

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Maya Work, age 10, for "Just Don't Quit," page 21

THE VOICE OF THE SEAL

A dream, a cry for help—the girls know what they have to do

A MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE

Halfway through the flight, Jeanette starts to panic

Also:

New illustrations by Teah Laupapa

A review of *I Am Malala*

MAY/JUNE 2015

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 5
MAY / JUNE 2015

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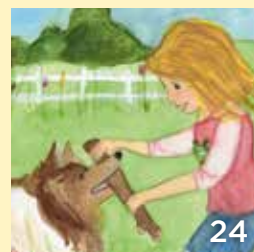
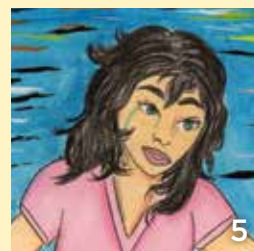
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Editor's Note

Take a chance. We're all afraid of the unknown, and of course we don't want to put ourselves in harm's way, but sometimes we need to follow our instincts and take a chance. Several stories in this issue deal with this very thing. In "The Voice of the Seal," two cousins have the same dream on their first night in the family's beach house. A voice is calling them, asking for help. They set out in the dark to find the voice. In "A Mysterious Package," a young woman is stopped by a kind-looking man as she runs to catch a plane. He begs her to deliver a package to his daughter in New York. She is reluctant, but something tells her it will be OK. Hannah in "The Lotus" and Sarah in "Owl Song" both take chances as well. Both of their lives are the better for it. Do any of these stories remind you of an experience in your own life? Write a story with a character at a crossroads. Which way will she go?

— *Gerry Mandel*

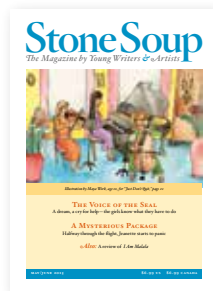
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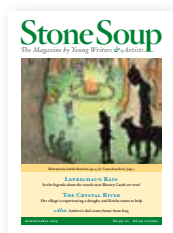
Submissions

Read our guidelines at stonesoup.com. If you have submission questions, write to editor@stonesoup.com. No email submissions, please.

ON THE COVER Maya Work enjoyed illustrating "Just Don't Quit" because she plays the piano herself. Two of her grandparents were classical musicians. After living in Sweden for a year, Maya can speak Swedish, and she loves lingonberry jelly. She would like to be an artist and a writer when she grows up.



The Mailbox



Before my dad found the January/February 2014 issue of your magazine for me at Powell's Books in Portland, I was wondering if I was the only kid who wrote stories and illustrated them outside of language arts assignments at school. From that first issue, I was hooked. I love to read all the stories by kids my age from all over the world, and I look forward to every issue. The art is amazing, and I always look at it for inspiration. The poems are all way better than the ones I read in school. And I wish I could write as persuasively and professionally as all the kids who write the book reviews. Some of my favorite stories are "Grandma's Angels," by Marina Stevenson [March/April 2014], "Standing Alone," by Erin Trefny [May/June 2014], and "Midnight's Song," by Jenna Fields [January/February 2014].

Anna Joy Dreher, 12
Portland, Oregon

I just subscribed to *Stone Soup* and I really, honestly, love it! Every day when I check the mail, I hope there is a great *Stone Soup* to devour in front of the fire with a blanket and all toasty when the story has brought me all around the world. I want to give all the authors a "well done" and a pat on the back. You all inspire me and I hope to be in this magazine too. *Stone Soup* seems like a great place to start for authors like you and me who want to be discovered for their writing talent!

Camille Furer, 11
Johnston, Iowa

Thank you for your marvelous *Stone Soup* magazine. You have inspired me to write more diligently and have made me acknowledge my talent as an author. Thank you for empowering me and all the other gifted writers out there. This is my second time submitting, and I am so incredibly glad I have taken this opportunity to get published. It's as if before I took this chance, I was only so-so at creating stories and poems, but suddenly I am more than that. I can't help but marvel that elementary and middle school students can produce such impressive artwork and writing! When I read Kyle Trefny's "Call of the Dolphins" [March/April 2014], I was blown away. He had fantastic voice and a pretty great illustration too.

Emily Dexter, 13
Carmel, Indiana

Emily's poem, "Paradise Blue," is on page 11 of this issue.

Stone Soup is my all-time favorite magazine, and I always rush to the couch to read it as soon as it arrives! Every story is written from the writer's heart, which makes the stories even more exciting! Thank you for making this magazine the success that it is, and for allowing me to be able to read it. I hope someday to become a famous author and to write life-changing stories for people worldwide! You have encouraged me to start the quest to achieve that dream.

Sophia Emmert, 12
Muscatine, Iowa

Sophia's work is recognized in the Honor Roll on page 48.

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



Mom always said we could have been twins

The Voice of the Seal

By Evelyn Chen

Illustrated by Teah Laupapa

“GOOD NIGHT, Cordelia and Georgia,” Mom said. She smiled at us and gently shut the bedroom door behind her. I listened as her footsteps receded down the hall.

It was our first night at the beach house in Oregon. Every summer, we came down here with my cousins and stayed for a month. It was heaven—the days were filled with swimming, wading, gathering shells, sailing, and exploring the nearby shops. My cousin, Georgia, who was also thirteen like me, and I were suddenly given free reign and we went as we pleased, suddenly free from the cage of school and homework and parents that we had been restrained with for so long.

I propped myself up on my elbow and grinned at Georgia in the semi-darkness. Moonlight streamed through the open window and a soft breeze caressed my curly black hair. The room was small, with barely enough room with our cots side-by-side, a large dresser, and closet. It was painted a cheery yellow that looked gray in the dim light, and the lavender curtains fluttered like butterfly wings.

Georgia smiled at me as she sat up, curled up in a pile of blankets. We looked almost identical—with shoulder-length, curly black hair that could never be tamed, bright blue eyes, and grins that never slid off our faces. Mom always said we could have been twins, for all people knew.

“I can’t believe we’re finally here. Let’s go at low tide tomorrow and look for starfish and anemones,” I suggested. My fingers danced over the soft blankets that I had pushed to the side.



Evelyn Chen, 12
Bellevue, Washington



Teah Laupapa, 13
Kapolei, Hawaii

It was much too warm for blankets.

"Sure!" Georgia said, her eyes lighting up. "I can't wait for morning." She shoved her blankets to the side and shifted on the cot, which creaked disagreeably. The plastic covering crinkled loudly.

I lay down again, my eyes sliding shut. I could feel weariness tugging at me. It had been a long drive here and I was exhausted. I lay there, straining to keep my eyes open as I listened to Georgia chatter about our plans for the month.

"Cordelia! Delia! Are you listening?" she called. She reached over and poked me. "I said, we should go boogie boarding if it's not too cold."

"Huh? Oh, OK," I said numbly, my sleep-deprived brain slow to reply. "Listen, I'm kind of tired. Can we sleep?"

"Fine," Georgia grumbled. She lay down again and turned over so we were facing each other. I smiled as my eyes slowly slid shut, giving way to darkness.

I twisted frantically, my lungs burning for air. The fishing net around me chafed my arms and cut into my throat. I struggled in the chilly water, my bones aching with cold. My head throbbed with pain and I fought to not black out. Air... air... air... my very toes screamed for it. I thrashed like a dead fish as darkness consumed my vision...

I sat bolt upright in the cot, drenched in cold sweat. My trembling fingers gripped the blankets hard. The dream flashed through my mind—I was caught, caught in a net, slowly drowning. I shook my head, trying to get the dream out of my mind. Just a dream, it was just a dream.

I focused on the sound of the waves crashing against the shore in the distance.

I suddenly heard loud panting from next to me. I turned around and saw Georgia sitting up, shaking violently. She glanced at me, her eyes wide open and wild with fear.

"What's wrong?" I forced my voice to stay steady. Georgia swallowed hard.

"A nightmare, that's all."

My stomach turned over and I felt a wave of nausea pass over me. Was it just a coincidence that we had both had a nightmare at the same time? "What was it about?" I asked. My limbs were shaking harder than ever. I couldn't stop my legs from bouncing up and down. Georgia gazed out the window, the moonlight illuminating her face. She sighed almost inaudibly.

"Drowning. I was drowning in a net..." Her voice trailed off and she shivered.

"No way. I had the same dream," I whispered. Georgia whipped around so fast that her hair fanned out around her face. She gasped.

"You're joking."

I shook my head. We sat there, staring at each other. My mind was racing.

"I-I," I said weakly. I couldn't get the words out. We gazed at each other in a tense silence.

Cordelia... Delia ... Georgia... Gia ...

A soft, melodious voice burdened with sorrow floated up from the window. The voice sent shivers down my spine, like water rippling over me. Something was calling my name. I slowly turned towards

the window, my heart pounding hard in my ears. I could feel blood rushing to my head.

Cordelia... Delia ... Georgia... Gia ...

Almost unconsciously I stood up, pushing away from the cot. The blankets fell to the floor, thudding softly against the wood panels. My toes curled on the cold floor. I hugged my arms to my chest, the soft fleece warming me. I turned my head to see Georgia standing up. Her eyes were slightly vacant and her mouth was open a little.

“Georgia,” I whispered hoarsely. I nodded towards the hallway. She inhaled deeply and nodded back, a silent communication going between us. I grabbed her arm and slowly cranked opened the door.

The house was silent, except for the eerie ticking of the kitchen clock. Every bedroom door was closed. I paused to listen. I could hear a faint snoring and loud breathing. Everyone was asleep. We padded down the hall, wincing at every creak of the floorboards, but no door opened. Milky light cast shadows across the floors.

We paused at the screen door leading to the beach. I let go of Georgia’s arm, and she let it fall limply to her side. I pressed my face to the screen, peering down the beach. The cool air refreshed me.

“Should we do this?” Georgia murmured. “We’ll get in trouble.” She twisted her hands together anxiously. I turned to her pleadingly. She sighed, her shoulders

slumping.

“We can leave a note,” I insisted. Georgia rolled her eyes and relented. I grabbed a pad of paper off of the wooden kitchen table and a pen.

I scribbled, *Georgia and I went for a walk on the beach. Will be back by breakfast.*

“There, Ms. Worrywart. Happy?” I said, setting the note on the table. I pushed open the screen door and slipped outside, followed by Georgia. The door gently banged closed behind her.

The sand tickled my toes as I walked along the silent beach. The sky was inky black, silver stars strewn across it. I bent down and sifted the soft sand through my hands. My beating heart slowed. Georgia paused to wait by me and I stood again. We shuffled along, shivering slightly in the cold wind.

Cordelia... Delia ... Georgia... Gia ...

I couldn’t stand it. I started running, sand spewing out from behind my feet. Georgia took off, jogging along behind me. I ran like I had never run before, somehow knowing that the voice was in trouble. The voice slowly dimmed as we approached the waves, becoming more and more ragged with pain.

I skidded to a stop at the edge of the ebony water. The waves sloshed against the shore, waves crashing one over another. Georgia and I scanned the water, back and forth. The voice was here. I was sure of it, as sure as the fact that the voice was

“No way. I had
the same dream,”
I whispered.

in trouble.

"Where is it?" Georgia moaned. She pounded her knee in frustration. I put my hand on her arm. I could feel goosebumps raising on it.

"Shh," I said abruptly. Suddenly I spotted it.

A dark shape was thrashing around in the water. Water sprayed up around it. I yanked Georgia's arm and took off, running down the beach, my feet pounding the sand. I ran as fast as I could, forcing one leg after another, gulping the cold air.

It was my dream. Something was in trouble.

I splashed through the water towards the shape, my feet grazing the rough rocks. The cold bit at my legs and my feet tingled. I frantically struggled on, water splashing on my clothes. Georgia was next to me, her hand gripping my arm.

I gasped and drew back. It was a seal. A seal, thrashing in a fisherman's net, caught and drowning. I gazed at it in horror, my eyes wide. For a second I was paralyzed, unable to move. Georgia gently tapped me. I shook myself and turned to her.

"We have to free it," she said, her voice calm and steady. She gazed at me fiercely, her blue eyes illuminated by the water. My feet were starting to be numb with cold. I nodded.

The seal gazed at us, its dark eyes melting with sadness. Its whiskers twitched. I reached out with a trembling hand. At my touch, it lay still, whimpering softly. Its skin was soft and leathery. I ran a hand over its back, murmuring soft,

soothing words.

Slowly Georgia and I began to untangle the net. My hands were shaking. I pried the net off of the seal, trying to loosen the knots and free it. I pulled at the rough cord, yanking it with all my might. Georgia steadily worked, silent and focused.

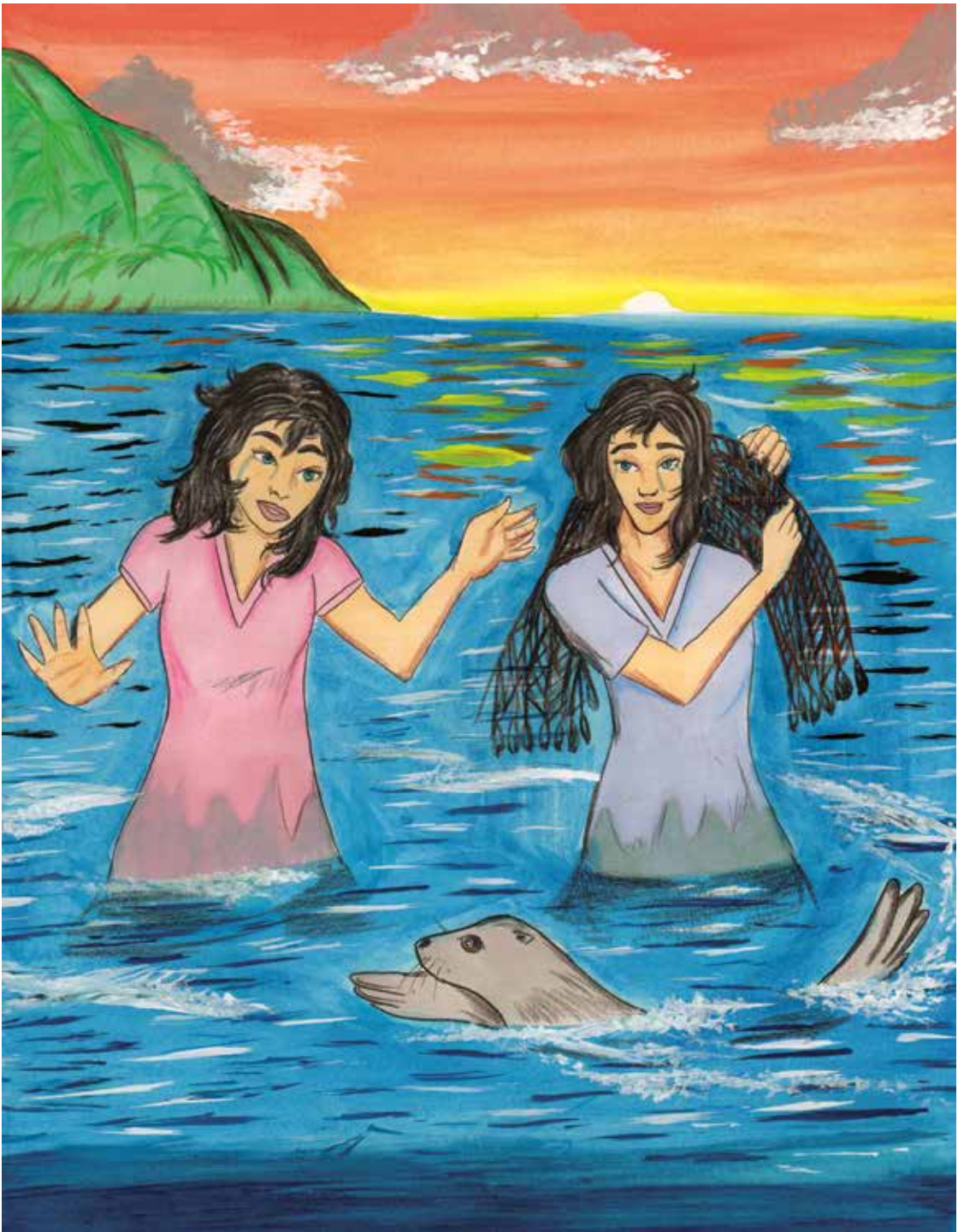
Hot tears of pity clouded my eyes. How could somebody do this? I felt hot tears stream down my cheeks, dripping off my chin. As if it knew that I was crying, the seal looked up at me. I smiled down at it, through the curtain of tears.

It might have been hours that we worked. I shivered violently, my limbs unsteady. But neither I nor Georgia were willing to stop. We would never leave the seal.

The breeze died down as we kept working, our hands fumbling over the rough bound rope. I glanced at Georgia. Her eyes swam with tears as she cried softly, for the seal. She sniffed and looked at me. We gave each other watery smiles and kept working.

Suddenly the net drifted free. Georgia reached out and grabbed it, hoisting it over her shoulder. The seal wiggled and danced with joy, swimming around us in circles. It nuzzled us tenderly, swimming around us. I stroked it, my hands running over the soft and damp skin. I put out my hand and the seal gently put his nose in my hand, sniffing around.

It sniffed Georgia, who made a sound like a half-sob and gently stroked it. My legs were numb and painful, yet I clum-



The seal wiggled and danced with joy, swimming around us in circles

sily petted it, unwilling to break our bond. The seal darted around us, swimming in and out, barking softly. I leaned down to hug it, ignoring the fact that my clothes were soaked with sea water.

Suddenly the sun burst over the horizon and the sky flooded with light, the darkness receding. The sky flushed a brilliant pink and golden, the fluffy light clouds illuminated. The water danced under the sunlight, reflecting brilliant hues of golden and pink and light blue. As if a spell had broken, the seal ducked into the water and was suddenly gone, like a silent bullet.

Goodbye, Georgia and Cordelia.

I stared after the seal. It raised its head once more.

Goodbye.

Then it was gone.

FOR MINUTES, Georgia and I just stood in the water, staring after the seal as waves crashed over our legs. The sky was so bright I almost had to wince.

At last, I said, "We did it."

"We did," Georgia said, her voice full of disbelief. I grabbed the rope and together we hoisted it out of the water, wading back onto the sand.

We struggled down the beach, our clothing and skin coated in wet sand and saltwater. Water dripped down my back. The weight of the rope made me wince. We reached the front door and dropped the rope on the step. Georgia turned to

me and gazed at me.

Slowly I smiled and suddenly she threw her arms around me. We embraced, holding each other, wet and cold, and yet not caring. I held her, half-crying, half-laughing. Mixed emotions rose as tears dripped down my cheeks. I was smiling, so hard it hurt.

Georgia released me, wiping her cheeks. She smiled and shook her head. "I'm so happy," she cried.

"I know," I said. "I know."

The door suddenly burst open and Mom was standing there, glaring at us. Her expression softened when she saw how wet and cold we were. She turned to gaze at the pile of rope.

"What..."

"We rescued a seal from a net," I blurted out. Mom's green eyes went wide. She raised her eyebrows, shocked. For a moment she didn't speak.

"How... how did you know that it was out there?" she finally said, her voice hushed. She didn't break her gaze from the rope.

I exchanged a look with Georgia. For a moment, neither of us said anything. The night flashed back through my mind.

At last, I said quietly, "The seal told us."

Mom didn't disagree. She only smiled and hugged us, though we were drenched and coated in sand.

"You should be very proud, girls," she whispered.

And we were.



Paradise Blue

By **Emily Dexter**

When I grow up someday,
I'll paint my house paradise blue,
An oasis among the streets.
Wind chimes will line the porch,
And will ring like almost forgotten songs
Spilling into the depths of a cavern.
Proud, leafy trees will hold birdhouses high.
Like a giant yellow ball of joy,
A forsythia bush will guard my house.
From out of my open windows,
Wandering aromas, sweet as honeycomb,
Will swirl and spin and pirouette.
Over my house, clouds will become
Puffy white maracas and caterpillars.
The air will shed its smog,
And I'll prop the front door ajar,
As thunder growls in the distance.



Emily Dexter, 13
Carmel, Indiana



His eyes were searching mine, pleading desperately

A Mysterious Package

By Lukas Bacho

Illustrated by Emma Schumacher

I SLIPPED OFF my shoes and sensed the tough airport rug beneath my feet. Behind me, hundreds of people were waiting in line for security. I slammed my bag into a gray plastic container.

“Welcome to San Francisco International Airport. Please do not leave any baggage *unattended* at *any time*. We are not responsible for any stolen items. Thank you.”

I stepped behind a broad-shouldered man, who immediately marched through the metal detector. It began beeping furiously; he still had his belt on.

Then it was my turn. I checked my watch and quickly walked through. It was 10:45 in the morning, and my flight had just begun boarding. So, tugging my high-heeled shoes on and grabbing my bag, I raced across the terminal.

B-98, I chanted in my mind. *B-98, B-98*. As I glanced at a sign indicating that my gate was to the right, the corner of my eye caught something. A slender man in a suit with a green tie was waving frantically at me, trying to get my attention.

I don't have time for this. Come on, Jeanette. You do not have time for this.

He looked desperate, and for a second, I thought that I had met him before. I raced over to him, my feet clacking over the din. What does he want?

Now, about three feet away from him, I noticed that he was trying to speak to me, but that he was apparently deaf, so the words came jumbled, stuttering, and mumbling at high speed



Lukas Bacho, 12
San Francisco, California



Emma Schumacher, 13
Lexington, Massachusetts

out of his mouth. Then, he took out a cardboard package discreetly and showed it to me with wide, chocolatey eyes. He fumbled for something in his jacket pocket and then displayed a paper and pencil. He was using the package as a backing, and he was scribbling a message onto the slip of paper. He held it out for me to read.

"Please," it said, and I imagined the voice of a desperate child somehow. "I promise, it is not illegal. It got through security. I need you. Deliver to my daughter in New York. Do not open. Please."

The man was tapping against the cardboard box now, and I looked up. He was pointing at an address. *Will he follow me if I don't take it? How does he even know I'm going to New York?* His eyes were searching mine, pleading desperately. I hesitated.

I must know this man.

I bowed my head quickly as the result of some unidentified force I would never comprehend. I snatched the package and spoke to him for the first and only time. "Yes. I will." I tried to show him that I understood. Then I fled from him towards my gate and did not look back. However, I did not need to. His deep brown eyes were still fresh in my mind.

By the time I arrived at Gate B-98, my wristwatch read 11:01. The chairs were empty, save for a few travelers engrossed in their laptops or preoccupied with their earbuds and books. I walked up alongside the counter, where an attendant took the boarding pass from my hands.

"Ma'am, is that your carry-on item?"

She raised an eyebrow and gestured towards the cardboard box I wielded in my left hand.

The last thing I need is a reminder of that stupid brown box!

"Um, uh... yes. It is... my carry-on." Now I was the stupid one, not the box.

The attendant seemed hesitant, but she scanned my boarding pass and waved me down the corridor. I tried to take my mind off the man's message, which was still stored inside my pocket. I fixed my gaze ahead and then turned the corner and stepped into the cabin, where two uniformed United Airlines flight attendants welcomed me aboard with practiced toothy smiles. I nodded to them and continued deeper into the plane, and side-stepped out of the aisle when I found my seat in business class. Finally, I sat down and pushed my bag and box under the seat in front of me with a sense of relief that the man didn't cause me to miss my flight.

I need to stop thinking about him.

I shifted in the fabric-covered frame and got comfortable as the safety presentation began and the engines roared to life. I then began thinking about my trip as I looked out the smudged plastic window. I was just thinking about the fog, and San Francisco, and my house, and my husband, and the reasons for this trip, when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

I turned to see the tall flight attendant who had welcomed me onto the plane. Her hair was in an exceptionally neat bun.

"I'm sorry, but your carry-on must be either entirely under the seat or in the overhead luggage bins."

I looked down, and I half expected the troublemaking box to smirk up at me. I managed an "Oh, OK" before unbuckling my seat belt and pushing the box with my hands the few critical centimeters it needed to move forward. The flight attendant, thankfully, was off on her way to pester someone else.

Where was I? Oh yes, the reasons for this trip. At least GovMail paid for a seat in business class for me. I was bored to death, though, over the subject of Environmentally Friendly Packaging Policies that I had to attend a conference all the way in New York for. *GovMail already kills the earth with their transportation methods, and people don't care.* The main purpose of developing "eco-packaging" was probably to advertise my company's commitment "to saving the planet." I really wished I didn't have to leave my daughter for four days over that mess. I watched the wing of the aircraft as we took off, and it sliced through the airport at high speed before my stomach lurched when we levitated off the ground.

As soon as we leveled out at our altitude, I took a panini out of my bag and bit into it hungrily over my tray table. When a flight attendant came by with drinks, I ordered a ginger ale and drank it steadily. This would be a long flight.

About halfway through the flight, I

had already read a little and decided that I should have been working on my laptop. I wanted to stretch my legs some first though, so I rose up out of my seat and walked past an array of multicolored heads sticking up over the seats. As I squeezed into a vacant lavatory at the end of the plane, waves of paranoia took over,

along with claustrophobia, and that did it. I started thinking about the box.

What if there is a bomb in the box? Tsunami after tsunami of fears swept over me and seeped into my brain. *Why did I trust*

that man? What was I thinking? There is something dangerous, something deadly, in there. I felt as if I only had one choice, and that was to open the box and ward off my fears. *He seemed like such a sensitive, honest man.* I slid the knob at chest level to my left and stumbled out through the doorway. I looked around for any signs of damage, or danger, anything, but all that I could hear was the Darth Vader air-conditioning spraying into the cabin. I must have looked a mess, because a blue-clad attendant stepped over and asked if I was OK.

"I'm fine, thanks," I mumbled, and walked down the aisle back to my seat. The brown box was still there, and I grabbed it before fastening my seat belt and noticing that the mother and son previously sitting beside me had left. Now was my chance, so I seized the moment and carefully tore open the packing tape

**"Deliver to my
daughter in New York.
Do not open. Please."**

with as much strength as I could muster. Inside was regular old bubble wrap that covered another smaller box, and I saw a post-it note stuck to that box, displaying the same slanted scrawl that the green-tied man used to communicate his desperation. *This is an invasion of his privacy.* Something told me to stop, so I neatly tucked in the bubble wrap and sealed the package as best I could. I read the address on the front a few times and placed it in its lawful place just as the mother and son returned to my business-class row and sat down. The glare of the mid-afternoon sun was irritating the boy, so I shut the window and got out my laptop to work.

By the time the captain told us it was time to put our tray tables up and our seats in the upright position, my watch said that it was a quarter past three, and I adjusted it to read the local New York time. After we had landed and gotten to our gate, I stood up and my knees cracked loudly. The son had some trouble lifting his suitcase into the aisle, but then a man on the other side of the plane made a show of helping him, and it was finally my turn to get off the plane. Purse and parcel in hand, I rushed out of the stuffy aircraft, knowing I would need to allow time to drop off the box before checking into my hotel.

Once I had gathered my luggage at the baggage claim, I walked out into the cold wispy New York air and climbed

into the limousine that had been waiting at the curb. I told the chauffeur to stop by the Seventh Avenue Manhattan address on the box. He looked confused but complied as he dodged the rough traffic on the busy boulevards. He pulled up in front of a red brick, three-story apartment building that looked completely ordinary from my point of view. I climbed the steps and rang the doorbell for the door farthest to the left, and someone inside could be heard thumping down the stairs.

The woman who answered the door was a

young, short woman aged not more than thirty-five and dressed in dark work clothes. I assumed the package was for her, and when she said hello I tried to hand it to her.

"A man gave this to me in San Francisco to deliver to you," I said, and felt so incredibly out of place and awkward as soon as I did. The woman looked down at the package and then broke into a grin.

"Oh, amazing! Wait right here. I'll bring my daughter down right now." The young woman scrambled up the stairs and returned moments later with a girl who looked to be about seven years old as I still stood, dumbfounded, on the threshold of this stranger's house.

"Thank you," the little girl said, and to my surprise tore open the package right then and there. *So I do get to see what's inside after all.*

"Oh, amazing!

Wait right here.

I'll bring my daughter

down right now."



I held back tears as I thought of my own daughter thousands of miles away

Inside the smallish box was a doll with short, brown hair and hazel eyes. The doll's blue shirt had a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge and the words *I Love San Francisco* printed in international orange. The doll resembled the little girl in many ways, and the second-grader embraced it as my chauffeur beeped down on the street.

"OK. I have to go." I smiled and turned to go as the mother thanked me. I held

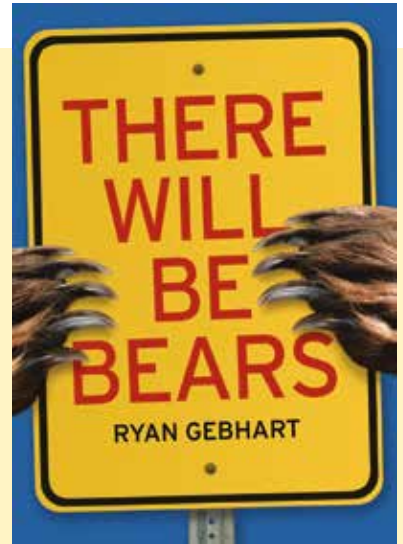
back tears as I thought of my own daughter thousands of miles away and said nothing as I hurried down the stairs. In the car, I smiled to myself, thinking that I might actually get something out of my stupid business trip.

I had made a little girl happier, and how much happier I couldn't say. But that was enough to keep me contented as I rode through the concrete jungle towards my hotel in the distance. 🌸

Book Review

By Jeffrey Huang

There Will Be Bears, by Ryan Gebhart;
Candlewick Press: Somerville, Massachusetts,
2014; \$16.99



Jeffrey Huang, 10
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

WHEN I FIRST SAW the cover of this book, I wasn't very interested, so I put it away. A few days later, I had nothing else to do, so I started reading. I was hooked. I could not put it down before I was done.

Nothing but trouble finds Tyson! His Grandpa Gene, also his best friend, needs to go to a far-off nursing home to manage his kidney disease. Before he leaves, he “bear swears” to take Tyson hunting. At first, Tyson and his family do not think it is a good idea, because they are worried Gene will get sick in the middle of the forest while facing a roaring wild bear. However, Gene says he'll go see the doctor before the trip. This calms Tyson down, although his parents still oppose the plan.

Reading this makes me think about my own grandpa. My grandpa is my best friend as well. He is a retired engineer, and since he knows I like science, every year on my birthday he always performs many science experiments, which leaves me a lot of good memories. I also love catching fish, so he often brings me fishing, which is always fun. But this year, my parents are against the idea of us going together, since they say I'm too naughty, and my grandpa is aging, so he doesn't have enough energy to control me. When I look at my grandpa now, he is much

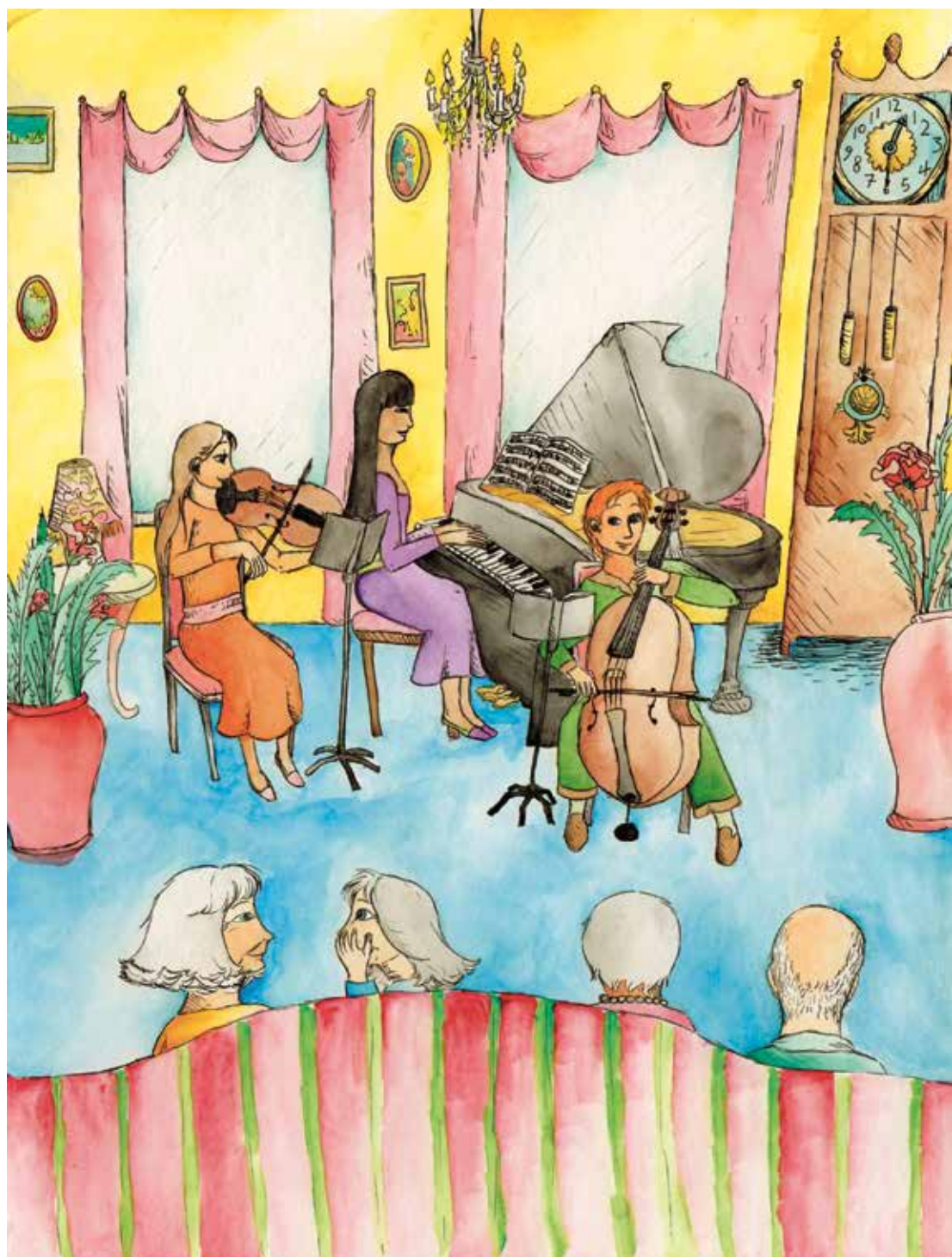
older than before. His spine is bent and he walks much slower. I am afraid I am losing my best friend. Now, he also lives in a nursing home, so I have the same feelings as Tyson.

Tyson is very reluctant to give up the trip, since it is his first elk hunt. The next day, the newspaper headline is “Ohio Couple Killed in Grand Tetons.” Tyson gets extremely scared but quickly changes his mind and decides to go anyway, since he is looking forward to their last trip.

So how did Tyson sneak away? He tricks his dad into thinking they’re going camping in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. His plan worked: Tyson shoots a deer and meets a bear!

In this book, you will see the combat between a dying man, his grandson, and an angry bear. This book has overtones of action and adventure. It is very dramatic, creating breathtaking scenes, active scenarios, and much more. It uses strong words instead of short, choppy sentences. It catches you in a trap-like material and doesn’t let you go until the end. I even had to force myself to stop reading and go play. Once you start reading, beware! Control yourself! Even though there are no pictures, it creates a movie screen in your head.

I would recommend this book to boys and brave girls. This story is good for kids who are starting to read advanced books. It has no pictures, but it is shorter than difficult books. Although the title of this story is simple, the book is very interesting. I cannot imagine it being written better. If you want to know more, read the book, *There Will be Bears*. ❁



My happiest memory of piano was when I performed at a local nursing home

Just Don't Quit

By **Juliette Shang**

Illustrated by **Maya Work**

EVERYONE IN MY CLASS who plays piano hates practicing. They all say, “Ugh, my mom is so annoying, she says I can quit piano when I am thirteen.” In my case, it’s the opposite way around.

Mom encourages me to quit when I whine about practicing. Of course no kid likes practicing, so I have to whine about it. And don’t get me started about how dull practicing scales, triads, and arpeggios is. But I don’t want to quit piano, because I love music. When I finally get a piece right, the music is so beautiful.

I remember the time when I learned the piece “Polonaise in G minor,” by Chopin. My teacher, who is really good at piano, is very strict. After hours and hours of practice, I thought I had mastered the piece, but she still managed to find something that went wrong, like the rest that wasn’t held long enough, or the quarter notes that sped up to eighth notes. So I had to practice again for weeks.

On the day I went on the stage in Steinway Hall, as I moved my hands, the music swirled into the performance hall. I saw the notes were dancing over the grand piano, and I played and played until I heard the great applause. My teacher was cheering and clapping, and I knew that she was so proud of me. So was I!

Music is magical because it helps me express myself. It is like a good friend. When I am feeling a bit sad, I play a piece by Handel and it cheers me up. The pieces he writes are always so upbeat, like someone is waiting for something exciting to hap-



Juliette Shang, 10
New York, New York



Maya Work, 10
Terrasse-Vaudreuil, Quebec,
Canada

pen. And I begin to feel that too. When I am angry, I play this piece by Bartok. I start banging the keyboard, to show the whole world my feelings. But the strange thing is, after playing a while of piano, I felt calmed down; I was absorbed in the intense music, forgetting about why I was mad in the first place. I always wonder if Bartok must have found his inner peace, like me, through his exotic music.

My happiest memory of piano was when I performed at a local nursing home for the senior people. I performed a trio, with a violinist and a cellist. We played "Orientale," by Cesar Cui. We played in perfect harmony and the senior people cheered so loudly for us, it made me blush a bit. After the concert, we walked around and chatted with our audience. They all

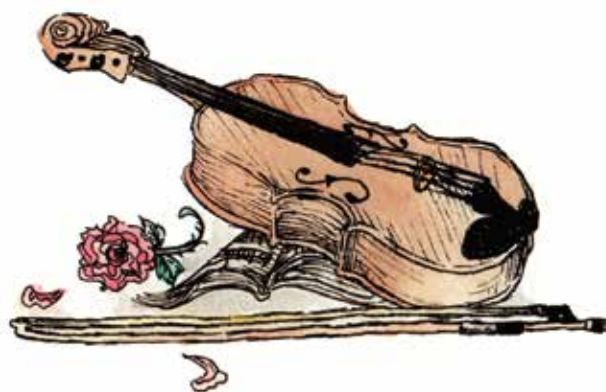
greeted us eagerly and told us the music made them very happy. One man told me that this had been the best afternoon he had had for a long time. I was proud that my piano made other people cheerful.

I met a woman who was over a hundred years old, next to her seventy-five-year-old daughter. I was startled a bit because her skin was so wrinkly. She said, "That was beautiful, darling. I play piano, and

the music has been with me all my life. It is something that can accompany you forever."

Her daughter chimed in and told us, "I played piano, but I quit... I have always regretted that. I know it is boring to practice sometimes, but if you keep at it, you will see the beauty of music everywhere you go. Just don't quit."

**Music is magical
because it helps me
express myself.**



Loving You from Far Away

By Julia Caggiano

Passing on

As I look up, you look down, but our love still shines bright
As it meets in one place
From there it lights up the night sky
Moonlit love

Moving

As the night chirps
I send my love to you
For you also used to hear this jolly nighttime song
But now I listen alone
You, very far away.
Still they bring back happy memories
Crickets singing down memory lane

Away at school

Every day I miss your happy laugh
Every night I fell asleep to your gentle snore
Not tonight
When I look at Orion and the dippers big and small, I love you even more
The way you listen to my stories
I think about that
And I know
I finally feel close even though we are far apart
Memories shine bright through the stars



Julia Caggiano, 10
Rockaway Township,
New Jersey

Moonbeam

By **Carrie Merhout**

Illustrated by **Elena G. Delzer**



Carrie Merhout, 10
Liberty Township, Ohio



Elena G. Delzer, 11
Suamico, Wisconsin

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DAY! Charlotte bounded home from school, eager to get back to their ranch. As usual, halfway there, her lady collie, Sunbeam, patiently waited for her. They traveled home together. When they reached the ranch house, Charlotte was greeted by the fragrant smell of blooming flowers, which was not unusual. “Welcome, spring!” she called, joyously scampering into the cabin built by her grandpa.

Charlotte was the only child living with the family. She had an older sister, named Meredith, but she was in college. Charlotte was very lonely and dreamed of having many pets. On their farm, they had goats, chickens, and pigs—but those weren’t her version of a pet. She meant cats, rabbits, hamsters, dogs, horses—things like that.

Charlotte set her bags down and raced to the barn to do her chores. Sunbeam followed, being protective like collies are. She worked diligently, hoping to beat her record time.

When she climbed the hayloft, a streak of silver ran past her! Too big for a mouse... too small to be a goat! Scared, she grabbed the nearest bundle and hauled it down. Quickly, she finished her job and went to the house for dinner.

THE NEXT MORNING was Saturday. Charlotte calmly ate her breakfast, not hurriedly at all. With Sunbeam at her heels, she went to the barn. Oh! That silver streak again! Charlotte shushed her collie and tried to follow it—with no



She thought about the mysterious streak. Then, she decided to do something.

success.

She disappointedly finished her chores and went back to the house.

"Anything I can do, Pa?"

"I'm fine. Go play with Sunbeam. I'm busy," he said, rather gruffly.

Charlotte went outside with Sunbeam and played. In the pasture, the flowers were lush. She played all morning and afternoon. She thought about the mysterious streak. Then, she decided to do something.

She could wake up early in the morning, hide in the barn, and maybe get a glimpse of it. Just a small sight of it.

Charlotte heard her ma yelling, "Come in for dinner!"

She thought, My, am I hungry, and hastily ran to the house.

EARLY, AT DAWN, Charlotte heard her alarm clock ring. She quickly turned it off. After she dressed, she tiptoed downstairs, still waking Sunbeam, whom Charlotte immediately quieted, and walked out the door, with Sunbeam trailing behind. On the new, fresh grass both walked soundlessly.

She reached the barn, climbed into the hayloft, and waited for a few minutes. Finally, a lumpy form came and slowly shaped into a-a-a—cat! Poor thing! thought Charlotte. So thin! Even

Sunbeam was lured into sympathy. She whined softly, barely enough to hear. The cat walked out of the barn.

Charlotte made up her mind to get something for the creature. She walked to the house, prepared a dish of milk from their goats, and carefully came back, trying not to spill any. She contentedly set it down and went back to bed, undressed, and tried to catch up on sleep.

When she woke up, Sunbeam was pawing at her covers, probably sent by her parents to wake her. She dressed and sped downstairs, smelling bacon, pancakes, and eggs.

“What’s up with you, sleepyhead?” Pa teased. She gobbled her food and ventured to the barn, greeted by an empty dish—licked clean.

You are hungry, she thought, and sneakily set the dish into the sink, just in time for church.

WAKING UP early and feeding her cat became a routine for Charlotte, and one Saturday, she saw the cat had changed.

You’re going to have babies! she thought in excitement. Good for you! I think you are healthy now. Good!

One day, the cat was not seen. Charlotte went on a search with Sunbeam, looking... looking. Eventually, they met a dark spot in an empty stall. There was the cat, looking sore with pain. Charlotte raced to Pa, and he was there, since it was his day off.

“Oh, Pa, there’s this cat and she is preg-

nant. She needs help giving birth! Please come!”

Once they had both seen her, Charlotte’s Pa allowed her to miss school. They called a nearby vet, telling of their arrival. They soon came, and the vet had a doctor ready—so they set off.


He asked some questions, and when they reached the stall, he asked them to wait. He went in alone. When the doctor came back, he told them to come in with him. She had kittens!

It turned out that she was a runaway from the vet’s animal shelter. And with Charlotte’s pleading, they kept the mother cat, who was very friendly. When the kittens were older, they would give them back to the vet.

After this was settled, Charlotte’s mother asked, “She is yours now. What will you name her?”

Having waited for this moment, Charlotte confidently answered, “Moonbeam. Also, it describes her color perfectly.”

ONE DAY, Charlotte ran home from school. As usual, halfway there, Sunbeam waited for her. But beside her, a silver-colored cat was sitting, watching for her patiently. Sunbeam ran up to Charlotte and happily licked her face. The silver cat came over and began making figure eights around her legs, purring.

“Hello, Sunbeam! You too, Moonbeam! Let’s go!” she cried. This time, all three traveled home together, never straying from the group. 

The Lotus

By Lily Hoelscher

Illustrated by Vaeya Nichols

THE BELL RANG, and a flood of students poured out of Madison Middle School. Kids laughed and chattered excitedly to each other, racing down the street toward their homes. Hannah Bauer was the only one not engaging in the mad rush for home. Instead, the thirteen-year-old walked slowly, the wind teasing her long, strawberry-blond hair.

It had been one of those days where nothing went right. She had arrived at school fifteen minutes late, forgotten her social studies homework, and somebody had stolen her sweatshirt. Rubbing her bare arms, she wondered if anything else could go wrong. Her answer came almost immediately, as a passing pickup slobbered her with mud from the gutter. Hannah slumped down on a nearby park bench in defeat and covered her face with her hands. She sat there for a long time, then opened her eyes and tried to brush the drying mud off her jeans and Paul Frank T-shirt. It didn't work.

"If I didn't know better, I'd guess the bench would collapse next," she muttered sourly. The painted wood gave an ominous creak, and Hannah bolted upward and sprinted away. She was brought to an abrupt halt when she collided with someone. They both fell to the ground.

Hannah scrambled to her feet with a flustered apology. "Oh golly, I'm so sorry!"

The other person stood up. It was a boy, probably a few years older than Hannah. He was really tall, with wild, curly brown hair and huge green eyes. "It's all right. I wasn't watching where



Lily Hoelscher, 13
Baker City, Oregon



Vaeya Nichols, 12
Ozark, Missouri

I was going anyway.” He brushed off his black T-shirt. Then, looking at her closely, he said, “I’m Tony Moore. Who are you?”

She blushed. “I’m Hannah Bauer.”

“Tough day, huh?” asked Tony, matter-of-factly.

Wordlessly, Hannah nodded, wondering how he knew.

“You’ve just got that look on your face. I’ve seen enough people, so I can tell what you’re feeling. Come,” he added. “I want to show you something. Might cheer you up.”

He started walking, and Hannah followed. She inexplicably trusted Tony, with his straightforward manner and sincere eyes. The boy led her through the park and into the woods on the other side. He went unwaveringly, along a tiny footpath Hannah wouldn’t even have noticed, and she wondered how many times he had come through this forest.

As if sensing her thoughts, Tony said over his shoulder, “I love these woods. If I could, I’d build myself a treehouse like *Swiss Family Robinson* and live here. I know practically every inch of this place.” He led her a little farther and jumped over a crumbling stone wall. Hannah followed, though she climbed over it. Tony’s legs were much longer than hers.

Tony was waiting for her. “This,” he said emphatically, green eyes shining, “is one of my favorite places.”

Hannah looked around. This was different from the rest of the woods she had seen. Cracked flagstones peeked between the moss, hinting that perhaps this had once been a courtyard. The stone wall

ran all the way around the clearing, and in the center was a small pond with a moss-covered fountain in it.

“What is this place?” asked Hannah, gasping in awe.

Tony shrugged his broad shoulders. “Dunno. Maybe a garden, or a temple, or something like that.” He took her by the hand and led her towards the pool. “This is what I wanted to show you,” he explained, motioning for her to step closer.

Hannah peered into the murky water, wondering if he would give her some nutty metaphor about looking closer at her reflection, or if he was going to push her in. He did neither.

“No, over there,” he said, pointing.

Hannah looked in the direction his finger was pointing and saw several pinkish-white flowers floating on the pool’s surface, nestled among broad, flat leaves. “What *are* they?” she questioned.

“Water lilies. Lotus. They’re really very lovely,” replied Tony, stroking the pearly petals. “But you wanna hear a secret about them?” His huge emerald eyes sparkled.

Hannah sat on the edge of the low wooden rail that encircled the pond. “Yeah. What is it?”

Tony leaned closer. “These flowers grow from the junkiest mud at the bottom of the pond,” he said softly. “Isn’t that amazing? A gorgeous flower, and it started out in the mud.”

“How?” asked Hannah, intrigued.

“Well, all of that muck is actually full of the stuff that a flower needs to grow. So the mud gives the lotus what it needs,



With that, he plucked one of the blossoms from the water and handed it to me

and the flower, searching for the sun, rises above it to the surface.”

Hannah blinked. Tony smiled and continued.

“I think people are like that. The world gives us what we need to rise above our troubles and be as beautiful as these flowers.” He gently touched one of the blossoms, then fixed her with his compelling gaze. “You can be like that, Hannah. Days like this, when the whole world seems against you, just remember that someday you’ll grow above all this muck, searching for the sun.”

Hannah stared at him. She wouldn’t have pegged him for the type to have this

kind of insight. “Th-thank you, Tony,” she stammered, finally finding her voice.

Tony smiled. “No prob, Hannah. Glad I could help. I’ll see you around.” With that, he plucked one of the blossoms from the water and handed it to her. He looked into her eyes. “Don’t forget it,” he said with another smile, and slipped away into the woods. Hannah just barely caught a flash of his catlike eyes, and then he was gone.

“Be seeing you around, Tony,” she whispered. She stroked the silky petals of the lotus, and then, tucking the bloom behind her ear, walked away, ready to face the day with renewed strength. ❀

Iron Chef

By **Ethan Archibald**

Illustrated with family photos



Ethan Archibald, 13
Alameda, California

YUM. THE SWEET smoky aroma of barbecued ribs fills the backyard and slowly drifts into the house. The backyard has uneven, rough stone tiles and a Big Green Egg Kamado (Japanese barbecue smoker) under the potato tree. Grass and roses are growing to the side.

The chef learned how to cook so well from her mother. The chef expresses herself through cooking. She says, “Cooking is my way of art and creativity.” The chef is CC Zhang, my mom. CC Zhang has black hair, dark eyes, a high bridged nose, is slender, and is tall. Mom looks like a typical Northern Chinese woman. Mom has a confident gait and is not afraid to say no. She wears a smile but has little patience for nonsense. Mom is extremely disciplined and mentally strong. Before she came to America, my grandpa told her, “Work hard, and be the best.” When she came to America, she didn’t have money, didn’t speak a word of English, but remembered her parents’ words. She was an honor student at her college and for years was titled, “The Most Productive Employee of the Year.”

Mom was born in Beijing, China. She has three older sisters and two older brothers. They have a close relationship. I asked, “Do you have a favorite memory with them?”

Mom replied, “Oh, every day.” Mom has never gotten into an argument with her older siblings. My grandma and grandpa used to tell them to be nice to each other. They used to live near Tiananmen Square. On the weekends, they would play together in the park and fly kites from time to time. They would also



Ethan's mom as a girl in China (left) and today

go to the movies. After that, they would go to a fancy restaurant. There were only a few fancy restaurants in Beijing back then. Mom said, "From then on, I was fascinated by food." Her cooking is the best. I have had it every day, and there was never a time where I went "blah."

My mom also was surrounded by cook-

ing when she was little. Grandma used to host parties often. First, Mom would watch. Later on, she started to help cook. Eventually, she cooked entire meals under Grandma's watch. Mom is extremely focused when she cooks. She is very aware of what is happening in the kitchen and organized. Once, I told her, "You look

very intense when you cook!”

My mom answered, “It looks intense, but cooking is very therapeutic for me.”

I continued to question her, “Why did you come to the United States?”

She answered with a smile, “To go to a university.”

A couple times a week, after Mom drops me off at school, she goes grocery shopping. She is picky about the quality of the produce: fresh and tasty. Mom often shops at a locally popular store. Her creativity is reflected when she is cooking. She almost never uses a cookbook and all is from her

vast imagination. Once she said, “Real chefs create their own recipes, but a cook uses the recipes.”

Since kindergarten, we have had a house rule where there is no TV watching during the weekdays. However, on the weekends, when my mom gets a chance to watch TV, she only watches the cooking show. The cooking show gives her inspiration, but she does not copy the recipes.

She often tells me, “Presentation of the food is equally important to the taste because the presentation and color of the food give the person an appetite.”

Last Thanksgiving, we hosted a party. All the dishes were different colors. It was like looking at a rainbow. There was dark amber, orange, magenta, green, and white! One of the guests cried, “It is too pretty to eat!”

When I was a baby, my mom told me that I never had baby food from the grocery store. It was always homemade from scratch. The first time my mom bought baby food and tasted it, it was horrible. Since then, the family menu changed. Everything is made from scratch. This includes soup, meat, vegetables, and even marmalade. When I like a dish or dishes

from a restaurant, she says, “I’m going to try and make it at home.” She always does it perfectly.

Mom’s dishes always have a lavish look and are utopian delights! The presentation is exquisite and artistic. Dad said, “She

has a very good appetite.” One of my favorite dishes is barbecued ribs, and when mom made them, they were juicy on the inside and crunchy on the outside. The color shades ranged from dark brown to light brown. The meat came off the bone easily. The taste was out of this world.

Mom always cooks multiple dishes at once, a skill that I admire. I think it is very hard to do multiple tasks at once, but she seems to do it with ease when it comes to cooking. Mom uses a variety of different ingredients, sometimes making variations of previous dishes.

When I look at her, I see the culture of China. Food is the center of life. In China, instead of asking, “How are you doing?” people on the street ask, “Have you eaten yet?” The funny thing is, when I am eating breakfast with my grandma, she

**When I look at her,
I see the culture
of China. Food is
the center of life.**

asks me what I want for lunch and dinner.

Mom knows every sound in the kitchen. If she hears bubbling and popping sounds, then she knows the water is boiling. If she hears a sizzling sound, she knows the pan is hot enough and it is time to put the food on the pan. When she smells the food, she knows the food is done. She knows this by heart, a skill accumulated through her years of cooking.

Now I have a great gourmet sense of food. I can thank my mom for that. Food is the culture, and the culture is the food. Dad says, "Mom's cooking has a unique combination of flavors, and I love it." He continues, "She has a different style of cooking that I like."

One dish reflects Dad's saying, "Mom's cooking has a unique combination of flavors and I love it." It has American and Asian ingredients that make a unique dish. For example, instead of making traditional coleslaw, she uses red cabbage, green onion, golden raisins, and cilantro. Her dressing is also exceptionally distin-

guished. Instead of using the traditional mayonnaise and vinegar, it includes salt, pepper, olive oil, and a touch of Asian ingredients: sweet chili sauce, rice vinegar, and sesame oil.

Mom is a swift and agile food cutter. Once, I was sitting at the counter doing my homework and I became fascinated by mom's cutting skills. She cuts food big and small, in one shape or another, so I asked her why.

She replied, "In the same dish, different ingredients need to be cut the same size, so it will look pretty and cook evenly. Julienne style cutting is thin slices and is good for stir-fried and salad. If you make a stew, you need to cut big chunks, or the food will melt in the pot."

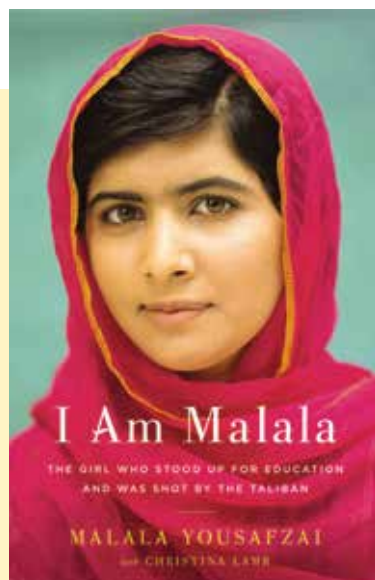
My mom has mastered the arts of cooking. Not only does she excel at inventing recipes, she recognizes every sound and ingredient, as well as how to cut food properly. Being a gourmand requires skill, passion, and knowledge for cooking. Mom truly is an Iron Chef! 🌀



Book Review

By Neha Gopal

I Am Malala, by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb; Little, Brown and Company: New York, 2013; \$26



Neha Gopal, 13
College Station, Texas

WOULD YOU STAND UP for what you believe in, even if it meant losing your life? With the rise of the Taliban, people of Afghanistan and Pakistan faced difficult times. Life was especially hard for girls. There were frequent whipping, beating, and verbal abuse. Women were locked up and beaten just for wearing nail polish. Non-covered ankles, bright clothes, high heels, white shoes, and even laughing loudly could lead to harsh punishment.

Furthermore, the Taliban banned girls from attending school and getting an education. Hundreds of schools for girls were destroyed by this Islamic fundamentalist organization. School is meant for learning, but in that region of the world, it was a place of fear and violence.

However, one girl spoke out and fought for the right to an education. On October 9, 2012, when she was fifteen years old, a gunman abruptly stopped her school bus and fired three shots at her. The shots were heard around the world, sparking national and international support for her. Her name is Malala.


Malala Yousafzai was born on July 12, 1997, in Swat Valley, Pakistan. Nobody congratulated her parents. Girls were thought to be capable of only household chores and raising chil-

dren. “I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain,” said Malala. Nonetheless, her father saw something special in her and named her after Malalai, a war heroine in Afghanistan.

Her father being a school owner and a teacher, Malala developed a deep passion for learning at an early age. She was one of the few brave people to speak out against the injustice girls faced in her community. Like her father, she spoke out and was heard on radio and appeared on TV. She also wrote a blog detailing her life under the Taliban rule. Her remarkable story became a *New York Times* documentary and caught the eyes of millions.

Unfortunately, her strong words angered the Taliban, who decided to kill her, despite her age. A week after being shot, Malala woke up thousands of miles away from her home with a tube in her neck to help her breathe. She had survived. And she became even more determined. Her story was heard around the world and she soon became a spokesperson for education worldwide.

At such a young age, she made people around the world stand together for a universal cause, demanding that all children go to school. More than three million people signed the Malala Petition. Her fearless nature is inspiring beyond measure and she has fought for the cause of millions of children who live in poverty, endure terrorism, and do not have the chance to go to school. In 2014, Malala won the Nobel Peace Prize for her incredible struggle, making her the youngest winner of this prestigious award.

I am Malala is a breathtaking story of how one girl’s courage and words touched millions of people: Too many children take the privilege of going to school for granted. This book reminds all of us to value our rights and freedom. It takes us through Malala’s audacious journey of confronting terrorism, violence, and fear. You’ll be glad that you traveled with her. 



"I want you to write a story about him so that he will live forever"

Too Young

By **Ellanora Lerner**

Illustrated by **Risa Cohen**

THE SUN RISES over Chicago every morning. Hordes of commuters head to work on the “L” and just as many cars jam pack the city streets. The city comes alive every morning as people head to work and again in the afternoon as the nine-to-fivers head back to Chicago’s numerous high-rises. The sun goes down. Sleep is had, it all begins again. Thousands of people are thrown into this cycle every day. Thousands of people repeat this same day over and over again until retirement pulls them out. Of course, sometimes someone’s cycle ends abruptly. The engineers of their fate decide one day that the cycle has gone on long enough. Sometimes there is a warning. For Roy there was not. Let me tell you what I know about Roy. He was a stereotypical Chicago man, born and bred in the Philadelphia suburbs, who had moved to Chicago just for a city to move to and a ten-year plan. He was in his mid to late forties, close to retirement but not quite there yet. He went to an average college and made an average income at a run-of-the-mill banking company in Chicago. He was a perfectly nice guy and a perfect example of the average Chicagoan adult. But he wasn’t a celebrity so there were no masses that cried his name and mourned him. And he wasn’t killed in a case of racial injustice and he didn’t get slain in a horrifying mass murder or mysterious plane crash. Because if that happened he would have been written about in papers and tabloids and, even if he was eventually forgotten, he would still get recognition. But none of that happened for him. He was just an average man with some



Ellanora Lerner, 12
New London, Connecticut



Risa Cohen, 12
Chicago, Illinois

not particularly close friends, a dad, a few cousins he hadn't spoken to in a while. There were plenty of people who liked him but not many who loved him. Sure, he had a nice funeral, there was a line of black-clad teary-eyed family members at the front of the room, most of whose biggest regret was "not getting to know Roy better." The attendees at the service were mainly people Roy had grown up with who hadn't seen him in years. They sat quietly and forlornly and told stories from when he was a toddler. And then the funeral was over and everyone went back to their former lives. After a few weeks Roy was, not forgotten, but also not actively remembered. Sure, every once in a while someone would think about him and sigh and say, "He went before his time," but then the photo albums would go back on the shelf and life would go on.

The only exception to this rule was Roy's father. Not only was Roy his son but he was also the last living person he was close to. Roy's father, who we will call Jim, was getting quite old and all his closest friends, as well as his wife, had passed away. After Roy died he began to muse on this. He realized that, well, he had no one close to him because they had all passed away. Roy really hadn't had anyone except Jim close to him since he was in high school.

A few years passed and Jim became more introverted. He was ninety-three when I first met him. I was volunteering for a local meal center that brought food to people who couldn't, or didn't, leave

their houses. Most of the people I delivered to would exclaim and cry and act sincerely happy when I brought the food, but Jim always looked concerned. Then one day a story I wrote got published in a magazine and somehow almost all of the people on my route heard about it. They all cooed and congratulated me when they saw me and even Jim looked happy. However, he didn't compliment me or discuss the story or anything. He simply invited me inside, sat me down at a table, and placed the magazine in front of him. I looked at him, confused, and placed his meal on the table.

"My son died five years ago," he said, and I bit my lip. Why was he telling me this? "He was fifty-two." I opened my mouth, but he shook his head and went on. "He was raised here, in this very house, he went to Lincoln College, and then he moved to Chicago. He worked at PNA Bank and he died in a car crash. There's no one alive that he was close to when he died except me. He has to get remembered." I looked him in the eye then and saw that his eyes were shining with tears. "I want you to write a story about him so that he will live forever."

I gasped. "I'm honored, but I don't know him, you should write a story," I protested.

"Oh, no," he shook his head. "Trust me, it would be awful." I began to protest again but he hung his head. I started to apologize but he shook his head. "It's probably time you keep moving, there's others waiting for you." He picked up

his meal and left the room. I froze as I watched him leave but as soon as he was gone I quickly stood and took a step towards the door he had disappeared through. I opened my mouth, closed it again, turned, and left.

When I got home I sat in front of my computer, about to start my next story. I could try to write about Jim's son but what I said was true, I didn't know him. Anything I tried to write would just be fiction, not his story. I shook my head and placed my hands on the keyboard but I couldn't seem to think of anything else so I closed down my laptop and went off to brush my teeth.

The next week when I went to the meal center to collect my food to bring around they told me that I shouldn't go to Jim's house anymore.

"Why?" I asked.


The woman working there bit her lip. "He passed away," she said quietly.

I looked down. "Oh," I said, and walked away.

The people on my route must have some magic way of learning information because they were all quiet and sad when I delivered the food. A few of them said something about Jim but mostly they just took their food quietly. When I drove past Jim's house, his old house, I felt a hole in my stomach and had to bite my lip to keep from crying. When I got home there was a package waiting for me. I picked it up and brought it inside and that was when I realized it was from

Jim. I opened it, half excitedly and half nervously. Inside there was a VCR tape. I was paralyzed for a second. Why did you have to get rid of your VCR player, Renee! Suddenly I realize, I haven't gotten rid of it. I jump up and rush to the hallway closet. After I lug out the huge player and connect it to my TV, which I am also about to get rid of, I begin to play the tape.

It is Roy's funeral. As I watch all the speakers I begin to realize that Jim was right. No one else really remembered or knew him, all of him. Then Jim begins to speak and I have to choke back tears. Once I can listen again it is clear that Jim's voice is close to breaking. He was not only Roy's father but his closest friend, and now there was no one to really remember either of them. When the tape finishes I take it out and stare at it through clouded vision. I'm not really looking at it, but I do see a small piece of white on the black. I blink rapidly and look closer. Tucked inside the plastic label cover there is a small folded-up note. I take it out and read the last thing I will probably ever hear from Jim. "He was too young to die. He deserves to live forever. Please try."

I stand up and go to my laptop. I open up a new document and look up at the sky. I don't know if he can hear me, but I need to say my last words to him. I'm not going to write the story of a son who died too young. I'm going to write the story of a father and a son. 

Life

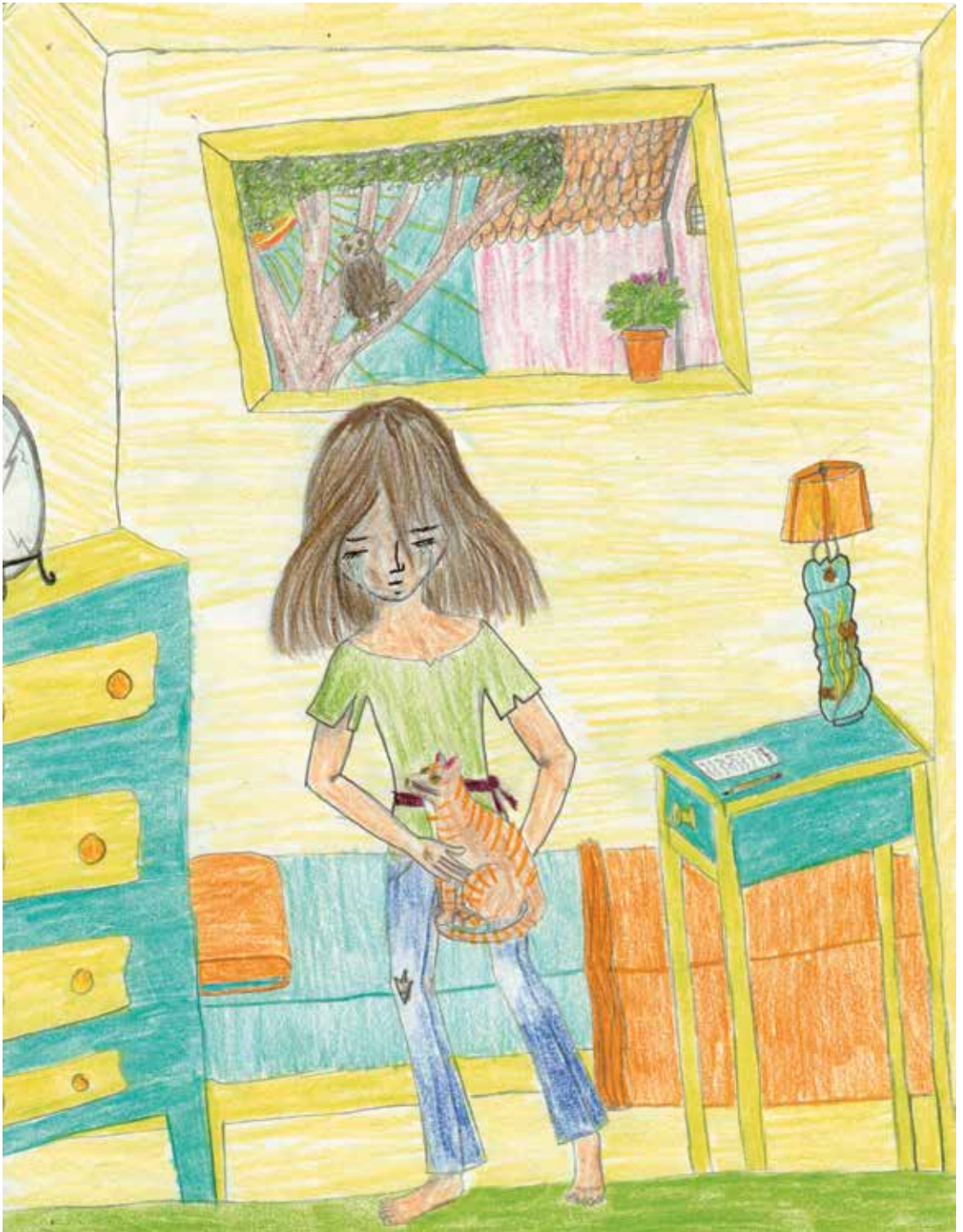
By **Daniel Fawcett**



Daniel Fawcett, 12
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

First breath
Cold air, gleaming lights
I do not understand this world
I do not know sometimes it is cold
Sometimes I must fight alone
Parents and family protect me
I am different but cannot understand why
Things happen bad and good
A brother comes
I want to protect him with all my strength
Care for him with all my love
We bicker and fight
But still I protect him
I cannot understand people, emotions, friends
All lost inside my mind
Alone

Around people but always alone
Without a friend
Family do not know what it is like
To be alone
I understand I am different
Blessing or curse
I do not know
But I fight for it to be a blessing
I write
Words flow
I get lost among stories, tales, and books
I do not know what lies ahead
But I charge through life



"Mrowww?" asked Ginger curiously, seeing his owner was upset

Owl Song

By Eleanor M. Polak

Illustrated by Iris Vandevorst

A GIRL SAT ON HER BED, staring up at the ceiling. “It’s not fair!” she yelled to the room. “I didn’t ask for them to *die*!” The girl’s eyes filled with tears as she punished herself inside for saying that word.

Aunt Emilia had always been so strict about saying *die* in her house. She had scolded her, Sarah, for a little slip, saying severely, “The Lord did not wish us to scorn those passed away with that dreadful word.”

But they *are* dead, Sarah thought, and no amount of pretense would change that.

The girl surveyed her bare little room. A wooden bed, desk, and dresser, with only a single small window and threadbare carpet, these had always been the furniture in her homely room. Sarah stood and went to the dresser, gazing into the old cracked mirror atop it. She desperately hoped to see something different this time, but no. She had the same straggly shoulder-length brown hair, pale almond-shaped face, and dark brown eyes, large in her thin little face.

Sarah turned, furious with herself, her reflection, and her life. Out the window she glanced, wanting desperately to see someone kind and comforting, but what she saw made her draw back in fear. Penelope and Sasha, the chief bullies in school, were walking along the street. They were popular, pretty, and everything she wasn’t. Sarah had lately become their favorite target. She stepped away at once, but not before Sasha had seen her. She whispered something to Penelope, who smirked, and to-



Eleanor M. Polak, 11
New Haven, Connecticut



Iris Vandevorst, 10
Nevada City, California

gether they mock-waved at Sarah.

She turned away from the window in a rush, needing something on which to take out her anger and frustration. She wanted to smash that mirror and scatter its fragments to the world, on top of those girls down there, to show them what it felt like to be her for just one minute. Sarah made a movement to grab hold of it, but her cat, Ginger, stopped her with a leap across the room.

"Oh, Ginger," Sarah sighed, "you always know what's best." For the girl and her cat both knew what would happen if she had hurled the mirror away, and it would not be good. Lonely young Sarah sometimes pretended that Ginger could understand her, and she told him all her worries.

"Mrowww?" asked Ginger curiously, seeing his owner was upset.

"The most awful thing's happened, dear," replied his mistress, for she felt she *must* get the story out somehow. "Aunt Emilia has decided to send us off to live with two old people in the country! Oh, apparently the Martans are 'kind and hardworking folks, Sarah dear,' but I don't want to go live like a slave of some old grandparents! But has Aunt Emilia ever cared what I want? No, it's always 'Sarah do this' and 'Sarah do that,' without the slightest thought of what *I* want to do. She's been waiting for years to get rid of me, and now she has!"

The poor girl sank onto her bed, in

a flood of tears. She knew it wasn't fair to speak of her aunt like this, but at the moment she was feeling too pitiful and misused to care. Maybe I could run away, Sarah thought desperately. I could go and live in the woods like children in story-books. Or I could simply refuse to go. Aunt couldn't force me to. Her heart sank. She knew these ideas would never work. So Sarah just lay down and cried her heart out.

When at last she tired of tears, she lay still, exhausted from crying. The sun was bidding farewell to the world, spreading

the sky with clouds as pale and soft as silk. Like a glorious fiery king, drawing his cloak around him, thought the girl, feeling as though an old friend had come to comfort her.

Perhaps things wouldn't be so bad after all. It wasn't as though she had loved the old house, for in truth it had always seemed like a prison. The mocking portraits of wealthy relatives long dead; the carpets and furniture stiff and without a speck of dust; the plastic imitation flowers, seeming to say vainly, "*We* are better than the live ones, for *we* will never wilt or die. Come, admire and pay your respects," all seemed to be setting an example which she *must* follow, though she was not sure she wanted to. And as for Aunt Emilia, no love had been lost between the two. The woman had considered Sarah as a duty and a nuisance, and was constantly re-

Perhaps if she went
away she would be
like this owl, alone, but
happy with her life.

minding the girl how much she owed her, Aunt Emilia, for all that had been done for her over the years.

Sarah got up and went to the window. A beautiful, tawny owl was sitting on a branch. There were no other birds. Sarah wondered if the owl was lonely. But no, she thought, its song is not one of sadness. It was a song of home, a new life, and finding yourself for who you truly are. Sarah felt and saw this vaguely, though she was too young to really understand it. Perhaps if she went away she would be like this owl, alone, but happy with her life, making herself a new path. Silly, Sarah chided sarcastically, like I have friends.

The tears welled up again, but back on her bed things seemed better. Maybe, Sarah thought, it would all turn out OK. The last thing she heard before drifting into sleep was the owl hooting in the distance. The sound gave her courage; she had always loved owls. Briefly, Sarah wondered if an owl would sing to her at her new home. But before she could think any more, she had fallen into a deep, dreamless sleep.

RAIN POUNDED against the roof of the car. Sarah watched the drops race down her window, slowly, then fast, then slow once more. The sky outside was dreary and gray as the concrete road itself, wet, dull, and reeking of misery. Any hopeful thoughts she had the night before had vanished, along with the only home Sarah had ever known. She looked down at the cage holding Ginger at her feet. "At

least you're here too," she whispered to the disgruntled auburn cat.

He frowned back, as though to say, *I don't appreciate this any more than you do, especially getting my fur wet. Cats have feelings, you know, and needs, too.*

Sarah glared at the back of the woman in front of her. An elderly lady, Aunt Emilia had a tall, sturdy body, a sharp nose and chin, and a gray bun with never a hair out of place. Her shaggy great eyebrows and stern gray eyes stared sternly at the road, daring the rain to come down harder.

"We are nearly there, Sarah," Aunt Emilia declared in her clipped, Scottish accent. "Now, child, *do* try to make a good impression on the Martans. You don't want to get thrown out on your *very* first day." She laughed mirthlessly, then her eyes hardened as she glanced over her shoulder at Sarah. "Not that that ever would happen, *would it?*"

"No," muttered her niece sullenly, glaring at the floor.

"What?"

"No, ma'am, it won't happen."

"I should hope not," replied Aunt Emilia. "Now, for goodness' sake, smooth down your skirt, child, and wipe that expression off your face; we're here!"

Sarah looked out the window as they turned down a narrow lane lined with hedges. A rusty old white mailbox read "The Martans" in large red letters. As they rounded a bend in the drive, the girl craned her neck to get a view of her new home.

What she saw surprised her. A small,



She laughed a tingly little laugh, which made Sarah feel at home at once

white house in need of paint and trimmed with gray to match the shingles on the roof. An old swinging chair was on the porch, and a weeping willow tree shed its tears onto the railing. Aunt Emilia gave a small sniff of disapproval, surveying the scraped old white paint, but to Sarah it seemed rather cozy, like Dusty, the old white-and-gray cat she had once owned before Ginger.

As they drew up by the house, a woman so old and wrinkled that she looked somewhat like a dried-up raisin, came out of the house and stood on the porch, wav-

ing enthusiastically to the couple in the car. Her wispy gray hair was pulled up in a bun, like Aunt Emilia's, but she was very short, hardly taller than Sarah, and she had amazingly bright blue eyes, which sparkled as she looked at the girl.

The grown-ups said a quick "Good day," and then Aunt Emilia drove off, leaving Sarah alone with the woman.

"Now, Sarah," the lady smiled, "what a nice-looking girl you are. I was a girl like you in my youth, but a very naughty and cheeky girl was I." She laughed a tingly little laugh, which made Sarah feel at home

at once. "And this is your cat? Ginger, you say his name is? What a handsome tom." She scratched Ginger around the ears as he purred contentedly. "Now," turning to a silent old man who had just came out, "I am Aunt Emma, and this is Uncle Sam. He's been around since the day America was founded, though it isn't him they speak of! Why, mercy me, what am I thinking of? You must be hungry, child; come inside and have something to eat. Then we can show you your new room. It is rather small, but I think you'll find it cozy." And, feeling more comfortable than she ever had before, Sarah stepped over the threshold of her new home.

THE SUN was setting once more, in the bright glow of colors needed to say farewell to the day. But Sarah was not yet sleepy, for it was summer and light remained a long time. Before I go to bed, she thought, I will take just one more look around my new room. It was small, as Aunt Emma had warned her, but beautiful and bright, with colorful rugs and covers, big windows, pretty pictures on the wall, and decorative lamps. Sarah could still not believe it was hers.

Still not feeling sleepy, she went up to an old mirror on the wall. Who am I? Sarah thought, staring at her reflection. It looked so different, yet the same, from the one she had seen at her old home. Then a spark of inspiration came to her.

**Whatever awaited
her, at least now
she had a home.**

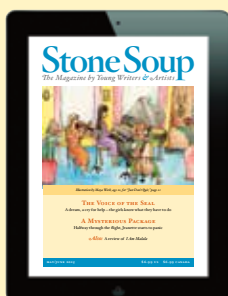
Out loud, she answered, "I am Sarah. I am the mother, protector, and mistress of Ginger. I am a friend to the owl outside my old window. I am adopted niece to Emma and Sam Martan. This is my home." *Home*. It was a word that had always seemed false and broken on Sarah's lips. But now, it came to her easily, like water passing through a bridge. She was *home*.

Sarah suddenly felt tired, as though the weight of the world was on her shoulders. She crept back to bed and snuggled happily into the covers. Tomorrow she

would play in the garden and help Uncle Sam with his work. Then she would go to school and meet new people, make friends and possibly enemies. But Sarah was not anxious or afraid. Whatever awaited her, at least now she had a home, and a family to share things with. An owl hooted nearby. Sarah wondered if it was her owl, who had flown all this way to sing to her. A line of poetry drifted, unbidden, into her head.

As the owl finds the golden coin,
Amid the pale silks of dawn,
Then all of you homeless, children wild;
Be home, before all light is gone.

Sarah was happy, as she fell into a deep sleep. She had made herself a new home, a new life. Whatever happened, Sarah would go right on living, right on singing her song. Just like the owl in the tree. 🌿



Bonus Materials

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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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