—Bluemoon because she always made me laugh, and Icewalker because she was so peaceful and serious.

As I knelt in the rough grass, stroking them, I was struck by how much my father had changed. When had this cold-hearted person replaced my caring dad? Almost before I finished the question though, I knew the answer. It was when I

was still very young. My mother had been a veterinarian who took time off from her practice to work during the Iditarod race each year, even though she hated it. She thought she was needed there, because it was so brutal. The last time I saw her, she said she was just going to look for a runaway dog that had been lost. It had torn loose from its harness and escaped just before its team started off to the next checkpoint. Not wanting to lose time, the musher had used a replacement dog and left. They found my mother the next morning, frozen to death. The lost dog turned up later and was fine. When I was old enough to realize what had happened, I blamed the Iditarod—unlike my dad, who blamed the dog, and had taken it out on our own dogs ever since. I suddenly realized how much better it would have been if my father had given way to his grief, rather than keeping it inside and turning it into anger.

I returned to the present, if anything more upset than before, to find Ice and Blue looking at me, obviously worried. Seeing them reminded me I had just lost two more of the dearest beings in my life, Mak and Swiftfoot.

Suddenly I had an idea. I had had enough. I would run away with Blue and Ice. I admit I didn't think very far ahead. In fact, I acted on impulse. Quietly, I went inside the house and got some light snow gear, and returned to the yard where the dogs were waiting. Leaving the yard through the gate at the back, we went into the woods behind our property.

WE WALKED for a long time. I was still so upset I didn't bother to check my compass or pay much attention at all to where we were going. After what seemed like hours, I realized we hadn't seen any houses, so I finally checked the compass—to find we had been heading not east, as I had assumed, but north. I suddenly felt tired, so tired I could barely think. I decided to have a quick rest before we moved on. I pulled off my backpack to use as a pillow, curled up in a hollow on the ground with the dogs next to me, and was immediately asleep.

SEVERAL HOURS later, I opened my eyes to a world of white and a changed landscape. I was shivering in my thin jacket, and night had fallen. I sat up, shaking snow from my hair and eyes, and realized we were in the middle of a blizzard.

"Bluemoon!" I called, seeing no one. The snow next to me erupted and Bluemoon emerged. "Icewalker!" A blue-white mound behind me came alive, and there was Icewalker. They shook the snow from their fur and pushed me up. I looked around. I hadn't had much idea of our whereabouts even before the blizzard, but now I had none at all. My compass was still, the needle frozen to the glass. I shook it in vain. I suddenly realized that I would probably have frozen too, had it not been for the dogs' warmth. Already the snow was collecting on my eyelashes, making it hard to see. I began to feel seriously afraid. Here I was, lightly dressed, in a blizzard,

with no shelter, barely able to see a foot in front of me—and to make things worse, I was lost with a frozen compass!

All of a sudden, I heard my mother's voice. It was something she had told me long ago: "Dogs have senses we humans can only dream of. They can find a piece of meat under two feet of snow from a mile away." It had fascinated me when she told me about it, and now it gave me an idea: could the dogs get us home?

"Bluemoon? Icewalker?" I said. They both looked up at me, tails waving gently. "*Home!*" I said, hoping I sounded strong and confident.

I struggled into my wet backpack, and turned to follow them as they headed into the trees. I tried to hurry, but the snow was too deep. I forced my cold feet to move through the snow after them, step by step. We must have trudged through the darkness for several hours before I saw light coming through the falling flakes between the trees. We were home! At that moment I was so glad to see the house that I wasn't thinking of why we had left to begin with.

AS I STUMBLED into the yard, I was amazed at the bright lights, trucks and people everywhere. Search parties! My father caught sight of me and ran over. With not a trace of his usual bad temper, he lifted me off the ground and hugged me so hard I could barely breathe.

"Where *were* you? What happened?! How did you make it?!" he cried, all at once.

"I ran away," I said simply. "The dogs

saved me.”

He sat down hard, right there in the snow.

“Dad,” I said in a rush, “it wasn’t the dogs’ fault that this happened, and it wasn’t a dog’s fault that Mom died, and she wouldn’t have wanted you to blame them. And you *know* she never would have wanted you to make them run the Iditarod—she hated it!”

Without anger or a moment’s hesitation, he said, “I do know, but I guess I hate feeling helpless, and I was helpless to save your mother. At least in the Iditarod I feel I can control some things!”

We were still sitting there in the snow, with the dogs, surrounded by bright lights, as if we were having a normal conversation—except that it wasn’t normal, for us.

“Dad, there are so many other things in life you can control—good things!” I said. “You don’t have to be angry all the time. I need you, and the dogs need you!”

He looked at me and suddenly his face seemed younger, and I was reminded of the dad I remembered from long ago. “I wish I could take it all back,” he said. “You are the most important thing in the world to me, and the dogs saved you!”

I think I started crying then. He pulled the dogs closer and hugged all of us.

AND THAT was definitely my greatest adventure.

My dad stopped being a musher right then and there, and he quit the Iditarod.

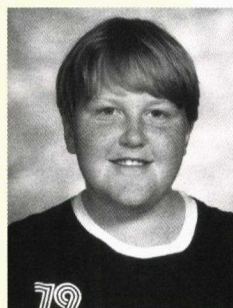
He became my greatest supporter during the long, hard years of study . . . to become the veterinarian I am now. ❁



Winter Walk

By Dylan Geiger

A winter walk—
My dog barking by
My side,
Leafless trees
Piled with snow,
Rotten cornstalks
Golden brown,
Cows with frosted fur
Chomping dead grass,
Squirrels feast on
Stored acorns,
Frozen water under
A rusted bridge,
Snow piled in drifts,
As I whistle
Trucks pass.



Dylan Geiger, 11
Everest, Kansas



The writing was not from a computer or a typewriter, but written by hand, with ink and quill

Mouse

By Nadezh Mulholland

Illustrated by Jessye Holmgren-Sidell

ROEY LOOKED SULKILY into her bedroom mirror. She turned around, scrutinizing her nose from every angle, but whichever direction she faced her nose, slightly resembling a ski slope, looked the same to her. It wasn't that Roey actively disliked the way she looked; just her nose. When you got down to it, she was actually quite pretty, and she knew it. Her flowing, fiery red hair could not match her personality better. Next came her favorite feature: her eyes. Dark brown, nearly black, and combined with her hair, they gave her an almost magical look. But, being human, she always saw the worst in herself and could only focus on her nose, her other features becoming unimportant and of no consolation. Roey sighed in frustration, feeling a little guilty. How could she be so shallow? She had much bigger problems to deal with than her looks. She made her way over to her bed.

Out from under her white bed with pink trim, which she was about seven years too old for, she pulled a large book. It was thick and heavy, bound with leather. The pages inside were yellow with age, but being no expert, she could put no number on its years. The writing was not from a computer or a typewriter, but written by hand, with ink and quill, she imagined. There was no name, no one to take credit for all the work they had done. Strangest of all, though, Roey thought, was that there was no title. She had checked over and over through the whole book, but no miraculous change occurred. The cover was that of the type of book Roey would have expected to be engraved with



Nadezh Mulholland, 13
Evanston, Illinois



Jessye Holmgren-Sidell, 11
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

gold letters, but that was not the case.

Roey climbed into her bed and pulled the covers up. She opened the book and could hear the stiff binding crackle as a small trickle of dust came down on her. The discovery of the nameless book had been exciting. There was a minimal amount of books in Paristile. People referred to them as books, but in Roey's mind they barely qualified. Pamphlets, a historic account of the formation of Paristile, a book of laws, dictionaries, and thesauruses—they weren't books, though, merely resources. Roey's definition of a book was something that made you think, made you question, made you wonder. None of these could even begin to make your mind work in the way that her new-found treasure did. Although she loved to read, this was a rare opportunity. It was usually herself and her writing she had to rely on for a bit of creativity.

Roey had no idea how she could have overlooked the book so many times, but perhaps it had not always been there. Two nights ago, as she had been climbing into bed, she saw its unfamiliar spine mixed in with a pile of a few other so-called books on her bedside table. How it got there was beyond her. For some reason she decided not to tell her family. Mainly this was because she didn't want to deal with the inevitable questions from her parents that would follow her vague explanation. "How old is it?" and "Where did it come from?" She felt strange answering questions on a topic she hardly knew anything about.

But maybe the questions were what she

longed for, what she wanted so desperately to hear. Her sister, Mouse, had been born with insatiable curiosity. You could see in her eyes the longing to explore the world around her the day she was born. Her name was actually Marguerite, but Roey had started calling her by the pet name she'd come up with years ago. When Marguerite was little she always wanted to know what was in cupboards or on counters, and so she would poke her head in like a mouse. Now the bedroom in which the seven-year-old should be sleeping was empty. Instead of her cozy bed, Mouse slept deeply in a hospital bed, with no certainty of waking again. Roey couldn't bare to face her absence, and mentioning the book to her parents and not being immediately flooded by questions from Mouse would be too much. She would have to truly acknowledge the fact that her little sister may never come home.

Roey could never forget a particular day, about two years ago. The memory of Mouse brought a smile to her face, in spite of everything. It had been Mouse's fifth birthday. Roey could see pure delight on Mouse's face as Mom brought in a beagle puppy. She had never expected such an amazing surprise, and Roey, looking at the huge grin on the little girl's face, was ecstatic seeing her sister so happy. Mouse had always been grateful for what she had, Roey knew. The littlest things, Mouse had always acknowledged, and it didn't take much to earn her trust, her love, her gratitude. She had always admired how open Mouse was, never judgmental; Roey

wished she could accept everyone that way. But Roey realized that all this happy memory meant now was that Mouse may never smile again. Roey had pushed these thoughts out of her head many times already, and once again attempted to shake them from her mind. She tried to tell herself that it wasn't an issue, everything would be fine; the book was here now, that was the important thing.

Roey replaced her dreadful feelings with the words of the book-with-no-name as she began to read. She was able to make out most of the handwritten words without difficulty. As the setting was described, Roey painted a picture of it in her mind. It seemed no different from her own world of Paristile, with nothing particularly distinguishable from any other place.

Roey must have dozed off at some point. As she was reading, she was engrossed in the words, the only words she could really lose herself in, but at the same time a part of her was still slightly aware of the real world surrounding her. Suddenly all that was gone. The paint of her light pink walls she'd chosen when she was only five, her wooden bed, her dresser, all disappeared. She was no longer reading and instead was standing on a busy block.

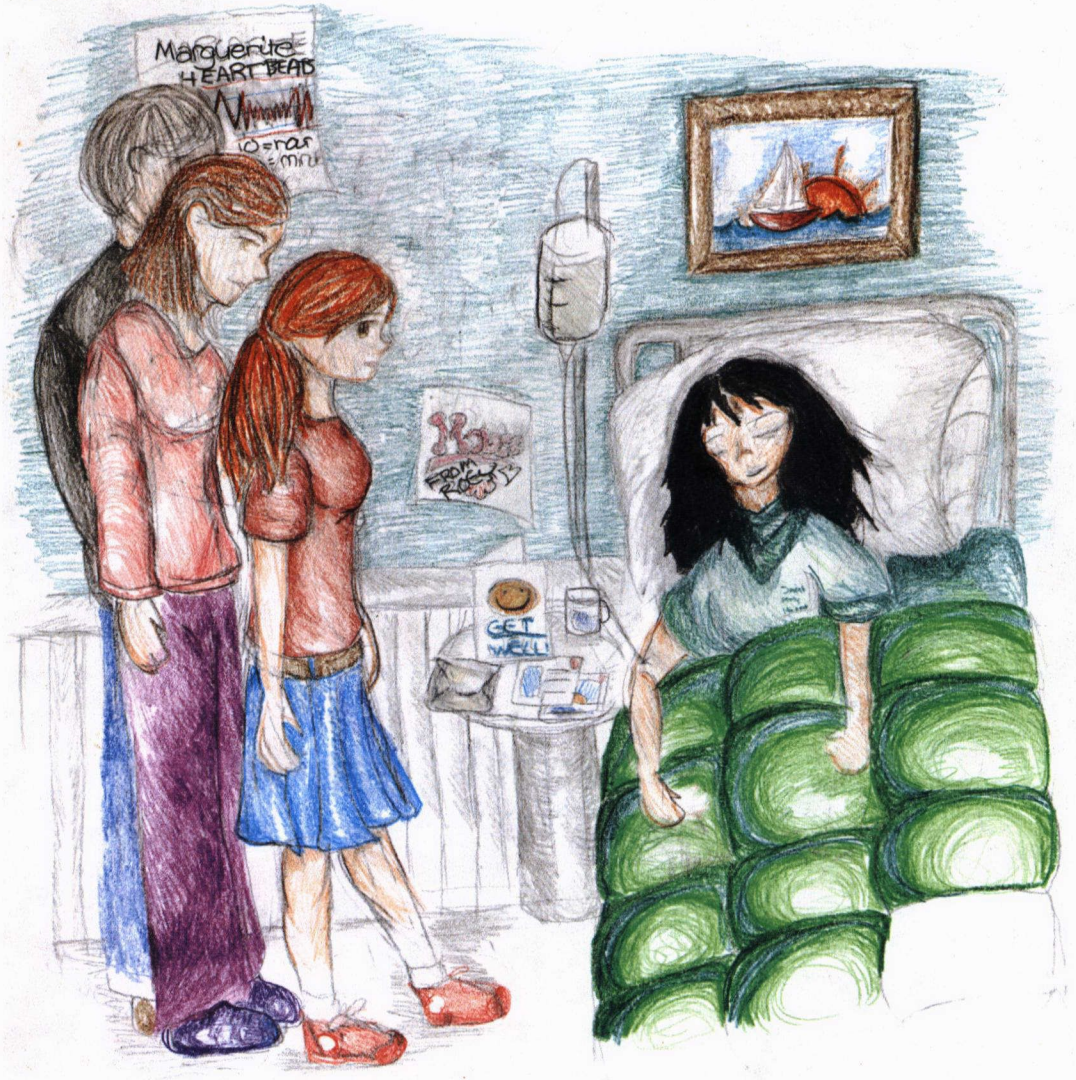
Roey turned to get a better look at where she was and saw right away that she knew the area very well. She was standing in the middle of the busiest block in her heavily populated suburban town, filled with noise and activity, as always. Roey's favorite store was to her left, and on her right was a cafe she and her friends liked

to go to after school. Suddenly a voice came from both everywhere and nowhere. She looked around, confused. "Roey, turn out that light right now. It's late and you've got school in the morning."

Roey woke with a start. No, not woke. Now everything was back in place, just as it had been before. But now she was also sitting up in bed and holding the book in her hands, and her father's voice was calling her back to reality. She couldn't have been dreaming. She'd been in the book! That was it, the only solution. She couldn't believe it, but she had to, she knew. She was excited and a bit frightened by her discovery.

"Roey Caylow! Don't ignore me, I said turn that light out!" her father's voice called.

Roey sighed. "I *am*!" she called back. She reached over to her bedside table to turn her light out and placed the book back under her bed. During the night, there was nothing to stop her worries for Mouse. In her dreams there was nothing to push out the dangerous thoughts. Images of Mouse, small for her age, lying alone at night in the hospital, haunted her. She didn't want their visits to end so early, she wanted to stay with her delicate raven-haired sister. Although Mouse was currently unconscious, Roey had begged her parents to let her stay in the hospital all night, but they had not permitted her to. They had responded to her pleas only by saying that even though this was a tragedy there was no use throwing their lives entirely off schedule when Mouse was in



She saw her sister's button nose and smiled; she'd always loved that nose

no state to be able to tell the difference. Upon hearing this Roey had run up to her room and slammed the door in a fit of angry and desperate tears. Roey tossed in her sleep as she dreamed of this memory, but there was nothing she could do.

Roey woke in the morning. She hadn't slept well, but even so she was already dressed when her mom called up to her from the kitchen. "Good morning, Roey. Get up, it's 6:45 and we're going to visit Mouse his morning!"

Roey brightened at this news. She wanted to get in as much time with her as possible before school started, so she hurried to get ready as quickly as she could.

At the hospital, a nurse saw Roey, her mom, and dad enter the waiting room. She recognized them and led them to Mouse. The nurse turned the metal handle and opened the heavy wooden door. Inside, Roey could smell the clean white air that hospitals always seem to have. She took it in subconsciously, but that wasn't what she was paying attention to right now. She saw her sister's button nose and smiled; she'd always loved that nose. Her black hair wasn't light and curly as usual, but tangled. This didn't mean much normally, but for Roey it just meant even less hope.

Roey saw it as if it were happening all over again. She saw her own waving hand, and the little girl bouncing gleefully across the road to meet her. And then the car. It swerved, trying to avoid her. It was too late. It skidded. And that was it. The doctor assured them that she'd gone into the coma immediately, so she didn't feel any pain. That was not enough for Roey. She just wanted her sister back.

She went through the day in a bit of a daze. She couldn't remember anything, but then again nothing in particular really happened. That night she once again pulled out the book from underneath her bed. This time, even though she did not

understand it all, she knew what to expect in reading the book. She began to read where she had left off the night before.

Roey was back where she was the first time she'd found herself inside the book. She started walking towards her home. She arrived at the front door the same purplish-pink color you might expect to see in a romance movie—Roey had gotten no say in the color choice—and walked inside.

Hanging on the coat rack was Mouse's once bright red scarf that was now beginning to fade. She'd gotten it when she was born. Below it on the welcome mat were Mouse's fuzzy blue boots. Roey saw, out of the corner of her eye, a gray mouse scurry by. It was small, even for a mouse, just as Mouse was small for her age. It had smooth fur and a playful, daring run, as if it wanted to take in all the information it could, always with more to learn. In that moment, Roey knew that everything would be OK. Mouse was going to be OK—she didn't question it. Her parents had been right: things would be back to normal soon.

For the first time in weeks, she could sleep all through the night. When she woke in the morning the book had disappeared as mysteriously as it had gotten there. Roey could never explain it, but somehow it was not one of those things that requires an explanation. ❀



"Whose trucks are those, Mommy? The ones with the flags?"

1942: A Changing World

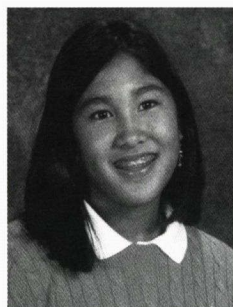
By **Amanda Pertierra**

Illustrated by **Emma Kim Burbage**

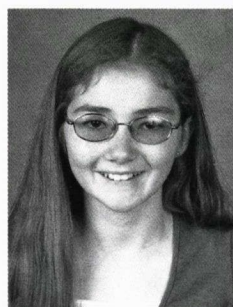
THEY CAME ONE DAY, their green army trucks all in one winding line, rumbling down the nearby road. I'd heard the noise, running to the balcony to look across the familiar swaying fields of sugar cane in our family's plantation, palm fronds bowing gently to the humid breeze. Lazy mosquitoes flicked in and out of the courtyards of the large house, a solid white against the tropical background. Yet there was a difference; at the normally deserted road I could make out a line of trucks with their fluttering white flags and blood-red circles. Soon I heard the rush of running footsteps to find my mom tugging me away from the open balcony to the sheltered curtains within. She was joined by all the other women—the maids, my nanny and my older sister. I looked questioningly at their pinched faces, eyes revealing a fear they dared not voice.

"Whose trucks are those, Mommy? The ones with the flags? Why can't I look?" I was shushed by looks from the rest, all of them craning their necks to peek at the line.

"Th- they're the Japanese and that is their flag," my mother answered hesitantly, adding bitterly, "probably bringing reinforcements for the cities." The trucks were only a distant rumble now, like the thunder before a storm. I looked up at her, my ten-year-old braids swinging, wondering if this was about that word I'd heard whispered during meals. What was it? Occupation. One never said it out loud, as though to do so would be to accept defeat, but even I knew it existed, a looming storm cloud not yet bursting to rain. It meant long famished



Amanda Pertierra, 13
New Canaan, Connecticut



Emma Kim Burbage, 12
Redwood City, California

months of food shortages and foreign soldiers who destroyed our government, all the while claiming the Philippines as their own. It was 1942 and somehow, that storm cloud seemed so much closer to raining after I first saw the Japanese trucks. Somehow I knew our lives were about to change. How, I did not know. Somehow.

I'D HEARD my mom say often that change was slow on the islands. If it ever came at all, it came slowly. And even if it did creep up on us unsuspected, it was met with such determined opposition it usually ran away. She said all this with pride, as though change was something to be feared. Maybe there was more truth to her statements than anyone realized, for after that first day the Japanese came my world did change, and it was every bit as awful as Mom made it sound. Except it wasn't slow; this change arrived overnight and no matter how hated I knew it wasn't going to run away.

Change was evident at school, where our class was taught about bomb raids. Once a week a shrill siren would sound and like scared cats in water at once we all jumped and huddled under our desks, glancing at each other. It was almost a game—who could remain the quietest and most still until the imminent all clear.

Then, at home ugly black curtains were put up on all the windows every night, dark shadows next to the familiar flowered frills. When I asked why these were needed, Mom pursed her lips, while Daddy muttered something about need-

ing to be "invisible" and "safety" against "bombs." The following day Mom placed all her jewelry in one big metal box. The pearls I'd longed to play dress-up with, heavy gold chains and even the sparkling diamonds were all put in, never to twinkle again for a very long time. She gave this box to Daddy, who dug a hole one night and dropped it in, burying everything. My older sister finally admitted that it was to hide them in case of war.

War? Who ever said anything about war? That was a long forgotten remnant of the past, remembered only in dusty school textbooks. The Japanese may be occupying the Philippines, yet they weren't causing war. Really, they didn't do much that we could tell, not yet at least. The bomb drills were a precaution, nothing more. But if all that was true, why was my sister talking about war? And suddenly it came to me. This change was war.

"YOU'RE THE Japanese and I'm the Americans," my sister announced one afternoon, weeks after the Japanese had arrived. We were playing a familiar game of Bad Guys versus Good Guys, except now the Japanese were bad and the Americans were good. Our plantation was a bubble, and though we might catch rare glimpses of the war outside, that bubble had yet to pop. Without any chance of seeing real battles, my sister and I had to be content with our own fake ones. And as usual, I was the bad guy.

"Not fair! I was the Japanese last time!"

"Fine . . . but only this once," my sister

conceded surprisingly. Sometimes being the older, better, smarter sister wasn't the unbeatable weapon it appeared. Satisfied, she started running down the lawn, whizzing past green-fronded plants and a menagerie of jewel-like flowers or even the odd bird, the scorching afternoon sun beating down relentlessly. Shaded by the cluster of trees, I waited. I was still too little to win if I tried to beat her running, so I listened to her feet pounding, bouncing, skipping, until finally my chance came. She stopped, gasping for breath, and I darted into the hot sun, tapping her back and declaring, "I win!"

"*You* can't win . . . The Japanese always win!"

"Yeah well . . . the Americans are the good guys and the good guys have to win."

"If the Americans are so good, the Japanese wouldn't even be here now!"

"Shhh . . ." I was hissing at the sound of wheels on gravel breaking the tense silence.

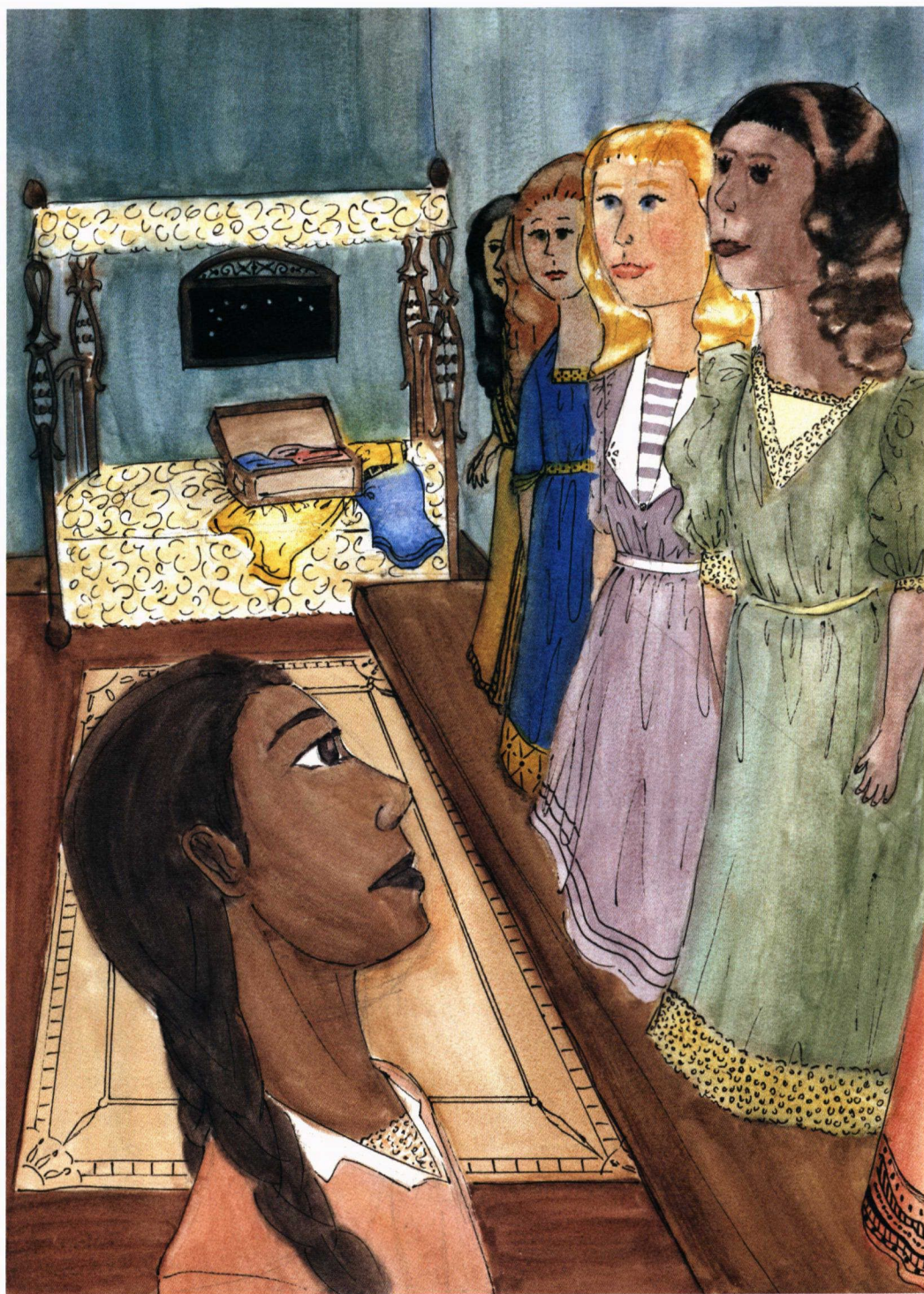
"What, it's just a stupid truck." All the same, she peered around the bush with me. Craning my neck, I could just make out one of the now common army trucks in the circular driveway. However, the Japanese flag was nowhere to be found. Out of the truck stepped a soldier, his pale skin as unusual as the unfamiliar uniform. Though his blue eyes appeared grim, he gave a sad little half-smile at the two of us, hiding unsuccessfully. Without another word the stranger knocked on the door, was received, and disappeared inside.

MY PARENTS broke the news at dinner that night. The soldier hadn't been Japanese as I'd thought, but an American, sent to tell us we would have to evacuate the plantation within the week. It was part of the war effort. So, Mom explained, the family would be leaving on a little "adventure," nothing more or less. And just like that our protective bubble popped and the war came seeping in, in ever more obvious torrents.

An adventure, that was all.

But later, as I surveyed my messy room, listening to the harried packing, I had to keep reminding myself. Dad's lined face certainly spoke of more than an adventure. And when Mom came in to help me pack, her eyes were bloodshot, as though she'd been crying. Watching the distracted way her trembling hands folded shirts, suddenly I felt the adult and she the child. A lump formed in my throat as I fought back tears of confusion, desperation. Tears for what I had lost and couldn't ever find again.

Looking up into the solemn faces of all my dolls, lined up on their shelf like a troop of soldiers, it seemed the whole world was sad. Their soft ringlets might not lose their bounciness or their bright silken dresses their sheen, but inside they would be falling apart. I wished I could be their knight, and rescue them and take them on my adventure, yet Mom had said I could only take one . . . Lilly, Tibby, Lucy, and Jackie . . . they all stretched out in an eternal line of hopelessness. Finally, I picked Mary, cradling her familiar stiff doll frame.



Looking up into the solemn faces of all my dolls, it seemed the whole world was sad

THE MORNING of our departure, my family left very early. We just piled everything into the car as though my parents were in a rush to leave. I envied Mary her unseeing glass eyes, that didn't have to watch as Daddy took one sweeping look at the house, then ducked into the car, followed by Mom, her mouth set, desperately trying to appear strong. Something was going awfully wrong; this was all supposed to be something out of a storybook, where the optimistic heroes skipped along on their quest, then hopped back home, having beaten the evil monster and proven their bravery. Instead, my family was scared, terrified of something I couldn't even name.


As we drove away I watched the plantation growing smaller and smaller, until it was a tiny white pinprick on the horizon. By now the heat stung like a bite, leaving everyone sticky and uncertain, and still I strained for a last glance of home. That's when it happened.

I smelled it first, a hint of smoke carried by the gentle breeze. Then I saw it. The white pinprick was a wavering red as though it were . . . fire. It was burning.

My home was burning. Disbelief. Shock. "Is that . . ." I turned to Mom for answers, and gasped to see her bent over, tears streaming unchecked.

"We didn't tell you . . . didn't want you to worry . . ." That was Dad, his own face working to contain his grief.

"But it's on fire . . ." Now it was my sister, uncharacteristically speechless.

"The Americans are burning it so the Japanese can't use it as headquarters. It is part of the war effort. We can't go back," Dad replied flatly, though I barely heard him. Two words echoed over and over. Fire. Burning. Burning fire. I saw it, could almost hear it, feel it. Crackling and snapping, with grabbing hands snatching, engulfing everything. I imagined my little shelf of dolls falling into the angry jaws of the flames. Each one tumbling down the stairs, their pale faces stained black by ash, defenseless until they were buried by the rubble. Buried and gone forever. Instinctively, I clutched at Mary, the only survivor of her troop. Her porcelain face was unmarred by my nightmare, facing straight ahead, an ironic smile lighting her features. She spoke of a future. 

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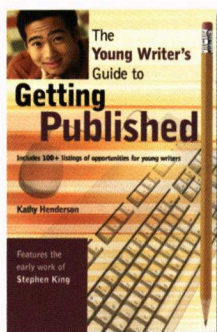
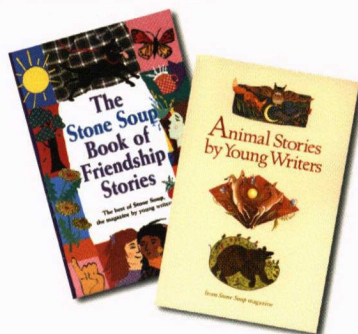
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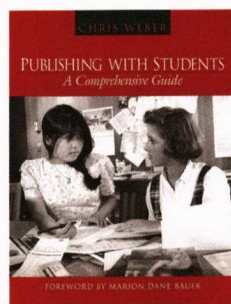
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