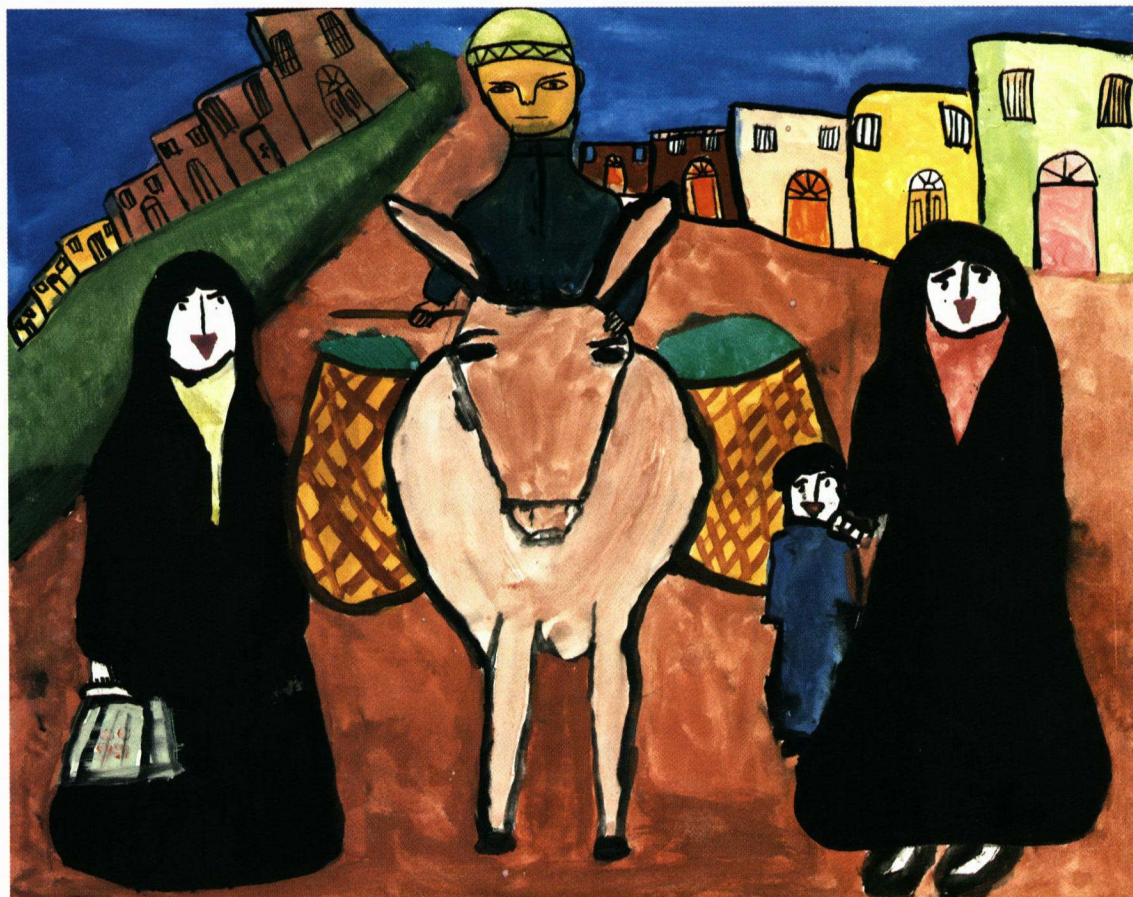


# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*"The Green Grocer," by Ghada Saleh Omar, age 10, Bahrain*

## KANEI'S TREASURE

Kanei is faced with prejudice when she starts school in Japan

## THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

If only we could stop time at the moment when we are happiest

*Also:* Illustrations by Laura Gould and Mona Cao

JULY/AUGUST 2006

\$5.75 US \$6.75 CANADA





# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 34, NUMBER 6

JULY / AUGUST 2006

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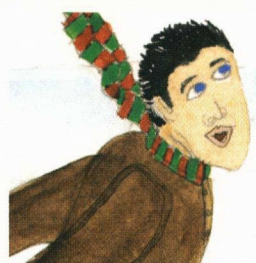
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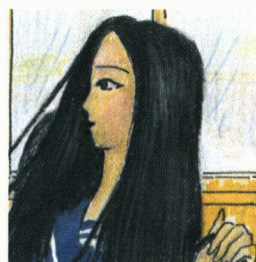
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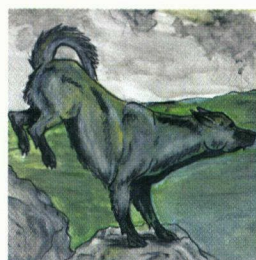
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# Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

**W**ELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

## Contributors' Guidelines

*Stone Soup* welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site at [www.stonesoup.com](http://www.stonesoup.com).

**Story and poem authors:** Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope with

your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us in four to six weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

**Book reviewers:** If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write editor Gerry Mandel. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. Enclose an SASE for her reply.

**Artists:** If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel three samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what you like to draw most. Enclose an SASE for her reply. We need artists who can draw or paint complete scenes in color. Please send color copies of your work, not originals.

**All contributors:** Send us writing and art about the things you feel most strongly about! Whether your work is about imaginary situations or real ones, use your own experiences and observations to give your work depth and a sense of reality. Send your work to *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address and phone number.

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



# The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I was just writing to let Shannon Keating know how much I *loved* her story, "Starfish," in the March/April 2006 issue. It was well written and very touching. I really loved how she described the innocence and simple mind of a two-year-old. The relationship between Shannon and Michael was the perfect picture of how a sister and brother should love each other. I really could relate to the way Shannon felt when she saved the starfish, because sometimes I have been in that situation: I find a small creature such as a worm or butterfly that needs help, and it is my decision whether to pick it up and save it or just leave it there. "Starfish" was such a simple, yet beautiful, story. Shannon, keep writing. Your story was wonderful!

**RACHEL STANLEY, 14**  
Seal Beach, California

*Rachel wrote and illustrated "Diver," which appeared in our September/October 2005 issue. She also illustrated two other stories for Stone Soup.*

I just received your March/April 2006 issue of *Stone Soup*. I want to share some thoughts with your readers if I may. All you young children keep on writing. I enjoy most of the stories that I read and I'm learning to become a writer myself. I am a blind man who supports all children to read and write as much as you can! If you make up your mind, don't change it, try to keep your ideas as fresh as they come! I also want to thank Sariel Hana Friedman for her poem, "Ghost Park." Sariel and other writers are being very encouraging to me as a 29-year-old blind man. Thanks for the great writing to you all!

**GARY JOHN POSCH, JR.**  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

I am a huge fan of your magazine. As a lover of writing and literature, it was the perfect magazine for me and I have thoroughly enjoyed every piece of writing contributed. The pieces the kids put in are so great and thoughtful, and beautiful, I hope to someday contribute to this amazing magazine. I am especially impressed by author Megan M. Gannett, who has written many pieces, such as "The Kingdom of Stones" [March/April 2004]. All of her pieces of writing are beautiful and deep, and I hope to someday write that way. I want to compliment all writers, authors, and book reviewers for great work and the *Stone Soup* staff for producing such a great magazine!! I love *Stone Soup*!

**JULIA THOMAS, 11**  
Bainbridge Island, Washington

*You can read all five of Megan's published stories at [stonesoup.com](http://stonesoup.com). Click on Writing, then Hall of Fame.*

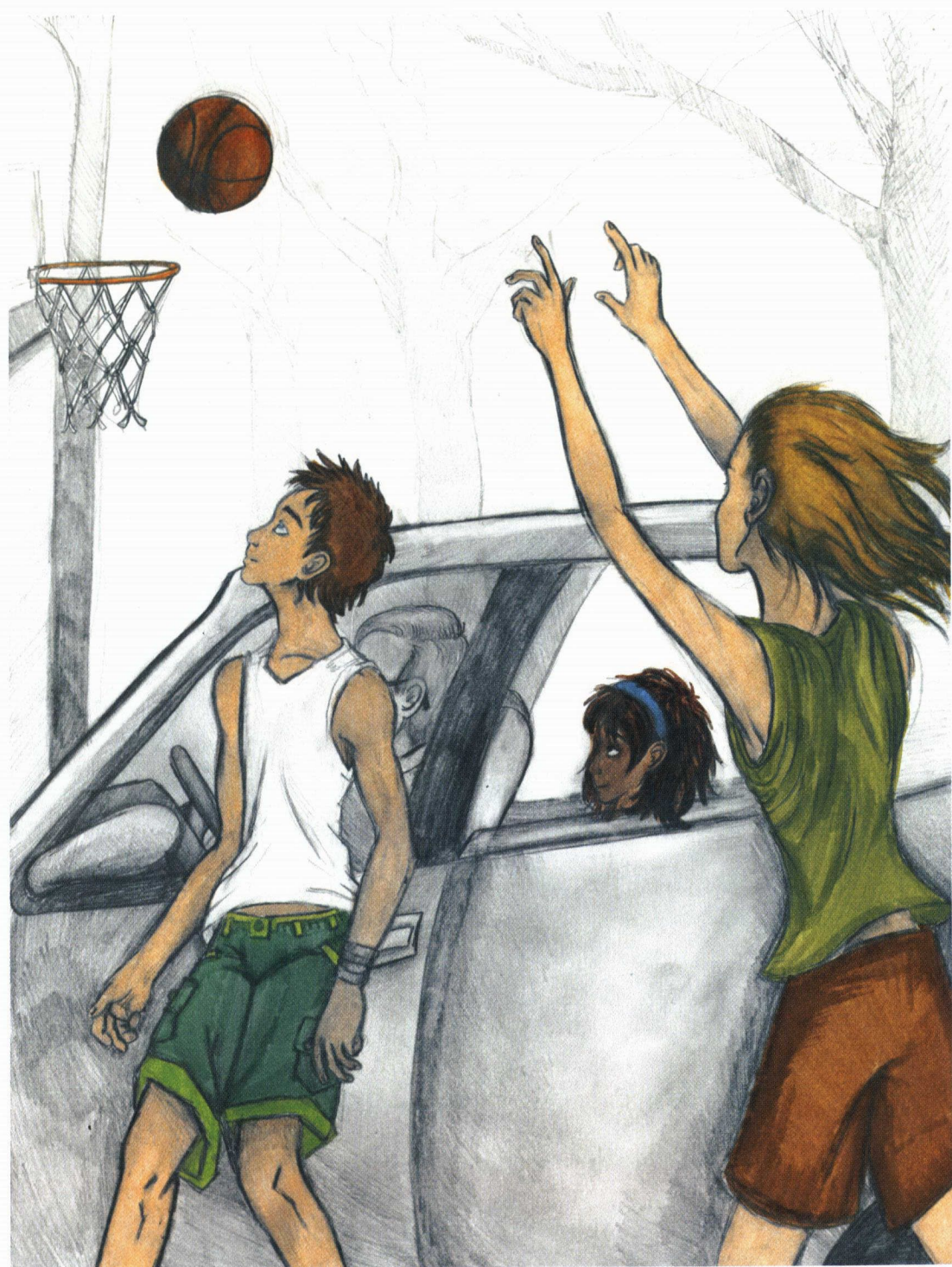
"To Be But a Child" [January/February 2006] absolutely engaged me in every possible way. Julia Soderholm's beautiful words flooded into a story that was so vivid, I could see everything that was happening. When Julia said Mae sipped her tea, I could feel a hot steamy liquid slip through my throat. The story just flowed together beautifully and I really felt like I was there. Annalise Nurme, your illustration really brought the story to life. Great job! It was hard for me to imagine that a thirteen-year-old girl and a twelve-year-old girl really made this story come true.

**TESS WEINER, 12**  
Wilmette, Illinois

*All the work mentioned in The Mailbox can be found on our Web site: [www.stonesoup.com](http://www.stonesoup.com).*

**Note to our readers:** Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We'd also like to receive anecdotes (150 words or less) about interesting experiences you'd like to share with our readers. Send letters to The Mailbox, Stone Soup, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, address, and phone number.





*I bent my knees and sent the ball arching beautifully towards the basket*



# Revenge Is Bittersweet

By Molly O'Neill

Illustrated by Laura Gould

IT WAS A PERFECT SHOT.

I was standing across the driveway from the basketball hoop—just beyond where the three-point line would have been—and Matt, who was rebounding, gave me a nice crisp bounce pass. I bent my knees and sent the ball arching beautifully towards the basket. Everything about the shot was perfect—the timing, the follow-through, and the soft *swish* of the ball falling through the net.

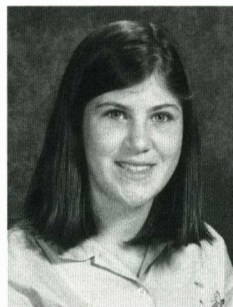
And for once even Matt didn't have any wisecracks to make. He just caught the ball and turned around to make a lay-up, which was about the highest compliment I could get from my older brother because I knew he would have tried the shot if he thought he had a chance at making it.

Just then Carla's dad pulled his silver Saab into the driveway. Matt tossed me the ball. "You'll do great," he said.

I hopped into the back seat of the car. Carla stopped listening to her MP3 player and said, "Nice shot."

"Thanks." I grinned. Carla knew how to give a compliment, how to make a casual remark into the most beautiful music. That was part of the reason I had talked her into trying out for basketball. She was my best friend, and I wanted her at the try-outs even if she didn't make the team.

Carla and I were different. I was good at basketball and lacrosse; she was better at field hockey and soccer. I was tall, she was short. My skin was light, hers was tan. My hair was straight, hers was curly.



Molly O'Neill, 13  
New Canaan, Connecticut



Laura Gould, 13  
Charleston, West Virginia

I was the quick one, specializing in steals and fast breaks. But Carla was the ideal team player in every sport. She had a natural instinct for passing and she made any group run smoothly.

Our main difference, though, was our personalities. I had friends but I wasn't very outgoing. Carla knew everything about everyone in our grade and she seemed to be friends with all of them. Except . . .

"Lindsay Oxman will be there," Carla said. "I hope we don't get put in her group."

"Yeah. And I hope we're in the same group."

Both of us were nervous—especially me, because I was really passionate about basketball. Carla enjoyed it, but it was just something to do for fun, not a big dream of hers. She didn't shoot baskets in the cold November rain even when the ball slipped into the mud. Sometimes I envied her easygoing nature, her ability to take things so lightly.

As it turned out, Lindsay was in our group. Lindsay had hated Carla since preschool. They had been in the same class every year since they were three, and by the time Carla and I met in the first year of middle school, she and Lindsay were well-established enemies.

Lindsay seemed to have everything her way. She was pretty, athletic, and popular. Logically, she should have been best friends with Carla, who also seemed to have everything her way. But while Carla was always herself, Lindsay got her

way by stepping over people, by lying, by pushing and shoving her way to the top of the social pyramid. She was the same way in basketball: a show-off and a ball hog.

First we warmed up with shooting. I enjoyed shooting—dribbling, turning, releasing, then darting to catch the ball as it fell through the net.

Next we did lay-ups. We were in two lines; one person made a lay-up and the other rebounded.

When Lindsay passed me the ball, it bounced off my foot. Maybe I was just nervous and distracted, or maybe she did it on purpose, but I could feel the heat rising to my cheeks as I chased after the ball. I couldn't even concentrate enough to make the lay-up.

After lay-ups, we did one-on-one. I was good at that—that was how I practiced in the driveway with Matt. Dribble to the right, crossover, dribble left-handed, protect the ball with your body, turn, switch hands, go in for a lay-up. On offense everything was simple. And then on defense, quick little steps, hands out, watching the stomach in case they try to fake with the head, forcing them to their weak side, waiting for them to hesitate, and then reaching out to steal the ball.

It was going fine until Lindsay was my defender. I was dribbling around her when she stuck out her foot and tripped me. My knee slammed into the floor and scraped across it. The ball bounced off the wall and rolled to a stop.

"Are you all right?" she asked sweetly,



reaching to help me up. We both knew that she was putting on an act for the coaches. "Loser," she mouthed at me. At least I think that's what she was trying to say. I was too busy glaring at her and trying to pretend that I was perfectly fine to pay attention to the shape her mouth was making.

I went to the back of the line. My knee was throbbing painfully. Carla caught my eye and shrugged.

We finished this part of the tryouts, and the coaches divided us into teams. Most of the tryouts would be small games, three-on-three, so they could see how we played.

Lindsay and I were on the same team. We were playing Carla's team first. Lindsay brought the ball up, but wouldn't pass to me even though I was open. She tried to make a three-point shot but it didn't even reach the basket. I jumped, caught the ball, and passed it to the third member of our team, who made a basket.

But Lindsay just wouldn't give me the ball. I spent the whole time running to shake off my defender, yelling that I was open, but not getting the ball. The few times I did get the ball I shot. I only missed once.

"What a jerk," Carla muttered during our water break. "She could at least *pretend* to be a team player."

I gulped down water and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. "I can't really do anything about it," I said.

"Yeah," admitted Carla, "but look

on the bright side. With her attitude, Lindsay'll never make it."

I nodded. That wasn't what I was concerned about. I was worried that *I'd* never make it.

Our next game went on pretty much the same way until the last minute of it. We were losing by two points (the coaches say the scores don't matter in tryouts, but I keep score in my head, and something in me wants to win).

I brought the ball up this time, and I dribbled right up the center, stopping right behind the three-point line. I bent my knees and sent the ball arching beautifully towards the basket.

I thought that Lindsay couldn't do anything to ruin this for me. I could tell as soon as the ball left my hands that it would be another perfect shot.

But Lindsay was a good rebounder. She could jump higher than anyone. She leapt up to catch the ball. She snatched my perfect shot from right in front of my nose. She dribbled into the basket and turned around for a reverse lay-up.

*Showoff*, I thought furiously.

"Nice pass," she remarked afterwards, as we were leaving. "A little high, though. I always prefer bounce passes myself."

I clenched my fist as she walked away. Carla didn't say anything. Someone else might have told me to ignore Lindsay, but Carla understood, and she was probably as angry as I was.

**T**HE TRYOUTS were on a Friday. The coaches would call you by the next

Monday if you were on the team.

Ten long days of waiting began.

I spent the waiting time shooting hoops, three-point shot over and over, endless lay-ups, just hoping that somehow practicing now would get me on the team. Carla didn't come over; she was busy. Matt didn't offer to practice with me. He had waited before, and he understood that waiting must be done alone.

Lindsay smiled smugly at me in the hallways. She thought she would make the team and I wouldn't. But as the week wore on, the smiles grew less frequent and less smug; she was waiting, too, and she hadn't received the phone call.

I waited. The call didn't come.

"It doesn't matter," Carla said. "You're still the best player in the school. It's not your fault that Lindsay's a jerk and coaches are blind."

On Thursday they called Carla. She biked over to my house right away. She had to tell me in person.

"That's great," I said when she told me. But I felt somehow cheated, betrayed, and my voice was hollow, my smile forced.

"It isn't fair," she said. "I only went because you wanted me to. I'll talk to the coaches about Lindsay. It'll be OK."

I doubted it, but I didn't say so.

The next day in school I arrived at first period and saw someone's notebook on a desk. I recognized it immediately; it was Lindsay's. "Where's Lindsay?" I asked when the teacher came in.

"She went to get a book from the library," he told me. "We have silent read-

ing today."

He left to stand in the hallway and yell at kids. I got out my book, but I kept looking at the notebook.

Suddenly I shut my book and reached for the notebook. Here was my chance to get even at last. My thoughts of revenge were vague, but this was a time for action and instinct, not for thought. I seized the notebook and flipped it open.

It was a spiral notebook, almost full by now, the pages filled up with orderly scribbles in blue ink, full of everything Lindsay had thought since September.

I could hear Lindsay talking to the teacher in the hallway. I scanned a page near the middle and tore it out. When Lindsay came in her notebook was sitting innocently on her desk, and I was reading almost as innocently at mine.

The folded paper sat like a lump of coal in my pocket all day. My conscience and curiosity nagged at me, causing me to be unusually quiet. Carla thought it was just because of the basketball team.

"Cheer up," she told me. "They could still call in the next three days."

I didn't answer. I didn't want her to know what I had done.

As soon as I got home I went to my room and shut the door. I tossed my backpack on the floor, sat down on my bed, and took the piece of paper out of my pocket.

It was crumpled up because I had jammed it into my pocket. I smoothed it out against my jeans, but for a moment I didn't look at it. Instead I stared at my





*I stared at the paper. What had I done?*



backpack on the floor, half thinking about how its bright blue stood out against my cream-colored rug, half thinking about the note.

I wasn't sure what exactly I expected to find. I had seen Lindsay writing in her notebook many times, but I didn't know what she wrote. I smoothed out the paper again and began to read:

Everyone else has a best friend—someone they talk to, someone they do everything with. Everyone has someone they can rely on, but I don't. I hate having so many friends, because I think they all secretly hate me.

Best friends tell you what people say about you, but I can only guess about the things people whisper behind my back.

Brianna's so lucky to have a best friend. I wish I had a best friend like she does. (Is it OK to be jealous of someone and terrified of them at the same time? It's all so easy for her. I try so hard to say hello to her, to smile at her in the halls, but she just hates me so much.)

The tryouts are coming up. Brianna has a best friend to come to the tryouts with her. A lot of my friends are going, but they've already sorted themselves into their own little pairs. They're not real friends. They sit with me at lunch and discuss fashion with me, but they don't really care about me. I don't think anyone does.

I really want to make the team. Basketball's the only constant in my life. I want to shoot hoops forever. Maybe if I make enough baskets it will all go away.

I STARED at the paper. What had I done? I felt sick with myself and with the world. There was an angry lump in my throat.

It was perfect material for ridicule and for blackmail. I had control over Lindsay now, and I could get even with her. Wasn't that what I had wanted? I wasn't sure anymore.

I wanted to show the paper to Carla and laugh at it. I wanted to not take it seriously, to make fun of it the way I made fun of the announcers' voices on cheesy TV commercials.

But I couldn't, because I knew this voice, and it was so similar to my own. I wanted to undo everything. If only there were some way to put the page back into the notebook, everything would be all right.

The phone rang, but I barely noticed it. All I heard was the crinkling of the paper as I crumpled it into a ball. I stared at it.

Maybe when Lindsay smiled at me she really wasn't mocking me. Maybe she was just smiling, like everyone does. And maybe I should smile back at her.

Matt came running up the stairs and burst into my room. "It's for you," he said, holding out the phone.

I didn't understand why he was grinning so broadly, but I swallowed painfully and muttered, "OK." I sent the crumpled paper arching beautifully towards the trash can.

It was a perfect shot.





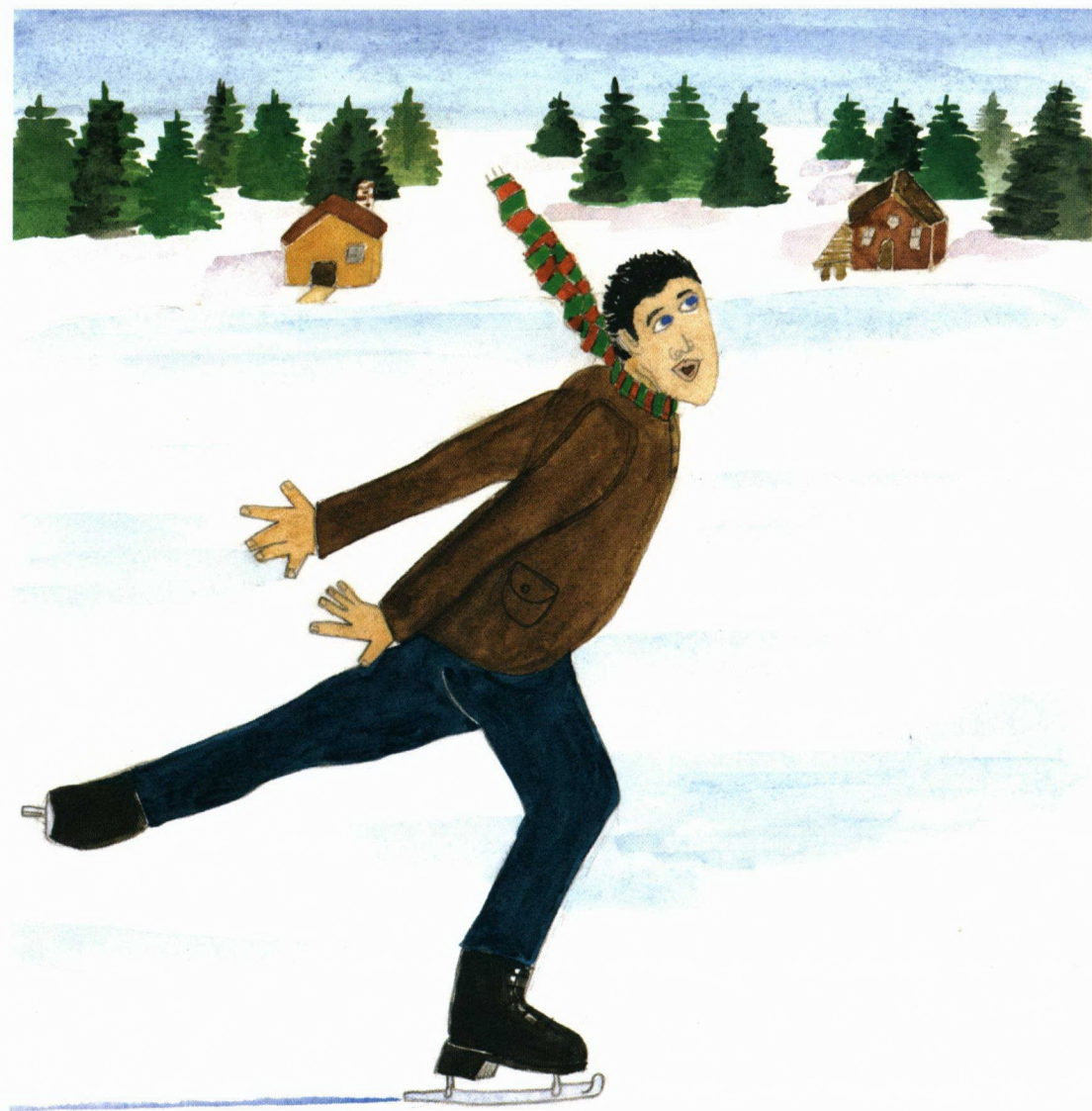
# Dawn

By Wujun Ke

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



Wujun Ke, 13  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina



*Zach loved skating. He felt as if he was gliding across the land, without a care in the world*



# On Thin Ice

By Sean Fay

Illustrated by William Gwaltney

IT STARTED OUT as a clear winter's day, cold enough for a jacket and a scarf but not bitter enough for several layers of clothing. As Zach Fields walked down to the edge of the lake, he could see his breath spiraling away from him into the air. It was a quiet and peaceful afternoon.

He was just going skating, as he had done ever since he could remember. He had not bothered telling his parents, for he would only be gone for a little while. With his skates strapped over his shoulder, he approached the lake.

The lake was very large, several families besides his lived in scattered places around the water's edge. Some used it for a year-round house, but his family just visited for the holidays. He liked it better here, for the forest was all around him and he could almost feel Mother Nature close by. He knew where all the animals lived, and even named a few of them. Of course, all the forest animals were fast asleep now. Even so, he was more at home here than anywhere else in the world.

Cautiously, he took his first gentle step onto the ice. Testing it, he slowly shifted all of his weight onto its slippery surface. It seemed strong enough, so he quickly tied on his skates and was off.

Zach loved skating. He felt as if he was gliding across the land, without a care in the world. The gentle wind, the ease of movement, he always has and always will love that feeling. Expertly, he did a few flips and turns, stretching his muscles until they felt ready to burst. He etched a few patterns into the ice and twirled



Photo: Annie Hibbee

Sean Fay, 11  
Camden, Maine



William Gwaltney, 10  
Englewood, Colorado

around, totally unaware that he was slowly moving away from his house. After a while, he glided to a stop. The wind had picked up, and it had started to snow. He decided to go back.

It was harder moving against the wind, so it was slow going. He had at least a mile to go until he reached his house, so he knew he had to keep going. His parents would get worried if he didn't come home soon. The sun was at its lowest point in the horizon, and the temperature had dropped. The air was sharp and brisk. Each breath sent a freezing dagger into his lungs, filling him with pain. The light snow had turned to a frenzy of sleet, pelting him in the face and making his skin raw and numb. An icy wind blew all around Zach, bringing the cold to the core of his body. He shivered. He wished he hadn't gone so far out. As he got colder, he slowed down. By about ten minutes he was barely moving. He crouched down, absorbing all of the body heat that he could.

Suddenly, he heard a creak behind him. A split second later, a groan, and then a crack appeared on the ice. It grew wider, and branched off into several smaller cracks. Then another crack appeared, and another. He sprang to his feet, and flew off. He could hear the groans of thin ice behind him, and sped up. The cracks raced behind Zach, growing and splitting and staying at his back all the while. The sleet and snow made seeing almost impossible, so he had no idea if he was even going in the right di-

rection. Then it happened.

The cracks finally caught up to him, and in a split second had surrounded him. He was frantic. He tried to move, but every time he did the ice creaked, and another crack formed. He was trapped. Even as he stood still, the cracks came closer and closer, and in a flash he was submerged in the water.

The freezing temperature hit him like a speeding freight train. The cold penetrated his flesh and went straight to the bone. The water sucked all the strength out of him and left him weak and even colder. As he bobbed back up to the surface, his head hit the ice. Using his remaining strength he pushed with all his might, but the ice wouldn't budge. His skates dragged him down, pulling him toward the murky depths of the lake. His eyelids were stiff and frozen, and no matter what he did they wouldn't open. He screamed in fright, but only bubbles escaped his mouth. Oxygen rapidly escaped his tired body, and his lungs pounded in his chest for air. He frantically searched for an opening in the ice with his hands, but found none. A wave of pain washed over him, and his lungs throbbed faster and faster and faster. Just as he started to sink into a void of darkness, his hands hit air, and he scrambled up onto the ice.

He feebly pushed himself onto the frozen water, and collapsed on its surface. He gasped and wheezed, filling his lungs with air. Coughing, water poured out of his mouth, collecting on the ice. Shaking



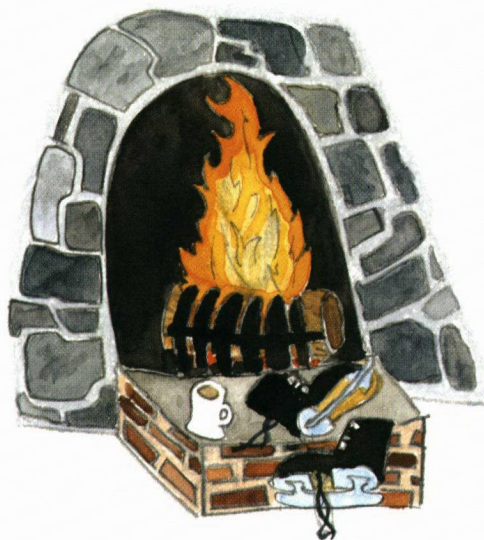
uncontrollably, Zach curled into a ball to find any heat possible, but found nothing. He shivered and blacked out.

When Zach woke up, he was still huddled on the ice. His clothes were sopping wet, and his ice skates were a wreck. He knew he had to move to stay alive. Hugging his dripping coat to his body, Zach made his way bit by bit back to his house. Extremely fatigued, he clomped up the steps to the back porch, and shakily removed his jacket, skates, shirt, and socks. His fingers were blue with cold, and numb. Fortunately, a fire was crackling and sizzling in the fireplace. Zach crouched and warmed himself by the fire. He made a cup of hot chocolate, and was walking back to the living room when he noticed a note on the kitchen counter. It read:

Zach, we're out looking for you. If you find this note, please get warm and call us. Your father has his cell phone with him. We are so worried about you! Love, Mom

Zach smiled as he reached for the phone. He slowly walked back to the couch and pulled a blanket over him. The hot chocolate was an immediate relief and filled Zach with a tingling sensation all over. As he punched in his dad's cell phone number he thought, Sometimes, you can only rely on yourself.

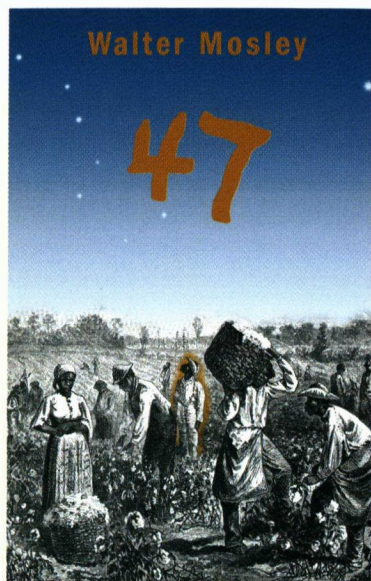
Outside, the ferocious thundering of sleet had turned into a soft, light snow, and the wind had ceased. As the sun went down, it shed its last rays on the ice. It shimmered and gleamed in the last fading rays of the day, and then darkness enveloped the land. Peace and quiet reigned once more. ❀



# Book Review

By Lara Gechijian

47, by Walter Mosley; Little, Brown and Company; New York, 2005; \$16.99



Lara Gechijian, 13  
Lincoln, Massachusetts

**W**ALTER MOSLEY PULLS you into the heart of slavery in 1832. He depicts the brutality of slavery and the true meaning of freedom, through the eyes of Forty-seven, an orphaned fourteen-year-old slave. As a child, Forty-seven was taken under the wing of Big Mama Flore, a house slave, who sheltered him from the realities of slavery. The day arrives when Forty-seven is old enough to work in the cotton fields. He now faces the painful realities of slavery. Tall John, a mysterious runaway slave, enters Forty-seven's life. He helps Forty-seven see beyond the fate of slavery and teaches him to believe in freedom.

I have never experienced the brutality of slavery, but as I was reading Mosley's descriptions, I could feel Forty-seven's pain; his burned shoulder from a branding iron, his infected hands from picking cotton, and his bleeding flesh from being bullwhipped. This book made me think of the grim stories that my grandparents passed on to me regarding the Armenian Genocide. Although there are obvious differences between slavery and genocide, there are some similarities—both groups of people suffered at the hands of others, and both lost freedom. Throughout this book, I could not stop thinking about freedom. Freedom, to me, is having independence and having the right to make decisions



and choices. I find it incomprehensible that freedom was taken from some individuals and some still do not have it today.

Forty-seven craves freedom once Tall John introduces him to it. He experiences freedom in two ways. First, Tall John informs Forty-seven that by considering yourself a slave, you are. If you say that you have a master, then you do. Forty-seven finally learns that he "ain't got no mastuh 'cause (he) ain't no slave." A second way that Tall John introduces freedom to Forty-seven is by taking him to "paradise." In paradise, Forty-seven is elated and shocked that such beauty and tranquility exists. This is where he tastes freedom for the first time. Now that he learned the meaning and the taste of freedom, Forty-seven is willing to risk everything to acquire freedom for himself, and for the ones he loves.

Walter Mosley's writing style captivates me. He takes one character, such as Tall John, and changes his personality. When Forty-seven and Tall John first meet, Forty-seven is overwhelmed with his language skills and forwardness. When white men confront Tall John, he is reserved. His personality changes again when Tall John talks to the men in the slave quarters, this time in a humorous way. Mosley gives Tall John a sense of humor to lighten up the cruelty of slavery. Tall John's changing character is a creative feature of Mosley's writing style which is very well portrayed in the novel.

As much as this book absorbed me, I did not like how Mosley combined two genres—historical fiction and science fiction. The science fiction portions of the book caught me off guard and took away from the shocking historical truth about slavery. With all of these painfully unsympathetic scenes in the book, the supernatural scenes do not fit.

47 is a great read for those who enjoy historical fiction narratives with deep meaning. Mosley's comprehensive characters pulled me into Forty-seven's world and let me think about emotions that I never thought about before. Tall John helped Forty-seven, as well as me, uncover the true meaning of freedom. ❁





*He sensed a vague lingering hint of danger in this area of the forest*



# Forest

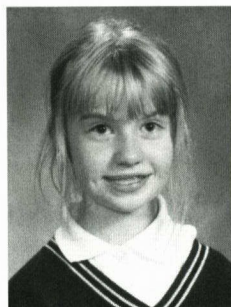
By **Rachael Goddard Rebstein**

*Illustrated by* **Ben Wisniewski**

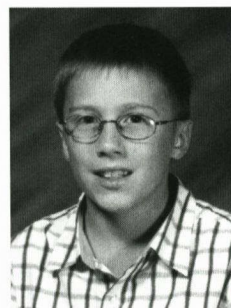
**I**T WAS THE AFTERNOON in the forest. It was a hot and muggy afternoon too, when the air hung heavily between the gnarled and ancient tree trunks, their rough bark creased and lined through the passage of years. The early morning mist had long since disappeared. Spider webs now hung aimlessly between the brownish-green undergrowth, illuminated by the blazing summer sun peering in through the thick canopy of trees. There was a soft crunching and crackling sound of dead leaves and small insects scrambled as quickly as they could to get away as a small patch of bristling ferns parted, and out of it emerged the boy.

He pushed his way ruthlessly through the thick undergrowth that covered the forest floor, snapping the sharp, dry branches that stuck out to bar his path, but he did so expertly, making sure to create as little noise as possible. He paused for a moment, panting softly, before turning around to look cautiously over his shoulder. No one. No one but the seemingly endless canopy of tall, majestic trees, surrounded by ferns and bushes, their knotted trunks reaching up to touch the brilliant blue sky that occasionally became visible but was usually too bright for him to look at on days like this. No one but the small brown squirrel that immediately spotted him as he looked, and then scooted off to the other side of the tree it clung to.

Well, it almost scooted. On sweltering, stifling days like these, all creatures in the forest were more sluggish than usual, and as for the boy, he became tired and sweaty more easily. Today in



Rachael Goddard Rebstein, 12  
Vancouver, British Columbia,  
Canada



Ben Wisniewski, 13  
Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

particular. The boy sat down slowly on a nearby burnt and jagged tree stump, only after checking for ants' nests of course. He sensed a vague lingering hint of danger in this area of the forest, and he knew he would be slower to react to it now, his senses dulled by heat, thirst, and pure exhaustion. Still, he could not go on for much longer without rest. The boy sniffed the air expertly, he had years of experience, but today all he smelt was the pine needles that covered the forest floor, the dark brown soil, and the muggy, stifling, humid air. Seeing as the air would reveal nothing, the boy pricked up his ears and listened. No luck. Only the distant sound of birds chirruping in the canopy and the low, infuriating hum of mosquitoes.

The boy wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead and fanned himself unsuccessfully with his hand. His throat was dry and parched, and it would be a long walk to get to any clean liquid to drink. He spotted a nearby almost bare berry bush and grabbed the only visible berry he could see off it. He put it slowly into his mouth. The sour flavor erupted into his tastebuds. He ate it as slowly as possible, trying to savor the moisture. But it was small, and did not last long, doing nothing to satisfy his burning throat. A rustling in the leaves made him jump to his feet. He spun around to see another brown squirrel dashing away through the undergrowth. The boy turned away, and, checking over his shoulder one last time, set off again, walking rapidly through the thick and seemingly impenetrable under-

growth. He had to keep going. This was no time to give up.

Suddenly another rustling made him spin around. This one seemed more distant and farther away. The boy eyed it suspiciously and began to slowly back away. The rustling was becoming steadily clearer and sharper as it came closer. From its sound, and years of experience, the boy was able to decipher that it was a much bigger animal that was now coming towards him. The crunching of the leaves from its footsteps seemed to indicate a sort of lumbering, awkward gait. Almost instantly the boy knew what it probably was. A bear. Slowly, his heart thumping against his ribcage, the boy backed away even further. Luckily, he knew how to deal with this sort of problem. Now, all he needed was a tree to climb. The boy scanned the trees, looking for a suitable branch he could pull himself up onto. The rustling, meanwhile, was getting louder.

The boy realized in an instant that the bear was too close by for him to have enough time to get onto the higher branches out of its reach. Any minute now, it would enter the patch of forest with the boy. Why oh why hadn't he heard it coming earlier?! The boy backed away even farther, his mind racing furiously. The bear, judging by its gait and size, was probably a grizzly. There was no escape for him now. The bear had left the boy with no choice.

His hands quivering slightly, the boy reached down and pulled out one of his most treasured possessions, his spear.





*Roger!!! What on earth is this?!!*

Made from the perfect strong tree branch, with a skillfully sharpened stone arrowhead tied to the top, he regarded it with pride. Slowly, the boy lowered his spear so it pointed to the exact direction of the rustling and, with a pounding heart, waited. Meanwhile, the bear, judging again by the sudden increased speed of its footsteps on the leaves, had broken into a charge and now opened its mouth into a terrible, vicious bloodthirsty roar. A roar that shook the canopy and made the boy

cringe with fear.

*"Roger!!! What on earth is this?!! You're supposed to be doing your math homework!! Are you hiding in the forest again?!! You had better not be or there will be trouble!!"*

THE BOY quickly turned and dashed away through the undergrowth, clutching his spear in one hand, before disappearing, silent as a shadow, away into the muggy depths of the forest. ❁





*"Ahem, um, would you please tell me where Mr. Yamanagi's class is? I think I'm lost"*



# Kanei's Treasure

By Eri Mizobe

Illustrated by Mona Cao

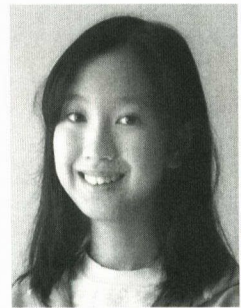
**H**ER NAME IS Kanei Miyamoto. Her father is Japanese, while her mother is Cantonese. She kissed her mother and grandmother goodbye, waved, and stepped out of her two-floored house in Kobe, Japan. Walking down the short road to her school, she slightly shifted her black *landoseru* or, in other words, leather school bag. She glanced at her watch. Three more minutes—if she didn't make haste, she would be late. Half jogging and half running, Kanei approached the school gates. It was lively, with groups of ecstatic girls and boys scattered everywhere, coming from every direction you can name. Looking around, Kanei shrank down ten inches—it was obvious that everyone here was pure Japanese. *I don't know what to do here, and I have no idea where my class is*, she told herself.

King-kong-kang-kong, king-kong-king-kong . . . the bells rang. *Interesting, I thought that bells are supposed to have only one sound that rings for five seconds or so.*

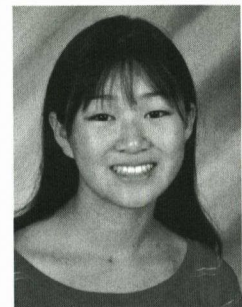
Kanei entered the building. It appeared like a maze to her . . . and it was her first time to ever go inside the school. She wasn't accustomed to the Japanese setting of schools. Back where she used to live, her parents couldn't afford the fees, so she attended a public school taught in English.

"Ahem, um, would you please tell me where Mr. Yamanagi's class is? I think I'm lost," she randomly chose a tall, dainty girl to ask.

The girl's long hair swung around. "Do you mean Yamanagi *sensei*?" the girl questioned.



Eri Mizobe, 13  
Kornhill, Quarry Bay,  
Hong Kong



Mona Cao, 13  
Freehold, New Jersey

*Oh yeah, oops!* Kanei forgot that she was supposed to call her teachers *sensei*, for teacher! "Um, yes!"

"Oh, well, I'm going there now. Just follow me."

"Thanks."

"No problem. You're new here?"

"Um, yes."

"What's your name?"

"Kanei Miyamoto. Yours?"

"Satsuki Takahara." Kanei felt somewhat relieved and felt like she had found a friend.

All her other classmates were already in the class. "Sit down, class, and we will begin." There was a robust man standing in front of the class, and Kanei figured that it was Yamanagi *sensei*. The giggling and gossiping in the class died down.

"All right, welcome class to the start of *ichigakki*, first term. I am your teacher this year. Let's begin by introducing ourselves to each other. How about we start with you." Yamanagi *sensei* pointed at a small boy sitting in a corner. He stood up and walked to the front of the class.

"Hi. I'm Kenta Nakamu. My birthday is November 5, 1993, and I was born in Osaka. My hobbies are baseball, soccer, video games, and comics. My dream for the future is to be the next Hideki Matsui." The class applauded. One by one, the students took turns. *Oh no, I don't want to do this.*

"Next, please." Kanei knew it was her turn.

"Hello, my name is Kanei Miyamoto. I was born in Shen Zhen, China, on May 17,

1993. I like to draw, play tennis, and sing. Someday, I would like to become a singer in a theater. This is the first time I am living in Japan and going to a real Japanese school, so . . ."

"Ha ha ha. Phugh!" A bunch of boys burst out laughing, and girls whispered behind cupped hands to each other. Satsuki was one of them. Kanei just gazed, bewildered. *Did I do anything wrong?*

". . . well, so I hope you will all help me settle here."

Silence.

Kanei didn't know if she should sit or stay. She looked at Yamanagi *sensei*. He seemed to be troubled.

"Uh, um, thank you, Kanei. Let's all help Kanei, right?"

Silence.

"Right, class?"

"Ye-es," murmured the class.

"Kanei," inquired Yamanagi *sensei*, "can you read and write? Do you know *kanji*, the Japanese characters?"

Snickers.

"Yes, I can, *sensei*. I was tutored every week in Japanese studies." Kanei felt humiliated.

"Oh. Then, good." The rest of the class continued with the self-introducing, and class started. In no time, it was recess. Kanei hunted for Satsuki, but to no avail. Desisting, she spotted a girls' washroom and decided to set foot in it. Just when she was about to open the door, it was yanked out of her hands and flung open.

"Oh, Satsuki, there you are! I was looking for you, and . . ."



"You were? Well, I'm sor-ry." Kanei sensed some sarcasm in Satsuki's tone.

Kanei was taken aback. "Well, I was just wondering if we could spend the recess together, since . . ."

"Oh, well. I can't. I'm not going to waste my life caring for a Chinese girl!" With that, Satsuki tossed her hair at Kanei, raised her nose high into the air, and went away.

*Gee, she sure is in some bad mood.* Although feeling much aggrieved, Kanei managed to swallow the pain and went back to class.

"Attention, class, attention. I have an important announcement to make. All the *shogaku rokunen*, primary six students, will be performing a school musical play in two months' time. If you wish to get one of the main vocal roles, you must attend the audition tomorrow after school, enjoy singing and acting, and be free every day for the next two months." *Sounds perfect for me. Perhaps it'll help me make some friends here.*

The following day, Kanei made her way to Nishima *sensei's* class, her music teacher. There were about fifteen people for the audition, and Nishima *sensei* recorded everyone's names onto a piece of paper in her hands.

"Everyone, please take a seat. We will begin soon. Hashimoto *sensei*, your art teacher, and Otsuka *sensei*, your principal, along with me, are the judges. We will judge you by having you all sing the song 'Sukiyaki' today. I will accompany you with the melody on piano. Everyone knows the song, right?"

Everyone, including Kanei, nodded.

This was one of her favorite Japanese songs. The tension in her heart loosened.

"We will go by the order I have you listed. First up is Kanei Miyamoto of Yamanagi *sensei's* class."

Kanei's heart skipped a beat. "Me?"

"Yes, Miss Kanei."

*Oh dear, I'm first!* The tension came back, and Kanei's heart seemed to beat as fiercely as a drum beat. She made her way to the front of the judges, as if she were in a trance. Nishima *sensei* seated herself at her piano and looked up. "Ready?"

Kanei shook herself from the trance. A small microphone was set before her, with a stand holding the lyrics to the song. "Um, yes." Kanei took a deep breath.

I look up  
When I walk  
So the tears won't fall  
Remembering those happy spring days  
But tonight I'm all alone . . .

Without realizing, Kanei started to get all giddy. How she admired the song! She moved her body and snapped her fingers in rhythm. She was in her own world . . .

I look up  
When I walk  
Counting the stars with tearful eyes  
Remembering those happy summer days  
But tonight I'm all alone

Happiness lies beyond the clouds  
Happiness lies above the sky . . .

The three judges clapped. "Marvelous, Kanei, *subarashii*. You may go now."

Still dazzled, Kanei left the classroom. The only thing she could recall was the look of Satsuki's face in the audience—astonished and full of fury.

“**K**ANEI MIYAMOTO,” said the results the next day, “and Satsuki Takahara as Polly and Sally Little.” Kanei couldn't trust her eyes. She was overjoyed and her mind leaped like a frog. *I made it!*

The only downside of her role was that she had to work with Satsuki, since the play was about Polly and Sally Little, sisters who were orphaned and spent each day looking for a home. Satsuki wasn't pleased. At the first practice, she hissed, “So it's you again.” Word traveled that Kanei was the “girl from China.” Even though she didn't feel at ease, Kanei pushed herself forward. Being part of a play was her dream, and she wouldn't let words ruin it.

**W**EEKS PASSED, and it was the day of the performance. Parents, teachers, and students were going to gather in the school theater on that special night. The performers met that morning to prepare.

“Kanei,” Nishima *sensei* inquired, “have you seen Satsuki? It's already thirty minutes past the meeting time, and she's not here.”

“No, *sensei*.”

“Very well. I will call her home.”

However, when Nishima *sensei* returned, she seemed to be full of anxiety. “Kanei, Satsuki has a sore throat. Her mother tells me that she will not be able

to perform tonight.”

“B-but, Nishima *sensei*, then what will happen to Satsuki's role?”

“We will have Mieri Kitamura, her best friend, do her part. She knows Satsuki's lines.” Kanei though knew that Mieri was dismayed about playing the role of Sally. And she knew how to make Satsuki better.

“Nishima *sensei*, excuse me for a while. I have something important to do. I'll be back for the rehearsals.”

“Where are you going?”

“Oh, somewhere . . .” her voice trailed off. Then, without allowing *sensei* to object, Kanei was gone, running out the school doors and racing back home. Grandma, inside, was startled.

“Kanei, why are you home so early?”

“Oh . . . I just need to get some . . . uh, things . . . for my partner in the play. I'll be quick.” Almost forgetting to take off her shoes, Kanei burst into the kitchen. Rummaging here and there, she frantically searched. *Here it is.* She boiled some water, and put the water in a small pot. *Now, where is that . . .* Once again, Kanei rummaged, this time not caring about making a mess. *Aha!* Within five minutes, she was back out the door with a basket full of her remedies. Kanei was going directly to Satsuki's house. It was easy—she lived only two houses away.

Ding-dong. The door was yanked open. “Yes?”

“Hi, I'm Satsuki's classmate. Would you please let me see her?”

“I'm afraid she is sick now.”

“Please—that is why I came.”





*"I brought you some medicines I have from China for sore throats. Trust me, they work"*

"Well . . . if you don't mind, sure." Apprehensively, Kanei stepped in. *Wow, Satsuki's house is big.* She found Satsuki's room.

"Satsuki, it's me, Kanei."

Satsuki looked up from her bed. "What do you want?" a weak voice replied.

"I brought you some medicines I have from China for sore throats. Trust me, they work . . . and fast. This is *jyon yao*, a blend of herbs. It's been used from the Qing Dynasty. And I brought you some hot water for this special tea . . . it's also

made from herbs."

"Ha! What's it got . . . snakes in it?"

"No. The *jyon yao* is made from Radix Rehmanniae, Cortex Moutan, Bulbus Fritillariae Cirrhosae, and . . ."

"Sounds as nasty as snakes to me!!"

"Well, I'll just leave them here for you, so . . ."

"Sure, but I'm not going to have any of it!!!" Satsuki yelled, breaking into coughs. Before they started fighting, Kanei left the house. She arrived back at school just in time for the rehearsal.

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, please be seated. The show will begin in ten minutes.” Night came abruptly for Kanei. Just then, someone came huffing and puffing for breath into the backstage room.

“SATSUKI!!!!!!” Everyone gasped. “YOU’RE BACK!!!!”

Nishima *sensei* and Mieri looked pleased. “Hurry! Change! Put on your makeup!” There was no time for talk.

The curtains were drawn, and the spotlights fell on Kanei and Satsuki. The show was truly starting. Despite Satsuki’s sore throat earlier that day, she had a lucid, sweet voice, and so did Kanei. Their harmony stunned the audience. Everything went smoothly . . . better than any other practice. The two girls polished the show by ending it with a mellow “Sukiyaki.” The audience clapped and cheered. Kanei never felt so superior.

Afterwards, unexpectedly, Nishima *sensei* appeared on stage with a microphone in her hand. “Everyone, before we finish, Satsuki, Sally, would like to say something important.” Satsuki cleared her throat.

“Well, I just wanted to acknowledge someone here on this stage with me today.” She glanced at Kanei. “Kanei, thank you, thank you so much. If you hadn’t given me the medicines you gave me today, I wouldn’t be here right now. They cured my throat, and just knowing that you cared for me made me stronger. I know that I treated you unjustly, but you were always the innocent one. I feel stupid for treating you so—just because you were born in China! I am full of regret, and I will never call you bad names again. Please forgive me. And you know how I said that I wouldn’t take your medicines? Well, I did, and they helped me realize the repulsive truth of what I really did to you.” Satsuki was shedding uncontrollable tears. She hugged Kanei.

Kanei was crying, too. “It’s all right.”

The crowd cheered once more.

Kanei had never cried happier, better tears before. And as they rolled down her cheeks, she knew that everything would be OK because she was accepted for who she was, right there. She had found a true friend, and treasure that she never knew she possessed. ❀

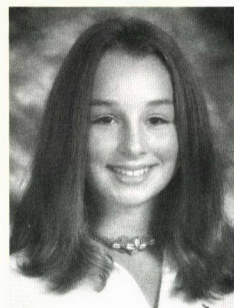




# Sailing

By Claudia Celovsky

The wind caresses my hair  
As I grasp the tiller,  
The direction of the sail in my hands.  
I watch the dazzling turquoise water  
Splash up against the boat,  
And glance up at my grandma's magnificent face.  
"Am I doing OK?"  
She answers with a smile and a wink.  
I feel so good,  
With the seagulls flying all around me,  
And the warm summer sunshine  
Beating on my bare back.  
I feel so good,  
With wonder flying all around me  
And the warm love of my grandma  
Beating in my soul.

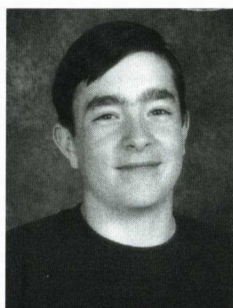


Claudia Celovsky, 13  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

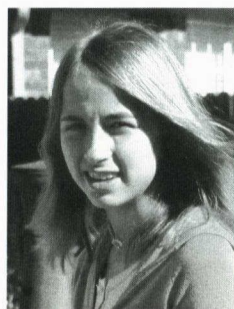
# Moon Child

By **Brian Hoover**

*Illustrated by* **Hannah Tyler**



Brian Hoover, 12  
Bend, Oregon



Hannah Tyler, 13  
Grapevine, Texas

**T**HE NIGHT AIR was crisp and cool upon Jake's face. Millions of tiny lights filled the sky like a field of fireflies. Like most nights, Jake sat on the old oak stump in the center of the silent woods. But tonight was special; he could feel it, the tension in the air, the stillness of the seemingly non-existent wildlife. Something was to happen.

A warm breeze stirred the trees, their great green leaves shimmering in the moonlight. Jake looked up at the moon, he broke out in a grin and rose to his feet, the air before him shimmered like waves lapping at his bare feet. His ragged jeans hung loosely about his slender frame, his rough crop of midnight-black hair dancing in the breeze, his leather jacket dully reflecting the light from the iridescent moon. It was happening.

In the distance a lone wolf released its mournful cry, the forest around seemed to answer. All at once a great clamor arose as out of the trees broke hundreds of birds. Below them on the ground picturesque white-tail deer, along with bears and foxes, ran away from the clearing. As soon as it had begun, it ended, and everything was still once more. They knew it was to happen.

The aurora of shimmering air encircled Jake, glittering around him like morning dew in the new sun's light. Jake stood stock still, the grin gone from his face to be replaced by a look of awe, nothing like this had happened before in his lifetime, he knew nothing about what was going on, except that it was part of him, and that it was meant to be.






*In the distance a lone wolf released its mournful cry*

A loud, earsplitting *crack* broke the silence of the night. Out of nowhere a blue-green bolt of lightning flew towards the earth at an astounding speed. Jake's body began to change, the smile had returned as he crouched on the ground. The bolt of lightning struck the ground not an inch before Jake's face. Fiery multicolored sparks flew, striking Jake all over. It was happening.

The ragged jeans and leather jacket fell away, along with the other articles of clothing, no longer necessary on this body of dense black fur. Jake lifted his new ca-

nine head and loosed such a howl that the very air seemed to vibrate with its melodious notes.

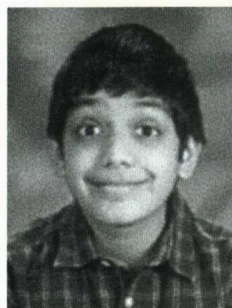
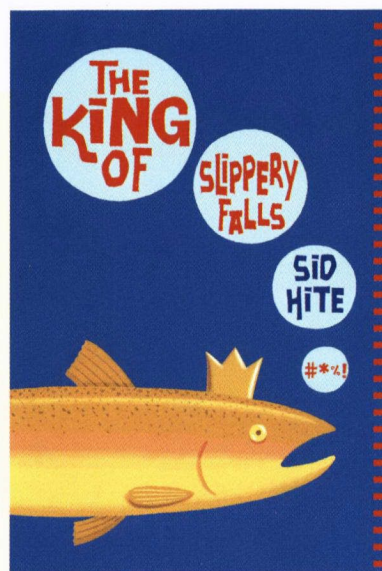
Jake turned, the shimmering air was gone, his time had come, as it now would for the rest of his life. He was a lycan, a demon, a werewolf.

Another call answered his, and he trotted off towards the reply. Above him the clouds parted, revealing a full blue moon. The Jake-wolf sat on his haunches, and howled once more at this sign of power. It had happened. 

# Book Review

By Neil Chakraborti

*The King of Slippery Falls*, by Sid Hite;  
Scholastic Press: New York, 2004; \$16.95



Neil Chakraborti, 12  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

**I**MAGINE IT'S your birthday. Your parents gave you a surprising gift that revealed your origin. How would you react?

Lewis Hinton, an ordinary boy in *The King of Slippery Falls*, is shocked on his fifteenth birthday, when he discovers that he's adopted. For one year, he tries to learn about his real family.

On his sixteenth birthday, his adopted mother, Martha, surprises Lewis with a letter from his real mother, J. A. Poisson. The letter reveals Lewis's real name: Louis Poisson, and his real mother gave him away to Avery, his adopted father, to find her husband and freedom. Lewis is angry with his real mother because she basically abandoned him for her own freedom! Lewis also feels angry with Martha for hiding this for s-i-x-t-e-e-n years! Now that's quite a long time to keep a secret. If I were Lewis, I probably would have thrown a fit and started screaming in anger, and inside, I would have felt pretty sad, too.

Lewis's friend, Sophie, and an eighty-eight-year-old woman named Maple tell him that he's of French origin by his last name, Poisson, like my last name, Chakraborti, reveals that I'm of Indian origin.

Maple is what's called "one of a kind." She told Lewis that



he's possibly descended from King Louis XV. She explains life's gradual, out-of-the-blue, and inspirational changes to Lewis. A person's life is like a story because both experience these three changes. I found this explanation most interesting. When I saw the misery of the evacuees from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on TV, I thought it like a major turning point in their lives. The devastation symbolized out-of-the-blue changes for these evacuees.

Anyhow, Lewis's origin gets importance in his one-horse town, Slippery Falls, and the town gets vibrant. Lewis becomes the center of attention in the town. Embarrassed, he tries to stop it. I recall a rumor in my school that I liked a girl, named Laura. I felt that everyone in the school enjoyed their time by conversations involving our relationship. Thank goodness it ended.

There's another important event in this story. Lewis spots a trout in the town's waterfall and he's determined to catch that fish. One day Lewis goes to the waterfall on his quest. He almost has the fish, but then slips and hits his head against a rock and gets unconscious, and bleeds heavily. He's taken to the hospital. Fortunately, Maple's blood saves his life. But he fails to achieve his goal. I felt pretty sad about that. Sometimes I try very hard to achieve goals. No matter how much perseverance I have, when I can't achieve them, I feel down.

While he recovers, Lewis decides to go to France to learn about the ways of the French, his people. He and his girlfriend, Amanda, organize a car wash to raise money for the trip. My parents are from India, and last summer, I went there to visit my relatives. Before I went, I learned a little of my native tongue, Bengali, from my parents, like Lewis learned some French before he went to France, from Sophie. Learning Bengali helped me enjoy the Bengali culture while I was there, and now I really like it. Lewis will probably enjoy the French culture. *Bon voyage, Louis!* 🍀





*In that reflection Maria saw her days with Sophie ahead of her*



# A Hidden Reflection

By **Emina S. Sonnad**

*Illustrated by the author*

**I**N THE MEADOW everything was silent and untouched. Maria looked over the vast field and the woods beyond and everything was blanketed in a thick layer of velvety snow. The air was cold and crisp, and stung Maria's throat and chest while she panted slightly from the run to this beautiful place. But she didn't see it as beautiful. Maria thought that the snow's glare was too harsh and the bitter cold wind was cruel and merciless.

She missed the warm sun from back in Hawaii where she was from. This was her first winter here in Oregon and everything about it made her more and more homesick. Instead of breathing in a gentle breeze filled with the fragrant scent of flowers and a touch of pineapple and coconut, she was breathing in nothing but the strong smells of snow and pine needles. Back at home she would have been lying on a warm, soft beach, feeling all the grains of beautiful white sand underneath her. Now she was standing bundled up in prickly scarves and hats with the rattling, empty crunch of snow and frost underneath her.

Maria looked around at the meadow and said quietly to herself, "How I wish I was back home. Or at least with my friends." And then, as if to answer her, a bundle of jackets, scarves, and mittens fell out of the nearby tree, screaming.

Maria gasped and ran over just in time to see that there was a girl in the midst of all of them, looking more like she had just won the lottery than fallen out of a fifteen-foot tree.

"Whoa! Ha ha ha! That was sooo fun!" she shrieked joyfully.



Emina S. Sonnad, 11  
Snohomish, Washington

"Are you OK?" Maria inquired anxiously. The girl merely looked at her in surprise as if seeing her for the first time. Her large blue eyes widened with delight.

"Oh, who are you? I'm Sophie! I can't believe you're here! Mama told me our neighbors would be arriving soon but I had no idea how soon! Hi!"

Sophie looked expectantly at Maria, her eyes fluttering excitedly as if she thought that Maria was about to proclaim that she was a fairy princess from Australia.

"Um, I'm Maria. I come from Hawaii. Nice to meet you."

"It's not nice, it's spectacular!" exclaimed Sophie, tossing back her curly blond hair with one gloved hand. "It's been so long since I've had a friend! Come with me! I'll show you around."

With that Sophie grabbed Maria's arm and led her around the meadow, pointing out different types of trees and winter animals as they went. They walked so far and long that by the time they were done there was hardly a patch of snow that was not covered in small boot tracks. After a while, Maria gasped, "I don't think I can take another step, let alone get home. Please let me stop and rest."

"Oh, very well. Hurry, though! I'm going to show you my favorite place in the world."

Maria sat down and felt her heart beating heavily inside of her. *Thump, thump, thump*. Her mind was racing too. Was she actually having fun? Did she really like it here? What about Hawaii? Home? But Sophie was so nice and funny. Would

they be friends? And could she ever forget about the warm beaches and swaying palm fronds?

"Are you done yet? It's gonna get real cold if we just sit here doing nothing." And with that Sophie burst into a line of cartwheels, finally tumbling into the snow, her hat askew and her freckled face shining with joy and pink from the cold. Maria stood, laughing so hard her cheeks hurt. Sophie stood up too and after a full minute of nonstop laughter she wheezed, "I guess . . . ha ha ha . . . we should carry on. Come on! I'll show you my special place but I'm warning you, it's a secret and I mean to keep it that way. Just over this way!"

Maria followed and watched as Sophie burrowed through the bushes, disappearing into the other side. And then, rather hesitantly, Maria did the same and was immediately in awe of the sight in front of her.

They were in a medium-sized enclosed area and Maria's first impression was that she had somehow journeyed into one of those beautiful sceneries in the movies her older sister, Kami, watched. Taking up most of the space were three cherry-blossom trees, forming a perfectly straight line of strong sturdy trunks and outstretched branches. The branches were almost completely bare but every once in a while Maria could catch a glimpse of a little pink blossom budding and spreading out its delicate petals. In it, it carried the beauty of being so small, serene and tranquil, and outside of it the color was dainty and pastel.



"Whoa . . ."

"Nice isn't it?"

"It's not nice, it's spectacular!" giggled Maria. She never saw sights like this in Hawaii.

"Well, that's not all! You won't believe what else there is, right behind the trees, hidden by all those flowers and branches."

Maria walked carefully around the trees, not wanting to disturb something so pure and beautiful. And true enough; hidden behind the rest, there was a small pond of crystal ice, the sun's weak light bouncing off of it and the cherry-blossom trees casting spiral shadows over it. Maria looked deeply into it and saw that while the outer layer was ice, beneath that there were a few inches of tinkling water. And almost completely hidden by the ice, there was a faint reflection of two girls

looking back up at them.

One was blond, fair-skinned, and had huge blue eyes. The other had dark brown eyes surrounded by long eyelashes, a cinnamon-colored complexion, and long black hair. In that reflection Maria saw her days with Sophie ahead of her, and their blooming friendship just like one of the cherry blossoms. She saw spring coming soon and then summer together in the meadow. Fall would blanket the ground in leaves and then another winter would come again. But this time Maria would be ready for it.

"It's beautiful," she murmured softly.

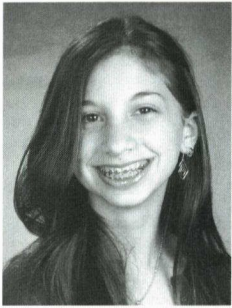
"I know. Does this make you miss your home at all?" asked Sophie gently.

"A little bit," replied Maria truthfully, "but now this is my home here in Oregon. This is my home here with you." ❁



# Tickle Me Pink

By Marissa Bergman



Marissa Bergman, 12  
Farmington, Connecticut

Buzz!  
The familiar sounds of bees pierce my ears  
As I lay on the dewy morning grass.  
Sprawled next to me is Tessa,  
My younger sister,  
Doodling with her favorite crayon.  
“Tickle Me Pink,  
Isn’t that a funny name?” I ask.  
Squish!  
I roll over to hear her reply, and  
Stubbles of the freshly mowed grass stick to my back.  
Giving me her naïve face she answers,  
“What color is your heart?”  
Not wanting to confuse the toddler,  
I flop against the pole of the basketball hoop with a  
Thud!  
“What color is spring?”  
Tessa persists.  
I was too old for her childish games,  
“I don’t know, now hurry up it’s at least  
1000 degrees out!”



The grass squelches as she stumbles towards me,  
Waving her drawing like a trophy.  
She sticks it in my face, and I see her masterpiece:  
A picture of her and me,  
Lying together in the grass  
On a warm spring day.  
"Your heart is pink,"  
She points to my chest in the drawing,  
"And so is spring."  
She points to the grass, sky, and flowers.  
And at that moment, my Tickle-Me-Pink heart  
Is a blossoming bud.



*I loved the beautiful spot. Grandpa loved us, and we all loved being there . . . together*



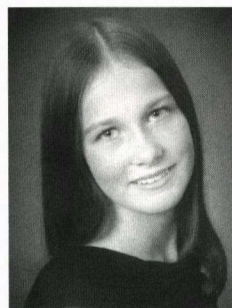
# The Animal Kingdom

By **Mackenzie Hollister**

*Illustrated by* **Justine Mueller**

**C**LOUDS LOLLYGAGGED across the sky, carried gently by the occasional half-hearted gust of wind. The sun, giving its all for that clear sunny perfect day we'd been hoping for, was defeated by the humid cloud that seemed to swallow up all of Pinckney, Michigan. We were left sticky and disgusted but somehow satisfied with the green grass that had finally replaced the snow. Sounds like any old April day, right? Ha! That's what I thought too. If I could have predicted the future then, I wouldn't come back to this memory, my last good memory with him, every other night in my dreams. If I could undo everything now and relive it over and over again and never feel anything but the feeling I had then and there, I'd be happy. I would be honestly happy for the rest of my life. Yeah, if I could undo everything and erase the unwanted, everything would be fine. But I can't, and it's not.

You see, it started as just another one of my trips to Michigan to visit my crazy, gotta-love-'em, family. Mom was hustling around, neatly stuffing all of the essentials into suitcases. Dad was doing what she told him to. Fluffy, our cat, was lying on the suitcases, effectively protesting our departure. And I was going through a mental list of everything I needed and always forgot: alarm clock—check; riding jeans and sneakers—check; underwear—check; hair towel—ooh . . . the hair towel—check. It was all normal. Things still proceeded as normal from the taxi ride, to the plane ride, to the two-hour car ride to my grandparents' house in Pinckney, Michigan.



Mackenzie Hollister, 12  
Newton, Massachusetts



Justine Mueller, 12  
Sand Springs, Oklahoma

When we finally arrived we were greeted with hugs and kisses from my aunts, cousins and of course my grandma and grandpa. There, and only there, my mother finally relaxed and got prepared for sleeping in and no cooking. I was happy too for I was at my favorite place in the world. What could be better than to be spoiled, loved, always have something to do, and be surrounded by cousins? Days in Michigan were always laid back: sometimes we would go to Screams, a Halloween-themed ice cream store appropriately placed in Hell, Michigan; other times we would ride horses, go to the lake, or just hang out and be with each other. I guess it didn't really matter what we did, as long as it was with the people we loved.

The first day started like it always did in Michigan, at 7:30, to the TV news and laughing voices of my grandparents. I tiptoed down the squishy-carpeted steps like I always did and snuggled into my spot in my grandpa's lap. Then after a minute, he started drumming his fingers on my knee, like he always did.

As the day proceeded, my newly crowned four-year-old cousin came over and was excited to see me, her magical cousin. After chasing her around for half the day and laughing a lot, I was tired and the humid air got me feeling stickier than a melted popsicle, but no, Katie wasn't tired. At that point I dragged her over to where my grandpa was sitting drinking some ice water on the porch and I gave him a look. He seemed to receive it correctly as "Help me!" because he looked at

Katie and asked her if she wanted to go on a picnic. I watched and smiled as her little blue eyes widened and her jaw dropped.

I followed her into the kitchen where we packed some crackers and pop in a little wooden basket with a quilt. We then tromped back out and met my grandpa where he was standing, turning off the electric fences that contained the horses.

We started walking past the barn—a place filled with happy memories of horseback riding. Inside I could hear hoofs hitting the ground, music playing and my aunt singing along. We kept walking into the pasture where Peaches and Misty, the large, beastly, gorgeous inhabitants, munched on their evening hay, and down the long hill to the back of the pasture, farther and farther away from my grandma who I could still see in the bright kitchen happily making dinner. I had never been that far back in my grandparents' property. I asked him where we were going but he just said, "You'll see." I laughed and looked over at my little cousin who was smiling and looking very excited. We kept walking, past the compost pile and the garden, past the little heap of junk that we never got around to cleaning up, farther and farther into the silence broken only by the occasional chirp of the crickets.

We finally ducked under a broken part of the fence and entered a new world, our world. Katie called it the Animal Kingdom. There weren't many inhabitants: just some bunnies, a gopher we expected by the hole, the occasional deer, and some bugs. You might think that it



was generous to call it an animal kingdom but that is what it was.

In our kingdom we found a broken metal chair that looked like it had been sitting there for years, obviously of a long, royal, mysterious past. That would be the throne. We also found some ducks, a mommy and a daddy, that would be the king and queen. You might say it was nothing special, just a grassy spot on the edge of a secret duck pond, sheltered by trees and high grass. Forgotten and taken over by the bugs. But it wasn't, not to us. We loved it.

Katie loved the bramble bushes, which, if you were willing to get scratched a little and push aside the branches, revealed a top-secret hideaway. I loved the beautiful spot. Grandpa loved us, and we all loved being there . . . together.

We had our picnic on the edge of the hardly-a-pond pond that disappeared in the winter and during droughts. While we were there we laughed, talked, and enjoyed each other's company. Being able to relax and let go was amazing, but to me what we did was insignificant compared to the people I was with. It was special then but not as special as it is now.

It was a good memory but we never knew it would be our last good memory.

Not long after I returned to home-sweet-home in Massachusetts, we got a phone call with some news that I still haven't fully accepted. My grandpa was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer—a very fast, mysterious, deadly cancer. They tried everything: alternative doctors and

medicine, special diets, strange devices believed in some cultures to heal, bubbly foot rub supposedly godly and curing, healthy salt, and a trip to Mexico to a special healing center. It was all just for hope.

We visited him a little while after that animal kingdom trip and he didn't look the same but I knew he was still in there somewhere behind the sunken eyes, pale face and skinny shapeless body. He was always fighting. He didn't say much but what he did say I will never forget. He didn't want me to. He said, "Grandpa loves you." He kept telling me that.

Everything happened too fast for me, just a blur. All I could do was sit back and watch as everything just happened, even though I didn't want it to. It was like an emotional, sad movie that I watched from afar. Except I wasn't watching the movie; I was in it and it wasn't a movie, it was my life.

On July 15, 2005, the worst happened. I flew to Michigan again. This time nothing was normal: no mental checklist, no average plane ride. Just a solemn journey, spent looking out the window, to somewhere I wanted and didn't want to be more than anything. It was a hard week that droned on forever, with everything seeming to happen sluggishly slow; even my memories of that time are in slow motion. It was hard sitting in the first pew of a funeral service, and the first car in the funeral procession, but most of all it was hard holding an all-of-a-sudden cold hand.

In the lengthy speech I gave at his funeral I tried my hardest to explain the


concept of the animal kingdom for Katie, who was too little to come. I knew she wanted everyone to know and so did I. I managed to talk fluently, calmly and I didn't mess up at all, which is hard to do at a time like that. But I did it for my grandpa. And I was glad I got up there in front of everybody because they all cared about him and had similar memories.

The whole town was there. My grandpa was one of the most loved men in Pinckney, Michigan. He was a builder, a township supervisor, a friend, and a great family member. I'm proud to be remembered as my grandpa's granddaughter. And I am thankful that I had that memory of him.

Katie and I still go down to the animal kingdom today and sit and remember our grandpa. Being in our special spot, talk-

ing to our grandpa, is the closest we can get to him now.

Sitting there listening to Katie look up and talk to him, mumbling, "I know you miss your little girl . . . can you ride down on your winged horse and visit?" is a new memory I have from that spot. When she saw the hot tears welling up in my eyes she whispered knowingly, "It's OK, he'll always be in our hearts."

Lying in the tall grasses, thinking to myself as Katie still rambled on, smiling at the sky, I realized something that I will never forget: sometimes you don't know how good you have it until it's gone. Right there with the hot July air suffocating me I learned one of the most important things I know: savor your animal kingdoms for you never know what the next day will bring. 





# Find Your Voice

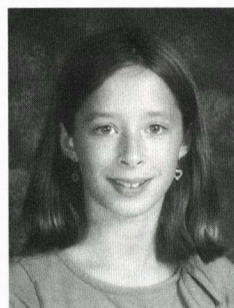
By **Erin Bennett**

*Illustrated by* **Susannah Benjamin**

**T**HE TREES SHOOK madly as Carmen Gonzalez made her way to a towering oak named El Grande Oak. She sat down on the roots that had managed to break through the ground. It was the only place she could be away from the chaos of her own home and relax in the quiet of the Marongo woods. Wildflowers and thornbushes covered the ground, while oak and birch trees towered overhead. It was the quietest place in the small town of Marongo, a town a little south from Madrid. Nobody chose to vacation to Marongo, but it was not frowned upon. There were no national landmarks, but small miracles were popular. It was not paradise, but it had its own inner beauty.

Carmen situated herself against the great oak as she opened her journal and took out her pen. Then she started to recite the day's highlights in her head. Every night, after the candles went out, she would sneak a match and candle from the cupboard. She would then make her way quietly with her journal and pen to the big oak where she sat now.

Nothing at her home was ever like the calming Marongo woods. Carmen had three sisters (one younger, two older) and three brothers (two younger, one older). She was the middle child, and "the beauty of the family." While her mother and siblings had short, stringy hair and big, long noses, Carmen had long, thick hair and a short, cute nose. Her outer beauty shone brighter than her inner beauty, though, for she was very shy. She liked to keep to herself, which was extremely hard at home. Her

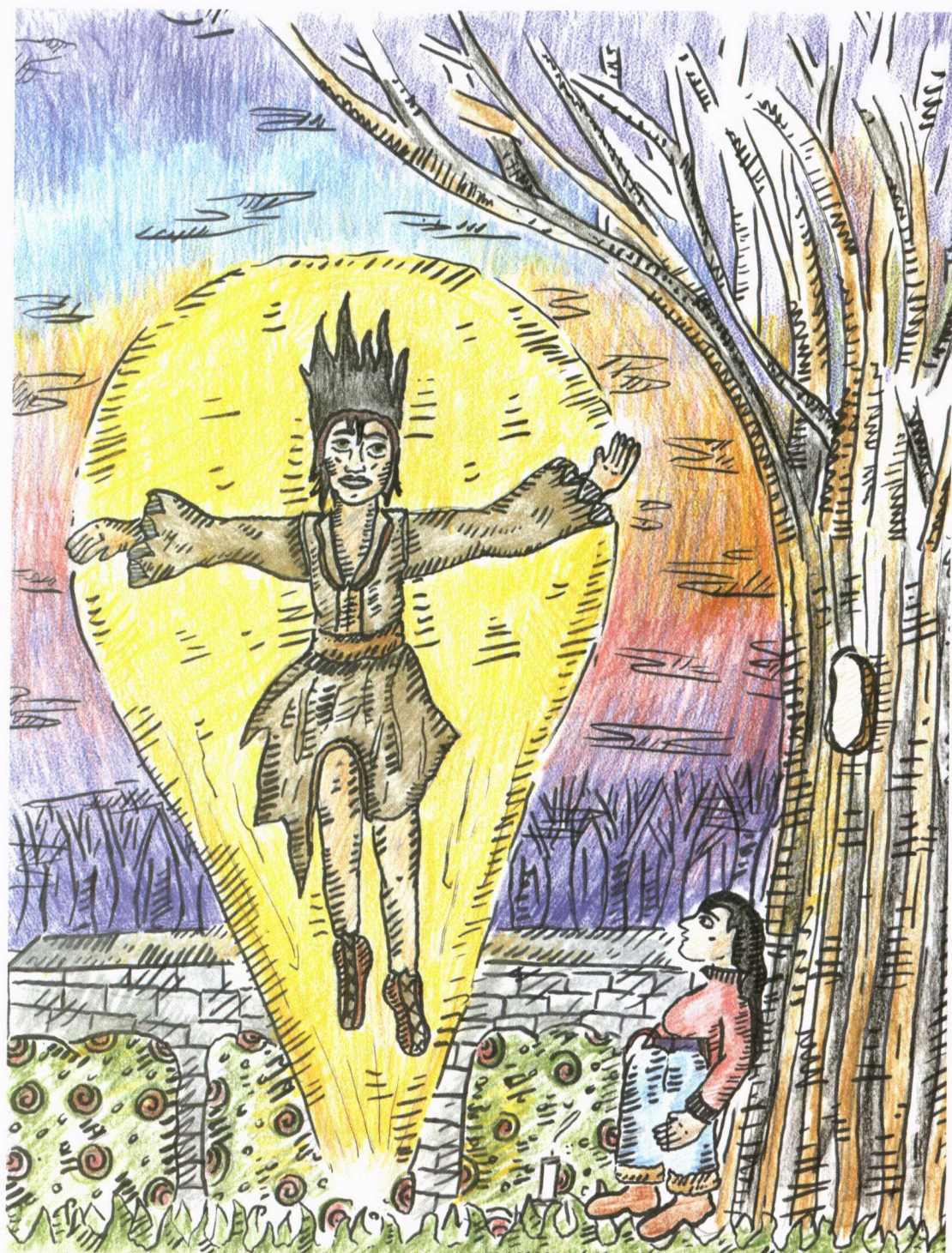


Erin Bennett, 11  
Chicago, Illinois



Susannah Benjamin, 12  
Greenwich, Connecticut





*Suddenly, a bright light came from nowhere, and in it appeared a small girl*



brothers and sisters were always playing loudly and obnoxiously, while Carmen enjoyed calmness and quiet in a household.

Carmen had had a friend once, named Maria Rodriguez. Maria had moved to New York, with Carmen's father as the guide and helper. They had all died in the crashing of the World Trade Center. Every night, after visiting the Marongo woods, Carmen would lie in her bed and recall the details about her father and her best friend.

Carmen thought of her friend often, also kind yet very shy. She was so kind-hearted, though, she would have achieved great things if she had lived, Carmen thought.

Suddenly, out of the darkness and the stillness, a bright light came from nowhere, and in it appeared a small girl. She had short black hair and a beautiful, Hispanic face. She was dressed in a gold ball gown, with white lace on the sleeves. Carmen thought the girl was strangely familiar. Then it hit her.

"Maria," Carmen said very quietly, almost like a whisper.

"*Hola*, Carmen," Maria said in a clear, tall voice, which was highly peculiar for Maria was very shy, even with her friends. "I have been sent on a mission to tell you a story I heard right before I died."

"Once, there was a beautiful maiden named Rita Diaz. She was daughter to the baker of the town. She was shy and quiet, but very kind. One day, Rita received a letter asking for her hand in marriage. She was too shy to refuse, so she was sent away to live with her new husband, Antonio Rivera, and his family. She soon realized that he was a cruel, mean man who even disobeyed his elders. Rita was too shy to ask for a divorce, so she stayed. Her husband made many terrible choices for her, so she was led into a hard, cold life. The end.

"Rita is like you, Carmen," Maria said after finishing her story. "If you wish to have a lovely life full of grace and happiness, you must learn to speak your own voice. Do not be scared to show your feelings. Carmen, do not be shy any longer, for I am watching over you, as is your father. Find your voice, and use it." With that, there was another burst of light, and Maria Rodriguez floated up into the sky, producing beautiful, silver wings.

Carmen let Maria's words sink in. She had been letting other people take over her life. She had to get a voice, one that was her own. She knew it would not be easy, for she was already fourteen years old. Yet she knew that if she tried her hardest, she could succeed. ❀

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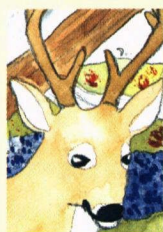
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