

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Ravela Smyth, age 11, for "Being Lucia," page 12

BEING LUCIA

Elizabeth is St. Lucia in her family's holiday celebration

GALACTIC REBELS

Can Jade and her friends stop the commander from destroying Enyo?

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 3
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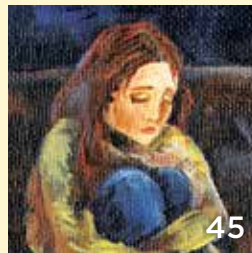
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Editor's Note

No two families are alike. Some are big, some are small. Some are happy, others have problems. The holidays usually revolve around family, and it just so happens that this issue includes a number of exceptional family stories and poems. Take "Being Lucia," for example, a joyful story about a family's tradition of celebrating a Swedish holiday together. Then there's "Having a Mother," where Morgan struggles to live up to her mom's expectations, and "Marcella's Miracle," where a family faces an unthinkable loss. In the true story, "Lunch in the Morning," Albert recreates a period in his grandfather's life when his family didn't have enough to eat. Finally, the poem "Made with Love" paints a picture of family happiness, as Jordan bakes bread with his grandmother. As you spend time with family this holiday season, think about a tradition, experience, or family story that has meaning for you. Then sit down and write about it.

— Gerry Mandel

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ON THE COVER Ravela Smyth has won many awards with her realistic illustrations. She believes that "a good illustration can help convey the vision of the author and bring stories alive." See more at ravelasart.weebly.com. Ravela has three cats—Mimi, Bluey, and Puppy—and wants to be a vet when she grows up.



The Mailbox



I have been a loyal subscriber to your magazine for about four years and have loved every story of each magazine. However, in the November/December 2014 issue, I found something that is insulting to my culture and should be corrected. In “The Life I Would Have Had,” by Ellie Woody, Korea is described almost as a rural village, or an abandoned farm. Why would a town be “abandoned during Easter”? Koreans are typically Christians or Catholics, both religions that celebrate Easter. Yes, I understand Korea isn’t as wealthy as some countries, but the way Korea is portrayed here is more similar to North Korea, where Jin Ae probably wouldn’t have been able to get out alive anyway. And the fact that she “wouldn’t go to school” is absolutely full of nonsense! A huge part of Korean culture is based on education. Even if the family was poor, education is a given. I am not trying to be rude, but the way my culture is described, is more of how it was fifty, sixty years ago, whereas the story seems to be in the present day. I hope next time Ellie would research her background info a little more before she makes a controversial story.

Ellerbe Whang, 12
Alameda, California

I’ve always wanted to be a writer, and your magazine seems like a promising place to start.

Alex Fieldler, 11
Portland, Oregon

Stone Soup is such a wonderful home for young writers and artists. Thank you for continuing to provide this beautiful and important service to budding creative minds! It was *Stone Soup* that really launched my writing career. I had some stories and poems published a few years back. Now I’ve finished high school and am on the cusp of a gap year where I will primarily be working on writing and finding publishing outlets. I’m working on a fantasy novella, I have a literature blog (marywoodsblog.blogspot.com), and I’m planning on attending my first writing conference this summer. It’s a very exciting time for me, stepping out into the big world of publishing! I just wanted to thank you again for giving me a place to get started. You are doing such good work.

Mary Woods
Frankfort, Illinois

Mary’s stories, “Memory’s Song,” “Cry of the Wild Heart,” “Song of the Trotter,” and “Through a Champion’s Eyes,” appeared in Stone Soup between 2009 and 2011.

My daughter, Maia Lee Forest, received a letter yesterday, saying her story is in the “maybe file.” Thank you so much for reading her story and for affirming her as a writer! Since she was a little girl, Maia has always said, “I am a writer and an artist.” While I have always seen her talent, it’s so great for her to get positive feedback from someone who is not her mom!

Tracey Forest, parent
North Bennington, Vermont

Stone Soup welcomes your comments. Send them to editor@stonesoup.com.



He was trying to stop, but it didn't work

Below the Ice

By **Alex Perry**

Illustrated by **Audrey Zhang**

ALEX SKIED DOWN the mountain and breathed in the scent of the pine trees. Everything was peaceful. He spotted a cluster of dark blue puddles of water seeping through the cracked ice. He longed to investigate and decided to stop and take a peek. As he got closer there was a quick flicker in one of the bigger puddles, creating a growing ring of tiny waves. He supposed it was a fish. As he slowed down he pushed his gloves back on his hands and covered his mouth with his neck warmer so his frosty breath would not come out. He quickly skied down but surprisingly skidded on the ice and one of his skis fell off. The screeching of the wind echoed through his ears as he fell on his back and slid down the hill in a tumbling heap of snow. His body was twisted up. He was trying to stop, but it didn't work. He managed to take a glimpse of the puddles only several yards in front of him.

He heard the icy ground crunching beneath him as he plunged into pitch-black water. All his consciousness streamed from him as he felt the deathly chill of the water. He tasted the saltiness of it in his mouth. He was drowning. It would be the end of it all. He couldn't manage getting his ski off, so he desperately tried swimming upward toward the surface, which already seemed miles overhead. He could feel thick walls of ice on his palms that he could climb up. He slowly climbed it with great difficulty. The coldness threatened to freeze him to the core until his death.

Random thoughts arose in Alex's head, which pushed him



Alex Perry, 9
San Francisco, California



Audrey Zhang, 11
Levittown, New York

away from his life. He remembered all the times he went out to dinner with his mom. And all the times he went out to play sports with his dad and all the times he talked and talked for hours with his brother Lucas and watched his cat play with a toy. He remembered the first time he ate mango frozen yogurt with chocolate shavings and he tasted the creamy deliciousness as it entered his watering mouth. The first time he got a home run in baseball, all the momentum and the crowd roaring. His first time playing Handel's *Water Music*, the beautiful tones of the notes humming through his ears. The exciting feeling that he had worked hard and accomplished something. Speeding along through the ocean when he was boogie boarding and when he went crashing and tumbling onto the beach and laughing with excitement. The wind rushing into his face as he went

down the steep roller coaster with his dad at Six Flags. His first flip he did off the diving board when he landed on his back. Feeling the feeling of doing something he never thought he could do. His life was flashing before him. All these special times in his life. Life. He wanted it. But he didn't think he could get it through all the chaos and the freezing blackness. He opened his eyes as much as possible and he saw light. Was it actually light? Could this possibly be it? Right as he took his first gasp of air he fell into a sleep he would probably never have again.

He awoke in the hotel room staring with fuzzy vision at a burning fire in front of him. He had fresh clothes on and he could feel the leather of the armchair he was sitting in. His mom brought a steaming dish of spaghetti with his favorite sauce, tomato sauce. He took a long sigh and slowly blinked...



Lunch in the Morning

By **Albert Shu**

THIS IS A TRUE STORY

GUANG'S STOMACH GRUMBLED. He sighed, took his bread out of his backpack, and looked at it, trying to control his appetite. "Remember, don't start eating it as soon as you get off our doorstep!" his mother had said as she placed the bread in a small paper bag with her flour-covered hands. But his stomach growled again and he took a very small bite.

It was 1960, and ever since the Communists had taken his parents' land and business, Guang had been given only a small loaf of bread to eat for lunch at school. His once handsome features were now pale and almost fleshless. There were six children in the family: three boys and three girls. As the fifth child in his family, and the second boy, Guang was not given enough to eat, as Chinese in those times thought that the oldest and youngest children were most important. Being a boy didn't help (Chinese considered boys superior to girls); he had one older brother and one younger one.

The three-year famine between 1958 and 1961 had been caused by Chairman Mao's Great Leap Forward policy. Chairman Mao had stated that China could catch up with Europe and the U.S. in industry if more steel could be manufactured. The whole population was forced to make steel. Anyone who didn't comply was considered an enemy of the state and punished. Farmers stopped farming and melted their farm tools for material to use to make steel and cut down scores of trees



Albert Shu, 10
Milpitas, California

to make fires. People in the cities melted pots and pans—Guang remembered how his family had only been allowed to keep one pot and one pan. Over the fires they placed a huge stove and threw all their metal in there. But steel-making is a very exact procedure. Metal must be burnt at just the right temperature, and the exact procedure has to be followed. The ordinary people didn't know the procedure, and a small wood bonfire is definitely not the right temperature. The metal they produced was not steel; it was useless scrap metal molded into shapes. Meanwhile, no one was farming, and even if they were allowed to, all the farm tools had been melted. Food was scarce. There was only bread to eat, and very little of that, too. In the countryside, some people were forced to eat things like tree bark and flowers.

Before the Communists took over, Guang's family was wealthy and well-to-do. It had owned two factories: a soy sauce factory and a biscuit factory. Then the Communists came to power and took away all their land and property because the Communist theory was that money, property, and other possessions should be distributed evenly amongst all citizens. His parents had often muttered about the Communists, and Guang had heard them sometimes. Guang still longed to gorge himself on a bag of biscuits and a plate of well-cooked meat. He missed the

life he had once had. Now, standing on the cracked, broken sidewalk, he couldn't resist his hunger. Even though he knew that by the time he got home after school, ten hours later, he would be starving, the temptation won. He took another bite, savoring the sweet taste of the bread.

As he ate he thought of the biscuit factory his family had owned. He remembered the bags of biscuits, with buttery crusts and soft, delicious insides that he had feasted on so often. He remembered how privileged he had felt every time one

of the factory's delivery trucks trundled by, how glad he had been that his family was so well-to-do. But now, whenever he noticed one of those delivery trucks, he remembered the Communists, and now he tried not to walk past the factory, now owned by the country.

The loaf was only the size of his fist, so he tried to make it last as long as possible, holding each piece in his mouth until it softened. Taking care not to drop a single crumb, he broke the bread in half, then took one half and broke it again. The aroma of fresh-baked corn bread tantalized him, and he pulled off another piece. He started ripping off large chunks and stuffing them in his mouth, but instead of subsiding, his hunger elevated.

When Guang arrived at school, he was just finishing the last piece of bread. Though he had devoured the equivalent of a small meal, he was just as ravenous

**There was only bread
to eat, and very little
of that, too.**




Albert's grandfather, Guang Wu Zhao, as a teenager

as he was when he had taken that tiny first bite. Digging into the bag, Guang pulled out a few crumbs and swallowed them as well. The bag was crumpled into a small round brown ball and tossed into a nearby wastebasket. Guang pretended to be a basketball player, flicking his wrist and muttering, "Two points! Score!" in Chinese. He gazed out at his school, a long three-story brick building with long windows that looked out on the grassless

field where some children played with a ball. His friend greeted him with a half-hearted "Hello!" as he walked through the gate and into the schoolyard. The bell rang and he trudged up the stairs and along the hall to his classroom, slung his backpack down on the floor, and pulled out his textbook.

Another long day, he thought.

Guang is my grandfather, and this is his true story. 

Morn

By Katherine Shock



Katherine Shock, 12
Baltimore, Maryland

Hazy gray-gold light
Patterns on the wall.
Mystical.

Creaking door,
A frisky tail, and she pounces
Ever so light.

She prances,
Arches her back, kneads deep into the blanket,
And collapses.

I curl around her,
A snug cocoon.
One.

Her eyes mere slits
A faint meow,
Contented.

A caressing hand,
Smoothing her rumpled fur,
Soft and warm like gingerbread.

I rest my hand near her heart,
Listen to her raspy purr.
Close my eyes.

And I doze off again.
Enveloped,
In the gray-gold morning light.

Being Lucia

By Molly O'Toole

Illustrated by Ravela Smyth



Molly O'Toole, 12
Arlington, Massachusetts



Ravela Smyth, 11
Northridge, California

BEEP! BEEP! I spring out of bed when my alarm sounds, but no alarm was needed to wake me up. I have been waiting for this day my whole life. I keep my pajamas on, because I need to wear clothes that aren't important for cooking. My stomach is doing that all too familiar flip-flop motion that indicates *Today is St. Lucia day. Today, I am Lucia.*

Bella and Matthew are already up and dancing around the kitchen. They look up when I come in. "Elizabeth!" they cry, and Bella runs up and hugs my waist. Bella is only five, but she's super smart. She's quiet and only speaks when necessary, but mostly because there's too much going on inside her head. It must sound like a Lowell mill in there. Matthew's eight and is a lot louder and more outgoing. He's kind of a class clown.

The stairs creak, followed by loud thumping and groaning. It's Kathryn. "Shush!" I say. "You'll wake up the adults!" She gives me her classic touch-me-and-I'll-kill-you look and grabs the recipe book off the shelf.

"OK, everyone knows the drill. Bella and Matthew gather the ingredients for the Lucia buns, I put them in the oven, and Elizabeth makes the coffee. Am I understood?"

I glare at Matthew, trying to warn him, but he can't resist. "Sir yes, sir!" he shouts in a stern voice, then puffs out his chest and salutes Kathryn. I roll my eyes. Matthew has to learn that you can't joke with her at 6:00 a.m. But Kathryn's response takes me off guard.

"That's more like it! Everyone, get busy!"



I have been waiting for this day my whole life

I grab the coffee pot and ground coffee and set some water to boil. Since coffee takes the shortest amount of time, I go to the hall closet and fetch the white robes and hats and wreaths.

My family is Swedish, so we celebrate St. Lucia Day. The oldest girl in the fam-

ily wears a wreath with seven candles (fake, or real in my case) and a white robe with a red sash. She walks into the kitchen with St. Lucia buns and coffee, singing the St. Lucia song. Some families sing it in English, but we were always taught the Swedish version. The other kids wear

white robes, and the really little ones dress up as *tomtar*, which are little Swedish mischievous elves, and sing other songs. The boys wear hats decorated with stars. They are *stjärngossar*, or star boys.

Kathryn was always Lucia, and now I'm thirteen and it's finally my turn. There's really no way to explain the way I feel. I guess you could say that it's like waiting in line at the amusement park; waiting for hours and hours. But finally you get to go on the ride, and it's the most amazing and exhilarating roller coaster that you will ever go on in your whole life. It's like a breath of fresh air, a rainbow after a thunderstorm, light after darkness. It's finally my time to be the special one, the one in the light. And I have never been more ready or eager.

I smile as I fold the robes and look out the window. It's the kind of winter day where the sun shines golden light on the ground, melting the early morning frost and creating a warm kind of air to the chilly sky.

"Elizabeth! The buns are ready!" shouts Kathryn. I snap out of my daydream and head to the kitchen. Awaiting me is a tray of fresh-out-of-the-oven Lucia buns. They smell like saffron, and small little heat waves are slowly rising towards the ceiling. I love Lucia buns so much that it makes my mouth melt just looking at them. But these aren't for me. I remind myself that I have to be Lucia, which

means bringing the buns to *other* people and pretending that I'm glad just to watch them eat. But even that burden doesn't take away the honor and glory that I get when I walk into the dining room. My great-grandmother wore that crown, and my grandmother, and my aunt, and

my mother, and my sister. But now *I'll* wear it, now *I'll* get to share my Lucia story, and *I'll* get to be part of that club, that *knowing*. Me.

"Elizabeth, get Matthew and Bella ready, and I'll finish the coffee. We need to hurry!" Kathryn wipes her forehead and gets out the mugs.

I take Matthew and Bella to the living room and pull the robes over their heads. "Here, Matthew—take your hat. Bella—get on your shirt." I fly around, tying this and adjusting that, and finally the two young ones are ready, and I can get myself tidied up. Myself. Me. Lucia. I shake a little in a feeble attempt to calm myself down. It just can't be done. It's almost time.

I run to the bathroom and change out of my pajamas and put on my white robe. It flutters just to the floor—but not quite touching it. Below the bustline there are some pleats, which go on for a few inches. It's simple but elegant.

The sash is beautiful. It's a deep, wondrous color that's somewhere between scarlet and burgundy. You can't see this from afar, but it's embroidered with tiny little flowers—poinsettias. I tie it around

What if the candles
fall? What if the wax
drips on my hair?

my waist and remove the crown wreath from its little box. It sits there while I brush my hair—I'm not really looking at it but I can picture it perfectly. It sits there in its own little glory, sitting on the bathroom cabinet; sitting in my thoughts and tinting them with a St. Lucia evergreen smell. Even though it's made of artificial pine needles, I can still smell it. Soon it will sit on my head and boast that I'm Lucia, its bright candles illuminating my face and the tiny flames flickering in my eyes.

Setting down my brush, I leave the bathroom to see that Kathryn is all dressed and lighting the candles. "What time is it?" I whisper, since I think that the adults might be down soon.

"Six thirty, that's when everyone's supposed to get up!" she mutters back.

The tradition is that the grown-ups sleep in, but our parents always get up early because they're so excited. It's like little kids on Christmas.


Kathryn takes a better look at me and says, "You look really nice."

I smile, "You too." Kathryn helps me get on my crown and light the candles. And this is actually the first time that I'm feeling *nervous* about being Lucia. What if the candles fall? What if the wax drips on my hair and forehead? I must be visibly tensing up, because Bella walks over and takes my hand. I smile at her and try to control my breathing. I start to hear doors opening and footsteps descend-

ing the stairs. It is hard to breathe. I try to stay steady because there is fire on my head, but I'm not doing very well.

"Calm down. It's easy," Kathryn whispers. I just take a few deep breaths and grab the mugs and trays. I can hear Mom and Dad and Gramps and Grams getting in their chairs. Kathryn switches off the lights and nudges me. This is my moment. This is me. I walk slowly into the dining room, my heart racing ninety miles per hour.

I hear Kathryn and Bella and Matthew behind me. This is when I'm supposed to start singing, but I don't. I can't.

I. Forget. The. Words. My head is racing. What's the song called? I forget everything. My mind is blank. I see everyone looking at me expectantly. Finally someone must've caught on, because I hear Kathryn start to sing *Sankta Lucia*... And I am so glad because she saved it for me. Being Lucia would've been all ruined if it weren't for her. I go along, *ljusklara hägring*. I smile brightly as I set the rolls and coffee down on the table. Everyone beams back. I feel special. I should. It's me. Me being Lucia. And I feel bliss beyond compare. The bright candles mix in with everything—the good smells, the nice people. And as my eyes fill with tears, I feel as if I'm melting away into the bright candle surroundings, and everywhere is light. Light like my heart. Light like me. Me being Lucia. 

It's me. Me being Lucia.

**And I feel bliss
beyond compare.**

Book Review

By Abhirupa Dasgupta

Kira-Kira, by Cynthia Kadohata;
Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing;
New York, 2006; \$6.99




Abhirupa Dasgupta, 13
Plano, Texas

ONCE IN A BLUE MOON, you come upon a book which you believe is the pure embodiment of perfection. You read the novel in what seems like a single breath, and by the time you have read the last perfectly tailored word, you would be just as happy to read the entire thing again, if only to experience the magic another time. This book entraps you, entangles you, enthrals you, makes you smile whenever you touch its spine. If you had your way, you would make everyone in the world read it. A book such as this is *Kira-Kira*, by Cynthia Kadohata.

Kira Kira centers on the life of Katie Takeshima, who moves with her family from their home in Iowa to the Deep South of Georgia. This move is a drastic change for Katie. In her new town, everyone stops and stares at her and her family. Some people marvel at her skin, her hair, and her eyes, but others just sneer at her and her family. Katie just can't figure it out. The only one who is patient enough to explain their new circumstances to her is her elder sister, Lynn. In Lynn's eyes, the entire world is an enigma, a shimmery wonderland only to be described by the Japanese word *kira-kira*, meaning glittery or shiny. Lynn teaches Katie the beauty in every life and the magic that

every day brings. However, tragedy strikes, and Lynn, the only one who ever truly understands Katie, falls prey to sickness. Katie has to grow up much too fast and, in doing so, forgets Lynn's lessons about the world.

I connected to this book on a spiritual level. In fact, my perception of the world was inspired very much by Lynn Takeshima. Once upon a time, I was an immigrant in a land of unfamiliar faces. I had no idea what to say, how to say it, when to say it. I was always the odd one out, always alone. My view of the world was a dark one; I thought that life was unfair and unkind and things would never be beautiful for me. All of that changed when I read *Kira-Kira*. I hung onto every word Lynn said, marveling at how similar our circumstances were yet how much our attitudes differed. Lynn and Katie inspired me to face the world with a smile; they taught me that beauty comes in the most dark places and in the most unexpected ways. The philosophy of *kira-kira*, of the shimmering wonderland that is our world, has kept me going in times that could've broken my spirit.

I didn't really have a single favorite part in the novel; the entire book was peppered with moments that took my breath away. I loved it when Katie stood up to Lynn's prejudiced friends and put them in their place. It empowered me to stand up for myself and others that I care about. I also loved the ending. I had thought that Katie would forget everything Lynn told her about the world, and she would once again be reduced to the heartbroken and cynical child she once was. However, Katie remembered the things Lynn had told her when her family went to California. She saw how lovely the world was, even through her own saddened eyes. She appreciated the beauty and *kira-kira* in every facet of the world. She inspired me to do the same. I hope she inspires you too. 

Galactic Rebels

By Natalia Dunyak

Illustrated by the author



Natalia Dunyak, 13
Perth Amboy, New Jersey

The Galactic Soldier Code

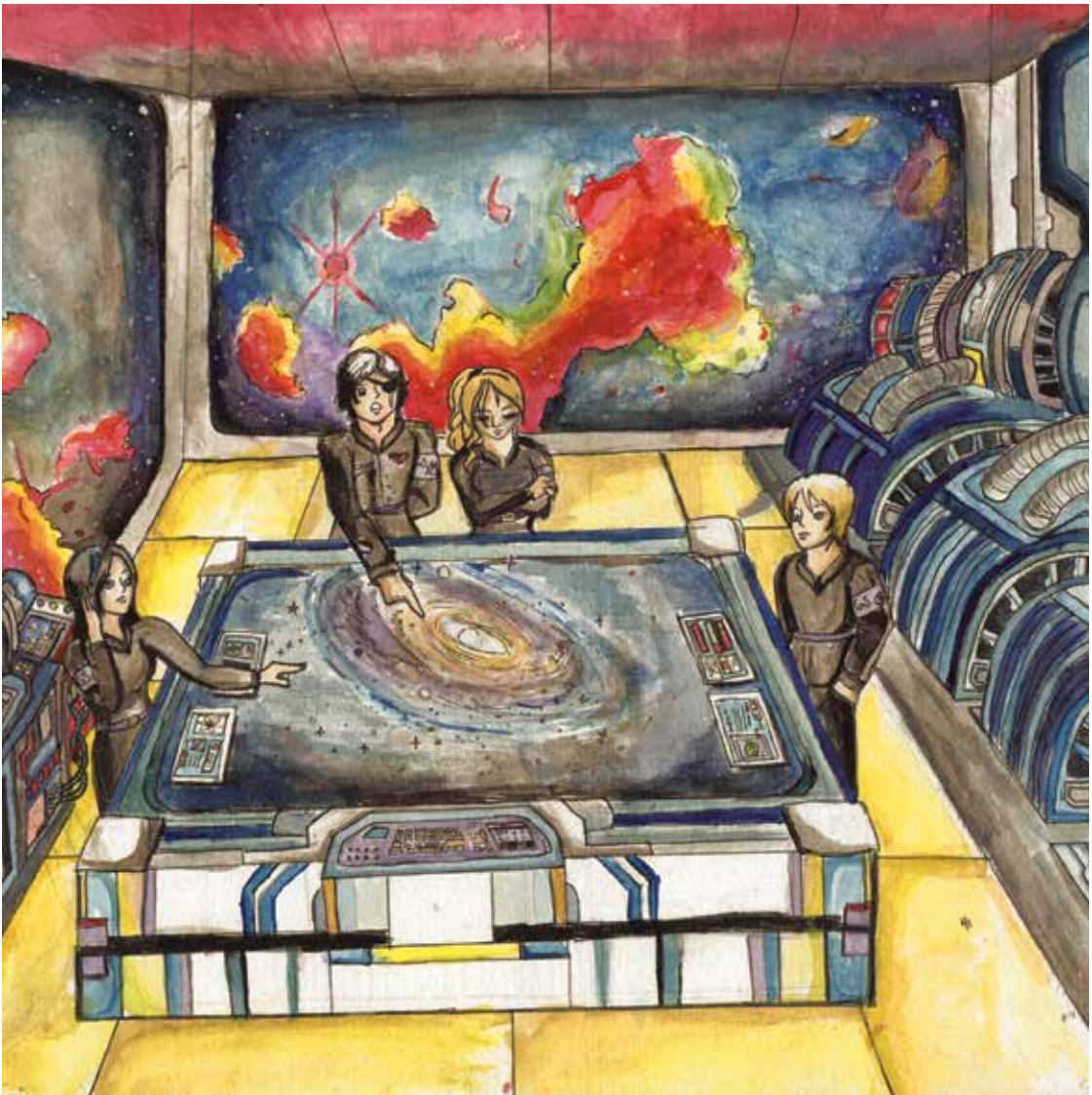
To protect the peace of the Milky Way,
To fight bravely on land, sea, air, and space,
To execute the orders of our superiors,
We are the Galactic Soldiers.

JADE'S CELL WAS A SMALL, cramped space, with bare white walls and floor, except for a small bed, sink, toilet, and mirror. She paced back and forth, her legs burning and the tattoo of her boots soothing her.

I'm running out of time, she thought bitterly. I need to get out of here.

Beads of sweat collected on her forehead, her heart beating like a drum in her chest. She sighed and pressed her back against the wall. She stopped to look at her reflection. She was startled by it. Her deep blue eyes were shaken with fear. A hunk of black hair covered the left side of her face. The one blue highlight stood out. She eyed her uniform—tight black shirt and pants, made for ease in slipping in and out of spacesuits. The purple band on her right arm finally caught her attention. The band had two thin letters, GS, and a crude drawing of an eagle circling Earth in orbit. It was the symbol of the Galactic Soldiers.

Jade was part of this group, the space combat branch of the military, founded shortly after the discovery of other planetary life. The soldiers were trained to be diplomats and defend the



It was so realistic it didn't look like a hologram

galaxy from harm. They went through intense training and had to understand the ins and outs of astrophysics. Jade excelled through training and rose through the ranks. She and other officers were sent on the spacecraft *Athena* to travel to the Alpha Centauri solar system. This mission

would determine the fate of the Earth.

She sighed as tears swelled in her eyes; she buried her face in her hands as the last few hours flooded back into her mind.

THE SOUNDS OF the four people's boots echoed through the hallway.

Their faces were grim. The commander had called the meeting; no doubt the news was going to be sour. He grunted and punched ten numbers into the entrance pad and the doors swished open. The moment they stepped in, the door shut behind them.

The room they entered was full of strange, colorful machines and glass walls. A rosy nebula shimmered softly. Dominic walked next to Jade. He smiled, his perfect white teeth glittering. "You know what the commander knows?"

"Nah, I have no idea," she replied. Dominic was the same rank as Jade; he had sandy blond hair and navy blue eyes, and a wicked sense of humor. He was a close friend of Jade's. She knew him better for his valiant acts as a soldier.

She craned her neck to stare at the commander. He was a ruthless leader who got his position through public relations and doing political favors. His greasy black hair fell onto his face. An eyepatch covered his right eye, but a scar still peeked out. No one was brave enough to ask where he got it from.

"Let's get started," he said. They gathered around a long, elegant table with a gridded screen. In the center there was a small lens. The commander pushed a button and a large hologram flickered on.

The hologram unfurled a three-dimensional map of the Milky Way galaxy. It was so realistic it didn't look like a hologram.

The nebulae looked like small clumps of clouds you could touch. The stars shined like Christmas lights. The brilliant map of the cosmos was annotated with red markings, showing approximate locations of the sun and other celestial objects. Everyone was in awe of its majesty, except the commander, who cleared his throat loudly.

"We have attack strategy to plan," he said. "This mission will determine the fate of the Earth."

Jade tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. She pointed to a green marble-looking piece of the hologram. "Commander, this

planet is Enyo, is it not?"

He nodded. "It's part of the solar system of Alpha Centauri, one of the stars of the triple star system. It was completely hidden until discovered in 2405. The planet is much like Earth. Its inhabitants are equally as advanced as us."

He sighed. "Planetary warfare between our two planets is ripping the Milky Way apart." His eye was like a dark pit, darker than space itself.

The war of the Milky Way has raged on for so long no one really remembers how it started. Enyo and Earth are locked in battle. As a result, both planets are draining their resources; to be frank they are pretty much destroying each other over something petty.

Dominic knit his eyebrows. "Sir, we know all of this. We know Earth is on the

**I tried to stop it,
she thought, but they
stopped me.**

verge of economic collapse, we learned this in training. Why are you repeating this?"

Veronica chimed in. "Because it's the last time any of us will hear this."

Jade stared at her. Veronica was a frosty girl, her platinum-blond hair tied back in a messy ponytail. She was the co-commander of the *Athena* spacecraft. She had a non-negotiable loyalty to the commander, despite his ruthlessness. Her lip was quivering and she was shaking, as if the information she knew was so dreadful it was unbearable to hear.

Veronica bit her lip, unable to meet Dominic and Jade's gaze. "The war has caused horrendous surface damage to both planets. We have developed artillery strong enough to destroy our solar system. If the war goes on we will most likely obliterate each other. Our leaders have come to a decision."

The commander stared directly at Jade and Dominic. "We will annihilate Enyo."

Jade gasped. No one was able to process what the commander had just said. Jade looked at Dominic, who shifted uneasily on the balls of his feet. Finally he broke the silence. "Sir, you can't be... you can't be serious."

The commander looked at Dominic like he was a pesky insect he was eager to crush. "You, a mere soldier, you are nowhere near my authority. Carry out your orders."

Veronica's eyes were glassy. The commander spoke. "You're all dismissed. We will start the destruction sequence at

2100 tomorrow."*

Everyone shuffled out of the room, except for Jade, who stared mesmerized by the map of the cosmos.

JADE PONDERED what to do. There was no way to escape from the cell; she wiped her bloodshot eyes.

I tried to stop it, she thought, but they stopped me.

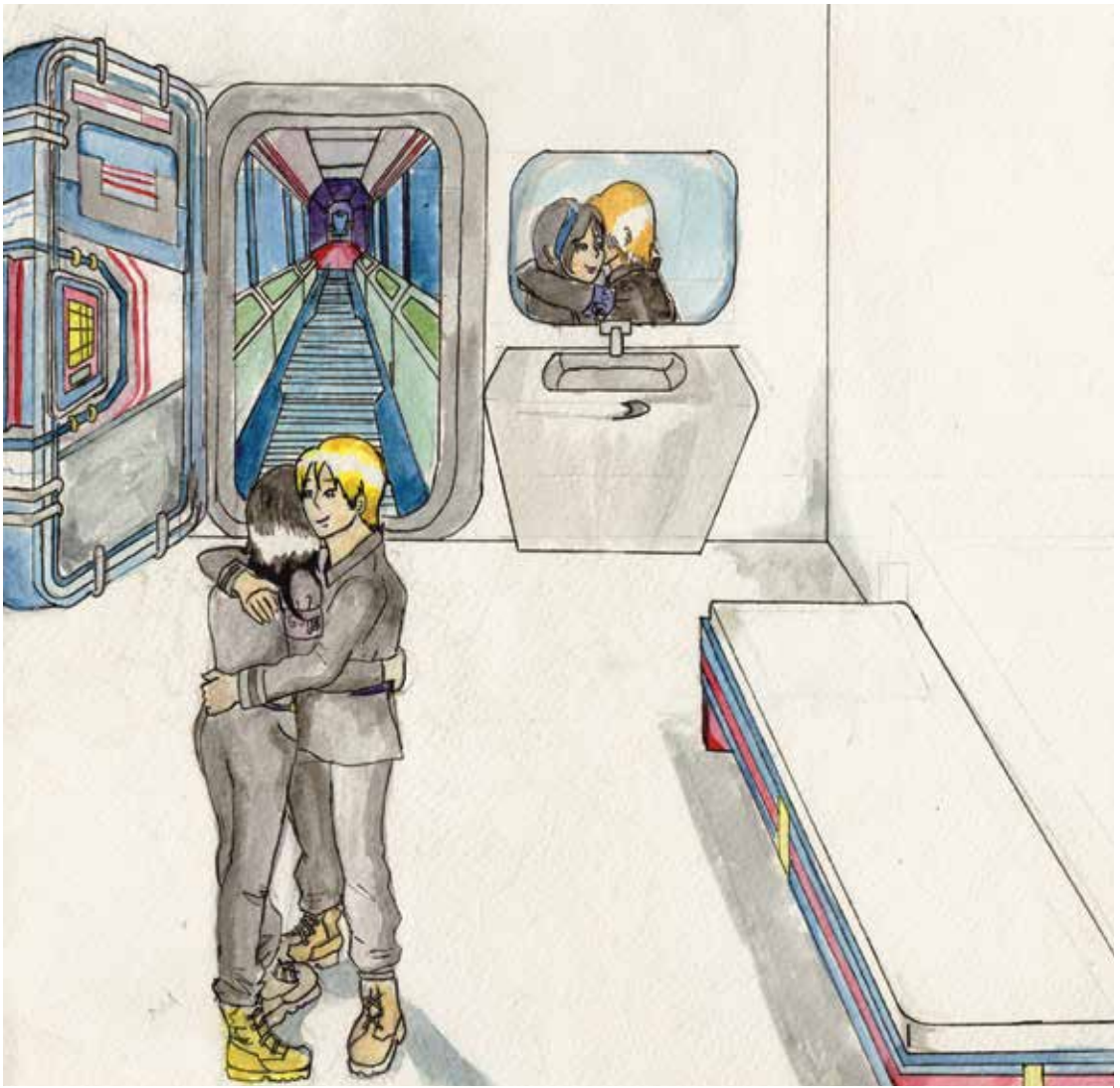
She remembered the stares when she broke down the door to the control room. Running like a lunatic to the control panel, smashing her fists into anything that got in her way. The commander tried to stop her, he gripped her arms and she smashed her elbow into his face, breaking his nose. She was almost able to destroy the pad, almost able to stop the attack.

ALMOST. SHE CRINGED at the word. The guards seized her and dragged her away from the controls. She could not break free, no matter how hard she thrashed and kicked. They put her back on her feet to face the commander.

He pinched the bridge of his nose with his left hand. With his right he waved his hand at her. "You," he said in a hoarse voice, "are hereby expelled from the Galactic Soldiers. You will be brought back to Earth as a traitor."

Jade scanned the room. There was no chance of escape. Her eyes fell on Dominic, who was gawking at her. He did

* 2100 is military time for 9:00 p.m.



Before Jade could speak, he embraced her in a hug

nothing to help her, he betrayed her. All those months of training together meant nothing to him. Jade quickly blinked the tears away as she was escorted to her prison. The guards shoved her in and slammed the door shut.

Jade knew it was only a matter of time before Enyo was destroyed. She didn't

understand why she cared so much; the belligerent planets were both guilty for dragging out the war. It was not right to punish Enyo for something that was both planets' faults. You can't wipe out a planet. It goes against all sense of morality. There has to be a logical way.

Jade heard loud crashing noises and

shouts. She got up and sauntered slowly toward the door. With a loud thud the door released. Dominic peeped his head in. "Thank goodness you're OK."

Before Jade could speak, he embraced her in a hug. He grabbed her hand. "Wipe your tears, we have a mission."

The right side of his face was smeared with crimson. He had been in a fight to get here.

"OK," she croaked, smiling.

They clasped hands and sprinted down the hall.

"LIKE I WOULD EVER tell you," the commander sneered. The commander was tied to a chair; Dominic held his weapon firmly toward his throat.

"How is the obliteration of an entire planet for the better good?" Dominic snarled. Dominic felt as ardent about this as Jade. Jade gasped when she saw the destruction sequence timer.

"Dominic!" she screamed, pointing to the dial. "Less than ten minutes left. It's now or never."

The commander will never give us the shutdown code, Jade thought. He'd rather die than let us know.

Her eyes shifted to Veronica, who was sobbing in the corner. She marched over to her. "What is the shutdown code?"

Tears streamed down her face. "620071."

Dominic punched the code into the control pad and the timer froze. "Destruction sequence shut down," said a robotic female voice.

The commander glared at Jade. "You stupid girl, you just destroyed the future of Earth. You were never a Galactic Soldier anyway."

Jade walked up to him and stared down at him. This time he was the helpless one and she was looking down on him. "I've finally learned what a Galactic Soldier is. A Galactic Soldier fights for what they believe in and they preserve peace. Peace can only be achieved through understanding. It's impossible with the horrendous act of violence you were about to commit. I am a Galactic Soldier."

Dominic smashed the control pad. Alarms blared. The commander smiled wickedly. He laughed a blood-curdling laugh. "Soon the guards will be here and you two will go to prison for the rest of your lives."

"I'll never let that happen," Dominic alleged. "JADE!"

Jade gazed out the broad window. She was captivated by how beautiful Enyo was. *It's like the Earth*, she thought. The clouds veiled the watery planet. Its two moons, Eris and Caligo, slowly circled it. Eris was a silver sphere and Caligo was a golden crescent.

Dominic grabbed her arm. "Hey, Jade, we can stare later, we need to get out of here!"

She nodded and waved her hand toward the escape pod. They ran toward it.

"Wait!" yelled Veronica. She could barely run in her heels.


"I helped. I want to get out of here too," she said. "I want to end this war the



“Wait!” yelled Veronica. She could barely run in her heels.

right way.” Jade and Dominic nodded and they entered the pod. They set course to Enyo so they could finally finish the war.

JADE, DOMINIC, and Veronica became known as heroes over hundreds of light years. They became universal

symbols for peace and morality. Enyo was also on the verge of economic collapse and concluded the war. Earth and Enyo soon became allies as they healed. They were given a second chance because a group of rebels fought for what they believed in. 

Made with Love

By Jordan Guberman

We stand in the old kitchen
On the white rustic floors
With cloth draped over the table
My tiny hands are ready

She gets the flour
As I stretch to get eggs
At the back of the fridge
My fingers slip
She saves it from behind
We laugh

We lower the mixer
Add the ingredients
I scoop a bit of batter into my mouth
She sees me but pretends not to notice
It makes me feel warm inside
Baking bread with Nana

I wait for the loaf to rise
We talk about things that we love together
Sports, food, and just life
The aroma of the perfect bakery fills the room
As I embrace the smell
And know it was made with love



Jordan Guberman, 12
Winnipeg, Manitoba,
Canada



The waiting room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop

Marcella's Miracle

By **Abigail Johnson**

Illustrated by **Frances Burnett-Stuart**

HIS BREATHING DEEPENED as he drifted off to sleep. His chest rose and fell in a rhythm that comforted his sister sitting next to him.

Ellie Harrison wrapped her arms around herself in a hug and closed her eyes. She tried to sleep like her brother, but it was impossible to get comfortable in the hard wooden chairs of the hospital waiting room.

After a few minutes, Sleep found her and took her away from the hospital and all the pain of everyone in the waiting room with her.

But Sleep had no extra time to spare and was impatient to be rid of this new customer. So Sleep went away, leaving her huddled in the cold chair of the hospital waiting room. She opened her eyes, rubbing them gently to make the grogginess go away. The fluorescent light shone brightly, but there was something oddly fake about it; about the whole room. Everything was a sterile white, and too clean for her liking.

She glanced around at the other people in the chairs all around her. Some had stains of recent tears on their cheeks; others sat staring straight ahead of them. A few were asleep like her older brother, Luke, curled up in chairs and even on the floor. One man sat with his head in his hands, sobbing silently into his sleeve. A woman close to the white door spoke softly into her cell phone, reading something off a form in her hand. Some children looked at magazines, and some played video games on iPads or cell phones. There was a big TV mounted on



Abigail Johnson, 12
Davis, California



Frances Burnett-Stuart, 13
Aberdeen, Scotland

the wall near the door, playing a children's program on mute. A few people stared blankly at the TV. But no one in the room was really focusing on what they were doing.

The waiting room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. Or even a cotton ball. The silence was not broken for several minutes, until the door opened and a doctor with smeared lipstick and messy hair that had been tied back in a loose ponytail walked in. Her eyes quickly scanned the room, and she called out a name.

"Flora O'Connor?"

The woman who had been speaking on her cell phone jumped up and dumped her phone and the forms on her lap into a huge purse. She walked over to the doctor uncertainly, tucking her red hair behind her ear and slinging the monstrous purse over her shoulder like it weighed a thousand pounds. The doctor whispered something that made the woman dissolve into tears. She bit her lip and nodded. Slowly she followed the doctor back through the door, still sobbing quietly. The doctor wore a look of almost sympathy as she closed the door, enveloping the waiting room in silence again. Ellie thought that the doctor should try a little harder to comfort the woman.

Ellie quite disliked doctors. She hated the blue pajamas they wore. The white hygiene masks and the fake smiles plastered on their faces. And especially the way they pretended to understand your pain, the way they shook their heads; im-

plying that their patient had not made it through the night or that their treatments hadn't been successful.

Now Ellie sighed and sank back into the wooden chair, tapping her foot impatiently. A moment later, the white door swung open again, and this time no doctor walked in, but Ellie's dad slumped to where Ellie and Luke sat.

His eyes were red and puffy, as if he had not slept in many weeks. He was unshaven and his hair stuck up in every which way. He held a cup of coffee from the cafeteria downstairs, on which his name was printed sloppily. Bradley Harrison.

"Daddy!" whispered Ellie, "Are you OK? How is Marcella doing? When can I visit?"

Ellie's father sighed. His youngest daughter, Marcella, who was only five, was in the hospital, unconscious. One week ago, Ellie's mom had been driving Marcella to her school. It was raining. They were stopped at a red light when a big truck came skidding out of nowhere. It collided with their car, and Ellie's mother had not survived.

Marcella was alive, but very hurt. The doctors were still trying to figure out what was wrong with her. She had scans and tests every day. Their father rarely left her bedside, except for nighttime, when they stayed in a hotel across the street from the hospital. Ellie and Luke spent much of their time in the waiting room, because only one visitor was allowed with Marcella at a time. But sometimes Ellie was permitted in with her sister, and she

knelt by the bed. It was full of Marcella's favorite stuffed animals and blankets, and the table beside the bed was overloaded with sweets and cards from friends.

Ellie was distraught at losing her mother, but since Marcella was so hurt, she couldn't think about her mom. She had to focus on Marcella, because she could not lose two members of her family. After Marcella got better, they could properly mourn Mrs. Harrison.

Ellie's dad looked at his shoes, blinking back tears.

"Marcella is the same. She's still unconscious. The doctors hoped to see some improvement after the treatment they gave her yesterday, but there's been no sign. But there's still hope. She will pull out of this! No extra visitors are allowed right now. But I was wondering if you were hungry. It's six thirty, and if you get too tired we can head back to the hotel soon. But I think we should eat first. Come on, wake up your brother and we'll head to the cafeteria. OK?"

Ellie nodded and shook Luke awake. He rubbed his neck, which must have been full of cricks from the uncomfortable chairs. They stood up solemnly and followed their father out a new door, this one also white, and down some stairs. He nodded at the receptionist in the lobby, who smiled and handed Luke and Ellie each a piece of candy.

The cafeteria was almost like a restaurant. Mr. Harrison ordered some pasta,

and Ellie got a grilled-cheese sandwich from the kids' menu. Luke wanted a grilled-cheese also, but it only came on the kids' menu.

"Can I get a grilled-cheese too?" Luke asked his father.

"You're too old. You can only get the kids' menu when you're under ten years old. You're twelve, Luke. Did you forget?" Mr. Harrison's laugh was strained.

Ellie stuck her tongue out at her brother. "I can still order from the kids'

menu! There's a good thing about being eight!"

Their dad forced another laugh. "You're right, Ellie. But don't stick out your tongue."

Ellie was proud that she had found a good thing about being four years younger than her brother, which she was always trying to do because Luke always teased her that he was older and bigger and stronger than her. He ended up ordering a burger, which Ellie pointed out was unhealthy.

Back at the hotel Ellie slept restlessly. None of them had been sleeping well since... the accident. They gained about six hours of sleep before the sun gobbled up the darkness and they returned to the hospital.

Marcella improved little over the next few days. The Harrisons appeared strong on the outside, but underneath their thick armor they began to lose hope.

**The doctors were still
trying to figure out what
was wrong with her.**

They knew that only a miracle could help Marcella. Ellie and Luke spent many more hours in the waiting room, and their dad spent countless hours by the bed of Marcella. More than a week passed.

Mr. Harrison drove Luke and Ellie back to their house to get more clothes, books, and games; because they had both run out. Then they returned to the sterile white hospital which Ellie so detested.

ONE DAY, as Ellie sat in the waiting room with Luke, she had an interesting thought. What would Marcella say when she woke up in a completely white and way-too-clean hospital? Would she remember the crash? Would she be confused?

Ellie asked Luke these questions, and he had an idea. He said that Ellie should make a poster or something, a poster for Marcella. Ellie thought it was an excellent idea.

Ellie had been trying to teach Marcella how to read before the crash, with the help of Luke. Marcella's attention span was only about five minutes at a time, but five minutes a day certainly got her somewhere. She could read a whole picture book and could sometimes follow along when Luke read his chapter books. In fact, she could read almost as well as Ellie.

So the next day, Ellie's father drove them to an arts-and-crafts store in downtown. Ellie loaded up the cart with poster paper, colored construction paper, and oodles of pens, crayons, and colored pencils in every color of the rainbow. Then

there was the scissors, the tape, the glue, and the hole-punchers of different shapes.

Ellie's dad groaned as he looked at the receipt but said nothing. They loaded all the supplies back into the car and pulled out of the parking lot. On the highway the mood in their car was sullen. Ellie's father was staring at the road in front of him. Suddenly he began to speak very slowly.

"This red light, this one right up in front of us, this is the light that... the place where... this is where it happened."

He said the last part very softly, as if he wanted them to know but he didn't want them to hear the words. Ellie glanced at him and saw a tear slowly slip down his cheek. He blinked rapidly and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Usually he wore contacts, but he had lost them in the chaos of the past few weeks.

Ellie stole a look over at Luke. He was concentrating on something outside his window but didn't seem to be taking it in. He sniffed a few times, and his eyes were red but dry. Ellie looked back and forth from her dad to her brother. She began to cry quietly in the back seat.

They sat in silence for the next few minutes. Ellie tried to think of something other than her mother. Something other than her sister. She thought of all the supplies they had bought. Then she pictured the poster she would make.

Across the top, she would print in big block letters: MARCELLA. It would be curved like a rainbow, and written in rain-



Ellie directed two nurses in its hanging

bow colors too. Underneath it would say, "WE'VE MISSED YOU SO MUCH!!" There would be doodles and nice pictures all around it, in bright bold colors. It would include nothing about their mother, for it would be no time for mourning. It would be a time of rejoice. Rejoice in

a family that persisted on. In the family that Ellie knew and loved. With Marcella at the center.

OVER THE NEXT few days, Ellie made a poster for Marcella with the help of Luke and occasionally their

dad. They worked on it for hours every day, right there on the floor of the waiting room. When it was finished, Ellie directed two nurses in its hanging.

She very much liked being in charge of adults.

“Um, a little more to the left. Now up more. Stop! That’s too much. Down more. No, no, no! You know, I think it would look better on this wall. Marcella might not look to her right first when she wakes up just because that’s where Dad is sitting. It has to be right in front of her. Yes, that wall. Now to the right... more... more... no, that’s too much. Move it back a little. Good! But that’s much too high, Marcella will have to look up and she might hurt her neck! Down more. More. OK, I think that’s as good as we’re going to get it.”

Ellie glared at the nurses like they were impossible. They hurried out of the room, muttering about the bossy eight-year-old girl they had just left.

Ellie grinned. They hadn’t done such a bad job. The bright colors of the poster looked good against the dreary white walls.

Later that night, after they had eaten dinner in the cafeteria, Mr. Harrison’s phone buzzed in his pocket. He answered it with his eyebrows raised. As he listened, a grin slowly spread across his face.

“We’ll be right there. Thank you, thank you for everything,” he said before he hung up his phone.

“Marcella is really improving! They’ve been noticing it all day, but now they

think that she might become conscious soon! They want us to be there, and they’re even gonna let us all go in! Isn’t that great?”

His eyes shone as he spoke.

“Yay!”

Ellie and Luke actually jumped for joy. They all ran up the stairs but slowed to a fast walk as they reached Marcella’s room. Mr. Harrison gave a soft knock as he opened the door. They stood for a moment, catching their breath, as the doctor beckoned them in.

“Her heart rate has returned to normal. She may wake up any minute now.”

Ellie grinned and sat down in one of the chairs by Marcella’s bed. She didn’t sit long, though. After about five minutes, Marcella opened her eyes. She struggled to sit up and looked up at the poster in front of her. Then she looked down at the tube connected to her wrist. Then back up at the poster. Slowly her face broke into a smile, a smile too big for her frail little five-year-old face.

Everyone hugged her. They all seemed to be speechless. Then everyone hugged everyone else, and Mr. Harrison said thank you over and over again to one of the doctors while Ellie ran up to the other and hugged her.

Marcella stayed in the hospital a few more days, and then they all went home. Even though their family was still missing someone, they seemed fuller than ever. And they all cherished Marcella, and her miracle survival, instead of dwelling on the past.



Cold

By **Claire Yoon MacDonald**

The cold air
Hits me instantly, spontaneously,
As I step out the door.
My breath
Puffs on the cold air in little white clouds,
Forming a quick wisp of silky fog.
Snow
Soft, white, like winter's blanket,
Spirals from the sky, landing on
The creases of my shirt,
Landing on my eyelashes,
Creating a cold white barrier between my eyes
And the world ahead.
Ice
It covers the water on the street
In a cold, hard shell of whiteness
Causing my boots
To slip and slide over it.
The bleak, black skeletons of trees
Sway solemnly in the harsh, snowy wind.
Cold.

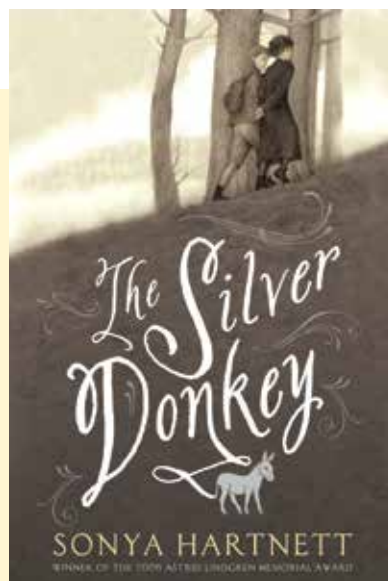


Claire Yoon MacDonald, 10
Bexley, Ohio

Book Review

By Myla Indigaro

The Silver Donkey, by Sonya Hartnett;
Candlewick Press: Somerville,
Massachusetts, 2014; \$8.99



Myla Indigaro, 10
Los Angeles, California

“AS THEY APPROACHED the hollow where the man lay, they were aggrieved to spy him sitting up. Clearly he was not dead. And although they had crept as quietly as they could, and kept themselves hidden behind tree trunks and weeds, the sharp-eared man must have heard—for he looked up from the fallen leaves, and stared directly at them.”


This quote from *The Silver Donkey* starts the amazing adventure of two sisters, little Coco and her older sister, Marcelle, who live in a small town in France. In the middle of a walk in the woods the sisters stumble upon a man they believe is dead, only to find he is a sleeping soldier blinded from war named Lieutenant Shepard.

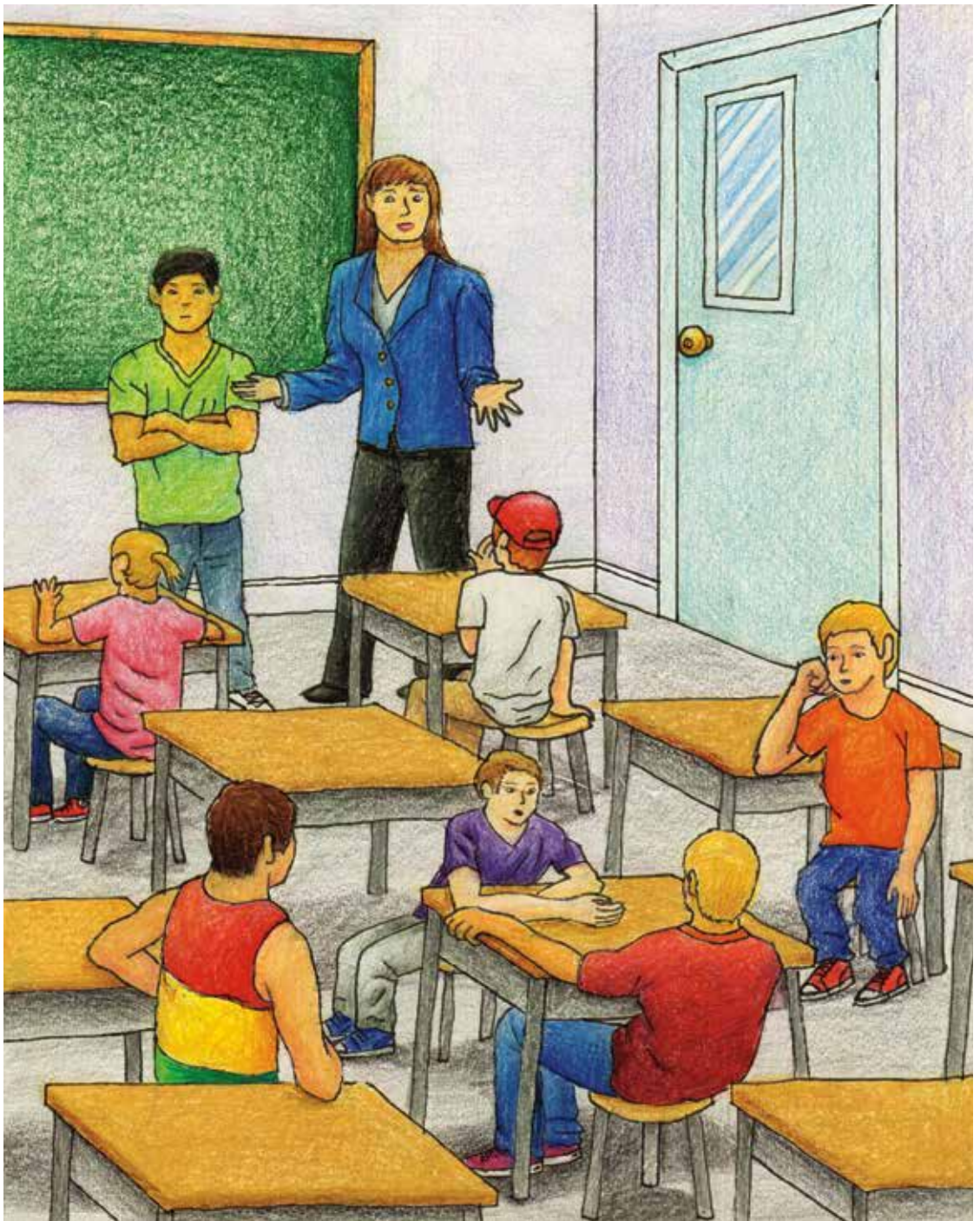
The Silver Donkey is a book beautifully written by Sonya Hartnett. Once I started reading this book, I couldn't stop. Maybe it was because of all the details she put in the book, which made it seem like I was really there. Or maybe it was because of her use of metaphors. But it was probably because of how meaningful the book was and how much it moved me. I have always been the type of person who wanted to help other people and that is exactly what Coco and Marcelle wanted to do. Coco and Marcelle did whatever they could to take care of

the soldier. They snuck him food, drink, and a pillow. In turn, the soldier dazzled the girls with stories and showed them his good luck charm that he carried with him—a little silver donkey.

During the days ahead, the sisters nourish Shepard with food and comfort and spend as much time with him as possible. They listen as he tells them about his life and the war and, more importantly, four stories, each about a loyal, humble, forgiving, noble, brave, hard-working creature—the donkey. I have always been an animal lover and I have even adopted an elephant from Kenya, but I never knew anything about the donkey. In the stories the donkey was always the hero. Whether it was to carry Joseph and his pregnant wife Mary to Bethlehem, or to rescue wounded soldiers, or to make the sky rain and save a village from drought, or to be a symbol of hope to Shepard's ill brother and personify a message to always do your best. Shepard also shares with the girls his hope and dream of going home, to cross the Channel to see his sickly younger brother, John.

Even though this is a story about war, I was not scared to read it. What was important to me was the relationship between the soldier and the girls. I love the fact that these girls who are about my age could make such a difference in his life. I think the most important thing in life is to be happy, and I try to make others happy, whether it's helping a friend who is sad or doing chores for my parents.

At the end of the book the girls find someone to take the soldier on a boat to go home. We don't know if he makes it in time to see his brother, but my imagination tells me he does. Although I am happy for the soldier, I was sad to see him leave, just like the girls were. However, I was excited to read that he left behind his prized possession for Coco to find—the silver donkey. It was a true buried treasure and a reminder to her to always do her best and be trustworthy and brave. 



"Class, I would like you to meet Kenta"

Conrad and Fate

By **Nate Sheehan**

Illustrated by **Gordon Su**

PROLOGUE

I DIDN'T WANT TO MOVE. I didn't want to move to America on July 17, 1956. My life was perfect in Japan. I had good friends. I had finally made the baseball team. Everything was perfect, but then I had to move to the U.S. The same country that fought a war against Japan. The same country where everybody who looks Japanese is an enemy.

Learn a new language. Make new friends. So, basically I had to start over when everything had been perfect. "Perfect" was the only word going through my mind as I sat in bed, looking blankly at the darkness, waiting for the alarm clock to ring.

CHILDREN WERE practically everywhere, rushing around like ants trying to find their hole. Room 117. I was getting good at reading English, but speaking—not so much. Room 117 would be on the second floor. (I had a tour of the school a few weeks ago.) I headed for the stairs.

Once in the classroom, I noticed one thing. I was the only somewhat dark-skinned child in the classroom. I got some stares, a few whispers, and sweat trickled down my neck.

The teacher broke the silence. "Class, I would like you to meet Kenta," she announced, motioning to me. I noticed a group of three in the back, whispering. I didn't know how, but I knew they were talking about me. I just knew.

As I walked past them, I learned that my prediction was right. I heard words like, "What's a Japanese kid doing here?"



Nate Sheehan, 12
Lexington, Massachusetts



Gordon Su, 13
Milpitas, California

"I don't know about you, but I want to pound him."

"Yeah, he doesn't belong here."

I gulped and rushed off to my seat, but whoever those kids were, they were right. I didn't belong here, I belonged in Japan. Japan was where my friends were. Japan is where my language is. Japan is where my father's grave is, along with the graves of other soldiers who were probably fathers too.

The teacher had the students give their names. I tried to pay attention but couldn't. I couldn't get my mind out of Japan. When the whisperers got their turn, I shoved my thoughts out and listened carefully. Tony, Ezra, and Derek. Those were their names.

Lunch was the worst and best part of the day. I sat down at a table and everybody else at the table moved. After the commotion, one kid was left sitting right across from me.

"Hey, I'm Conrad." He put out a hand, willing to shake.

"Kenta," I croaked.

"Kietta?"

"Kennta." I exaggerated the *n*.

"Kenta," Conrad responded.

I nodded.

Lunch ended, recess started. According to Conrad, the big sport was football.

"What's football?" I asked.

"Oh yeah, you don't play football in Japan," Conrad responded. "OK, here's how you play. So there's a quarterback.

When he says "Hike!" he throws the ball to... you know what? It's complicated to explain. You'll catch on as you play."

"OK," I said.

I regretted saying that as soon as we started playing. First of all, I was picked last. The captains were Tony (the leader of the whisperers) and a kid named Joe, who

I didn't recognize. They had a big argument over who should get me.

Tony won.

Joe lost.

I was on Joe's team.

The game started with a player from Tony's team punting the odd-shaped ball. Maybe this game is like soccer, I thought, as the ball soared over our heads and landed right in front of me. I started to kick it.

"Penalty!" somebody yelled. "Five yards!"

Derek (another one of the whisperers) walked the ball five steps and placed it on the ground. "You're supposed to pick it up, yellow boy," said Derek in a mocking tone. All the kids laughed.

The next thing I knew, Joe (the captain) said, "Hike!" I didn't know what to do, so I copied all the other kids running like maniacs. Joe threw the oval-shaped ball. It was going right towards me.

What was I supposed to do? I thought. Was I supposed to catch it? I had no more time for thinking about it, so I caught it. Now what?

I suddenly thought of what Joe did, just a minute ago. "Hike!" I said and I threw

Everything was
perfect, but then I had
to move to the U.S.

the ball to a kid down the field.

"Illegal forward pass!" cried out Tony. "Do you have a brain? Or is your head full of empty space? Well, I guess that's what happens when you live off raw fish. 'Cause you would run with the ball, instead of throwing it."

My ears burned. The whole world was laughing at me. What did Conrad get me into? I wondered.

After recess, Conrad walked up to me. "Sorry," he immediately said, "I thought they would ignore you and you could learn the game by watching, but I was wrong. Sorry, I'm really sorry."

I nodded. It didn't even occur to me that Conrad could have stood up for me during the game.

Recess was bad. But then class started and it was easily the best part of the day, because then all the bullies out to get me couldn't touch me without the teacher noticing. The rest of the day rushed by: math, science, music, art, and finally, reading.

Before I walked home, Conrad passed on to me that there were baseball tryouts next week. Finally, I had something to look forward to besides getting beat up by Tony and his gang.

THIS ONE WEEK felt a lot more like a year rather than a week. Everything was going in slow motion, but finally, the week was over. I waited for the bell to ring during reading. To tell the truth, I wasn't really reading at all. I had my book in front of me, flipped open to a random page. I was—*ring!!* I flew out of my seat,

out of the classroom, and raced down the hallway to grab my glove from my backpack. Once outside, I caught sight of Conrad.

"I forgot to tell you," said Conrad, once I had caught up. "The team is run by the students, so don't get your hopes high."

All my excitement completely disappeared. Why did I bother to try out in the first place? I thought, but I went over to the field anyway.

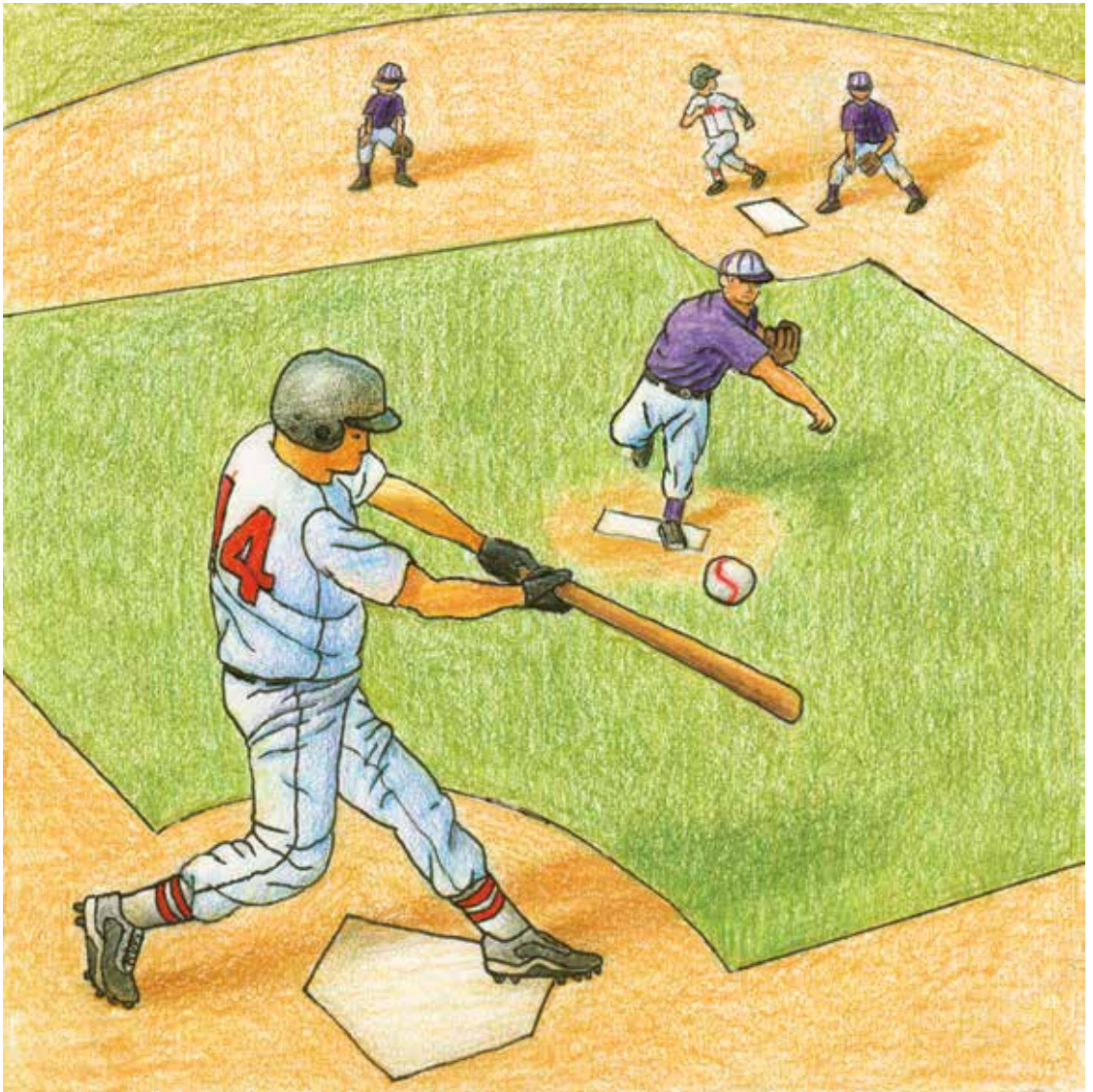
Before I even touched the diamond, Tony told me to scram. Immediately, Conrad stood up for me.

"Fine," Conrad said, "if you won't let Kenta try out, I'm not trying out either."

Next thing I knew, everybody rushed over to Conrad and me, saying stuff like "Oh, sorry. Of course Kenta can try out" and "We didn't mean it. It was just a joke." After the crowd cleared, I got a good look at who was still not in favor of me trying out. Obviously, Tony was one of them. Five other kids stood by him. One of them was Joe, which surprised me. I didn't think of Joe as someone who was part of Tony's group. Even more surprising, Ezra and Derek were not there.

"I'm out of here," said Tony. "I don't play with Japs."* The five other kids fol-

* The term *Jap* (shorthand for "Japanese person") is a derogatory term used in the United States during World War II, when Japan and the United States were at war. It is realistic that a bully in 1956 would call a Japanese child "Jap." There were also derogatory terms for African Americans, Jews, Italians, Irish, and other ethnic minorities. Fortunately, racist terms are much less common today than in the 1950s.



I got more and more excited as the ball came closer

lowed, throwing insults at those who stayed for wanting to play with a Japanese person.

Warm-ups started and I immediately knew I would be on the team. The other kids were amazed that I knew so much about the game.

Once I joined the team, kids started to get to know me better. Ezra and Derek insulting me became rare, and I actually started to feel liked. Very soon, Conrad, Ezra, Derek, and I got very tight. But unfortunately, that didn't stop Tony from getting in my face.

Our team won every game that season. Conrad was easily the best player on the team, but I was surprised to find myself in the number-two slot.

I remember one game. I was at bat. Bases were loaded; the bench was cheering me on. The ball felt like it was going in slow motion, when I look back on it, but it really was going crazy fast. I got more and more excited as the ball came closer, even though I tried to stay concentrated.

Boom! It went out of the park. I tried to run around the bases as slowly as I could to make the joy last as long as possible. Once I got around, my teammates treated me as if I made some miracle. “A grand slam!” Everyone on my team was cheering and patting me on the back.

SOMETIME AFTER that, Ezra, Derek, Conrad, and I met after school. Ezra had called the meeting. It seemed the three of them were as tired as I was of Tony bullying me. Ezra announced he had a plan to “get Tony in real trouble.”

We met at Ezra’s house. His mom and dad were both at work when Ezra got home, which made it a perfect meeting place. Ezra unlocked the door and told us to go upstairs to his room. His house was really nice. I gazed at all the fancy woodwork as we made our way to Ezra’s room.

I looked over to Derek and Conrad. They didn’t seem to notice the house. All of a sudden, I felt poor. Then I recalled why I came to America, for money. I remembered what my family lost after Dad died in the war—income, money. Finally, I

remembered how much Mom had to save to get us to America, even with my aunt and uncle’s help. Money.

Once we settled, Ezra took a piece of paper from his desk and placed it on the floor in the middle of the four of us. It was a diagram. “So, this is my plan,” said Ezra. Using his pen, Ezra pointed at all the squiggles on his diagram, so that we could begin to make sense of them. “Derek and I will lure Tony to where the main hall meets the fifth-grade wing. We’ll tell Tony that Kenta is right around the corner. Kenta, you’re the bait. But while Tony is beating you up and we’re egging him on, Conrad will be taking photos with my dad’s camera. And we’ll have evidence! Clear?”

Ezra looked pleased with himself.

“Clear,” Conrad confirmed. “But you and Derek will get in trouble if you take part in the fight.”

“Yeah, that is what I was thinking,” added Derek.

Conrad spoke up again, “What if we have Ezra and Derek make an excuse to stay out of the fight, like going to the bathroom?”

“That would work,” Ezra said. “I’ll add that to my diagram.”

“Uh, guys, I don’t want to get beaten up,” I said. Everybody turned to look at me, as if they just realized that I was there. They were so caught up in getting Tony in trouble that they forgot that I was a real person and not a dummy. There was a momentary silence, as the three searched for a logical explanation for doing this.

Ezra spoke up first. "Well, think of it this way. If you face Tony this one time, you won't have to face him again."

"True," I agreed. It was going to be a long tomorrow.

"Let's go outside and play baseball," Conrad suggested, wisely changing the subject. For the rest of the afternoon, we played in Ezra's backyard. At the same time, all of us were trying to ignore the butterflies in our stomachs from Ezra's plan.

OUR PLAN went into action the next day. Before I knew it, I was standing in the main hall, waiting for Tony to appear. Just around the corner, I heard the muffled voices of Tony, Ezra, and Derek. Next came a single pair of footsteps, making their way down the hall. They were Tony's footsteps, trying to make them as loud as he could without stomping, so I could hear him. Conrad wasn't ready. I started to panic.

"Hey, airhead!" Tony yelled at me.

Hurry up with the camera, Conrad, I thought, as if mentally thinking it would make him hurry up.

It didn't.

I almost said it out loud. I almost yelled it. I wanted to do anything but stand in front of Tony, but I did nothing. I wanted to run, hide, close my eyes to make him go away, but I was frozen in place. I didn't want to ruin the plan. I didn't want Ezra, Conrad, or Derek to think of me as a scaredy-cat. I stayed put, for them, for the plan.

I saw Tony's arm winding up for the first punch. *Slam!* I was on the ground. A sharp pain shot up my nose. Little red trickles of blood slowly started dropping onto the floor. My eyes were closed, keeping back tears. I curled up in a ball, waiting for more to come.

It didn't come.

"Conrad Garberg!"

It sounded like the principal's voice.

I slowly uncurled and looked up.

Tony was on the ground.


Conrad had a bloody fist.

But I didn't see any camera.

In the principal's office, I tried to clarify everything. All I had to say was, "Tony punched me. Then, Conrad punched Tony to stop him." There was no argument with that, I had proof: the still unwashed marks on Tony and Conrad's hands and my bloody nose. I also tried to explain about the camera, but the principal either didn't understand me due to my accent or he didn't care.

EXPELLED. Both Conrad and Tony were expelled for fighting. The weird thing was, once Tony was gone, all the other kids started acting nice to me.

Conrad and I stayed in touch, but it became harder when he moved to Nebraska after his dad's job changed. Eventually, I heard that Tony had moved to California, though I didn't really know why.

Today, people always ask me how I got used to America. I always respond, "Baseball." But the truth is, it was Conrad. 

Stage Fright

By Jane Trina

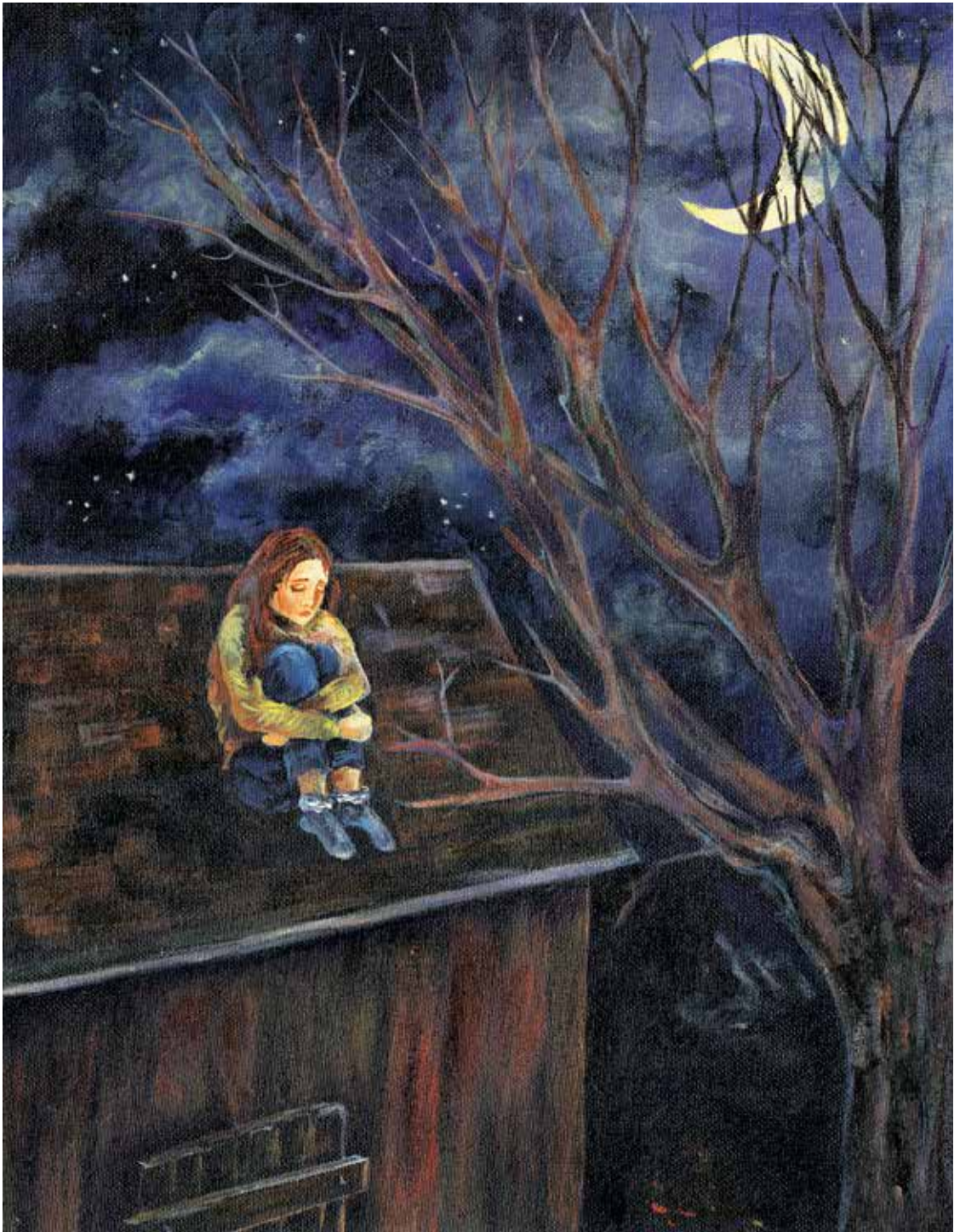
I am bold but I still have fear
Small as a bug on a leaf
Step by step to center stage

Spiders up my spine
Shoulders back
Lump in my throat
Swallow hard
Cloud in my head
Think straight

Words in a cocoon
Make their way out
Start to fly
In the bright lights
I find my voice



Jane Trina, 10
Whitefish, Montana



The sky glittered above, a blue canvas sprinkled with glittering stars

Having a Mother

By **Morgan Biagioni**

Illustrated by **Claire Litsey**

TEARS FILLED MY EYES as I stared back at my mother. I turned and fled out the door, not caring that it was the middle of the night. The yard was filled with deep shadows, and leaves crackled beneath my feet as I ran over the open expanse of tufty grass and into the forest beyond.

I somehow found my way to the shed, sagging wearily in its sheltering copse. Despite its bad condition, it had a fresh new lock on the tightly sealed doors, like a sheet of fresh paint over rotten wood. But I didn't want to get *into* the shed: I wanted to get *onto* it.

I grabbed the branch just above my head, well worn from years of use. Hauling myself up onto the familiar knot in the tree, I sidestepped onto the bottom half of the roof of the shed and then scrambled up onto the very top, shingles sliding underneath my soft hands.

Brushing aside dry leaves and twigs, I sat down, legs dangling over the edge, and looked up. The sky glittered above, a blue canvas sprinkled with glittering stars. The thin sliver of a moon cast pale moonbeams onto the quiet nighttime forest, dappling the ground with silver puddles of moonlight.

My breath puffed out in a white cloud; it was cold, but I didn't mind. Crossing my arms, my gaze shifted downward, and I gazed out over the rest of the forest, tall, green-needled pines stretching up higher than I cared to look. The tears escaped my dark brown eyes, and I felt them slide silently down my cheeks.

I hugged my knees to my chest and gritted my teeth, my face



Morgan Biagioni, 13
Roswell, Georgia



Claire Litsey, 12
Northlake, Texas

contorting in pain. More tears flooded out, and my lower lip quivered. I let my long brown hair fall into my face; it tickled my cheek and brought back memories of when my mother's hair would just brush my face as she bent down to embrace me.

We had had yet another fight. I knew friction between my mom and me was to be expected as I grew up, but it wasn't supposed to be like this, was it?

I closed my eyes and pulled my knees in closer. My mother was an important figure in my life. She stood six feet tall, solid and muscular like a female football player, with short, curly brown hair and brown eyes. When she smiled, it felt like she could light up the whole world, but when she was angry, even the bravest cowered before her. And recently, we had begun fighting horrifically. It usually happened late at night, after dinner, when we would start discussing school and soccer and other such things.

Today had been about my lack of physical fitness. To give her credit, I wasn't the fittest eighth-grader there ever was, but in my defense the past few years had been a struggle. I had broken both ankles, dislocated and broken my shoulder, broken my femur, popped my knee out of place, broken my index finger, injured my wrist, and had a bone contusion on the back of my femur, all within the last four years. Despite multiple sessions of physical therapy, I was having great difficulty returning to my previous physical state. Slap eighth-grade tests, quizzes, and

homework on top of that, and I didn't exactly have the time or energy to work out, either.

None of that mattered to my mother. She wanted me fit, and she wanted me to attend a run-a-mile-a-day fitness program at my school, which I was definitely not up to in my current physical state. It had led to a yelling match on both sides, with my dad's eyes nervously flitting back and forth between us like a bystander watching a tennis match. Eventually, my mother, as always, in her higher mindset and household superiority, had beaten me down to nearly nothing, and I had fled the scene before greater damage could be done.

Now, sobbing silently in the still winter air, head throbbing from my tears, I wished bitterly for anything that could make my mother love me. Deep down, I knew that she did, but right now my heart was broken by her harsh words, and I wanted something, *anything*, to hold onto—including a dream of her never yelling at me again.

I longed for the comfort and solitude of writing, although I had nothing to write on or with. So, in my head, I asked myself: What would my book character (currently named Aspen Simber) do in this situation?

I turned the question over and over in my mind, inspecting it and testing it. I had tried to make Aspen realistic, so she would cry, of course, like I was. Then, maybe, she would push through it and tell herself that words don't last forever and that her mother really did love her. I tried

to do as she did, but the pain was like a knife: whenever I tried to pull it out, more pain flooded through me.

So what, then? What did I do? I couldn't stay on this rooftop until the pain went away; it would linger with me for many days, and only time could heal the rift. I needed a solution for the now, not the tomorrow.

Make a list in your head, Morgan, I thought. This was a helpful way of reminding myself of everything good that I knew to be true about my mother.

Number one, my mind continued, your mother really does love you.

More tears escaped, but they weren't as agonizing.

Number two, you really aren't very fit. She just wants to help.

I could think of no more after that (though I racked my brains in searching), and my teeth were chattering. Reluctantly, I climbed down from my perch to return

to the warmth of the house.

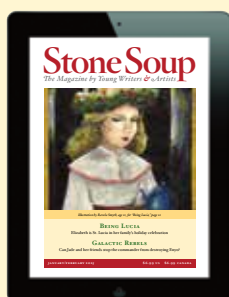
Suddenly a thought came to me. There were girls like me in the world who didn't have a mother. Who would give up everything to have one, no matter how big or scary, no matter how many fights she would get into. They wanted nothing more—not fashion or technology or even riches, just a mother to love and care for them. My heart pounded.

I had a mother. No matter how big or scary, no matter how many fights I got into with her, I had a mother, and she was usually kind and loving and caring. The thought put a small smile on my cold lips. I loved her, and I knew she loved me. She really did, despite all of our disagreements.

I pushed my hair out of my face and found with a start the tears it had been filled with were frozen.

Huh. I guess it *was* pretty cold. Smiling for real, I ran back to the house, ready to face my mother once more. ❁





Bonus Materials

On Our Website

- Editor Gerry Mandel blogs about the featured story from each issue.
stonesoup.com/blog
- A feature about child composer Jahan Raymond, including video and sheet music.
stonesoup.com/jahan
- Hundreds of stories, poems, and book reviews from past issues—FREE in the *Stone Soup* Archive!
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Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll! We receive hundreds of submissions every month by kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

— *The Editors*

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