

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Isabella Ronchetti, age 13, for "Leprechaun Rain," page 5

LEPRECHAUN RAIN

So the legends about the woods near Blarney Castle are true!

THE CRYSTAL RIVER

Her village is experiencing a draught, and Keisha wants to help

Also: Andrew's dad comes home from Iraq

MARCH/APRIL 2015

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 4
MARCH / APRIL 2015

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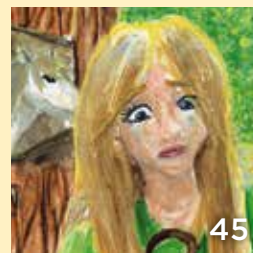
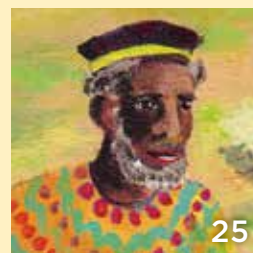
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Editor's Note

The power of magic. Wouldn't it be nice if our dreams could come true? If we could be reunited with loved ones who are no longer with us? If magic stones could grant our wishes, and leprechauns and fairies really came out at night to party? This issue has four stories where magic plays a central role. Each one leaves us with a feeling of deep satisfaction. "Leprechaun Rain" takes place in Ireland. Emma sets out in a rainstorm to find her family's missing sheep. To her delight, she discovers a band of leprechauns and fairies in the forest who help her and the sheep get home safely. In "The Treehouse" Chloë sees her sister again, and in "Carrot's Home" Claire's pet rabbit comes to her in a dream. Just when all hope seems lost, Keisha's wish to help her village in "The Crystal River" comes true, because of a magic blue stone. What is your fondest wish? Write a story with magic as a key element.

— Gerry Mandel

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ON THE COVER Isabella Ronchetti lives in Florence, Italy, with her American mom (an artist) and her Italian dad (a musician). She loves to draw and paint fantastical creatures and scenes, using ink, colored pencil, and watercolor. See more of Isabella's artwork at her blog: jarofturquoisesunshine.com



The Mailbox



I just wanted to say that the story “The Interference,” by Lily Strauss [November/December 2014] was AMAZING. I thought that it was from a very unique point of view and was exceedingly well written. Also, some of the points brought up really made me think. I’m the same age as Lily, and I wish that I could write like she does! All in all, I want to congratulate the author and tell her to keep it up!

Rebecca Hamilton, 12

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Thank you so much for inspiring young writers like me and giving us a goal to work towards. When I got the book in the mail that you sent me to review, it was all I could think about for days, I was so happy! Thank you for creating moments like this and helping young authors’ dreams come true.

Jessica McGaughey, 13

Odessa, Ontario, Canada

Jessica’s book review is on page 34 of this issue.

I have been reading *Stone Soup* for many years, and I think your mission to compile children’s literature into a magazine is inspiring. When I read this magazine, I am exposed to different cultures and perspectives. Growing up in a bilingual household—I speak and understand English and Cantonese—embracing different cultures has always been important to me.

Eric Huang, 13

Oakland, California

For a long time I had been looking for a magazine that published stories by young writers in my general age group. *Stone Soup* exceeded that; I love how you give not only aspiring writers such a great opportunity—but artists as well. I have always loved to write, and reading so many incredible stories by kids has motivated me to write even more. I also like how you publish stories from a diverse array of genres; each and every story I have read from your magazine is different in its own special way.

Ermeen Choudhury, 12

Scarsdale, New York

Ermeen’s story, “The Treehouse,” is on page 13 of this issue.

I want to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. Thank you for creating this work of art that kids can enjoy and love. *Stone Soup* has encouraged me to write more than ever, and even try to submit some of my stories and poems. I want to be a writer when I grow up, and to try and get something published in your magazine is my first step.

Eleanor M. Polak, 10

New Haven, Connecticut

I really enjoyed reading your July/August issue, especially the poem “Nature’s Plea,” by Aiwen Desai. It is inspiring to read the stories in *Stone Soup* and see how other kids in the United States and beyond write, and what types of things they write about.

Madeline Hammond, 10

Manchester, Massachusetts

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



Suddenly Emma could stand it no longer

Leprechaun Rain

By **Hannah Ogden**

Illustrated by **Isabella Ronchetti**

EMMMA O'MALLEY was alone. Up in her attic room of her grandmother Josephine's farm, she could hear the rain hammering on the roof. She shivered. The lights had gone out twenty minutes ago, and the only light in the room came from a flickering candle on her dresser. Dark shadows danced across the room like untamed ghosts. She got up from her bed where she had been sitting and went to the window. The rain made it impossible to see, but she could faintly hear her parents outside. Once the rain had started, they had run outside to check on the sheep that belonged to the farm. It rained quite a lot here in Ireland, but this storm had her parents worried. Telling Emma to stay in her room, they had departed. Emma's grandmother had gone out to the barn to check on the barn cats, and they had all been gone for nearly half an hour. Emma hated the wait. She wondered if her sheep, the one she had been given for her birthday last year and had named Katie, was all right.

Suddenly, Emma heard a crack of thunder overhead, and she jumped. She could not hear her parents any longer, as the rain had worsened. It came in sheets, rocking the house. Another crack of thunder boomed in the sky. Emma shivered. Were her parents all right? Suddenly Emma could stand it no longer. She went to her sock drawer and pulled on a pair of wool socks and a gray sweater over her T-shirt. A bolt of lightning lit up the room, and she flinched, but she continued dressing. She pulled a blue hat over her wildly curly black hair and made her



Hannah Ogden, 13
Sammamish, Washington



Isabella Ronchetti, 13
Florence, Italy

way out her door. Her coat was hanging up somewhere in the hallway. She silently climbed down the ladder from the attic and down the hall. The house was freezing cold. Most of the walls were made out of gray stone, as the house was nearly four hundred years old. Emma grabbed a green raincoat from its hook, and she put it on, taking care to cover her head with the hood. Suddenly she heard the door open, and she spun around. A dark shadowy shape walked over the threshold, and the creature threw back its hood, revealing the tired face of her father.

"Dad!" Emma cried, and she threw herself at him in a tackling hug.

"Emma!" her dad answered. He hugged her tightly, the smell of wet wool filling Emma's nose.

"Your mother is right behind me. We checked on the sheep, but the rain caused the fence to fall over," her father said.

"Emma." Emma turned towards the door where her mother was walking in. She shut and bolted the door behind her. Her mother pushed back her hood, revealing her tangled mess of damp red hair.

"Emma," her mother continued, "we looked everywhere, but some of the sheep are missing." Emma paled, her freckles standing out on her face. If her family lost some of the sheep, then the farm would not survive. They depended on them.

"Which ones are missing?" she asked.

Emma's mother hugged her and said, "About ten others, and Katie." Emma stiffened and drew back.

"Where is the flashlight?" she demand-

ed. She had no idea what she was doing, but she knew she had to do something. Her mother handed her the flashlight she was holding.

"What do you need it for?" she asked, but she found out two seconds later as Emma switched it on and opened the door to the swirling darkness of the night. Emma shoved her feet into her rain boots, which were on the front step, and ran out from under the porch. The storm blasted her back. Rain pounded on her, and her feet stuck in the mud. She heard her parents shouting for her to come back, but she half ran, half battled her way on towards the barn. A faint light glowed out from one of the windows, like a lighthouse. Emma reached the huge front door to the barn just as a boom of thunder sounded. She flinched. Emma held the flashlight in one hand as she fumbled with the latch to the barn. She finally managed to pull it open, and she slipped inside. The wind banged the door shut. The rain was slightly muffled. Emma looked around the barn. Straw was strewn around on the floor, and the smell of kerosene met her nose. Emma figured that Katie and the others might be here, hiding in fear from the violent storm. She shined her flashlight around the vast room and stopped the light at the stairs up to the loft. She heard her grandmother's voice drifting down the steps. Emma jogged to the bottom of the stairs and sprinted up them. Her grandmother sat on the floor of the loft, a blanket around her shoulders. And all around her

were the barn cats. There were several of them, and they all sat clustered around her grandmother. Josephine had lit one of the kerosene lamps, and it emitted a soft glow around the room. One of the cats was lying across her lap, and another was strewn over her shoulder. At the sound of Emma's footsteps Josephine looked up.

"Emma!" she said.
"Where are your parents? Did you come here by yourself? Oh, I hope they're all right."

"Mom and Dad are fine. I came by myself. Grandmother, is Katie here?" Her grandmother shook her head.

"Nay, I have not seen her. Is she lost?"

"Yes, Grandmother, I have to find her."

"I was hoping you would say otherwise. Do you really mean to go after her?"

"I have to. I can't bear the thought of Katie and some of the other sheep wandering around in this weather. What if..."

"Child, I know what you mean. But I'm sure they will be fine until the storm ends." But as Emma looked into her grandmother's startling blue eyes she knew that they told a different story.

"I'm sorry, Grandmother," Emma said as she turned back to the loft stairs and started running down them two at a time. The barn door creaked open and then slammed shut. Josephine was left alone.

"Oh, my dear girl," she said sadly. She got up from where she had been sitting, and the cat on her shoulders jumped down nimbly. Josephine crossed the room

and struggled to open the window, which faced the stretch of grassy plain where lightning lit up the sky. She hung the kerosene lamp on a latch that stuck out from the window. The lamp hung there, like a beacon in the churning darkness. Then Josephine closed the window.

Emma continued to run. She skirted around the huge field that lay behind the barn and ran instead towards the woods. On the right side of her family's barn was the forest that had been there for ages. It was very old. Blarney Castle was

a mere few miles east of it. Legends and myths hung around the woods like old spiderwebs. There was a sort of hushed feeling about it. Some of the villagers said that fairies lived in those woods, while others said for sure it was the leprechauns. Thoughts of this swirled around in Emma's mind as she ran towards it, but she pushed them away. The thoughts stayed though, right in the back of her mind. She ran faster through the woods. The rain was still making its way down through the canopy of the trees. Water poured down from a leaf over Emma's head, and freezing water cascaded down her neck uncomfortably. Emma jogged up a small hill and looked down. Down there the forest was dark. She shined her flashlight around, but the dimming light from it only helped her see a good two feet in front of her.

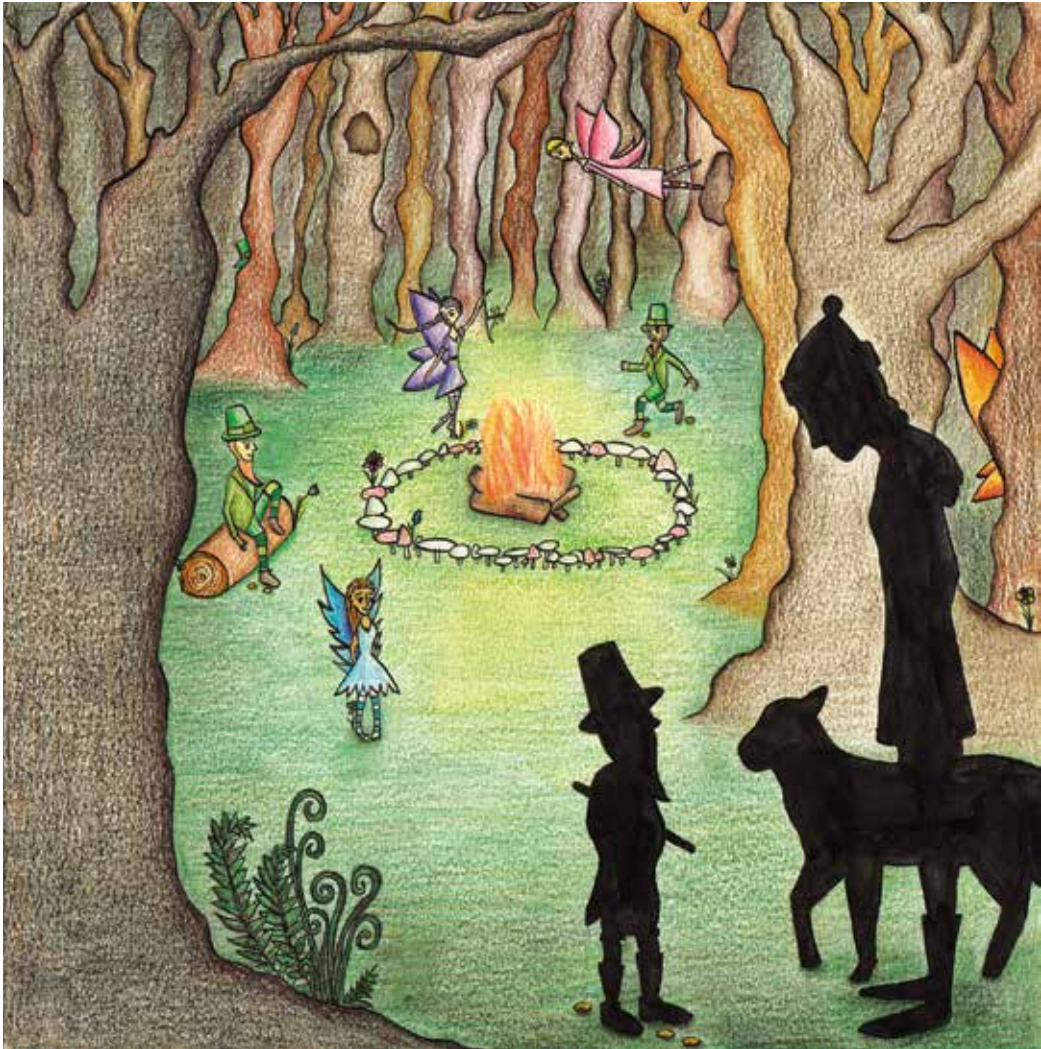
"Katie!" she yelled, but she was met

Legends and myths
hung around the woods
like old spiderwebs.

with only the sound of rain. It mocked her. Emma stood there, on top of that small cliff overlooking the forest, wondering if she should go on, when the cliff made up its mind for her. The ground on which she was standing crumbled away, and she was sliding down into the darkness. Her hand hit a rock, and her flashlight was torn from her grasp. Emma was not sure how long she fell. She gave up counting the bumps that her head received. After what seemed like hours, Emma stopped sliding. She lay face down there in the mud for a minute, trying hard to get her breath back. Emma opened her eyes but then shut them again, as there was nothing to see in the hard darkness. She did not know where she was. She felt a single tear roll down her face. What have I done? she asked herself. Suddenly, Emma heard laughter. It sounded faint, and far off. Emma pushed herself up and listened hard. The laughter sounded again. It sounded high pitched, like a child's gleeful warble. Emma looked around. She could not see where the laughter was coming from. Seeking help, Emma walked slowly, limping, towards the sound, her feet sometimes catching on tree roots. The laughter grew louder. Emma felt her hand make contact with something. It felt to be a tree. Peering around the tree, Emma saw what looked like something out of a fairy tale. Dancing around in a ring made of toadstools was a merry band of fairies and leprechauns. They were laughing as they danced madly in the circle. A sweet smell rose up from

their party, it smelled of lilacs and fresh grass, of freshly baked bread and spring-time. The leprechauns were dressed all in green, many had beards, and the fairies were dressed in all the colors of the rainbow. A green haze rose up from the bonfire in the middle of their ring, and no rain fell down on the party. Emma stood there, her mouth agape. Then the fairies began to sing, a sweet sound, like light rain falling down on grass, not at all like the hurricane that was pouring down. Little flowers and shamrocks sprang up from the fairies' feet, and wherever a leprechaun stepped a tiny gold coin sprang up from the ground. A leprechaun started playing on a little flute, and the music made Emma's heart soar. She thought she had never seen anything quite so lovely. Then, there, across the fire, she saw her Katie. The little sheep stood with ten others, watching the revelries. Quietly, Emma moved back around the tree and stooped down into the underbrush. She did not want to be seen. She did not know whether it was from fear or the feeling of not wanting to disturb the dancers. Emma crawled around in the underbrush until she reached the sheep. Katie came over and pushed her nose against Emma's arm, happy to see her.

"Hello, Katie," Emma whispered. "Are you OK?" Emma quickly counted the other sheep. Ten. "Let's go home." Just then Emma noticed that the music had stopped. She turned around slowly. The fairies and leprechauns were standing in a crowd, looking up at her. The tallest did



"I apologize for interrupting your party," Emma said

not even come up to her knee.

"Hullo," Emma said. She did not know what else to say.

"You be human?" one of leprechauns asked. He was the flutist. He pointed his little flute at her accusingly.

"Yes, I am," Emma said, "and I have gotten lost during the storm while looking for my dear sheep. Do you know the

way out of the forest?"

"The forest is our home," the fairies said in chorus. "Humans do not usually find themselves in the middle of our parties."

"I apologize for interrupting your party," Emma said, and she meant it. "All I want is to bring my sheep and myself home. If I promise never to tell anyone about this, will you show me the way out?"

"Nay, we need something more than that!" one of the leprechauns cried. "Have ye anythin' to trade?"

"Aye! Aye!" the crowd cried. "A promise and a trade for the way out the forest!"

"Well," Emma started, "I..." She had nothing. But then she remembered the blue hat atop her head. "Well," she began again, pulling it off, "I do have this. Will this be a good trade?"

"Aye! Aye!" the leprechauns and fairies cried. "That is a good trade indeed!"

The flute player stepped forward and took the hat from Emma's hand.

"Go now!" he said to Emma. "Let the lights be a way out for ye!" He waved a hand, and a long line of lights appeared. They led back the way that Emma had come, out of the woods.

"Thank you, dear sirs and ladies," Emma said. Then she picked up Katie and whistled to the other sheep. As she walked away, she thought she heard laughter and the partygoers crying, "Tell no one of us! Promise!" And then the light led her out of the forest and back out into the night.

THE RAIN HAD not let up. Emma clutched Katie tightly and continued to follow the light. Suddenly, it stopped. Emma stopped in her tracks, waiting for it to move.

"Why are you stopping?" she asked it. "We can't be home yet, surely." The light did not move. Emma looked around. "Well, a good help you have be..." Her voice died. There, right in front of her,

was a light suspended in midair. Emma squinted, and through the rain she was able to make out the barn.

"Oh, thank you!" she cried as the light disappeared. Emma ran towards the barn and around the side. Pushing the door open, Emma herded the sheep inside and went in. Her parents and grandmother were in the middle of the room. Her mother and father were putting dry raincoats on over their wet ones. They looked as though they were going back out. Emma's mother looked like she had been crying.

"I'm back," Emma said, and set Katie down. Her parents turned in amazement.

"Emma!" her parents and grandmother cried, and they hugged her.


"Are you all right, Emma?" Her mother was talking. "You aren't hurt? Oh honey, I was so worried!"

"I'm fine, Mom," Emma said. "I found Katie and the others in the woods, they are all fine."

"What happened in there?" her father asked. "The woods were pitch black, how did you find your way out?"

"It was hard, but I managed," Emma said. Emma knew for a fact that she wasn't a good liar, but she saw her parents' faces relax.

"Yes, of course," Josephine said briskly, but Emma thought she saw her grandmother wink. "Everything is all right."

Emma nodded, but over the howling wind she thought she could hear laughter, the sound of a flute, and voices crying, "A Promise! Never tell! Never tell!" 

Coming Home

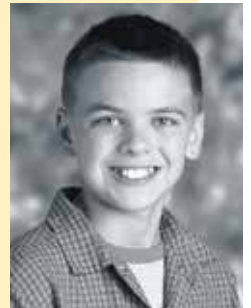
By Andrew Eisenbrown

We go to the airport
looking for him
The day he got back
from that God Awful Place

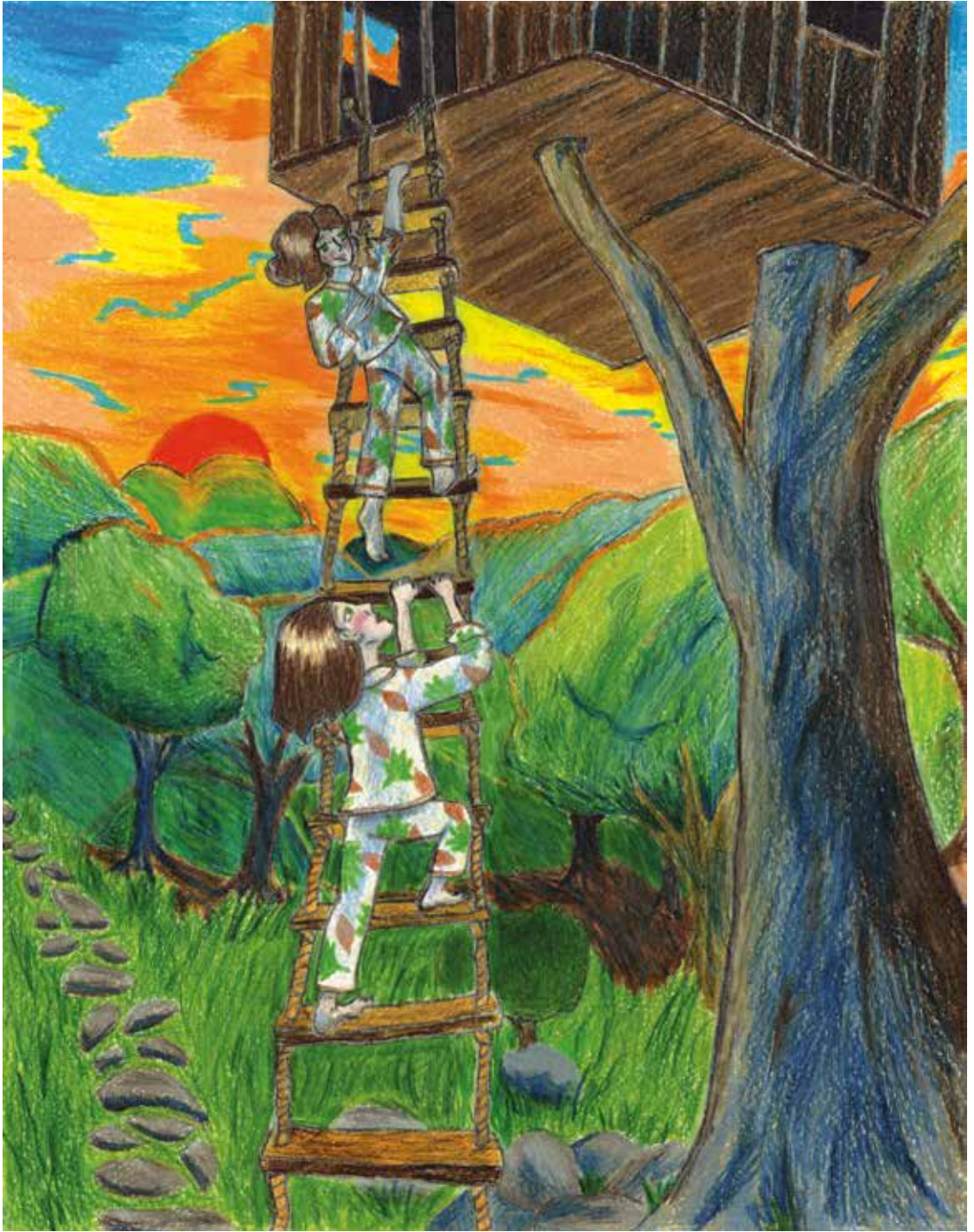
I see people
most of them soldiers
talking and crying
but none of them him

Finally I stop
I see green and brown
I see him smile
He puts out his arms

Then I knew
This was my dad
This was my dad
Back from Iraq



Andrew Eisenbrown, 12
Omaha, Nebraska



"I, Grace Sadlon, sister of Chloë Sadlon, vow to never ever break the Sister Code"

The Treehouse

By Ermeen Choudhury

Illustrated by Phoebe Wagoner

“**C**HLOË. CHLOË, WAKE UP!” Grace poked her sister in the side, then gently shook her, barely able to contain her excitement.

Chloë slowly opened one eyelid, and in seconds the two seven-year-olds were scampering out of the bedroom and down the hallway, leaf-dappled pajamas billowing on their small forms. After making sure their parents were asleep, they went out the back door together, giggling. The girls ran barefoot through swaying grass, scrambled up craggy rocks, maneuvered through a network of gangly trees, and finally, breathless, arrived at their destination.

The treehouse stood tall and grand, silhouetted against the golden-orange sky, and the sisters ogled its brilliance for a while. A path of flat stones trailed up to the tree’s roots, and a flimsy rope ladder climbed up its length. Sitting amid a fountain of branches was the house, built of dark, ancient-looking planks of wood.

“Come on. Let’s go!” Grace shrieked with delight, and began to skip from stone to stone. She was crawling up the first few rungs before Chloë snapped out of her trance and followed her.

Before they entered the house, the girls stopped, their faces solemn. Grace went first. Placing a hand on her chest, she recited, “I, Grace Sadlon, sister of Chloë Sadlon, vow to never ever break the Sister Code. I will always be a loyal sister, and will never tell anyone the secrets of the treehouse.”

Chloë opened her mouth, but before she could utter a sound



Ermeen Choudhury, 12
Scarsdale, New York



Phoebe Wagoner, 11
Carlisle, Kentucky

Grace's foot slipped on the rung above her and her leg swung around wildly as she tried to regain her footing. The ladder began to rock back and forth. "Grace, watch out!" Chloë screamed, but it was too late, and they both came crashing to the ground.

CHLOË TUMBLED head over heels in the grass; a stone nicked her ankle, but she didn't care. Pushing herself up with her palms she scurried back to the treehouse. The ladder lay in a yellow heap on the ground, and next to it, sprawled on the grass, was Grace.

Chloë's vision blurred; everything was out of focus. A huge lump formed in her throat, and she dashed over to her sister, screaming her name over and over again. She tried to speak clearly, although a thick syrup seemed to be weighing her tongue down. "Grace. Can you hear me? Grace! Listen to me!" Chloë grabbed Grace's hand, clutching it tightly as though she could squeeze the life back into her. "Grace, you can hear me, right?" she urged. "Remember the Sister Code? You just said it, and then you..."

Chloë's body felt numb; all she could feel was her heart thudding steadily in her chest. "Grace," she whispered, then wrapped her arms around her sister's lifeless body.

FIVE YEARS LATER

THE BELL PIERCED the air, reverberating throughout Harley Middle School's campus. As if on cue, students

began pouring out of the building like a puddle of spilt ink slowly spreading further and further on paper. Kids talked energetically to one another, some huddled in large groups, others in pairs. Only one girl walked alone.

Chloë Sadlon brushed her straight hair behind an ear, staring at the ground as she walked. After years of practice, she had learned how to zone out the world around her—the sounds of chattering and laughter, the sound of happiness.

Someone accidentally shoved her from behind, and she stumbled on the pavement. Indifferent, she boarded the bus and sat in her usual seat; second-to-last row, window seat to the left. And as usual, nobody sat with her.

"HEY, HON. How was school?" Dad asked as Chloë dumped her bag on the kitchen table.

Chloë shrugged. "Good." She unzipped her bag halfway, then remembered she had completed her homework the day before and hadn't been assigned anything new. She murmured a "hi" to her mom before going quietly upstairs to her bedroom.

Chloë was about to plop down on her bed, but something moved in her peripheral vision. A piece of paper, barely five inches square, rustled against the heating vents. She edged closer, pulling out the scrap of paper and bringing it up close.

Two stick figures, one slightly taller than the other, stood together in the middle of a crudely drawn forest, holding

hands. Above it, in scrawly second-grade print, was the word *Sisters*.

Chloë walked backwards, landing with a *thump* on her bed, her eyes never moving off the drawing. And then she said it.

“Grace.”

Suddenly feeling a longing for fresh air, she went out the back door.

The wind blew through Chloë’s hair, the scent of nature filling her lungs. A strange sensation coursed through her, and although her mind told her to go to the hammock on the patio, her legs wanted to go somewhere else.

Solely following her instincts, Chloë climbed up a congregation of rocks, wandered through the dense woods, and then halted suddenly.

The same thrill that had formed whenever she had seen the treehouse was present again, only this time, bittersweet. Because Grace wasn’t at her side to appreciate it with her.

Chloë walked from stone to stone, then searched for footholds in the tree itself, as the ladder could no longer be used. Her legs had grown much longer over the years, and she found herself climbing swiftly up the aged trunk until she reached the top.

“I, Chloë Sadlon,” she muttered, then began again, louder this time; the way Grace would. “I, Chloë Sadlon, sister of Grace Sadlon, vow to never, ever break the Sister Code. I will always be

a loyal...” her voice cracked slightly, but she ploughed on, “...a loyal sister, and will never tell anyone the secrets of the treehouse.”

Without further hesitation, Chloë stepped inside.

A MUSTY, YET SWEET aroma lingered in the air, and a feeling that could only be described as nostalgia seeped into Chloë’s heart. The place had been built for seven-year-olds, not a gangly twelve-year-old, so Chloë had to stoop so that her head wouldn’t hit the ceiling.

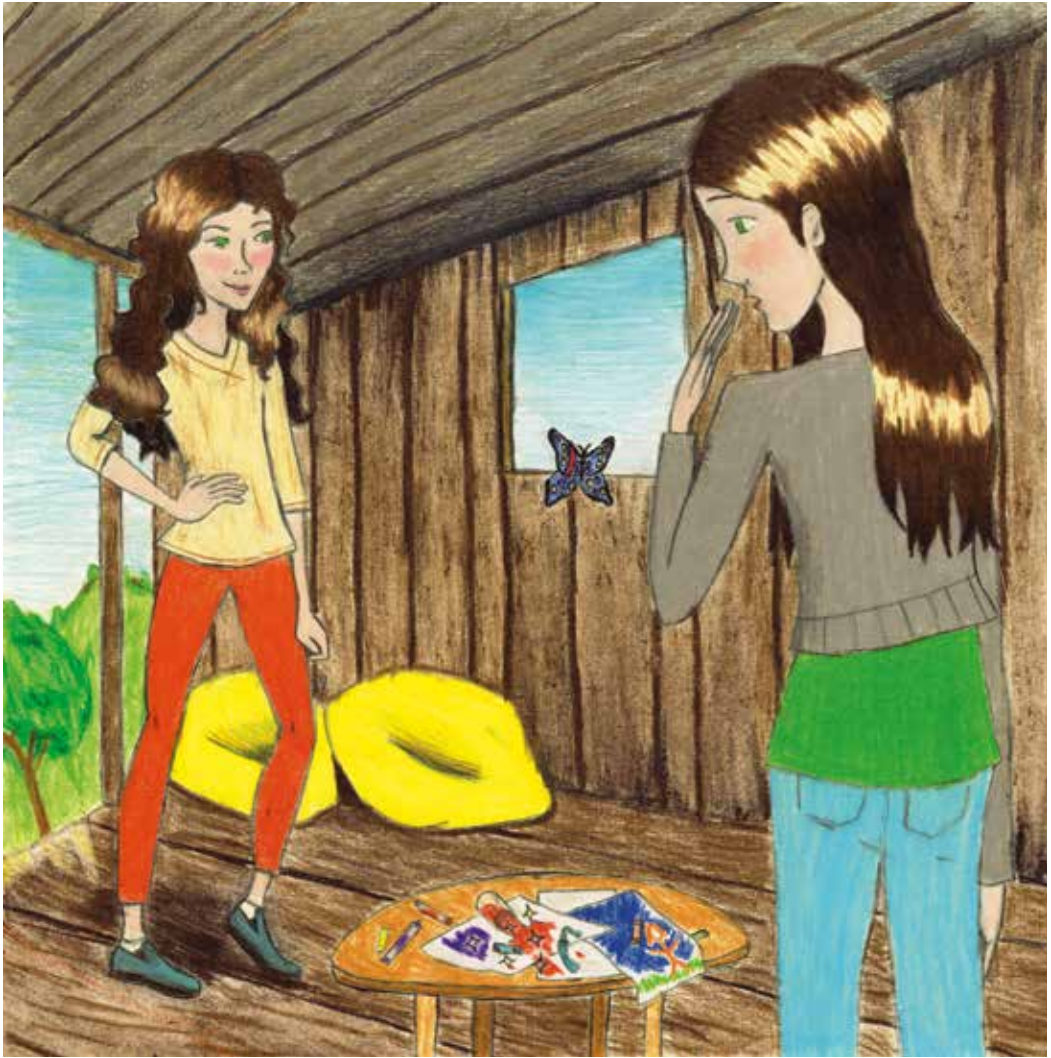
Two beanbags sat in the corner, still rumpled as though the sisters had been sitting there only a minute ago. Crayons and sheets of paper were scattered on a small, circular table, some of the sheets decked with glitter.

A gossamer-winged butterfly fluttered onto the sill of the window—which was really a hole in the wall—delicate as a feather. As Chloë got a better look, she noticed how the wings were speckled with gold and violet suspended in royal blue, edges tipped with black. A dash of magenta ran in a flourish through one wing, but not the other. *Unusual*, she thought to herself. She remembered prancing about in the backyard with Grace, trying to spot as many different butterflies as she could. But never had she found a butterfly as exquisite as this one.

“Ha, Grace. Beat ya this time.” The

“Grace, watch out!”

**Chloë screamed,
but it was too late.**



There was something familiar about the girl, something she couldn't quite place

words flew out of Chloë's mouth before she could control them, analyze them. When had she ever spoken so freely?

"Wow, that's beautiful," came a voice, and Chloë whirled around.

A tall, slender girl stood right behind her, dark curls tumbling down her shoulders like a waterfall. There was an impish gleam in her green eyes. It was strange

how much her eyes resembled Chloë's.

"Wh-who are you?" Chloë stammered. There was something familiar about the girl, something she couldn't quite place—maybe it was the way she stood with her legs wide apart, how she smiled with one side of her mouth higher than the other.

When realization hit her, Chloë felt as though she had been hit in the chest with

a block of granite. She gasped for air, putting a hand on the wall to steady herself.

A look of mischief flashed in the girl's eyes, a look that Chloë realized she missed with all her heart. "Land ahoy, Princess Cassandra! Scrub the deck until it is so shiny I can see my beard in it! Our ship *must* look stunning so that the natives won't think we're a bunch of hooligans."

All at once, a feeling, a sensation that Chloë hadn't felt for years, bubbled up inside her. And, to her astonishment, a giggle escaped her lips. She allowed herself a few seconds to reminisce over the halcyon days she had spent with her sister in the treehouse, as they played their favorite game of pirates. Then she snatched a piece of paper off the table as a rag.

Princess Cassandra put a delicate hand to her forehead. "Oh, Captain Bigbeard, must I? I just *loathe* getting all filthy!"

Captain Bigbeard scratched his chin. "Do as I say, or I shall chop off all your luscious locks! Aargh!"

"Oh, dear," the princess sighed, a sound rather like a sorrowful breeze. "I have no other choice but to obey you."

So the princess held up her large, voluminous skirts and began to scrub laboriously at the deck. The captain kept himself busy by twirling his beard or shouting commands, such as, "Scrub harder, *harder* I say!" or "Put some muscle into it! Oh, well, I'm afraid you don't have much muscle in those scrawny arms of yours."

Happiness blossomed in Chloë's chest like a flower, filling her from head to toe. She smothered her giggles while she held up an imaginary skirt or wilted from the heat, sniggered in between complaints of the sun ruining her perfect complexion.

The girl had tied up her hair around her chin to look like a wild beard and found a curved stick on the floor as a hook. The


two girls moved around the treehouse, occasionally walking outside and shimmying up the branches (or the crow's nest) to get a better view of the land that was in sight.

After the long voyage at sea Chloë was exhausted, and she collapsed on the beanbags.

"Come on, let's do something else," the girl pleaded, sticking her head outside the door of the treehouse. Then something changed in her expression. She looked back at Chloë, and her eyes seemed to be saying something. *Goodbye*.

Without warning, she jumped.

Chloë leapt to her feet, staring at the place where Grace had left the treehouse. But all that was left was the cool forest air, still and quiet. *So it was all in my head*, she thought to herself. But she didn't feel the sorrow that she had anticipated. No, the flower remained in her heart, happiness stored in its unfurling petals.

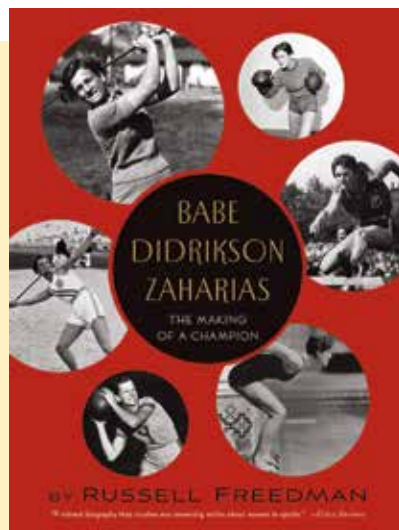
"Thanks, Grace," she whispered, a gentle wind carrying her words, and she could almost see a bright green eye winking back. 

Happiness blossomed
in Chloë's chest
like a flower.

Book Review

By Ben Dauphinais

Babe Didrikson Zaharias: The Making of a Champion, by Russell Freedman; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers: Boston, 2014; \$10.99



Ben Dauphinais, 11
Yadkinville, North Carolina

RUSSELL FREEDMAN'S biography, *Babe Didrikson Zaharias: The Making of a Champion*, is a fascinating book that tells the life story of one of the greatest athletes of all time. Babe lived for sports and excelled in many of them, including golf, track and field, basketball, baseball, tennis, bowling, diving, swimming, roller skating, and boxing. Earning her nickname from baseball great George Herman "Babe" Ruth, Jr., Babe took the world of athletics by storm, despite the opposition she faced as a woman athlete in the early twentieth century.


Mildred Ella Didrikson was born on June 26, 1911, in Port Arthur, Texas. She was born into a family with five older siblings and would later become an older sibling herself. Babe grew up with a group of barefoot neighborhood kids, and she quickly became known as the local tomboy. As a child Babe seemed to find trouble. She was often sent to the principal's office because of her pranks, and one time she was found sitting on top of the flagpole!

It wasn't long before Babe realized her passion. She knew

from a young age what she wanted to live for, and her goal was to be the greatest athlete of all time. Babe was a motivated and determined young woman who was willing to work extremely hard to achieve her goals. It was not unusual for Babe to train from early morning right up until it turned dark.

Before I read this book, I wondered if I could even relate to Babe. I quickly realized we had more in common than I thought. First, Babe and I share the same birthday, June 26. Also, I realized that Babe was an ordinary kid who loved sports, mowed lawns to earn money, and routinely found mischief, such as hitching a ride on a freight car and jumping off as it moved faster and faster!

What I enjoyed most about reading this book was the surprise and excitement the biography had in store for the reader. I felt like I became friends with Babe. I rallied with Babe as she overcame adversities, cheered with her at every victory, and was shocked when the fame-seeking tomboy from Texas wanted to spend time at home in her garden and flowers. I was angry when Babe was treated unfairly, nervous when her marriage struggled, and sad when she died at such a young age.

This is a wonderful biography and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it! Babe was a strong-willed young woman whose life demonstrated that with determination and purpose you can conquer and rise above adversities. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading biographies. 

Carrot's Home

By Claire Mao

Illustrated by Catherine Chung



Claire Mao, 10
Dedham, Massachusetts



Catherine Chung, 11
Theodore, Alabama

I USED TO OWN *real* bunnies in Shanghai, China. My grandpa always bought some for me. But my only distinct memory of owning a pet rabbit was in my grandparents' apartment. It was 2011, so I was seven years old and as obsessed with bunnies as some girls are obsessed with "Let It Go." My friend Giselle came to visit me and my grandparents, and she brought a moving present—a real, snow-white, fluffy rabbit! I had been wishing for one already!

We played with the bunny, whom we named Carrot, until Giselle had to go back to her place. Carrot was looking at me wistfully through the purple wired crate.

"If you want to set him free, do that. But only on our balcony, in case he makes a mess," said my grandma. I swear, that woman can read my mind!

We let him eat carrots off the cool, tiled balcony of my grandparents' apartment. I lifted him up so he could see the ant-like people dotting the lush green grass, and the surrounding buildings in this area of crowded China. It's safe to say that he loved when I did that. Oh, the summertime joys!

We would sometimes walk him to the park. Lots of feral cats lived there, and they actually scared Carrot! We held him, petted him, and let him drink water from a little blue saucer on the porch.

He ate carrots and played with us peacefully, until, on the fifteenth day we had him, we had to give him away somehow because we were going to another part of China to stay for a



We let him eat carrots off the cool, tiled balcony

couple of weeks.

That night, while my grandma was lulling him to sleep, Carrot drew in his last breath. His heart stopped beating. His eyes closed.

I knew what happened. I ran from my room to the porch.

"He knew... he knew we were going away. It... it was his time..." my grandma explained, her eyes fogging up. "Oh, Claire, I'm so sorry!"

I burst into tears and hugged her tightly, as if she would float away from me if I let go, just like Carrot. It wasn't her fault. Maybe Carrot had a disease. Maybe he was old. Maybe...

I trudged back to my room, defeated. I sat on the dusty old piano bench and

played "Swan Lake." Only this time, the song sounded sadder and more lonesome.

I cried until my eyes were red. Red, like Carrot's eyes, I thought. Red, like my anger, and red like beauty.

While I was trying to fall asleep that miserable night, suddenly I gasped. I saw Carrot floating on the air. He had a golden halo. He smiled at me.

"Claire, you must not be sad. You took good care of me. You can sleep in peace knowing that you will see me once more..."

I knew I could let my past slip away. The future is waiting. Carrot was guarding me, like an angel. He was watching me, from heaven.

One day, I will see him again.



Lane Seven

By Keslee Peterson



Keslee Peterson, 13
Mountain Home, Idaho

Legs, they're trembling with nervous excitement.
Muffled voices pulse through your head.
You're moving now
Perched
Tense at the edge.
You grip the lip of the block.
Your body shakes with the sound of the start,
But
You're already gone.

You slip into the water
Like it's meant to be. It is.
The rush pulls you.
Through the water you speed.
Your body taking control
Arms, legs, core
Gliding in perfect precision.

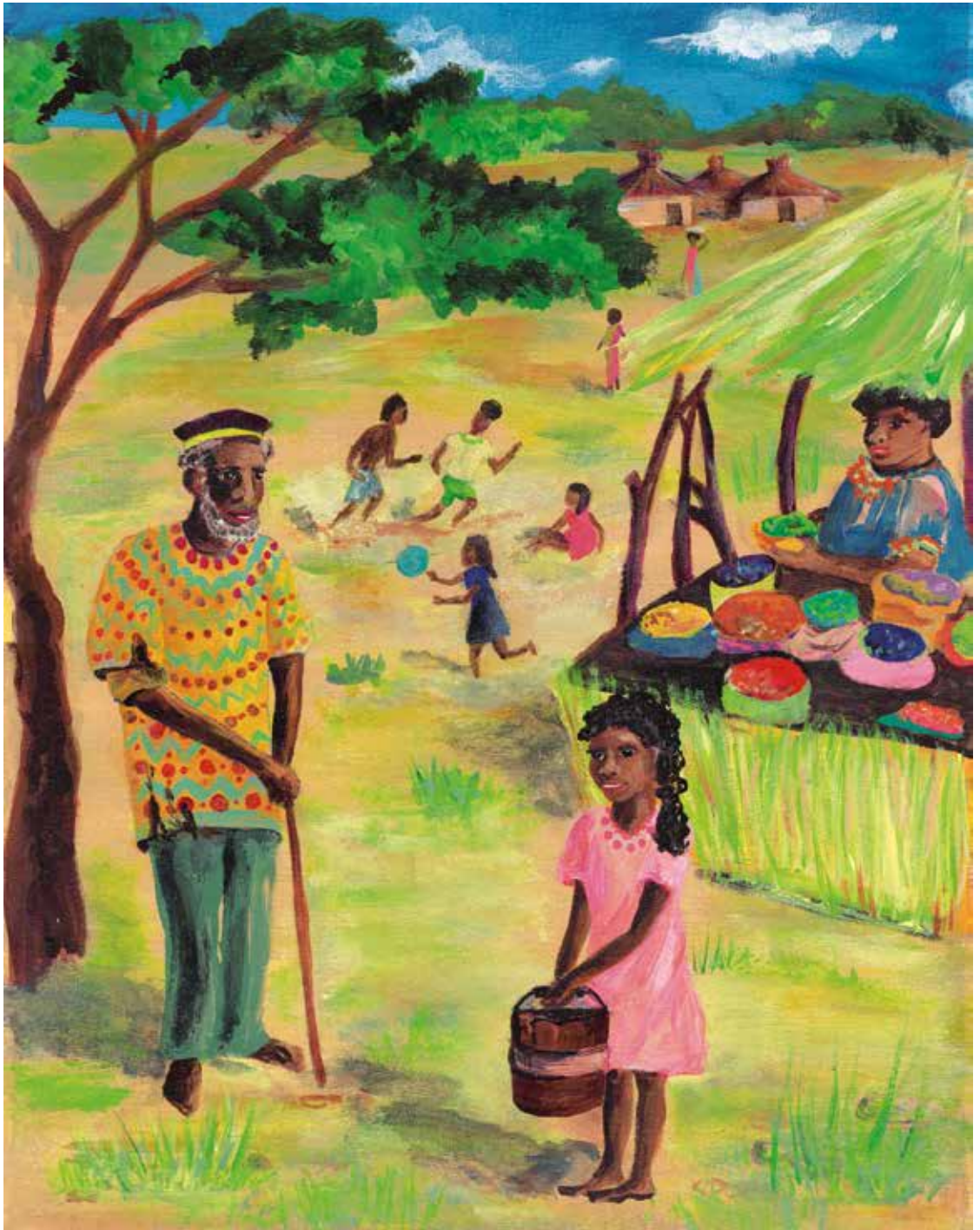
You snort something into your airway.
Gasping for air
You leave the perfect world for a flash
Of a second.

Halfway to the T
Marble Seven in view.
Can you make it?

One last breath
And you completely submerge.
Spinning through the bubbles
A hair away from the wall.
You kick.
Hard pressure starts at your feet
It spreads,
Rocketing your body backwards.

A few seconds left.
You're still on fire, but it's fading.
Your speed is no longer faster
Than your heartbeat.
You kick it in the last few yards
Knowing
The end is near.

You slam both hands on the wall
Smiling, screaming, laughing,
You pump your fists in the air
As you watch
The other swimmers finish
After you.



"Don't forget to look for a magic stone today"

The Crystal River

By Kara Peter

Illustrated by Alina Ponomarenko

EVERYTHING IN THE VILLAGE was brown. The small, squat huts were brown. The narrow dirt road was brown. The marketplace was crowded and filthy and brown. The grass and fields, which always seemed withered and tired, were brown. And most of all, day after day, the twisting, murky river was brown.

Keisha trudged along the path through the village one morning on her way to get water, like she did most mornings. Despite the sweltering summer heat, the older villagers greeted each other cheerfully and young children skipped and played. Among them was Keisha's little sister, Afia, who was only four. Glancing briefly back over her shoulder, Keisha spotted Afia racing and laughing with a group of other children. Mini whirlwinds of dust swirled up around their small bodies, and they paused frequently to cough dry, hacking coughs.

Another group of young children waved to Keisha, and she waved back. But the kids the same age as Keisha teased, just like they did every day. "Are you still looking for magic stones?" they taunted, and hooted with laughter.

Some days Keisha retaliated, saying, "You have to go for water every day too. You know that it's as brown as the road. You'll be jealous if I *do* find a magic stone." Today though, Keisha just ignored them and marched on, gripping the handle of the large wooden bucket.

Several older kids who were standing nearby, taking a rare rest from their daily stifling hot farm work, smiled at her.



Kara Peter, 13
Portage, Michigan



Alina Ponomarenko, 12
Lewisville, Texas

"You're only twelve, Keisha—stop trying to save the world by yourself!" They chuckled.

Keisha disregarded them as well.

At the center of town, Keisha passed the marketplace. It was dusty and dim, but everyone laughed loudly as they bartered for a good deal. "I'm not payin' that much for your scrawny vegetables!" one woman declared over the roar of the crowd.

At the edge of the marketplace, under the shade of a lone tree, stood the old blind man that everyone called Grandfather, though only out of respect—no one knew of anyone that he was related to. As always, Grandfather knew when Keisha was coming. "Good day, young one!" he greeted her. "Don't forget to look for a magic stone today."

"I won't, Grandfather," Keisha assured him halfheartedly. It was Grandfather who had first told her about the magic stones. They were blue, he had told her. A deep, beautiful blue like the ocean. Keisha had never seen the ocean and knew no one who had, but she could imagine an intense, powerful blue that she was sure must be the hue of the ocean.

The stones, Grandfather had told her, were for wishing on. If you held one and wished, the next day your wish would come true. He was considered only a skillful storyteller by the rest of the village, but Keisha held his stories as fact.

Keisha hummed a quiet, wordless tune as she walked past the end of the village and along rows and rows of fields. Her

gaze darted around, constantly searching for the dark blue stones, but her heart was heavier than a full sack of rocks gathered from the fields. There never were any wishing stones, and she suddenly felt certain that there never would be.

Keisha wondered if everyone else was right. She realized that they probably were and that Grandfather was only a storyteller. Anger as hot as boiling water flared up inside her, and she realized how childish the hopes were that she had clung to. Keisha quickened her pace, her tough, bare feet hitting the hard ground with slaps like an angry drumbeat.

Many steps later, Keisha reached the twisting river. She straightened her faded, tattered dress and bent to fill the huge bucket with the murky brown water; water that her family would drink. The river—which was more of a creek or stream—was called Crystal River. But the water was never crystal clear, or anywhere near it. Maybe it had been pure at one time, but if it had, no one could remember. Now clean water was wishful thinking. The shallow river seemed to be narrower every day too, and it was scarcely deep enough for Keisha to submerge her entire bucket under the muddy, sun-warmed water.

Standing up, Keisha lugged the back-breaking bucket up the short, steep bank and set it down. She sat, since there was no one nearby to scold her for being lazy. The warm sun blazed down on her, scorching and burning. Keisha ran her fingers through her black braided hair and

held it up off her sweaty neck, staring miserably at the river.

There were many small stones along the banks of the river, and another sudden wave of fierce anger washed over her. Keisha bit her lip against the strong feeling of unjustness, willing her emotions not to spill over into hot tears. She grabbed a handful of small stones, digging all the way into the muck of the riverbank, and flung them far down the river.

The stones were in the air for only a brief second as they soared above the stream and then dived into it, but it was long enough. Long enough for Keisha to see that one of them was blue.

She scrambled after it, but the stone had already plunged to the muddy bottom of the river. Keisha searched desperately, but she knew deep inside her that it was futile. She had let Grandfather down. She had stopped looking; stopped hoping. And now her chance was gone.

"Keisha! What on earth is taking you so long?" Keisha turned and glared at her older brother. She leaped out of the river, grabbed the burdensome water bucket, and flew past him down the path, not noticing the weight.

THAT NIGHT, lying on a thin blanket in the corner of her family's traditional mud-brick hut, Keisha listened to the lions roar. They were far away, in the

thick savannahs, but their powerful roars echoed all the way to Keisha's village. Usually they sounded courageous and bold to Keisha, and she longed to be more like them. But that night they sounded mournful. Hopeless.

Keisha soundlessly cried herself to sleep.

**"You're only twelve,
Keisha—stop trying
to save the world
by yourself!"**

THE NEXT MORNING, Keisha was up while the sky was still a smoky gray, like she was every morning. She ate their family's standard porridge-like breakfast. After that she helped

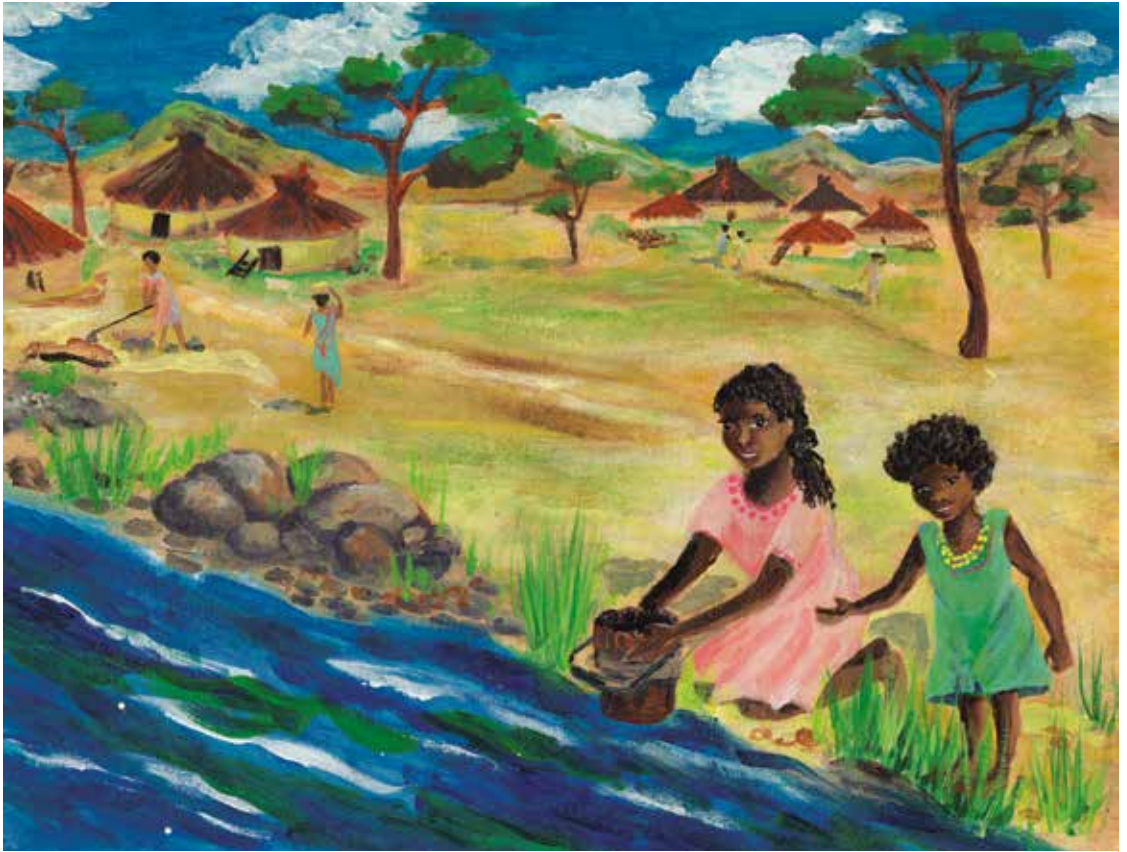
her mother tidy up their home. Then she went out to work in her family's fields.

Keisha worked numbly, not noticing the ruthlessly blazing sun. She didn't notice her aching back and stiff hands. She worked silently and diligently.

In the middle of the morning, one of Keisha's sisters, Nyala, who was younger than her by one year, left because it was her turn to fetch water. Keisha hardly noticed.

"Good work," Keisha's father told her once. He was a quiet man and rarely gave compliments. Today Keisha didn't care. She continued only to labor unfeelingly, as if she were in a dream, her thin hands working automatically.

"Come look! Come look!" All at once, Nyala came tearing through the village. Her bucket was still empty. "Come to the river! The water's clear!"



Amazingly, her sister was right

Keisha raced after her sister. The long distance to the river seemed only a few short strides.

Amazingly, her sister was right. The water splashed gently and glittered like crystals, cutting through the dusty land. Keisha's harsh anger as she had thrown the blue stone had worked as a wish; a bitter, powerful wish of hope and desperation.

Taking the bucket from her sister, Keisha knelt and filled it. The clear water

flowed in freely. She lifted the bucket and turned around. Nearly the entire village was standing behind her, with joyful smiles. Near the back stood Grandfather, with a smile that was the biggest of all.

Keisha looked towards the cheerful crowd of villagers and back at the dreary, brown village. She gazed up at the endless blue sky and bright African sun. She watched the sparkling river, as clear as a million crystals. And she smiled too. ❀

Spring

By **William C. Kelly**

Illustrated by **Sanjana Chimata**

WHEN I LIFTED my lids on the morning of April fourteenth, there was a change in the air. I couldn't hear, see, smell, or even touch this feeling. I just knew it. Peering around my room suspiciously, I realized that nothing had changed. My bookshelf, desk, and dresser were all in the same place. Everything was the same yet everything was different. I just couldn't pinpoint it. On the other hand, my seven-year-old Maine Coon cat, Daphne, could. She was biting, clawing, and hissing just to look out the window. Groaning like a bear coming out of hibernation, I staggered from my bed and pulled open the blinds. As soon as I got a glimpse of what was outside, I gasped. Why? Outside my window was a picture-perfect scene. The sun high in the brilliant blue sky illuminated Rockaway in a whole new light. It seemed as if a new Rockaway had swept in and brought with it new life. The next thing I noticed was the emerald-green grass. It beckoned me to come out as a lighthouse beckons lost sailors out at sea. A flash of scarlet and the birds' singing made me realize that it was spring. A highlight of this picture-perfect scene was the ocean. Waves were crashing on the shore and seagulls glided through the air. Best of all was the breeze. Unlike the cold, harsh, icy wind that had dominated the peninsula for the past few months, this breeze was warm, inviting, and a prelude of the joys that would follow. It seemed like a perfect day. My thoughts were cut off by another thought—the praying mantis. Let me explain.

Last year I found an injured praying mantis on 145th Street



William C. Kelly, 11
Belle Harbor, Queens, New York



Sanjana Chimata, 12
Basking Ridge, New Jersey



I saw a little plant fighting for survival on a metal and concrete pier


while bike-riding. I couldn't identify it right away but my brother, Michael, could. Peering through his glasses, he murmured, "It's a praying mantis." To make a long story short, in less than half an hour, the insect had acquired a ten-gallon tank, dirt substrate, sticks and twigs, and a bulging abdomen. I fed the mantis ten large crickets, which she eagerly accepted. What grabbed my attention was how she groomed herself meticulously. First, she would start with the leg farthest away from her and work her way down towards her front legs. She would move her tongue along the edges of her prickly-spiny limbs. This always brought out panic in my young sister, Renee.

"Mommy, the mantis is biting herself; make her stop, now!"

One day I noticed the praying mantis's eyes just staring at me with intense curiosity. I opened the screened lid and lifted up the mantis. She was fascinated by my hair. Sometimes she would hold up one strand of my hair between her limbs and study it intently. Several times she climbed and perched herself upon my head, just to feel my hair. The first couple of times she crawled on my bare skin, I got goosebumps due to her prickly-spiny legs, but that sensation quickly faded because I had successfully tamed her. One of the things that made homework less tedious was having her crawl and roam around my desk as the gears turned in my head. The praying mantis had become the insect version of the dog I have always wanted.

Around December her color started

to change—from a bright green to a dull, earthy color. She seldom ate crickets. She allowed them to walk around her without making any effort to grasp them. It slowly occurred to me that my precious mantis was slowly dying. So when I trudged home from school January third, I was astonished to see what I thought was a small banana hanging from the top of the cage. Upon closer inspection I realized it was an egg case!!! I was overjoyed for a mere five seconds, but soon my eyes filled with tears upon the realization that the praying mantis was dead. She was curled up like an autumn leaf. Gingerly, I picked up the egg sack and carried it to the back deck, having bittersweet feelings about this entire ordeal. I was filled with grief because my praying mantis was dead, but happy that somehow I had helped nature by creating a natural haven for her to lay her eggs. If I hadn't found her that day she would have never had a chance to lay her eggs. Every day I look at the egg case to see if the eggs have hatched. They haven't yet...

THE LAST DAY of spring break, as I walked down the beach, I saw a little plant fighting for survival on a metal and concrete pier. It was growing in a crevice, struggling for water and glimpses of sunlight. At first, I thought it would die. Then, I remembered how my injured mantis had found a way to lay her eggs. Life had found a way for the mantis and life would find a way for the plant. Life will always find a way... 

2014, Fog

By Abraham Lawrence



Abraham Lawrence, 12
Eugene, Oregon

The world is full of fog
that people put out
to hide the wrongs that they have done
(or are about to do)

The world is full of deceitfulness and lies
that is the fog of the world

But there is another kind
and that is of the countryside of my home
where fog is real
and drifts
drowsily around
old Douglas firs
and house windows

Through that slow sleepy fog
I read in newspapers
and hear on the radio
about the war in this and that
far-off country

Though here at home I am safe and warm
there is no war here
except the occasional war
between that stray cat and my dog
aside from that
there is only peace

Later when the sun breaks through
lighting tree tips and making colors bright and flowing down
I run along the warming ground
with my large black dog
for both of us are youths and like to run
he with ears flopping and tail bouncing
and I with my hair bent by the wind

Then I sit on a hill and watch
the ducks swimming in the lake
the herons fishing for newts
and the hawks hunting for mice

I can see a deer with her fawns
the robins in their nest
the bees going to work at the flowers

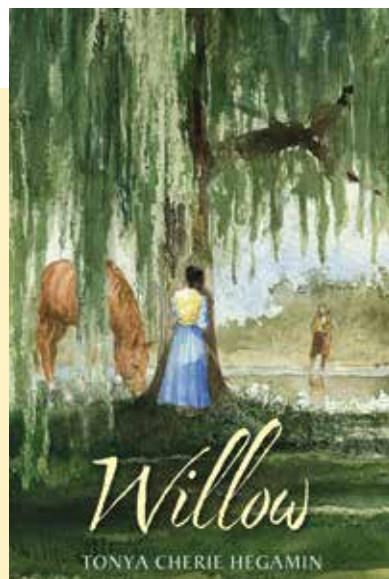
I am glad that they are all still here.

I think to myself
this is Paradise.

Book Review

By Jessica McGaughey

Willow, by Tonya Cherie Hegamin;
Candlewick Press: Somerville, Massachusetts,
2014; \$16.99



Jessica McGaughey, 13
Odessa, Ontario, Canada

THE FIRST THING I noticed about this book was the fact that Willow is both the main character's name and the title. I liked this because I sometimes refer to a book by the protagonist's name and not the title.

Willow is about a fifteen-year-old black girl who lives in Maryland in the late 1840s. Like many girls of her heritage in that time, Willow is a slave. However, she considers her life almost as good as a free one, because she has always been favored by her master. Reverend Jefferson Jeffries (what a name!) treats all his slaves with much more respect than other masters do. Still, they are slaves. Willow's father is both Rev Jeff's most trusted servant and his overseer, so Willow and her papa live a little nicer than most.

Unlike many parents today, Willow's papa makes all the decisions for her and is not open to negotiation. My parents give me lots of choices and support the things I want to do, like piano and competitive gymnastics.

One thing that is very similar between Willow and me is that we love to read and write. However, my parents have always encouraged and helped me with reading, and Willow has to keep hers a secret.

I have been keeping a journal for years and making up stories since I was little. Now I write some of them down, but every day I tell myself several stories that will never end up on paper.


For Willow, writing does not come easily, as she has to teach herself. Her most prized possession is the copybook in which she writes letters to her dead mama.

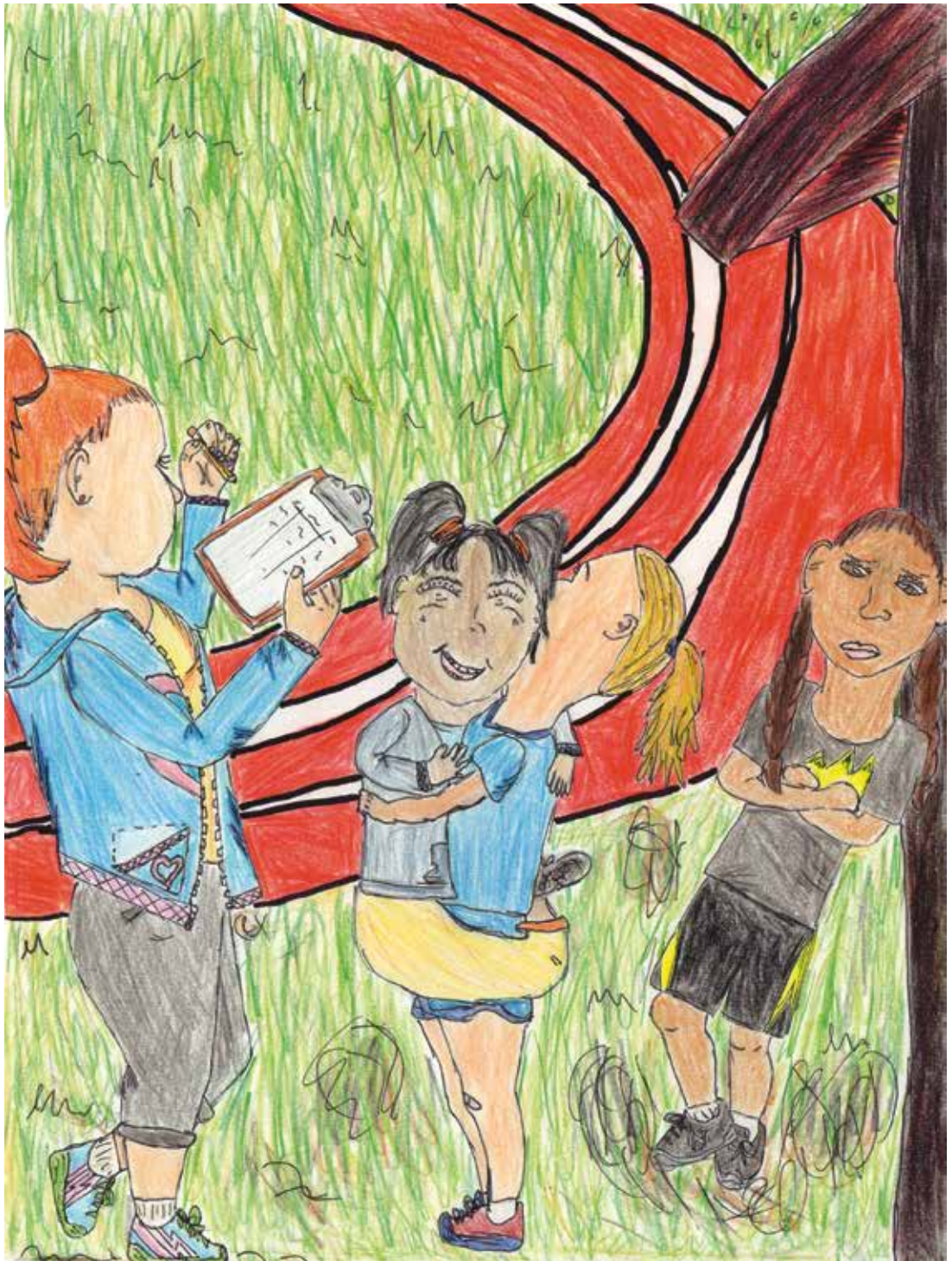
One day, while Willow is riding her horse in the woods, near the tree where she writes these letters, she spots two black men in the forest, one leading the other to freedom. Later, meeting one of those men, Cato, she discovers that he is a freeborn and lives in a town full of free blacks. *Amazing!* Willow thinks. *A whole town full of free black people?*

Soon she falls in love with Cato and begins to consider running away. One part of this book which I particularly did not like is when Willow and Cato spend a night together in the woods. It is very romantic and has too much description. The author uses a lot of description throughout the book, and in some places, like this, I thought it was too much.

The thing I liked most about this book was that you felt you knew the characters. Since it is written in the first person, I felt that I was Willow, and I knew all of the other characters.

I was so excited when I got this book, I sat down to start it almost immediately. From the very first page to the very last one, *Willow* is a powerful book. It talks a lot about human rights and is very accurate and true to the times. One issue that is addressed as well as slavery is male dominance, the fact that men made all the decisions. At the start of the book, Cato is not sure how much rights women deserve, until he meets Willow and realizes that, just as blacks need their rights, so do women.

If you read this book, I hope you find it, as I did, to be a good account of the times back then, written in a way easily related to by modern preteens and teenagers. 



"And the honor goes to Rhonda, Lucy, and Bailey!"

No Regrets

By Evelyn Chen

Illustrated by Collette McCurdy

MY SNEAKERS POUNDED the red turf as I circled the track. Sweat ran down my neck and I wiped my stinging eyes. Beside me ran Rhonda Monroe, her braids flying out behind her.

“You’re slow, Bailey. You shouldn’t be on the track team. Bye bye,” she jeered as she shot away from me. I gritted my teeth and ran harder, ignoring my burning lungs. I drove my feet hard into the ground, imagining that with each step I was pounding Rhonda’s face. I smiled viciously. Finally I skidded to a stop in front of Coach Leslie, just seconds behind Rhonda. I gasped and clutched my aching sides, determined to not look at her triumphant smirk.

Coach Leslie smiled encouragingly as the other girls began to cluster around her. Finally, as Jenna leisurely jogged up to the group, she pulled out her clipboard. “Great job, everyone,” she said. “I have some great news. The Oregon State Championships are coming up. Three of you landed a spot in the champs. And the honor goes to Rhonda, Lucy, and Bailey!”

“I knew it,” Rhonda said loudly. “I’ve won the Oregon State Championships twice. I mean, for such a great runner like me, it’s totally easy.”

Lucy screamed and tackled me. I crashed into the ground and winced. Lucy didn’t seem to notice. She danced around me, her face shining with happiness. I pushed myself up and gave her a grin. I glanced at Rhonda, who stood off to the side, staring at us. I could see a longing in her eyes that startled me.



Evelyn Chen, 12
Bellevue, Washington



Collette McCurdy, 12
San Diego, California

"The winner of the race receives one thousand dollars. However, other girls from many other states will also be competing. I expect you girls to come to practice at least four times a week, including our normal meets. The rest of you, we will just have our usual practices two times a week," Coach Leslie instructed. "All right, see you on Thursday."

I ran to Mom's car and threw open the door. She looked up from her iPhone and smiled as I jumped into the back seat. "Well, you look happy," she observed as she started the engine. I bounced up and down on the seat.

"I'm going to the Oregon champs with Lucy!" I cheered. "And... well, with Rhonda." My mother frowned at my subdued excitement about Rhonda. She raised an eyebrow quizzically. I avoided her gaze and picked at the stitches in the back seat. My mother cleared her throat and I sighed, defeated.

"It's just that Rhonda's so rude," I finally mumbled. "She always makes fun of me."

"And you do the same to her."

"You would, too, if you had to listen to her sneer at you all day!" I snapped. My mother shook her head and stopped the car at the red light. I crossed my arms, scowling. Figures my mom would insist I had to be Ms. Goody-Goody angel. My mom turned around to face me. I braced myself for a blow about treating others well. But instead she only said, "Rhonda's brother has a rare disease. Only an expensive operation her parents can't afford

can save him. It's been hard on Rhonda." I didn't say anything as the guilt plague pummeled me. My mom turned around and kept driving.

Guilt. It was the one feeling I couldn't stand. I wished I could just go back to hating Rhonda in peace.

"**F**AST MILE, girls, let's go," Coach Leslie called the second Lucy, Rhonda, and I stepped onto the turf. I nodded and sprinted down the track, Lucy at my heels. I could hardly look at Rhonda, much less give a snarky remark as Lucy and I passed her. Her head was down and she was dragging her feet.

Around the track I whirled, Rhonda trailing behind me. My breaths came in short gasps as I fought for air. My legs pushed onward though my muscles screamed for a break. Finally I crossed the finish line, seconds before Lucy. We waited for Rhonda. It seemed like an eternity before she finally ran up to us. We hurried over to Coach Leslie.

She was frowning as she whipped her red hair into a ponytail. I winced as she started giving Rhonda the stink eye. "OK, not bad. Take a water break. Rhonda, come over here," Coach Leslie ordered. I gulped down the refreshing water as it cooled my body. I could feel beads of sweat running down my sticky back.

I inched over to where Coach Leslie was standing behind the storage shed. I leaned back, pretending to savor the shade. Instead, I strained to hear their conversation. "Look, I know you have a

lot going on, but that run was unacceptable. You got to step up your game or else Alexia is going to replace you. Once you're on the track you have to leave your emotions behind," Coach Leslie said.

"OK, OK. My brother had another seizure and you're, like, telling me to just deal with it. Give me a break!" Rhonda said. Her voice started to crack. She sniffled.

"Uh, I'm sorry this is so hard for you. Just, um, try to calm down," Coach Leslie said awkwardly. She was never the comforting person. She was kind, but her way of kindness was driving us hard. They stepped out from behind the shed and I jumped and made a strangled cat sound.

Coach Leslie eyed me, but I avoided her gaze. "All right, we'll run more tomorrow. Get a good rest tonight and try not to think about... other things," she said, giving Rhonda a good stare. I nodded and wearily headed towards the gate. As I let myself out and walked over to the car, I still couldn't believe Rhonda Monroe would cry about anything.

MY MIND FORGOT about Rhonda's brother and soon all three of us felt the bitter competition. Rhonda had always been rude and outspoken, but even sensitive Lucy had become brusque. I tried to be friendly, but it was hard, especially imagining the shiny new computer in my bedroom.

During a break from our fast mile, we all sat on the bench in a heavy silence. I wasn't about to break it. I reached for my water bottle and the cool water trickled down my throat. Lucy fiddled with her rope necklace. Suddenly she said, "What if none of us wins?"

Rhonda looked angry. "Well, if you have no motivation to, I'm going to win," she said harshly. She stood up and stomped away, her braids flying around like an angry cloud around her face. Lucy looked shocked. My throat was tight.

"What's her problem?" Lucy asked. She glowered at the concrete. I shrugged offhandedly.

"We've all got our reasons, right?"

Lucy looked surprised and slightly hurt. Without looking at her, I screwed the cap back on my bottle and quickly walked over to Coach Leslie, who was beckoning for us. Rhonda stepped on my foot and giggled. "Sorry," she said, emphasizing the last syllable. A jolt of pain shot through my foot and I grimaced, trying my best not to scream at her.

Lucy raised her eyebrow. I hopped over to her, clutching my foot. "OK, you were right," I said under my breath. She laughed and put an arm over my shoulders.

MY FINGERS DANCED over the stitches in the back seat, fiddling with the string and skidding over the vinyl. My stomach felt like a ballerina,

**"Rhonda's brother has
a rare disease. It's been
hard on Rhonda."**



"It's your teammate!" Mom said loudly

spinning and jumping at every turn in the road. I stared out the window.

"You all right, Bailey? We're going to stop for lunch soon," my dad called, spinning the wheel to exit the interstate. I nodded tensely and fiddled with my phone, trying to relax.

We pulled into the parking lot at Subway's and I hopped out, jogging for the door. A blast of air-conditioning greeted me. The lady behind the counter waved us over. I stared without really looking at the menu.

The door opened again and I heard the chattering of another family. I looked towards them and did a double take. It

was Rhonda's family. My throat closed. I scooted over so my mom blocked me from Rhonda's view and peeked out.

Rhonda's mom was holding the hand of a small, skinny, and somewhat sickly-looking boy. He was wearing thick glasses and was completely bald. Rhonda stared at the ground, hovering next to her father, who carried a large bag of medicine.

"What do you guys want?" the lady at the counter said irritably.

"I'll take a regular footlong," I said quickly. My parents and I took our sandwiches and sat down at a table. Rhonda's eyes widened as she saw me. I stared at the table, averting eye contact.

"It's your teammate!" Mom said loudly. She waved Rhonda over with a large smile. "Hello, Rhonda! Would you like to join us for lunch?"

Rhonda's face turned pink. She blinked and swallowed hard. "Uh, no thank you," Rhonda said. "We have to get going." She turned on her heel and walked out of the restaurant, her family following close behind. I watched her brother hobble out, and not for the first time I realized there was more to Rhonda than what met the eye.

"LET'S GO, GIRLS!" Coach Leslie said encouragingly, clapping her hands together and pulling up her windbreaker hood higher. The wind whipped my legs and I pulled my stringy hair into a ponytail. Huddling in a warm-up jacket, I jogged up and down the sidelines, trying to keep warm. My stomach was in knots and my legs were about as stable as jello.

Lucy sipped at her water bottle, her face white. I walked over to her and she set it down, staring into my face solemnly. I cracked a grin and patted her on the back.

"Good luck," I croaked.

"You too," she managed to say. Both of us glanced at Rhonda, who was pacing in circles with a dark look on her face. I chuckled.

"The race will begin in twenty minutes," the announcer said. A cheer went up in the crowd. I scanned the stands, packed with parents and supporters, for my parents. Rhonda's mom had her arm

around Rhonda's brother, who was in a thick coat and shivering. I looked away.

Coach Leslie beckoned us over. She clapped us on the back and smiled thinly.

"Remember that no matter what happens, I'm proud of you all and you girls are some of the best runners in the Northwest," she said bracingly. "Now go win it all."

A while later, the announcer came back on. "All runners please line up on the track." I couldn't breathe, suddenly dizzy. I strode over to number three, which was also plastered on my back. I was right next to Rhonda, who was smiling confidently.

"Good luck," I said awkwardly. She brushed one of her braids from her face.

"I don't need any luck, but good luck anyways," she said haughtily. I couldn't keep the glare from my face. Who did Rhonda think she was?

"Ready... set... go!" the announcer yelled. The pistol fired loudly. I shoved off the ground and ran with all my might, pushing myself to the head of the group. Rhonda was fourth and Lucy was lost in the middle. We sprinted around the track, and I was in the lead. I couldn't keep the smile from my face as the crowd cheered as I passed.

I pounded my feet into the turf, pumping my arms. I reached out for every piece of energy I had. The crowd became a blur in the background. It was just me and the turf.

The bells clanged for the final lap. I stretched and dug deeper. I could do

this. The cheers and screams got louder. Rhonda surged ahead to third. I ignored her and kept running, willing my exhausted muscles to go farther. They screamed to stop but I ignored the pains shooting in my thighs.

My lungs burned for air and I gasped, running harder. Rhonda was in second. I could see her approaching me from behind. I pumped my legs faster, running, running, running...

I stumbled across the finish line and found Rhonda standing right next to me. Who had crossed first? My eyes widened as I realized what was happening. I paced, trying to breathe, to get fresh oxygen in my lungs. I gasped, wiping sweat from my stinging eyes.

"Please, please, please," I whispered, my stomach cramping in fear. The judges dashed into a small booth. I watched them, willing me to have crossed first. Not Rhonda.

The judges came back out, with a smile plastered across their faces. One reached for a microphone. I watched him with hungry eyes, scared beyond my wits. My entire body was trembling.

"This race has been extremely close and we first want to congratulate all the participants..." I tuned out the rest of his speech, mentally urging him to hurry up. "However, there is one winner and that person is... *Bailey Fley!*"

I couldn't see, couldn't breathe, couldn't hear. All of a sudden my entire

body was screaming, jumping for joy. I was blissful, ecstatic, I was beyond comparison to any kind of happiness. I ran around, yelling in triumph, my voice carrying across the stadium. I ran over to Coach Leslie and hugged her hard. My parents climbed out of the stands.

And then I saw Rhonda, standing to the side, crying and shaking with grief. I walked over to her.

"Sorry," I mumbled.

"It's all my fault. My brother needed the operation. It's all my fault if he dies," she sobbed, collapsing onto the turf. The judges pressed a check into my hand. I stared at it and back at Rhonda.

Tears ran down her neck as she looked at me.

"Congratulations," she whispered. She turned away, her face full of bitterness. "It's all my fault," she whispered.

Something inside of me shuddered. I reached for the check with moist fingertips. My brain was frozen, unthinking. I closed my eyes and placed the check in her hand.

"What?" she said.

"You have a reason," I said softly. "Hope your brother gets better." Rhonda clutched the check, shaking her head.

"N-no-o, I can't," she stammered.

"Yes you can," I said. I walked away and ran towards my parents with open arms. As I glanced behind me, I saw Rhonda embrace her brother.

I had no regrets.



My Rope Swing

By Alexandra Orczyk

Threads of twine twisted together
Working to keep me up
As I swing into the air
My hair trailing behind me.

Crashing my legs into the bushes
I get scratched all over
But I don't care
Holding onto the rope with all my might.

Wind slashes against my cheeks
Bark and twigs fall in my eyes
The branch sways back and forth, threatening to break
As I spin around in a wild circle.

Leaning back and looking up
The tree's limbs wrap around the sky
Shining through the foliage
The sun smiles and so do I.



Alexandra Orczyk, 11
Escondido, California



"No, it can't be"

Judah

By **Emily Stevens**

Illustrated by **Valerie Sorokosh**

“**N**O, IT CAN’T be.” Slowly my hands caressed the sweet-smelling leather of his bridle, and my fingers traced the small letters engraved on the tiny brass nameplate. J-U-D-A-H. Judah. My gaze dropped from my friend’s sympathetic face to the bridle in my hands to hide the tears welling up in my eyes. The only thing that I could see past my tears was the shiny metal plaque on my best friend’s bridle. My chest grew tight and a sob rose in my throat as I made out the tiny red hearts that I had painted around his name. I realized suddenly that my lips were moving in a silent prayer. “Please no, God, please don’t let it be true. Not Judah. Not my stubborn, cantankerous, sweet, wonderful Judah! Please don’t let it be true.” But it was true. I knew that it was true. Judah was gone.

Coming to this stable for riding lessons and meeting Judah was one of the best things that had ever happened to me. He was a sorrel thoroughbred gelding, kind of plain looking but beautiful in my eyes. There wasn’t really anything special about his appearance, except the large white splotch on his forehead that made an almost perfect map of the Middle East, hence his unusual name. But something had drawn me to him, and ever since the first time our eyes met, we were a team. I had learned to ride on Judah, and almost all of the blue ribbons that adorned my bedroom wall had been won from Judah’s back. The tall thoroughbred was an excellent teacher, and everything I knew about horses I attributed to him and my riding instructor, Holly. I had won many ribbons and spent many happy times on and



Emily Stevens, 13
Southwick, Massachusetts



Valerie Sorokosh, 13
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

around Judah, and when my father left my family for good, it was Judah whose mane I had cried in. We were a team. Or, we had been.

My mind was numb and I wanted to be alone, but I listened while my friend told me what had happened.

After the first of several mild knee injuries that Judah had suffered over the last few years, his owner and my riding instructor, Holly, had begun to consider retiring him. After all, Judah was getting rather old. However, his quick recovery and the way he threw himself back into his work convinced her that he would be able to give riding lessons for quite a while yet, so Judah stayed. That was the way it had been after his second injury, too. But when the same problem popped up again, Holly had decided that it was time to turn the most amazing horse in the world out to pasture. She had made the decision without telling anyone, and he had left to go to another farm two days ago.

I wanted to be mad at Holly for sending Judah away, but I couldn't. I was too miserable to be angry. Already I missed my horse. Well, not my horse. Judah was Holly's horse, and it wasn't like she needed anyone's permission to retire him. Only Judah, God, and I knew that I thought of him as my horse. Judah's fuzzy orange ears were the only ones that I had ever whispered it to. If only it were true.

If only he was my horse. But he wasn't. And he was gone.

I walked out of the stable without a word, never realizing that Judah's familiar leather bridle was still clutched in my hands.

I couldn't bring myself to go back to the stable after that, so instead I turned my attention to finding my best friend in the world. After numerous emails to Holly, I learned that Judah was still in the state, but Holly had forgotten the name of the place where he was, and she didn't have time to

try to find it. So, after that, all of my spare time was spent researching stables in the area and sending countless emails, letters, and phone calls to the owners to find out if an old sorrel thoroughbred with an irregular white splotch on his forehead lived there. Sometimes, if nobody replied to my desperate messages, my mom would drive me to the stable or farm after work to ask in person. Yet, though I knocked on many doors and sent countless emails and all my allowance money was spent on postage stamps, I could not locate Judah. It had been over a month since I'd seen him last, and every night I barely held back a flood of tears when I looked at the many pictures of him scattered about my room.

While driving to my sister's dance recital on a chilly day in October, we passed an unfamiliar stable set far back from the


When my father left
my family for good,
it was Judah whose
mane I had cried in.

road. A pasture full of lush grass sprawled toward the road, and I scrutinized it, as I always did, for horses. Suddenly, I spotted a tall, fuzzy sorrel grazing near the middle of the pasture. “Mom, can we stop here for a second? Please?” The strained, high-pitched voice that asked the question sounded more like a dying duck than me. But I didn’t care. Tears pricked at my eyes, and my throat constricted. My heart pounded. My mom pulled over with a concerned glance in my direction.

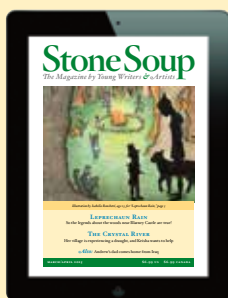
“What’s wrong, honey?” she queried. I didn’t answer. The next few moments passed in a blur. There was a house near the barn, and I leaped out of the car and sprinted to it. Almost as soon as I knocked on the door, someone opened it.

After that, I don’t remember anything

of what happened except for hearing the words “Judah, yes” and “go see him.” That was all I needed to hear.

Blinded by tears, I tore across the lawn and vaulted over the fence to the pasture. “Judah!” I called out to my horse with as much strength as I could muster, ignoring the tears streaming down my face. The next instant, Judah was coming toward me, and I threw my arms around his neck and buried my face in his mane. Far too soon I would have to get back in the car for my sister’s recital, and I would have to leave my beloved Judah again. But just then none of that mattered. For a wonderful moment, it was just me and Judah, and I don’t believe that I have ever been happier than in that single moment with him. 





Bonus Materials

On Our Website

- Editor Gerry Mandel blogs about the featured story from each issue.
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- A feature about child composer Jahan Raymond, including video and sheet music.
stonesoup.com/jahan
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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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