

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Maya Work, age 11, for "Blue Butterfly," page 35

THE SERVICE PROJECT

The last thing Madeline wants to do is babysit an old person

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Is magic real? Can Aria help Carissa get her sister back?

Also: A poem about baseball

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 45, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016

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Editor's Note

Unlikely friendships. It's natural to make friends with people similar to us, people around our age with backgrounds similar to our own. Every once in a while we have an opportunity to become friends with someone completely different. Three stories in this issue show us how unlikely friendships can make our lives richer. In "The Service Project," Madeline starts her week helping out at the nursing home with a lot of prejudices about old people. By the end of the week, she has a new friend: Mrs. Blair, who, it turns out, had a fascinating career as a Broadway star. A chance meeting leads to friendship between a grieving Elizabeth and Ramona, who is blind, in "Seeing in the Dark." In "Finding Freedom," the most unlikely friendship of all blossoms between the daughter of a plantation owner and a slave girl who needs her help. Have you ever made an unlikely friend? Tell us about it in your next story!

— Gerry Mandel

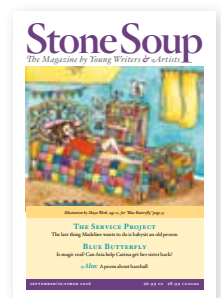
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ON THE COVER This is Maya Work's third cover for *Stone Soup*! Maya loves to draw. She sometimes teaches art to a group of homeschooled kids. She illustrated a CD cover for a local Montreal rock band. Maya enjoys acting and recently played Miranda in her theater group's adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.



The Mailbox



Thank you for publishing the terrific written works and phenomenal art pieces in your amazing magazine. I have always loved to read your magazine, and I await my latest issue each month.

Thank you for giving kids a chance to find and use their unique, powerful voices.

Rebecca K. Beaver, 12

Tenafly, New Jersey

I am new to *Stone Soup* and I am already enjoying the fantastic stories people have shared through its amazing community. Thank you everyone who has contributed to this fabulous magazine!

Tae Cheung Hong, 12

Newton, Massachusetts

I love how you are encouraging children to write. Thank you for publishing children's literature! I am a sixth-grader, and I enjoy writing.

Michael Leon Jr., 12

Las Vegas, Nevada

I am from Australia and I love your magazine (my favorite part is the Mailbox)! My passion is writing, and I want to be a successful writer or reporter when I grow up, and I think it would be a great idea to submit something to your magazine!

Odi Paatsch, 13

Melbourne, Australia

I wanted to say how much I appreciate your magazine. I have wanted to be an author for years, and though my high ambitions have always been to write like the masters (Jane Austen, George Elliot, Katherine Mansfield, and Elizabeth Gaskell are among some I hope to imitate), I think it excellent practice to work on more modest material for your magazine. You have made my goal seem much more reachable, and I respect your hard work. It is a splendid thing you are doing for aspiring young writers like me.

Eleanor M. Polak, 12

New Haven, Connecticut

Eleanor's story, "Owl Eyes," appeared in the May/June 2015 issue of Stone Soup. You can read it in the archives at stonesoup.com.

On behalf of *all* of your current and future subscribers I salute your dedication in providing them with quality literature in a physically readable format, i.e., paper.

Roger Forman, grandparent

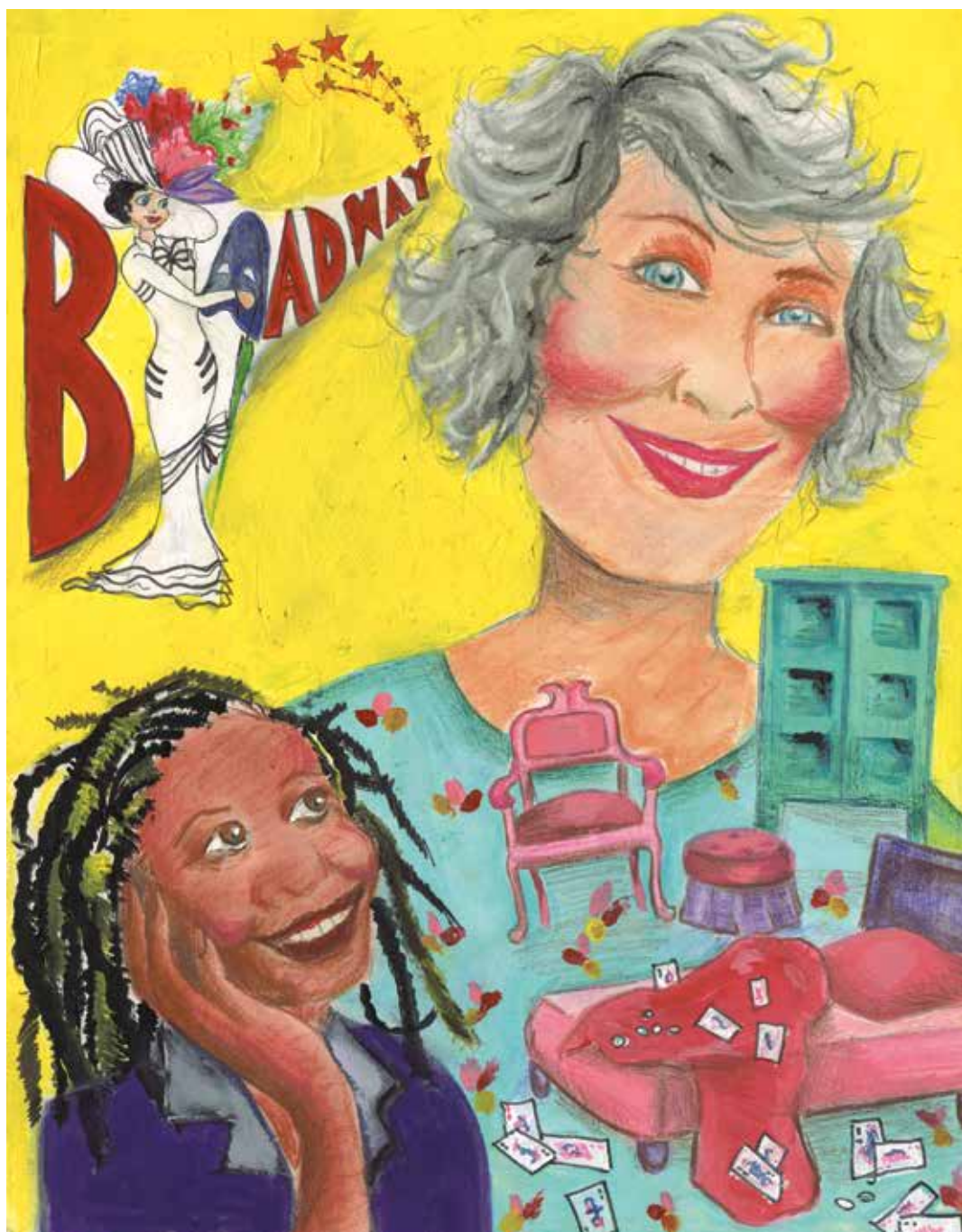
St. Paul, Minnesota

My teacher recently introduced me to *Stone Soup*, and I enjoy reading it. I particularly liked Rainer Pasca's poem, "Nature's Canvas" [May/June 2016], for its imagery, description, and poetic feel.

Julia Manolios, 11

Floral Park, New York

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



"That's really cool. Can you tell me about it?" Madeline asked, amazed

The Service Project

By **Niya Wodi**

Illustrated by **Ravela Smyth**

MADELINE ANXIOUSLY gathered her books and half-jogged towards the classroom door, praying that her Civics teacher, Miss Jones, wouldn't notice her.

"Madeline, can I speak with you for a moment?" Madeline's Civics teacher called in her high, soprano voice. Her eyes scanned the room and then narrowed when they met Madeline's.

Madeline heaved a sigh. So much for being unnoticed. I bet she's going to call your parents, Madeline silently thought, scolding herself. She made her way to Miss Jones's desk, prepared for the worst.

Miss Jones towered over Madeline and pointed a perfectly manicured finger at her. "I told you last week that you need five community service hours to pass my class. Why don't I have them?" Miss Jones snapped.

"I'm sorry. I guess I forgot. Besides, I have drama and acting classes filling up my time," Madeline mumbled apologetically.

Miss Jones huffed. "Because of your procrastination, I have no choice but to assign you a project." She rummaged through her desk drawer, searching for something.

Madeline groaned. She'd heard rumors about the hand-picked projects from Miss Jones. Two kids received trash duty and one even got a job volunteering at the local jail. Madeline imagined herself picking up a rotten banana peel on the side of the road or talking to a prisoner with face piercings and shuddered. Miss Jones finally pulled out a flyer and placed it



Niya Wodi, 12
Marietta, Georgia



Ravela Smyth, 13
Northridge, California

in front of Madeline.

"This is an advertisement from Nature's Nursing Home. They are looking for volunteers to help entertain the elderly there. The number and address is at the bottom," Miss Jones said smugly.

"I have to babysit old people?" Madeline screeched. "I don't have time! There's a reason why their friends and family don't visit them anymore. This will be so humiliating."

Miss Jones frowned in disapproval. "You will start next Monday, volunteering right after school. Don't skip this," Miss Jones said, shoving the flyer in Madeline's hand.

That night, Madeline tried to forget about Miss Jones's idea during dinner, but it was nearly impossible. She pushed a piece of chicken around her plate and dug holes in her rice.

"Are you OK, Madeline?" Madeline's mother asked and then shot a look at Courtney, Madeline's older sister, who was playing on her phone.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Madeline replied, looking down at her plate.

"You actually look kind of horrible. Did your friend realize that you're a doofus? Oops, you don't have any friends," Courtney snickered.

Madeline stuck out her tongue. She wasn't in the mood for her sister's juvenile comebacks.

"Courtney!" Madeline's mother exclaimed.

Later, Madeline decided to do her homework. She dumped the contents of her backpack on her bed and searched

for her math worksheet. When she was searching on her bed, Madeline's eyes traveled to the half-crumpled Nature's Nursing Home flyer that she shoved in her bag that afternoon. Madeline sighed, grabbed the flyer, and went downstairs to the kitchen phone.

WHEN MADELINE walked inside Nature's Nursing Home on Monday, her instinct was to run away and accept a failing grade from Miss Jones. Instead, she kept her head down as she made her way to the front desk.

"Hi, my name is Madeline. I'm here to volunteer to entertain the old, sorry, elderly people here," Madeline said politely to the lady at the front desk.

The lady smiled. "That's excellent. We don't get a lot of volunteers, never mind young ones. Many people are hostile toward the seniors here. Follow me, please."

The lady led Madeline to a door and knocked twice. It was very quiet until a frail voice answered, "Come in."

Inside, the room smelled heavily of perfume and baby powder. A bed lay towards a corner, unmade, and an assortment of cards and game chips were scattered all over the bedroom floor. Sitting on a chair next to a square table sat an old woman with frizzy, gray curls forming a halo around her head. Her floral shirt and blue jeans stood out against her pale skin.

"This is Mrs. Blair, the senior citizen who you will be spending time with every day this week," the lady at the front desk said proudly. She gave Madeline a wink and shut the door behind her.

Madeline stood awkwardly in front of Mrs. Blair. She cleared her throat and spoke. "Hello. I'm Madeline."

"Hello, Madeline. You have a pretty name," Mrs. Blair replied.

"Thank you," Madeline replied shyly. "May I sit?" She gestured to the other chair.

"Sure," Mrs. Blair shrugged.

Silence filled the space between them. Mrs. Blair's eyes shifted to and from Madeline to the room.

"Tell me about yourself, Madeline," Mrs. Blair said suddenly.

"Well," Madeline started, "I don't have any grandpas or grandmas, so I can't relate to elderly people much. I love the performing arts. I'm mainly here because I have to volunteer here to get a good grade in Civics." As soon as Madeline said the last sentence, she winced.

Mrs. Blair didn't seem to mind. "Many people, especially teens, don't seem to care about old folks like me. Thankfully, I'm going to change that about you. Ask me anything."

Madeline thought for a moment. "What was your job?" Madeline finally decided.

"I was a Broadway star in New York," Mrs. Blair answered, looking down.

"That's really cool. Can you tell me about it?" Madeline asked, amazed.

Mrs. Blair grinned. "It was in 1948 and I was fourteen at the time. There was a

crazy superstition that the lead actor or actress had to wear a special bracelet or they would be cursed forever in their acting career. Back then, I was the lead in almost all of the plays so I always wore the bracelet. Till this day, I still have it and used to wear it when performing plays for

the others here when I was more flexible."

Madeline laughed along with Mrs. Blair and listened carefully to the other stories.

When Courtney came to pick up Madeline, Madeline was sad to go. She had become so en-

grossed in Mrs. Blair's stories that she lost track of time. Madeline climbed in Courtney's car with a grin plastered on her face with the thought of coming back the next day.

Courtney sniffed and then crinkled her eyebrows and nose. "Whew. You smell like an oldie," Courtney smirked.

"I know. Who knew that talking with old people wouldn't be so bad?" Madeline replied, ignoring Courtney's jab.

"Old people are so antisocial and unpopular. I don't know how you're going to deal with this nut job all week," Courtney sneered.

Heat rushed to Madeline's face. "Not everything revolves around something as shallow as being cool, you know. Someday, that could be you sitting in a nursing home with no one to visit you," Madeline snapped.

For once, Courtney didn't have any-

**"I have to
babysit old people?"
Madeline screeched.
"I don't have time!"**

thing to say on their way home and Madeline basked in the glory of her comeback.

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday passed by in a blur. On Friday, Madeline was genuinely upset to say goodbye to Mrs. Blair.

“Don’t be sad,” Mrs. Blair comforted, “you can still visit me.”

“I guess I could, if I have time,” Madeline said reluctantly.

Suddenly, Mrs. Blair’s face brightened. She pulled out a small, black box from her pocket. Her wrinkled hand pressed it into Madeline’s.

“Oh, I didn’t buy you anything. I’m so sorry,” Madeline apologized, suddenly feeling selfish.

“It’s my gift to you. Open it,” Mrs. Blair said impatiently.

Madeline carefully opened the box and gasped when she saw what was inside. A silver bracelet with a charm star lay inside. She lifted the bracelet gently and fastened it on her wrist.

“It’s the lucky bracelet that you wore. Thank you. I hope that your family will visit you, someday,” Madeline whispered.

Just then, the lady at the front desk opened the door and peeked in.

“Your sister is here,” the lady said softly.

The tears that Madeline had held in finally spilled over. She gave Mrs. Blair a hug. “I promise to visit every day that I’m free.”

“Thank you. That would be nice,” Mrs. Blair muttered, tears also in her eyes.

As Courtney drove, Madeline touched the silver bracelet and made a personal promise that she would keep her word. 🌀



Three Huge Problems:

Getting Through a Week in the Sixth Grade!

By **Charlotte Eaton**

Illustrated by **Audrey Zhang**

“**K**AT! TIME FOR DINNER!”
“Coming!”

Kat had come home from a long day—a very long day—at Hearst Middle School. She wasn’t hungry, she was mad.

“Kat, it’s getting cold!”

She sighed, closed her homework book, still ignoring her phone, and headed downstairs.

“Did you have a good day?” asked her mom as she was scooping pasta onto the dinner plates. Kat’s brother, Finn, was already eating the Italian bread and getting crumbs everywhere. Kat sat down and grabbed a piece of bread. Maybe she was hungrier than she thought.

“Kat? Did you hear me?”

“Yeah.”

“So how was your day?”

“Good.”

But Kat had really had the opposite of a good day at school. Faith, her best friend, had dumped her over a boy neither one of them really even liked, then she was bullied by Becca, the most popular girl at school. Again. And she’d lost all her math homework for the year. Or maybe she hadn’t lost it; maybe someone had taken it. She wasn’t sure, and she wasn’t sure if she was ever going to be sure. Three huge problems, no huge solutions. Ugh.

Kat ate her dinner and ruminated quietly about the day’s events while Finn, Mom, and Dad yapped about some foot-



Charlotte Eaton, 12
Mount Kisco, New York



Audrey Zhang, 13
Levittown, New York

ball game or something. Every once in a while they tried to include her in the conversation, but she just shrugged, sighed, or rolled her eyes.

THE NEXT DAY when she got to school, before any classes started, she bought a cup of hot chocolate in the cafeteria. She went back outside to sit on the bench and wait for the first bell for homeroom. She was sitting there, thinking about what she could have done with her math homework and how to explain to Faith that she really didn't have any interest in Brian, when she heard someone cry out.

That's when she saw the self-appointed popular girls—the Sassies, as some people called them, but never to their faces—bullying a girl named Samantha in front of the school.

"Hey, stop it!" said Samantha as they pushed her to the ground.

"Let her go," yelled Kat.

"What are you going to do about it?" mocked Becca, the leader of the gang. "You want me to let her go? Say *please!*"

Her group laughed. Samantha was trying to pull away, but Becca was too strong.

Right then and there, without planning or knowing what she was doing, Kat spilled her hot chocolate all over Becca's satin dress.

"Please," Kat said in her sweetest voice. "Oops."

"Hey! My dress!" Becca cried.

"That's what I'll do about it, bully. I guess that chocolate wasn't so hot after

all. Come on, Samantha. Let's go to homeroom."

Kat and Samantha hurried away from the gang, who were all still stunned at what Kat had done to Becca.

LATER, AFTER third period, Kat thought she was in the clear. She'd made it through gym and the Sassies hadn't bothered her at all. She thought they were done with her, or maybe even a little scared of her.

Big mistake. On the way to the cafeteria after fourth period, she turned a corner and came face to face with Becca and her group. They swarmed around her.

"You'll be sorry for what you did to me," said Becca.

Kat knew from experience that when Becca said someone was going to be sorry for what they had done, they really were going to be sorry. Becca had beaten up two girls in the fifth grade for daring to talk back to her.

Becca didn't look scared of her, that's for sure.

AT LUNCH, Samantha thanked Kat for standing up for her this morning.

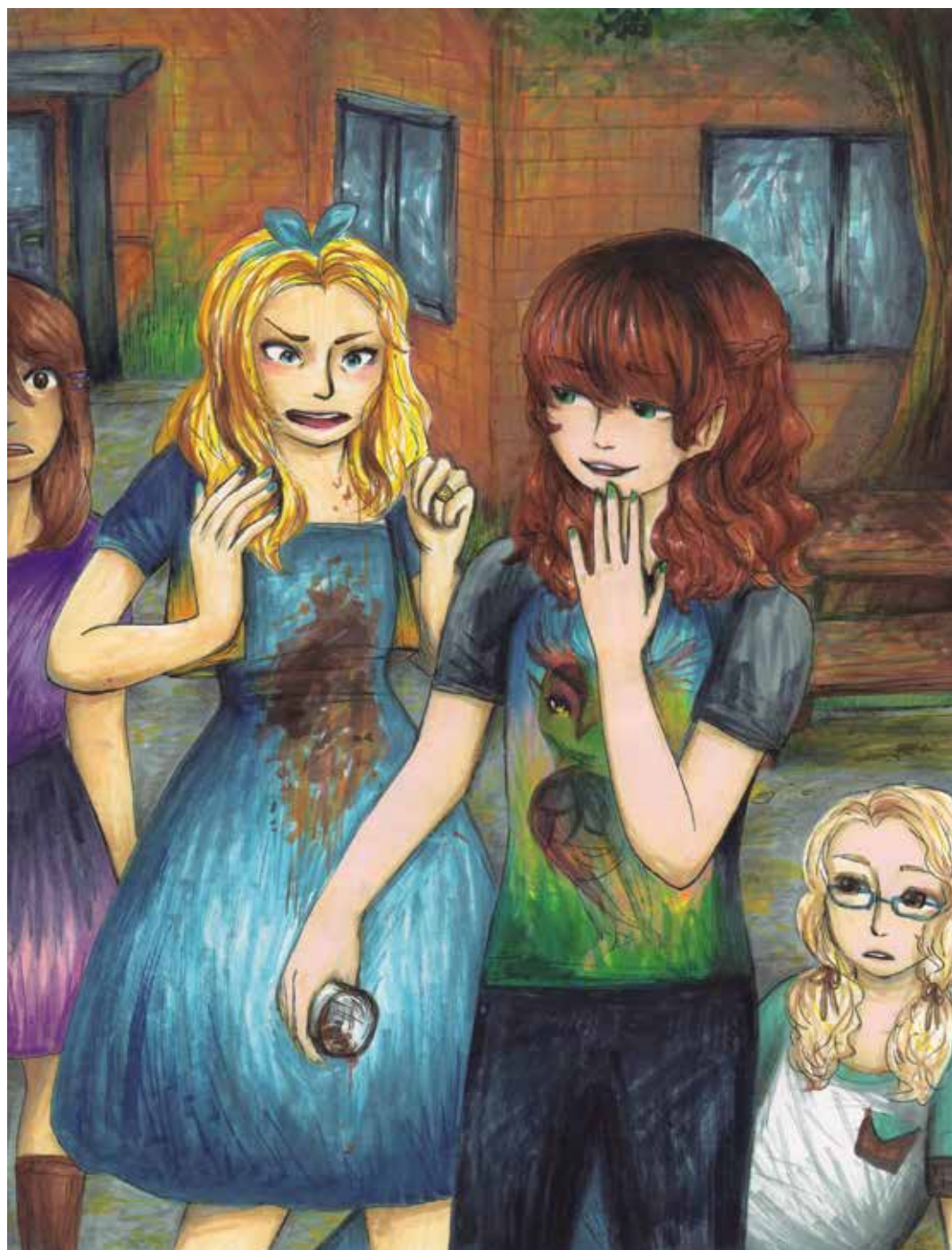
"Thank you, Kat. That was really nice. And really brave."

"Oh, it was nothing."

"No, it wasn't nothing. Becca is the meanest girl in the whole school."

"I guess so."

Because she'd stuck up for Samantha and stood up to Becca and the Sassies, Kat thought she should feel good about herself. But she had butterflies in her



"Please," Kat said in her sweetest voice. "Oops."

stomach because she didn't know what Becca was going to do.

THAT NIGHT, she couldn't sleep. Her phone kept beeping because she was getting mean texts that said things like, "Is Crybaby going to cry because she can't stand up for herself?" Which didn't make any sense because she had stood up to them, not for herself but for someone else. Then again, where is it written that bullies and their dumb texts have to make sense?

Kat turned the volume down to zero and went to sleep, but she had some pretty rough dreams. In one, Becca was an evil witch who was trying to turn her into a cricket!

ON THE BUS the next morning, Becca and her group were convincing people that Kat had bullied her and that Kat was mean for doing that. It was all a lie.

Of course, Samantha didn't believe it because she was there when it actually happened! Still, in every period Samantha was the only one who didn't ignore her. Everyone else believed Becca, maybe because they were afraid not to. Even Faith, her supposed best friend, was mean to her, "Gosh, Kat, you have some nerve to bully Becca."

"I didn't bully her!" cried Kat. "She was beating up Samantha and I stopped her!"

"Stop lying. Liar."

"I'm not lying, and if you weren't so mad about this Brian thing, which isn't a thing at all, you would trust me and be-

lieve me like you always do."

"Wait," said Faith, "why is the thing with Brian not a thing?"

"Because he likes you, not me!"

"Then why were you talking to him the other day in gym?"

"Because, silly, he was asking me about you!"

"Oh. Really? He likes me?"

"Really. Now can you do me a favor and help me find my math homework?"

Faith looked down on the ground and blushed.

"I don't have to help you find it because I know where it is. I have it in my locker."

"What?"

"I was mad about Brian. Please forgive me."

"OK, deal: if you stop believing I'm lying, I'll forgive you for snatching my homework!"

They laughed and hugged and it felt good.

"You know something?" said Faith. "I don't really even like Brian."

Kat smiled and said, "I know."

They laughed again, glad to be friends once more.

THAT NIGHT, Kat was happier than the night before: two of her three huge problems had been solved!

She wished the third one could be sucked into a hole and disappear. Fat chance.

She had turned off her phone to avoid that nightmare, and then she went to sleep. She had another dream about

Becca. In this one, she found herself standing up against Becca while everyone in the sixth grade watched. They ended up liking her and wanting to hang out with her while Becca ran away crying.

In the morning, she thought, “Could that really happen? Can I make everyone see the truth about Becca and her lie? Could the dream I just had really come true?”

She let the question hang in the air for a couple of seconds. Then she made the decision. She knew what to do and how to do it.

AS USUAL, Becca called her a “cry-baby” on the bus.

Her reaction to that was very strong, but according to her plan she kept it inside.

When they got off the bus, Becca and the Sassies surrounded her and all the other kids stood around to see what would happen.

Kat walked up to Becca and said, loud enough for everyone to hear, “Becca, I’m sorry for spilling that hot chocolate on you. I hope you can forgive me and that we can be friends like I always thought we could.”

Becca stood there with her mouth wide open, looking completely stunned for the second time that week. She clearly didn’t know what to say.

Kat stuck out her hand in a gesture of friendship and peace.

The other kids started chanting, “Shake her hand, shake her hand!”

With everyone watching in anticipation and chanting, Becca had only one choice.

She shook Kat’s hand!

AFTER THAT DAY, Becca never bothered her again. They never really became great friends, but they had an understanding and, more importantly, Becca pretty much stopped picking on other kids. The Sassies were still kind of sassy but they were usually nice to her. Faith decided she liked Brian after all, but that’s for another story!

And Kat never got to be as popular as she’d dreamed, but she was really happy with how it had all turned out. And she never was turned into a cricket after all.

Three huge problems, solved!

What problems would tomorrow bring?

She wasn’t worried. Bring it on!



Irises

By Caroline Smyth



Caroline Smyth, 12
Raleigh, North Carolina

Every day I am reborn
as something

new.

I am a prim cherry blossom,

a sleek flying fish,

a youthful scholar

I am everything all at once;
a savory dash of powdery cinnamon,
a sprig of scorched chard.

I am the pulse of the air
I inhale,
I am one of seven billion

Homo sapiens.

But no matter

what or

who

I am, I will always gaze at our world of

infinity

from behind the same gleaming obsidian pupils,
the same shining chestnut irises.



We shiver with the sheer excitement of it all

Rainstorm

By **Jem Burch**

Illustrated by the author

THE HOT, ARID CALIFORNIA AIR that is usually scorching in the middle of July has—for some odd, outlandish reason—quieted down. It is like a rain forest: wet and hot with great clouds like the feathers of an African gray parrot that ooze languidly along the horizon. It is like the South; the air is saturated with lazy banks of humidity. The hay that the Smiths have purchased (it's sitting on their pristine lawn, ugly and out of place as a baby swan in a duck's family) is steaming. Literally *steaming*. Wisps like ghostly hands rise from it, trailing their lacy tendrils in the swampy air. The air smells of storm.

We sit on the old couch and sniff the air rapturously, like hounds pausing in pursuit of a fox. Nothing is more satisfying than sitting at the big living room window with a friend and watching with relish as the rain floods the uneven backyard. If only the lights would go out! We shiver with the sheer excitement of it all. It is truly delicious.

The wind has picked up, wailing like a lost toddler, tossing leaf handkerchiefs in the gray sky. Trees rustle, whispering half-heard rumors to one another, swapping gossip, passing tales back and forth. When a human picks one up on the wind, all the truth will be swept away into history, leaving nothing but a faux shell of fabrication.

Lunch? No. Mom leaves the room. No time for idle chewing and chomping: important things are happening. The first raindrops begin to fall. They are too small to make a difference, but to us they are like gold coins falling from the heavens. We



Jem Burch, 13
Van Nuys, California

count them. There is one. *Plip*. Did you see that one fall on the chair? *Plop*. There are too many! *Pitter-patter*. We can't possibly count them all.

The intervals between the drops become shorter and shorter, until they vanish altogether. They speckle the patio and slide down the windows, creating tiny rivers, swirled with rivulets and eddies that channel the course of these miniature streams.

And then we can hear it. The melodious symphony of a thousand raindrops, falling from the endless Above. And the roiling sky: it is like the angry sea and it seethes and churns and it is a lion, ready to destroy. And we laugh and it is like the jingling of keys and it eggs the storm on. But we are ready as the lightning flashes. And it lights the room for a mere second in an eerie bluish spike of electricity. Lights, can you please go out!

"Why don't you just turn them off?" suggests practical Mom, so calm, so mad-denyingly oblivious to necessity. "It's the same in the end."

Nuh-uh. No way. That defeats the whole purpose.

And then we jump as the booming of thunder rends the air like a gong. And the house shakes as we land on the couch again and shudder and shiver and realize that more will follow. And we gaze out at the rain and wind and the blinding sheets of droplets pelting at our house like it is a mere tin can, forlorn and meek and quiet

in an empty alleyway. And the grass looks greener than before and we wish it would grow in the browning parts.

And then Sister screams as lightning strikes again and the lights go out! We cheer and high-five and Sister's textbook is on the floor and one of the pages has scribbles from where the pencil marked it when she dropped it. But then the lights come back on and it was just a flicker and we whine and yawn and boredom has returned.

But then it hasn't because the light flickers and it is fun to watch and the storm still rages on and the patio is drenched and flooded with puddles. And we itch to go and jump and step in them until we are all wet and we can dry off and put on clean clothes. But Mom says no, you might get struck by lightning. And we whine but we know in our hearts she is right and anyway, who wants to be outside when you could get electrocuted? Not us.

The backyard trees are wet and drooping from the excess of rain. Little droplets of silver fall from their somber black trunks and onto the soaked earth. Maybe our unassuming backyard will become a rain forest and we can have monkeys for pets! Sister says we're crazy, but who cares if we are.

And then, *crash bang boom!* Lightning and thunder rising to a crescendo, creating a duet in the sky of blue and gray that pulses like a heart. The lights have to go out for real now! But they still don't and

**The wind has
picked up, wailing
like a lost toddler.**

we are battling the storm and the house is now nothing but a tepee or a lean-to. We must fight for survival in the cold, wet, roiling blackness.

Mom is saying something about going to the grocery store and we don't listen to her until we remember that the gutters will have overflowed. We plead to Mom to bring us along too; there is nothing better to do at this moment. And she complies and tells us to put on our jackets and boots. We oblige and walk out the door in bright colors and face the rain. We taste the adventure, craning our necks up to the gray sky and sticking our tongues out to feel the sweet fizz of excitement bubble in our mouths like a sugary soda.

And then we see the gutter, the streaming gutter, torrents and all, cascading down the curb in a cataract of currents and eddies, ebb and flow. We long to wet our feet inside our snug Wellington boots and feel droplets explode around us. Mom says no. Of course she does.

We get in the car and rain slides down the curved windows and it is beautiful. The pane is bejeweled with tiny viscous pearls and we want to collect them and hold onto them forever.

But there are other, better, more interesting things. The street is slick and wet and the asphalt is darker and rivers run in the gutters. The intersections are flooded and cars skid across the pools and puddles, their wheels creating showers

that kiss the windows as they maneuver in between the scanty traffic. We watch, safely tucked in our own little box, as a woman in a gray sweatshirt, dotted with rain, attempts to safely navigate a way across the streaming gutter. She titters as though she is embarrassed and pushes her dirty-blond bangs out of her eyes. Raising her maroon umbrella, she hops carefully across the river and onto the asphalt, careful not to dampen her sneakers.

And then the light turns green and we speed off down the road.

We are going slower than normal; we cannot risk hydroplaning on the slick road. And then we are at the market, and drivers are honking at each other. We slide into a spot and hop out and rush into the store.

The floor is scuffed and muddy from thousands of boots and rubbers and the air has the all-too-familiar scent of wet dog. The watermelons and cantaloupes look so out of place against the people garbed in their raincoats and boots.

We clomp happily in our colorful boots, following Mom through the market as she putters about, stopping every half-second to grab some item or another, which we take from her and throw into the fire-engine-red cart like basketball stars. (I missed from only a couple feet away, but who cares?)

And then there is a huge crack as lightning spiders across the ominous sky, leaving spots dancing in our eyes. The

**The booming of
thunder rends the air
like a gong.**



"The thunder was right above us!"

lights flicker like a candle in a breeze and thunder sounds its resonant gong. The building shakes. Chaos reigns.

"The thunder was right above us!"

"This weather is supposedly caused by a hurricane in the Pacific."

"Eeeeeeeee!!!"

The lights are out, as though someone just blew out that candle. The refrigeration has turned off. People are standing stock still; an old woman literally drops the container of basil she was contemplating. This is even better than a blackout at home!

Where are the emergency lights? Surely they're not blacked out too? But they aren't and dim yellow lights illuminate the shoppers. People putter around the building quietly; no one wants to shatter the peculiar ringing of silence in their ears.

We finish shopping and noiselessly: it is as though we are ghosts or shadows, or even wraiths bewitched by evil enchantresses. I always thought that the scariest thing on Halloween would be the howls and yowls and boos and shrieks of ghosts, but now it is the quiet I am frightened of. If a monster jumped out at me right now, I would die, just die.

My friend's mom calls. It is time for him to go home. I want him to stay. He wants to too. "It's no fun seeing the storm

alone," he complains as we drive to his house. I agree with him. What's the point? There isn't one, I conclude sullenly, there isn't one.

Mom pulls into our driveway. I silently help her unload the groceries, I silently put the vegetables in the refrigerator, and I silently slink off to my room. The

storm isn't even fun anymore: it has been reduced to a mere drizzle, the kind that makes it too wet to go outside, but too dry to do anything interesting.

I sigh and stare out the window. Why did my friend have to go? Why

couldn't he have stayed? We could have had so much more fun. And I bet the storm would've returned just for us.

"Why did you leave?" I ask the uncomfortable gray sky. "Why did you go away? Why couldn't you have stayed?"

My question is ignored; no thunder rumbles in reply, no lightning flashes to alleviate my sulkiness. The storm doesn't care about me. Fine then, I won't care about it.

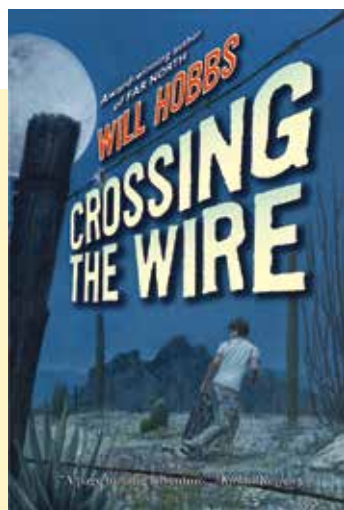
I cross my arms and frown at the ground, concentrating all my energy on pouting. But it is hard, and I soon lower my hands to my lap. I realize something. The storm had to go. It had to rain on someone else's house and give them the same joy it gave me. I smile up at the gray sky as thunder growls in the distance. ❀

**If a monster
jumped out at me
right now, I would
die, just die.**

Book Review

By Sarah Gu

Crossing the Wire, by Will Hobbs; HarperCollins
Publishers: New York, 2006; \$16.99



Sarah Gu, 13
McLean, Virginia

WHEN HIS FATHER DIED years ago trying to cross the Arizona border, fifteen-year-old Victor Flores dropped out of school and started to plant corn to support his mother and five younger siblings. After he gradually came out of the grief of his father's death, more problems came up for Victor. Nobody bought Mexican corn anymore, because American corn planted with chemical fertilizers and pesticides was much more affordable.

One day Victor realized, if he continued to plant corn his family would have to starve. He decided to risk his life and cross the Mexican border and go to the United States like the other men in his village.

His journey was extremely precarious and deadly. Victor experienced a lot of things that he had never imagined before. First, he broke his scalp by jumping off a dashing train. Then he experienced starvation, running out of food in the middle of the desert. His guide that he met got caught by border patrol. Surprisingly, Victor met his best friend in a soup kitchen, Rico, who left for *El Norte* several weeks before him. Victor even carried drugs for the drug smugglers without knowing it. And worst of all, he experienced walking for hours and hours under the blazing sun—chapped lips, dried mouth, completely dehydrated, his throat felt


like it was on fire when he had to swallow. After eleven weeks, everything was worth it, he finally crossed and found a job.

This book completely reversed my opinion on illegal immigrants. Before I read this book, I thought that, while the legal immigrants, like my parents, came to the U.S. as college students and waited for ten years to get a green card, the illegal immigrants did not go through the process of naturalization and it was effortless for them to get to the United States. In my head, I imagined that all they had to do was to run for a couple of hours and *BAM!* they are in the U.S.

After reading this book, I felt ashamed and apologetic for what I had thought before. Nobody wants to leave their family and go to a completely unfamiliar country that they have never been to before. Like Victor, he did not want to come to the United States, but there was a burden on his back, to support his family. Also, the journey was deadly. People cannot imagine how many people died on their journey trying to cross the border. People have died because of starvation, some ran out of water, some died because of the heat, and some were even shot by border patrol. Only a few of the determined and the fortunate people have succeeded.

Although the journey was hard, that does not mean it is not the right thing to do. From this book, I learned to see the world with other people's eyes.

After reading this book, I also truly felt sympathetic for people like Victor in real life. At the same time, I also learned to be thankful and to treasure the smallest things beside me, like going to school legally, not worrying about being deported, and having the ability to communicate with others using English.

Crossing the Wire is a breathtaking book. I loved the characters and the story. This book is full of exciting adventures. I finished the book in just two days. *Crossing the Wire* is one of my favorite books and I hope you can read it too! 



"Watch out!" Elizabeth screamed

Seeing in the Dark

By **Sandra Detweiler**

Illustrated by **Catherine Chung**

IT WAS LATE SUMMER. The air was thick and humid. Elizabeth lay on her bed, even though the sun had been up for hours. Every day she chose a different place to zone out—her beanbag chair, the couch, a chair at the dining room table. It didn't make much difference. Every night she cried herself to sleep, soaking her pillow, which was already stiff with tears. She didn't even bother to turn it over to the fresh side. Every day the sun rose, but it couldn't light her world now that her mother was gone.

Elizabeth stared at the ceiling. When she was little, she and her mom used to lie on their backs, finding shapes in the ceiling plaster and making up stories about them. She picked them out now—the lion, the goat, the spaceship, the otter, the dragon, the wine glass—but they didn't mean anything anymore. They were just splotches of plaster.

It was hot. Sweltering, actually. The hot air pressed on Elizabeth's lungs, making it hard to breathe. At last she couldn't stand it anymore—the shapes on the ceiling, the heat, the awful, muffled stillness of the house, the endless hours, passing unnoticed.

She jumped off her bed and ran down the stairs and out the front door. She paused on the doorstep, listening to the cicadas chirping in the sleepy silence. A mail truck was turning the corner at the end of her street. She ran to the mailbox, not really expecting to find anything interesting but needing something to do.

Back in the house, she flipped through the mail, a lump



Sandra Detweiler, 13
Eugene, Oregon



Catherine Chung, 12
Theodore, Alabama

forming in her throat when she saw that several letters were addressed to Alice Benson, her mother. Most of it was for her dad, but one envelope had her name on it. She almost smiled when she saw the stamp with the queen's profile on it. The letter was from her brother, James, who was in England for the summer.

Elizabeth tore the letter open and read:

Dear Elizabeth,

I couldn't believe it when I heard that Mom had been killed in a car crash. I miss you and Dad like crazy. Hang in there, Liz. I know this must be really hard for you. It is for me. Tell Dad I'm coming home on the eighteenth. See you soon.

Love,
Jimmy

The next day, when Elizabeth got up, she thought, Seven days since *it* happened. She was surprised she'd lasted this long.

After eating breakfast with her dad, who barely acknowledged her presence before shutting himself in his office for the day, Elizabeth decided to take a walk.

The sun hadn't had time to heat everything up yet, so it was almost cool as she started down her street. Half an hour later, she had walked further than she ever had before, to a part of town she'd only seen from the window of a car.

The road sloped down, and as Elizabeth started down the hill, the door of a yellow house opened and a girl and a dog came out. The girl seemed to be blind—she gripped the dog's harness and

walked cautiously as she started up the hill toward Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was so fascinated that she almost didn't hear the whir of a bike tire. Almost. When she looked up, she saw a man on a bike coasting swiftly down the hill toward the blind girl. Elizabeth expected him to steer clear of the girl and her dog, but the man was listening to music and didn't see her.

"Watch out!" Elizabeth screamed.

The girl looked up, confused. Her dog barked and tried to pull her out of the way. The biker looked up but it was too late for him to change course. He was going to crash!

Without thinking, Elizabeth leapt into the bike's path. She felt it collide with her body, knocking her down on the rough asphalt. Her head slammed against the ground and she blacked out.

THE FIRST THING she noticed when she woke up was the music. It was piano music and at first she thought it was her mom playing. But she had never heard this song before. All the songs her mom used to play were worn into her brain so that she could easily recognize them.

She opened her eyes. She was lying on a cream-colored sofa and it was the blind girl playing the piano, not her mom.

Elizabeth tried to raise herself on her elbows, but her head was throbbing and she fell back on the pillows with a groan.

The girl stopped playing. "Mom, she's awake!" she called and then hurried over and knelt next to the sofa. She moved so

easily through the room that Elizabeth wondered if she was really blind.

Just then, a tall woman with long blond hair like her daughter's hurried in, holding an ice pack. "How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Lousy," muttered Elizabeth.

The woman gently laid the ice pack against Elizabeth's head. "My name is Maria Belmont. This is my daughter, Ramona."

"What happened?" asked Elizabeth. "I just remember jumping in front of the bike and then..."

Maria smiled. "Yes, the biker said so. He was quite worked up. Didn't even say sorry. He seemed to think it was your fault you got hit. At least he helped me carry you in here."

"I had to jump in front of him, otherwise he would have hit her," Elizabeth explained, gesturing to Ramona.

Ramona laughed. "Are you always this noble? The biker wouldn't have hurt me any worse than he hurt you."

Elizabeth giggled. "I guess you're right," she admitted. "But I couldn't just stand there and do nothing," she added. "It wouldn't be fair."

Ramona laughed again. "So what's your name anyway, Miss Nobleness?"

"Elizabeth."

"Should I call your parents?" asked Maria. "They might be worried..."

"No," said Elizabeth quickly. "I'm sure

they're not."

"All right," said Maria uncertainly. "If you're sure."

Just then, Elizabeth noticed the dog which had been lying next to the sofa the whole time.

"What's your dog's name?" she asked Ramona, stroking its soft black fur.

"Luz," said Ramona. "It means 'light' in Spanish."

"Why'd you name her that?"

Ramona looked thoughtful. "I guess because she's kind of like

my light—she's invisible to me, but I can't see without her."

"Are you girls hungry?" Maria called from the other room. "Do you want some food?"

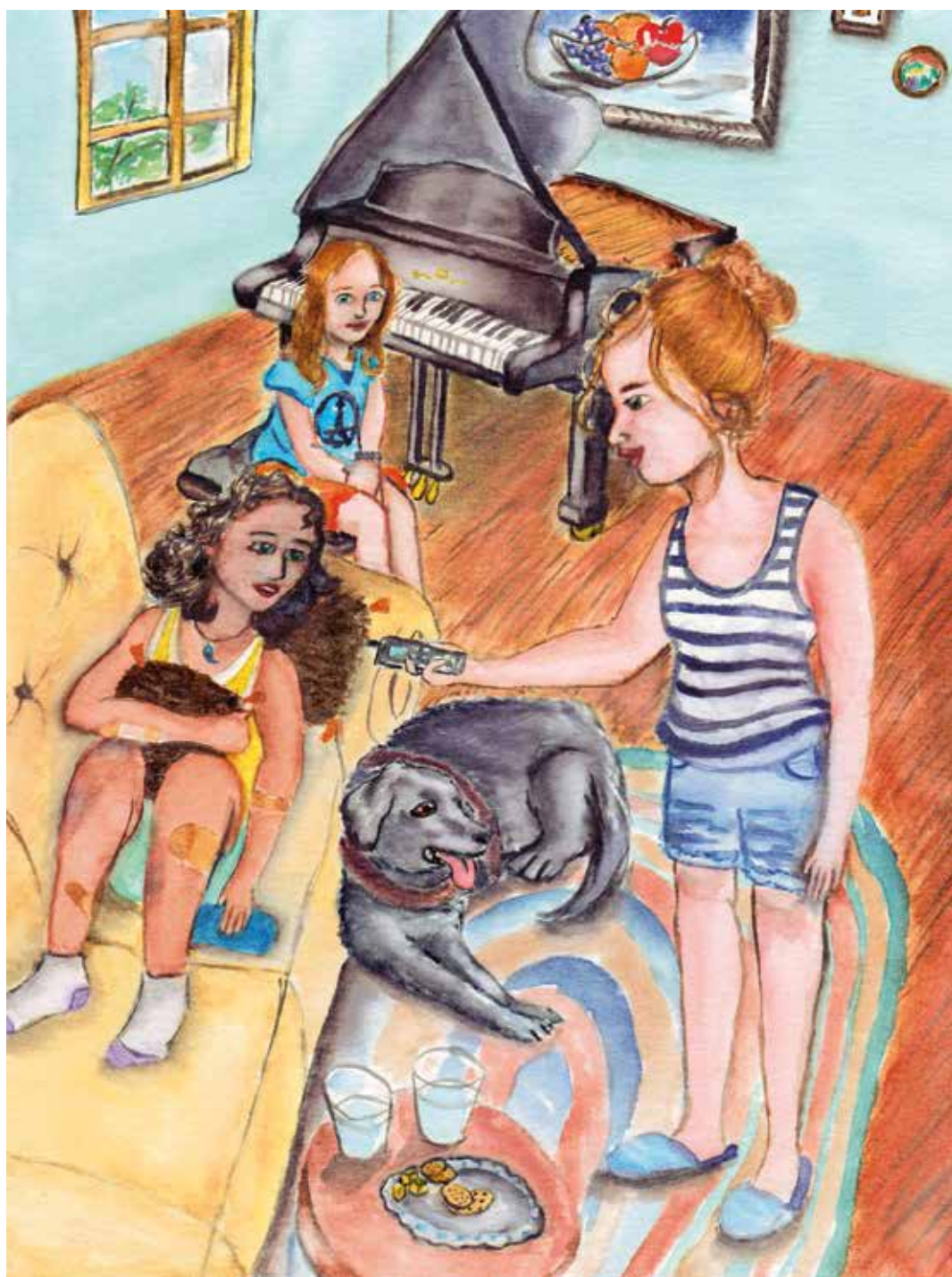
"Sure, thanks, Mom," Ramona called back.

A few minutes later, Maria came in, carrying a plate of crackers and cheese. Elizabeth and Ramona ate hungrily, feeding Luz a few bits of cheese. When they were finished, Maria came in, holding a phone.

"Do you want to stay here and rest for a few hours?" she asked Elizabeth. "If you do, I need you to call your parents and let them know you're OK. Otherwise, I can drive you home or you can have them come pick you up."

Elizabeth sat up, but it made her feel dizzy. "Can I stay here for a while?" she asked.

**It was piano music
and at first she
thought it was
her mom playing.**



"Can I stay here for a while?" she asked

"Of course," said Maria. "Just let them know you're OK."

She handed Elizabeth the phone, and Elizabeth dialed her home number. As she had expected, no one answered, so she left a message saying she'd be home in a few hours.

Then she lay back down on the fuzzy brown cushions. She ached all over. Ramona went back to the piano, Luz snuffled comfortably in Elizabeth's ear. She relaxed and eventually drifted off to sleep.

When she opened her eyes again she felt less achy. Ramona was still at the piano, but the light had changed and she had the feeling she'd been asleep for at least an hour.

Maria poked her head into the room. "Want some lunch?" she asked.

"Sure," Elizabeth replied.

"Is macaroni OK?"

Elizabeth nodded and sat up. Her head still ached and there were scratches and bruises on her arms and legs, but she felt a little better.

"Do you play piano?" Ramona asked.

"I took lessons for a few years a while back," Elizabeth answered.

"I know some easy duets we could play," said Ramona hopefully. "I have the music too, if that's easier."

"OK," said Elizabeth, coming over and sitting next to Ramona.

They played until Maria called them in for lunch. The duets were simple and easy to play but sounded cool with the two

parts. Elizabeth enjoyed them as much as the macaroni that followed.

"Can Elizabeth stay a while longer?" Ramona asked her mom. "If you want to," she added to Elizabeth.

"Sure, if that's OK," said Elizabeth.

"It's fine with me, as long as you're sure your parents won't mind," said Maria.

Elizabeth doubted whether her father had even noticed that she was gone. She followed Ramona back to the piano and spent the afternoon

playing. When they ran out of duets, Ramona showed Elizabeth a solo piece. This one was familiar.

"My mom used to play this," said Elizabeth softly. Then, even more softly, "She died in a car accident a week ago."

"Oh, that's awful!" cried Ramona. "You must be so sad."

Elizabeth nodded. "My dad just wanders around the house all day or shuts himself in his office. And my brother is in England. I got a letter from him yesterday. He's coming home in a few weeks."

Ramona took Elizabeth's hand and squeezed it. "Well, at least you have that to look forward to. You have to remember to look for the good things in your life, not the bad things. If we just think about bad things, we'll never be happy. I wasn't always blind. I got sick when I was little and now I can't see. At first I cried so much. I missed the light and the colors. But then my parents got me Luz, and I

**"You have to
remember to look
for the good things
in your life."**

learned to play piano, and I *feel* the colors, even if I can't see them, in the music."

Later, Maria drove Elizabeth home. As they pulled up in front of her house, the dark windows stared blankly at her. Their house had become a ghost house, quiet as a graveyard, not the welcoming home it had once been. It wasn't right.

"Are your parents home?" Maria asked uncertainly.

Elizabeth nodded, her throat tight.

Maria turned around to look at her. "It was very sweet of you to jump in front of that bike. And Ramona loved having someone to play piano with. If you want to come over sometime, you can have your parents call me."

Elizabeth nodded again and got out of the car. "Thanks for everything," she managed to say.

She climbed the steps to her front door and pushed it open. It was unlocked, just the way she'd left it. She watched from the window as Maria's red car drove away. Elizabeth looked around the dreary living room. She was sick of the dark, sick of the silence.

She went up to her bedroom. It was stiflingly hot and stuffy up here, and she opened her window as wide as it would go. Then she grabbed her worn copy of *Stargirl* and ran outside. She found a shady spot in her backyard and spent the rest of the afternoon reading her favorite parts of the book. When she went back

inside, she was feeling almost good.

At dinner—pizza, *again*—she told her dad about what had happened at Ramona's house. He seemed shaken by her story.

"I'm so sorry, Elizabeth," he said. "I've been so sad about losing Alice that I haven't been paying attention to you."

"It's OK," said Elizabeth quickly.

"No, it's not. Alice is gone and there's nothing I can do about it. We need to move on."

"I was wondering," said Elizabeth, "could you help me find some of Mom's piano music? I want to try to play it."

"Sure," said her dad, almost smiling.

"And—could you call Ramona's mom and see when I can come over?"

"Of course."

When they finished eating, Elizabeth's dad showed her where her mom's music was kept, then left to call Maria, leaving Elizabeth to play. She stumbled through the first few pieces but gradually relaxed into it and played with more confidence.

A few minutes later, her dad came back into the room. He waited for her to finish the song she was playing, then he said, "Want to start taking piano lessons again?"

Elizabeth smiled, watching the sun sink behind the rooftops across the street. Even when it was gone, it wasn't really dark. Just twilight.

"That would be great," she said.



Home Plate

By **Ross Mangels**

Ah, Baseball!
My favorite sport.
I feel the excitement
and adrenalin running through me
As we begin the game.
I'm in my favorite position,
The catcher's spot,
With the batter right beside me.
I sign the pitch to the pitcher
And the pitcher winds up.
I see the ball sailing toward me
And I hear the *thud* of the ball in my mitt.
But wait, what's this?
A man stealing second?
I must throw him out!
I pop up as quick as I can,
To zap the ball to the second baseman.
The throw,
The slide,
The tag.
And the umpire calls it... OUT!
Hooray!
As I squat down for the next pitch,
I smile and think,
"This is where I belong,
Right behind Home Plate."



Ross Mangels, 11
Skopje, Macedonia

The Hunt

By **Christopher Thien**

Illustrated by **Bedford Stevens**



Christopher Thien, 13
Weiser, Idaho



Bedford Stevens, 12
Springfield, Oregon

IT WAS A COOL FALL DAY and the opening day for archery. My brother and I woke up early and hiked three miles from base camp to find a tall tree that overlooked the meadow. My brother and I had been sitting there for three hours on the edge of a line of trees, sitting on a tree stand almost fifteen feet up a pine tree. There was a meadow with a lot of tall grasses that the deer liked to munch on.

Then, finally, it was there, the perfect deer walking across the meadow. It was a four-by-four deer that looked pretty big. It was “the shot” I had to take.

You could hear the grass that crumpled when its feet landed on the ground. The distant gurgling of the stream on the other side of the meadow. I raised the bow into shooting stance. I nocked the arrow into the nock. I aimed at the deer, getting the green dot on the sight to line up with the deer’s big chest. The air was cool as the breeze tickled the hairs on my neck. My breathing was in slow deep breaths, trying to be as still as I could be. You could smell the pine wood. My finger twitched the trigger. The trigger release popped back into its open position. You could see and feel the bowstring moving towards the body of the bow and hear its whir. The arrow was moving towards the deer. The deer turned its head, looking at the arrow so close to his body. He could hear the hum of the arrow zipping through the air. His reaction was just too slow. The shot went straight at his heart.



The deer turned its head, looking at the arrow so close to his body

As the body collapsed to the ground, the blood oozed drop by drop. He was breathing his last little bit of air. You

could see the chest rising and falling with each gasp and then there was a long sigh and it was over. ❀



“Why, Aria? Do you think it was really magic?”

Blue Butterfly

By **Elia Smith**

Illustrated by **Maya Work**

MAGIC IS LIKE a little puppy. Curious and frolicsome, it bounds throughout the world, unbidden and free. It pauses, sometimes, to explore or play. It's that breeze that makes the nape of your neck tingle delightfully, that lifts you way off your feet, then sends you tumbling into warm, soft grass.

It usually shows up when you don't expect it—but sometimes when you do. Sometimes you know what it is the moment it touches you, other times you don't realize until much later. Sometimes it's just curious, other times it has a more serious cause. You never really know, with magic.

Carissa Berlin had learned that lesson. She knew that magic, while amazing, wasn't always dependable. It had a mind of its own. It chose when to appear, when it would help—and when it wouldn't. Her pa said there was a reason behind everything. He said magic could sense when interfering could mess things up, so that's why it kept away at times. It couldn't be just random.

Carissa wasn't so sure. That freakish storm the other night, for instance. Her friend Lou's barn roof crashed in, but Carissa's house was untouched.

"A miracle," her ma had said as the family stood out on the porch, watching the neighbors fix and clean after the damage. "A right-and-regular miracle." Carissa had agreed and felt thankful that they were all fine, and their home was too.

Now—a day later—as she sat on her bed, deep in thought, she knew it was more than a coincidental happenstance. It



Elia Smith, 11
Santa Monica, California



Maya Work, 11
Terrasse-Vaudreuil, Quebec,
Canada

was more. Magical, it had to be. The exciting thought made Carissa's legs jiggle. But why us? she wondered. We're doing great this year with Pa's business, so fixing wouldn't've set us back much at all... why not somebody who needed the protection more?

She thought about asking her older sister, Ivy. Ivy always had good ideas, even if she could be bossy sometimes. But these days, Ivy often seemed preoccupied, and she snapped at or ignored her younger sister more than usual.

No, Carissa decided. This was something she wanted to figure out herself. She flopped back on the bed so that she was looking at the ceiling. There was a crack on it that she liked to stare at when she was thinking. If you tilted your head at the right angle, it looked like a thin, tall girl with floating hair and large butterfly-like wings. When Carissa was six, she had decided that the ceiling-crack girl was a fairy and had named her Aria.

"Why, Aria?" Carissa asked aloud, staring up at the figure. She often talked to Aria like this. Obviously, she couldn't answer, but it made it easier for Carissa to think of ideas when she felt like she was brainstorming with another person. "Do you think it was really magic?"

The curtains fluttered, and a shaft of sunlight danced, just for a second, over Aria. Carissa took that as a yes. "You know how Pa says there's a reason for ev-

erything, especially with magic, so what's the reason here?" No answers popped into her mind. She got no bright ideas. Carissa sighed and closed her eyes, wondering about the whys and hows of magic.

CARISSA SAT UP in bed. Something was different, though she wasn't sure what. She looked around, panic growing. Her eyes darted from her bookcase to her plush blue chair and around again. The window was wide open, and the yellow curtains streamed in the breeze. Carissa could hear the chirps and whistles of the birds outside.

The things in her room looked as if someone had sprinkled a fine silver powder throughout the room—they glittered like diamonds in the sunlight. Then Carissa noticed something that made her jaw drop in astonishment.

Aria was gone from the ceiling. Where there was a crack, there was now smooth white ceiling. Suddenly, Carissa was aware of a sweet, high voice singing a soft melody. She stood up, entranced, and walked through the window. She floated out and seemed to glide through a world unlike the one she knew.

Then! On the top of a hill, stood the figure Carissa had dreamed about for so long. The girl's hair was golden like sunlight and flew behind her though there was no breeze. She had deep blue eyes and wore a dress that seemed to shift and glow, like it had been woven from the

**She floated out
and seemed to glide
through a world unlike
the one she knew.**

spirit of nature itself. Most remarkable of all, two bright blue, gossamer wings extended from her back, like those of a butterfly. She was the one singing, and the closer Carissa got, the more beautiful it seemed—clear and pure, delicate and sweet. “Aria?” Carissa breathed, and moved slowly toward the girl.

“Come, Carissa,” she sang, smiling and holding out her arms, “I can show you the secrets of magic... Come, Carissa!” She stepped forward, her face welcoming—

“COME, CARISSA, I said!” Her ma’s voice rang out in her ears. “It’s time for dinner!” Carissa blinked. She must’ve fallen asleep. What a lovely and strange dream she had. Just to be sure, she checked that Aria was still on the ceiling. Once again, the girl’s enchanting shape was imprinted right over Carissa’s bed.

Carissa climbed off her bed and stretched. She glanced quickly at herself in the mirror—short, slim ten-year-old with auburn hair and bright green eyes. Carissa began walking toward the kitchen. Oddly, she still vividly remembered every detail of her dream. Usually, they vanished the moment she awoke, leaving only hazy traces. This one was different...

“There you are!” her ma scolded, placing a plate of spaghetti in front of her youngest daughter. “I called and called... what were you doing up there?”

“Oh,” Carissa began, a forkful of noodles already poised to be eaten, “I fell asleep this afternoon, I guess.” She stuffed the pasta into her mouth. Mmm, there was nothing like her ma’s spaghetti.

Her ma—the best cook in their town—was tall and graceful, with white-blond hair that fell to her waist, and had green eyes just like Carissa’s. Her ma’s hair, however, was a blessing given to Ivy, who today wore it in a long French braid.

“I would’ve given anything for a nap today,” she commented with a toss of her braid. “But I had to finish my essay, then I went down to Brianna’s to help her fix up her house...” Carissa sighed and ate another bite of spaghetti. She remembered when Ivy used to be a fun sister. They’d go to the park together, and Ivy’d push her on the swing... or the two of them would walk down to the corner store and Ivy would miraculously “discover” a dollar in her pocket: just enough for two PayDays, their favorite candy bar.

It all changed when Ivy turned thirteen. All of a sudden, she didn’t want to be seen with her younger sister, much less voluntarily play with her. When, on a rare occasion, they got some time together, Ivy only wanted to *talk*. About clothes, the girls at school, and—much to Carissa’s disgust—boys.

When the spaghetti was finished, Ivy gathered up the plates and Carissa collected the silverware and cups. “Mmmm...” Pa sighed, leaning back in his chair. “Marie, there is nothing so good as your spaghetti!” Pa was a big man with broad shoulders, strong arms, and the softest heart Carissa had ever known.

Ma smiled at him and picked up the napkins and place mats.

Carissa left for her room. Ivy had parted as soon as her chore was done—no



"If that's not magical I don't know what is"

doubt calling her best friend, Brianna. As Carissa made her way down the hall to her bedroom, flashes of her odd dream swam through her mind. The room seeming different... Aria's crack gone... The girl...

She collapsed on her bed and stared at the outline of Aria. It was a normal evening, or it *should* have been a normal evening. But for a reason that was now twirling just out of reach of Carissa's understanding, it wasn't.

She peeked out of her door. Across the hall, Ivy's door was open a crack. "OK... bye. See you tomorrow," her sister's voice said, slightly muted. Then silence. Carefully Carissa walked to Ivy's door and opened it. Still though, she did not enter, wary.

"Um? Ivy?" she asked hesitantly. Ivy's room was slightly larger than Carissa's and painted pale lavender. Ivy was sprawled out on her bed, reading a book. She looked up and smiled.

"I have a question," Carissa said, taking a step into the room. The light brown carpet was soft under her uncertain foot. "Um... I wanted to know... if," Carissa stalled, wondering if her question was foolish. Well, it was a little too late to turn back now... "Do-you-believe-in-magic?" she blurted all at once.

Ivy paused, twirling the end of her braid. Seconds went by, though they seemed like days, as Carissa waited in the doorway. Abruptly her sister stood up. "Come on, Cari. I want to show you something." Ivy led the way, out of the room, down the hallway, and through the

back door. They now stood in their small backyard.

The redbud trees' thin branches swayed softly in the evening breeze. Carissa took a deep breath of the cool, rich air and felt the jumble of thoughts in her head clear. "It's beautiful, isn't it?" Ivy asked, her gentle voice breaking the silence. It was only then Carissa realized her sister was looking not at the contents of the yard, but over it, at the glowing sunset painted across the sky.

Carissa drew in her breath. It was simply stunning. The pale orange sun glowed gently just above the trees, the yellow light melting into orange, to a soft pinkish hue which fell into fire-engine red, ending in a spectacular magenta.

"If that's not magical I don't know what is," Ivy sighed contentedly, her eyes dreamy. Carissa nodded slowly, wondering how she never could have noticed how beautiful the sunset was, when it happened every day.

The silence was broken by the sharp *bring!* of the telephone and Mrs. Berlin's voice calling, "Vivi! It's for you!" Then, with a simple step toward the kitchen by Ivy, the precious moment with her sister disappeared. It was like Carissa had traveled back in time, then had suddenly snapped into the present. Just a minute ago, Carissa had felt like her best friend was back, that warm, smiley feeling in her tummy that everything was going to turn out fine.

Then Ivy was gone, and the ponytail-flipping, sarcastic, Carissa-ignoring stranger was back.

Carissa stood out there for a moment longer, but the scene had lost its luster. With a sad sigh, she turned and headed back for her house. If she had paused a moment from the door, wanting to experience the happiness the sunset gave her again, and turned to look, she might have seen a stunningly blue butterfly with unusually sparkling wings flit across the sky. She might have been reminded of something, or perhaps *someone*. She might have followed its magic into the backwoods and had the most amazing adventure of her life—

But she did not. She thought instead, not of Aria, not of magic, but of her life's woes, and thus instead took a much shorter, less thrilling journey back into her room, where she collapsed on her bed, tears beginning to fill her eyes.

Carissa buried her face in her pillow and mourned softly for times long ago, times where Ivy was actually interested in her. So, she missed seeing that her ceiling was empty of girl-shaped cracks...

CARISSA SQUINTED at the fairy-like girl, trying to get a closer look at her features. The nearer she got to the figure, the harder it became to pinpoint her looks. Oddly, though, her song's strength increased.

"Carissa, come! You want to know, I want to teach, I can show you many things, Carissa..."

"Who are you?" Carissa asked. Her words echoed as if she stood in a cavern. The girl froze, silenced.

"My name is Aria," she sang with a

smile, "the Fairy of Song." Carissa saw with a start her grin was just like Ivy's. She raised her arms high, and silver light danced across her face for a moment, then a perfect giant golden conch seashell appeared, and Aria stepped into it.

Drawn, Carissa walked closer, until she was standing inside the enormous shell. It lifted into the sky, and the panorama below was an odd mix of things she had seen in her life, things from books she had read, scenes from plays she had made up.

"Is this really happening?" Carissa asked. "Is it magic?"

"No," Aria crooned, her words falling into the wind. "It's your imagination."

Then, in one terrible moment, the seashell disappeared. Carissa plummeted down, down, toward cold, hard rock, faster and faster, while Aria's previously enchanting voice turned into cruel laughter.

"But," Aria's voice turned kind again, "so was that." The danger vanished, and Carissa was standing once again with Ivy, looking at the sunset, just as beautiful as before. Carissa began to get the same warm feeling of happiness. A blue butterfly flew across the sky's scene, illuminated and glittering. Ivy turned and looked at Carissa, and her eyes were the butterfly's stunning blue, instead of their normal brown.

When she spoke, she rather sang, and her voice was Aria's. "That was not."

Carissa was facing Aria now, standing in a corridor so long and white ahead of her, yet the scene behind her was decorated and bursting with colors. Carissa tried

to turn to get into the loveliness of the things behind her, staring at the bright glory in rapture, yet found she could only go forward, and as she did so, adorning it with the beauty right up to the position she stood in right then.

"I have one question," Carissa said as she moved forward. "Is magic real?" Aria laughed. The sound was like little jingle bells infused with a bird's cheerful tweet.

"Of course it's real! It's everywhere, all the time!" With that she disappeared. Carissa then noticed that Aria's figure was hiding a small sign that never got any closer, yet never got any farther away. It seemed to move with each of Carissa's steps.

Emblazoned with all number of opal opportunity, precious promises, and emerald expectations, and a very odd statue of a blue butterfly, it read, FUTURE.

"CARISSA!" Ivy's voice pierced through Carissa's brain, and she was dimly aware of being shaken. "Cari! Are you OK?" Groggy, Carissa sat up. Pale morning light filtered through the curtains.

"Wha...?" she asked, rubbing her eyes. She was still wearing yesterday's clothes, and a tear track was barely wet down her face.

"You were talking in your sleep," Ivy explained, sitting down on the bed and resting her hand on Carissa's knee. "You kept saying things like, 'Where's the magic?' and 'Aria! Come back, Aria!' Incidentally, who's Aria?"

"Oh, just..." She planned to say *just a random character from my dream* but felt like that was lying. "The Fairy of Song."

Ivy nodded like she understood, but Carissa knew she didn't. "Cari," Ivy said slowly, "I... What you asked last night... It got me thinking... What do you think of when you think of magic?" Carissa smiled.

"A blue butterfly."

"Do you want me to show you how to do the butterfly bun? The edges look like a butterfly's wings," Ivy offered. Carissa felt a little joyful tingle deep inside her.


"Sure."

As Ivy wove Carissa's hair in and out, they chatted about things. Things that mattered. Shared memories, ideas, and, most importantly, magic.

"I think," Ivy said, "that magic is always everywhere, all the time." Carissa gave a jolt at how much she sounded like Aria. "Hold still, Cari. It's just that most of the time you don't notice it at all, so when you do, it seems... well, magical."

"Like the sunset," Carissa added and felt her sister's agreement and approval shine onto her. Just like it used to be. Maybe the FUTURE isn't so bad after all. "You know, I..."

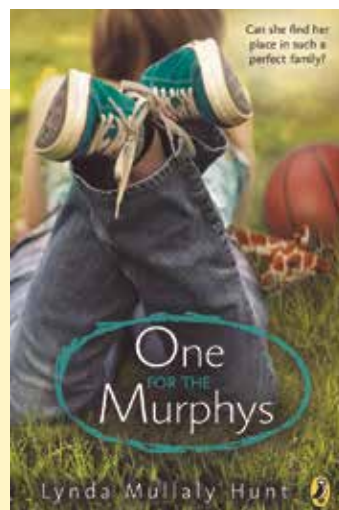
Then Ivy's cell phone rang. Carissa held her breath as her sister took it out of her pocket, the pop song she had as her ringtone blaring. According to caller ID, it was Brianna. In awe, Carissa watched as Ivy's finger, with no hesitation, pressed the "dismiss" button for the call.

"You were saying?" Ivy asked, as if there had been no interruption. And that, Carissa decided, was real magic. 

Book Review

By Catherine Chung

One for the Murphys, by Lynda Mullaly Hunt;
Nancy Paulsen Books: New York, 2012; \$16.99



Catherine Chung, 12
Theodore, Alabama

GROWING UP BROWSING through Salvation Army bins and snoozing in the basement, twelve-year-old Carley Connors is a born-and-bred Vegas girl who's as tough as nails. Her dad is completely out of the picture, and it's always been just her and her alcoholic mom. Carley's mom smokes, makes her daughter eat from soup cans, and neglects sending Carley to school. This life is all Carley has ever known. But this zone of "normal" is torn apart after her mom's heartbreaking betrayal that lands Carley in foster care.

Do you ever doubt the people you love? That's how Carley feels. Rejected from the one lifeline she knows, she chooses to shut herself off from everybody else. Her new foster family, the Murphys, are a lively household with three boys. They're genuinely caring, but so... different. And so begins Carley's struggle of opening herself up to the Murphys' outpouring of love.

The first couple chapters of *One for the Murphys* led me to wonder why Carley would even miss her mom. After all, she abused, neglected, and betrayed Carley. So how could she still ache for her mother?

As the story progressed, I began to understand why. Carley's mom is her closest family member. Memories of Mom singing *The Little Mermaid* and creating rhymes for her entertainment evoke a


cozy childhood glow in Carley.

My mom and I are very close. Sometimes I wonder if she knows me better than I know myself! She's my number-one confidant. Whenever I have freak-out episodes or when I just need to calm down, she always knows exactly how to comfort me. Mom's also pretty honest whenever I've done something that's not quite right.

I remember when I was enraged at my mom for a couple of days. We argued. I vaguely remember it was for a minor transgression that I probably deserved to be chastised for. There was some yelling involved. Mom wanted us to calm down and think it over, but that wasn't the case. Afterwards came days of silence, with anger and depression boiling inside me. By day three, I was still keeping up my anger act, but I recall my mother standing in the doorway, late at night, whispering, "No matter what, I'll always love you."

This is the same for Carley. Her toughness can't mask the fact that she still yearns to be with her real mother, because she feels that nothing could ever compare to the warmth of a mother's embrace. I agree that's one of the best feelings in the world that we often overlook.

The aspect I enjoyed most about *One for the Murphys* was how Lynda Mullaly Hunt let you explore Carley's story. I laughed at her hilarious one-liners, rooted for Carley and the Murphys, and wept during the touching scene in which Carley describes the truth of her mother's actions. The writing is so real. You can practically hear Michael Eric clomping down the stairs imitating his favorite superhero, Super Poopy Man, as Carley affectionately describes her foster brother's antics.

One for the Murphys is a thought-provoking novel that taught me not to take for granted and to always be prepared for the dramatic changes life brings. Anyone who wishes to read a tale with heart infused with humor and insight should consider *One for the Murphys* their next read. 

Finding Freedom

By **Christina Suh**

Illustrated by **Michaela Brandonisio**



Christina Suh, 12
Wayne, Pennsylvania



Michaela Brandonisio, 13
Bolingbrook, Illinois

THE LAST FLAME of candlelight had flickered out hours ago, but even in the complete darkness, Annabelle Caldwell's eyes refused to remain shut.

It's hopeless, Annabelle said to herself as she gazed out the window at the full moon. *I'm never going to fall asleep.* Her mind began wandering and it settled upon Ruth's birthday party later this week. She and the other girls from her class would wear their nicest dresses and sit primly at the patio table, sipping their lemonade and nibbling their tea sandwiches. They'd make small conversation and giggle occasionally at appropriate times. Perhaps there...

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Annabelle jumped out of bed. Her heart raced. She could barely breathe. Beads of sweat began to form on her forehead. *What was that sound? And where was it coming from?*

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The thumping was coming from above her.

Are there ghosts in the attic? Annabelle thought as a shiver ran up her spine.

Don't be silly, she told herself as her heartbeat slowly returned to its normal pace. *Ghosts aren't real.*

But when the noise continued, she decided to investigate. Stealthily, she crept across her bedroom to the bureau. She groped around for a few endless moments and finally drew out three items: a lantern, a box of matches, and an old wooden bat.

Annabelle tiptoed to the door and opened it a crack, just



"Miss, how much do you know about slavery?"

wide enough so that she could slip out of the room and into the hallway. She crawled to the spiraling staircase, wincing at every creak, every groan. Her heart pumped faster every second.

When she finally came face to face with the closed attic door, the *thump, thump, thump*-ing was noticeably louder.

Cautiously, she opened the door, making a terribly loud squeak. The thumping stopped at once.

"Who's there?"

Annabelle grasped onto the wall to keep from fainting. She should've run away: fly down the stairs, race into her room, and hide under the covers. But instead, with a shaky hand, she lit the lamp with a match, positioned her bat to swing, and inched forward.

Through the beacon of light, Annabelle could make out a petrified face.

It was a hot summer day when Annabelle's

father returned home from the cotton fields with a female slave.

"She's no good on the plantation. Hopefully, she can help out in the house."

Susan was only a few years older than her, so Annabelle had tried making friends, but whenever she tried talking to her, the girl would always turn away and not respond. Annabelle had given up trying a couple years ago.

"Susan, what are you doing here?" Annabelle whispered, lowering her weapon slowly.

Looking down at her bare feet, her face burning with shame, Susan muttered grimly, "I was leaving, miss."

A long silence stretched between them.

Annabelle was smart enough to realize that Susan wasn't leaving for a vacation.

"Miss, how much do you know about slavery?" Susan finally asked, looking straight into Annabelle's eyes for the first time.

"Not much," Annabelle admitted.

"When I was seven, a group of European men came into my small village of Bunumbu, armed with guns and bayonets, and chained everyone up. They kicked us, whipped us, even threatened to kill us. They forced us into a cramped boat in horrible conditions. During that voyage, many, including my father and baby sister, died. When we arrived in Virginia, we were informed we'd be working as slaves. My mother and I were separated. I was placed in an auction where we were bid on."

"Oh, Susan," Annabelle whispered, "that's dreadful."

"Yes, miss," Susan confirmed. "I was hoping to head north to Pennsylvania, where I could begin a new life."

Annabelle knew that this was all wrong. The right thing to do was to tell her father of Susan's plan to escape.

What would it be like, Annabelle thought, for me to be Susan?

But as she looked into Susan's wide chocolate eyes, she knew she couldn't do such a thing. How could she ever pity herself again when there were people out there like Susan? People who have lost everything. People who have nobody left to turn to.

"Susan, I want to help."

Annabelle took the girl's small bur-lap sack and signaled for her to stay put. Then, silently, she went downstairs and collected a week's meager supply of food, a refillable canister with water, a cotton blanket, a roll of gauze, and a compass.

Susan's eyes lit up and she opened her mouth to speak. Annabelle put a finger to her lips and shook her head.

"Thank you," Susan whispered quietly. Annabelle reached for the girl's hand and led her to the backyard, where there was a surrounding forest.

Annabelle could see the tears running down Susan's face as she said, "I will never forget you and your kindness."

Annabelle didn't hesitate as she wrapped her new friend into a hug.

"Goodbye," Susan said. She turned around and disappeared into the woods. ❀

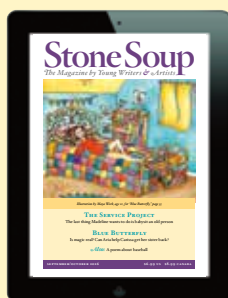
Night Music

By **Norah Brady**

The cricket drones
and an eternity passes.
As the night whispers on the ground below,
perched forever behind the star-soaked curtain of sky.
And the rain drips from the old gutters
to my windowsill
and onto the ground below.
Listen.
Wait.
You may hear the murmuring conversations
behind the windows of home.
A wisp of music
drifting on wind and mist,
caught in the dewy grass.
This world, half asleep,
falling into the arms of unconscious thought
and dreamless slumber
is a symphony.



Norah Brady, 13
Jamaica Plain,
Massachusetts



Honor Roll

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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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