

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

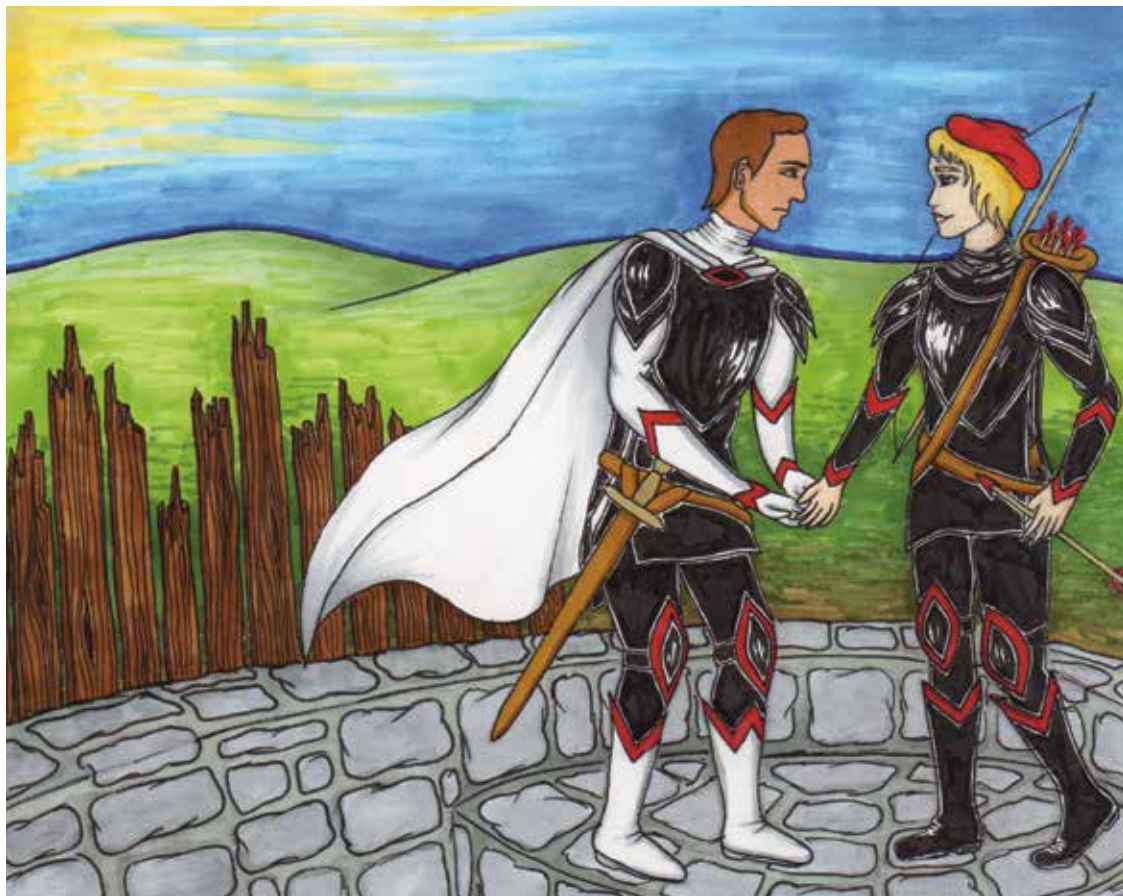


Illustration by Lily Johnson, age 13, for "Twenty and a Half Minutes," page 13

TWENTY AND A HALF MINUTES

A future world; a battle; will Joachim lose his only friend?

FINALLY FREE (MAYBE?)

The glorious Statue of Liberty welcomes immigrants to America

Also: Solana loves playing in the orchestra

MAY/JUNE 2017

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44th Anniversary!

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 45, NUMBER 5
MAY/JUNE 2017

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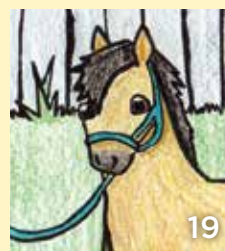
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Editor's Note

Dear Readers, It's not easy to say goodbye! After forty-four years, I will step down as editor of *Stone Soup* at the end of May. Co-founder William Rubel will continue our work. I am honored to have been part of the *Stone Soup* project, from its humble beginnings in our dorm rooms at UC Santa Cruz in 1973 to today. *Stone Soup* is a magazine built on a dream. William's vision and savvy brought it to life. My work (and the work of many others) has helped it thrive. Thank you to all who have worked with me over the years—from staff members to graphic designers, printers, mailing house—I have loved working with all of you. I send my love to our thousands of contributors and their families, some of whom I have had the pleasure of getting to know personally. Your creative work is the heart and soul of *Stone Soup*. Keep writing and keep making art! Now we can watch together as the *Stone Soup* dream continues.



— Gerry Mandel

Send your farewell wishes to gmandel@stonesoup.com

Subscriptions, Submissions, Contacts

Visit stonesoup.com to subscribe, submit work, or contact us.

ON THE COVER "Drawing is definitely a way to express myself," says cover artist Lily Johnson. She enjoys drawing people, especially facial features, in pencil or charcoal. Lily and her dad, a musician, like to talk about the arts and go to museums together. Lily also enjoys writing and wants to be a journalist when she's older.



The Mailbox



I am an apprentice poet and an actress. I love school and I love *Stone Soup*! Reading the poems in your magazine always inspires me to write new poems, and to keep following my dreams of becoming a poet.

Eliana Brenden, 11
Maplewood, New Jersey

I really enjoy what *Stone Soup* does. You inspire kids all over the world who have never even thought about getting published to go out there and take that opportunity. Kids who have always thought of themselves as mediocre authors and illustrators finally get the chance to be shown just how incredible their work really is.

Alleah Donahue, 13
Oakland, California

You published a story of mine in 1991, when I was nine years old. I remember submitting many stories to you and being absolutely stunned when I got the news that you accepted “The Man O’ War” [November/December 1991] for publication. Fast forward to today—I am thirty-five years old with three kids in New York City. My oldest (who is seven) subscribes to *Stone Soup* and loves writing. She looks forward to getting each magazine. Just wanted to say thank you for running a great publication—one day you’ll receive submissions from my daughter. We love to support *Stone Soup*.

Joyce Fu, parent and former contributor
New York, New York

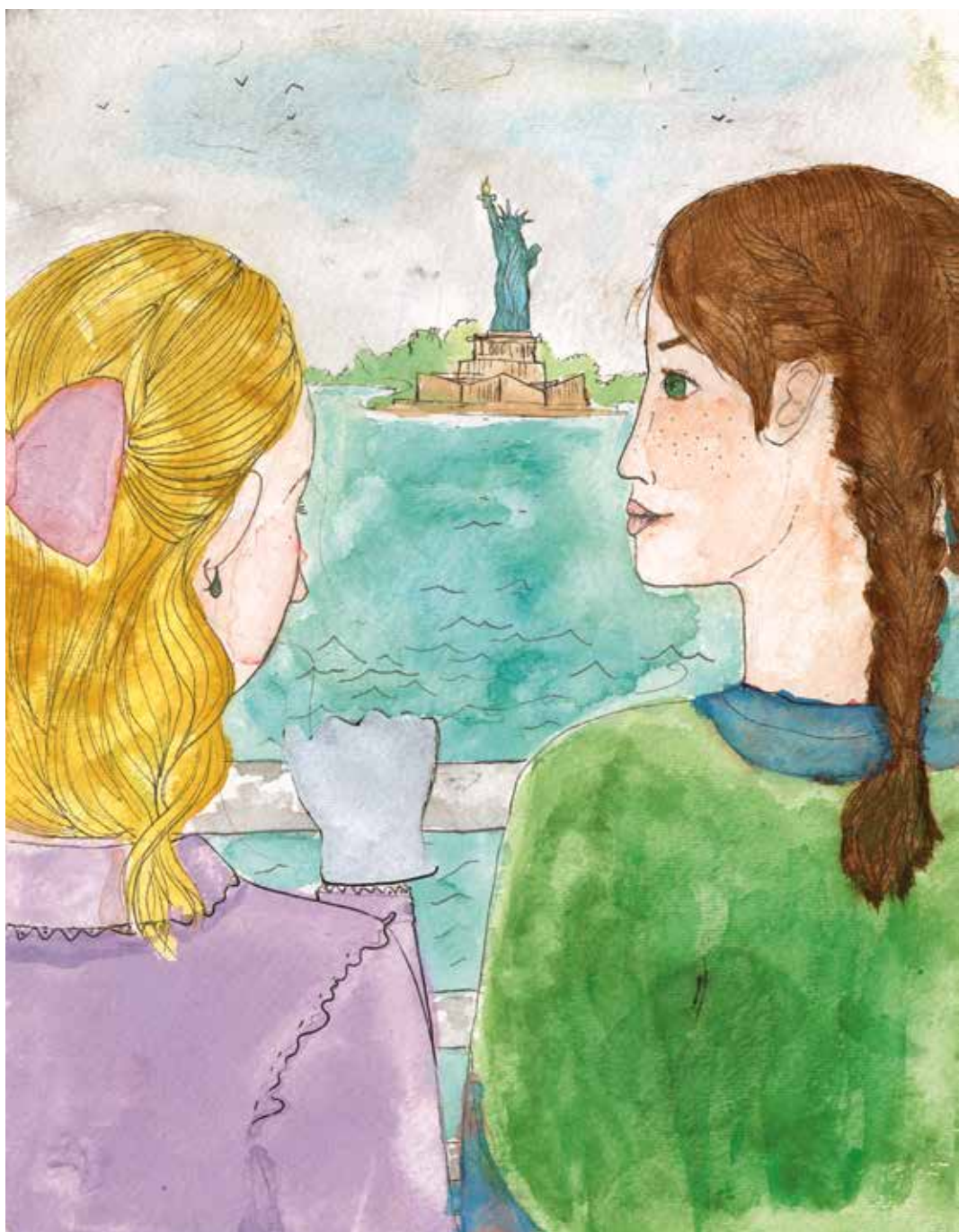
I would like to start by just saying thank you. I have been reading your magazine ever since my dad gave me a subscription when I was eight. I have wonderful memories of typing away at an old computer when I was nine, carefully orchestrating stories only *slightly* modeled on my favorite books. I remember tearing through the mail and plopping down on the couch for hours, reading stories and studying illustrations. I now have my little sister reading and writing along with me. Thank you for the inspiration. You are probably one of the main reasons I started writing, and I have been published in a poetry/short story anthology, in my local newspaper, and written a novel with my dad (not published yet, but we’re hoping!). I hope you keep inspiring young kids like me who were just waiting for a dream.

Catie Macauley, 13
Charlotte, Vermont

It has been my dream for as long as I can remember to be an author, as I love to read, write, and learn. I have been pouring over *Stone Soup*, and I love every poem, story, and book review that I have read in the magazine and online since receiving a subscription for my birthday. I could not have asked for a better birthday present!

Lily Eames Scheckner, 10
Silver Spring, Maryland

Stone Soup welcomes your comments. Send them to editor@stonesoup.com. You can read all the stories mentioned in The Mailbox in the Archives at stonesoup.com.



I had heard about it, but never had I thought it would look like this

Finally Free (Maybe?)

By Alexandra Orczyk

Illustrated by Iva Borrello

DEAR MOTHER,
Tomorrow is the day. Just think of it! Tomorrow I will be in America! Everyone is talking about how much opportunity and dreams coming true and hope awaits us there. *No one cares if you're Christian or Jewish, Italian or German, people say. Once we're there, we'll be free!*

I guess that for most of the people here, that's true. But for me, there's really no opportunity or dreams coming true or hope. As soon as I get off this ship, I'm going to Huntington Station and boarding an orphan train.

I *should* be happy. Maybe someone will adopt me. Then I'll finally have a family, finally have someone who loves me. But you're in France, Mother. The whole time I was in the orphanage, I was hoping that maybe, just maybe, you'd show up at the doorstep and take me. I'd jump into your arms, and we'd hug each other, and you'd swear you'd never leave me again. I had it all perfectly planned out.

That hope is gone now. I am in America; you are in France. The Atlantic Ocean is big, Mother, far bigger than you can imagine. It doesn't matter anymore whether or not you really are dead like everybody says you are. We will never meet again.

Your loving daughter,
Amélie

DEAR MOTHER,
Sara insists that I should learn English. She learned



Alexandra Orczyk, 12
Escondido, California



Iva Borrello, 13
Portland, Oregon

it, and she said it was easy as could be. I know that English is the language they speak in America, and that it would help me ever so much if I were able to speak it. But my tongue refuses to learn that language. It is ever so confusing, and I always forget to put adjectives before nouns instead of after.

Sara is a friend I made on this ship. If she were going on an orphan train, she wouldn't have to worry a single bit. She has silky hair, deep blue eyes, and is very pretty. She also has a talent for thinking quickly, something I'm not quite good at.

We were talking about the smell of the sea when suddenly there was a loud *bonk hink bonk*. A boat was docking next to us. A few people with white coats stepped out, ready to inspect our ship.

People started running all around, tripping over each other, all running toward the rails, as if in a hurry to jump overboard. I had no clue what was happening, so I told Sara, "Come on! Let's go check it out!"

After falling over and being trampled a few times, we sat on a box of old ship things, the only place where we could find room. Then we saw it. I had heard about it, a gift from France to the USA, but never had I thought it would look like this. The Statue of Liberty. People were cheering, crying, going down on their knees and praying.

A person was talking to our captain, Captain Santelli. "S.S. La Gascogne, cleared to go!" said the person. We were put on a ferry going towards some island.

And that is all I can write now, Mother.

I'll try to write more soon.

Your loving daughter,
Amélie

DEAR MOTHER,
I thought that as soon as I got off the ferry, I would be in America. That's why, even though Sara was speechless, gazing at Lady Liberty behind us, I was sitting and looking at my train tickets.

"Think you're going straight off to America?" someone asked. I jolted. What was that person talking about?

"We have to go through Ellis Island, you know," he spoke again. He was dressed in rags, and he looked like a younger version of how I imagined my father would look.

"Pardon me?" I asked.

"It's where all the steerage goes before they come to America. They inspect us and make sure we're good to enter." He attempted to scratch out the dirt from underneath his fingernails. "I found out from people on board."

I tried to remember where I knew this person from. "I don't remember seeing you before..." I said.

He suddenly turned red, then purple, then white, then green, and finally back to a normal face color. "I... umm... well... you probably never noticed me... I'm sure that's it..."

He coughed. "If I tell you a secret, will you promise not to tell anybody?" he asked me.

I nodded.

"Well..." he paused for a moment, as if deciding whether or not to say this, "I

was a stowaway.”

I gasped.

“I’m turning eighteen tomorrow,” he said. “I wanted to get away from my family, start a new life in America. But I didn’t have any money, so I snuck aboard.”

I was frozen.

“I hid in the bilge and snuck food from the garbage cans of the first-class deck.” He looked sincerely at me when he was finished. “*Please* don’t tell anyone,” he said.

Don’t worry. I won’t.

DEAR MOTHER,
I’m so sorry that I forgot to end my last letter. We had just arrived at Ellis Island, and so I had no time to sign my name.

There were many people on the dock, as many people as the Atlantic Ocean was big. Never, ever had I imagined there would be so many people! Everyone was carrying their trunks, all trying their hardest in a race to get to freedom first. Me, I had no luggage, only my train ticket and what was on me.

Slap! An officer walked up to me and pinned a tag on me, eyes full of concern, yet covered by a comfortable blanket of confusion. I was number 137. I wasn’t sure, Mother. Was that all I was, a number printed on a piece of paper? I guess I was, for I had nobody. Nobody to meet me once I got out of Ellis Island. Nobody to hold my hand and walk through here.

I took three long, steady breaths and then proceeded through tall, wide, beckoning doors. But right before the en-

trance, I took a peek inside and stopped. I thought back at what the stowaway told me. If it was true, then this is it. When I walk inside, I’ll be at the mercy of whatever lies inside.

Mother, just then it was dawning on me that I really may never see you again.

Your loving daughter,
Amélie

DEAR MOTHER,
The stairs loomed in front of us. Sara and I held hands and began to walk up one step, then another, on and on like the ribs of a seashell. The stairs spiraled for seemingly infinity, for we were all so nervous. Truth be told, Sara was nervous. I was part confused, part nervous, and part longing for home. My emotions were waging a war against each other, and their guns made my head hurt.

People, dressed all fancy in black and white, were looking down on us. They gave us all a quick glance. I truthfully didn’t think about it much. I was always being looked down on at the orphanage, so this was completely normal for me.

We walked into a huge room, as huge as there were people on the dock of Ellis Island. I never knew how big things were in America. I was so used to things being small that this was something entirely new.

“Isn’t this place huge?” I asked Sara.

She shook her head. “Nope. Huge isn’t the right word. Gargantuan is more like it.”

I laughed. “Imagine someone making it this far and not being able to get



"No, no, of course it can't be true..."

to America because they were lost in this gargantuan room!"

After we waited for hours, the line finally started. The sound was earsplitting. The voices of the people, with the voices of the shoes, combined to form the sort of noise I sometimes heard outside my orphanage window when cats were fighting to find mates.

Yet another doctor checked us over. I wonder how many doctors there must be in Ellis Island. Do they think there's something wrong with us? I remembered the stowaway's words. *They inspect us and*

make sure we're good to enter. If he was right, there might be a way out of this. Maybe, if I can somehow convince the doctors that there is something wrong with me, I'd be able to go back home...

That was a very wicked thought, Mother. I should have been grateful. But I couldn't help myself. Before I realized what I was doing, I started making queer faces, scrunching my nose into odd positions, and sticking my tongue out.

Quicker than you can read this word (although, Mother, I suppose that wasn't a good description because you'll never

read this), the doctor in front of me scribbled an X on my dress with chalk.

This wasn't a good idea. I knew what an X meant. It meant you were out, gone. An X was the symbol for execution. But I was over imagining things. This was America, the land of the free. Of course they wouldn't execute people.

Luckily, Sara is a quick thinker and knows English. She told the doctor that I accidentally swallowed something disgusting. "That is why she made all those faces," she explained. He looked suspicious, but after some more convincing from Sara, he rubbed off the chalk. We continued walking though more unfamiliar gates and hallways.

"Amélie!" an officer called my name. I sat down at a desk. The officer picked up a piece of paper, cleared his throat, and started reading in extremely accented French. "What is your name?" he asked.

I thought this was a stupid question to ask. He obviously already knew my name, so why was he asking me? Still, I answered, "I'm Amélie."

He looked at the paper, nodded, and then squinted, as if the type wasn't clear. "And your last name?"

I didn't know how to answer this. "I'm... not quite sure," I said. The orphanage master told me my parents' names, Marie and Louis André, but said that they didn't have my last name on record.

"Oh, I see," the officer said, skeptically. "What is your final destination in America?" he asked.

"Huntington Station. I- I'm going on

an orphan train," I said, shaking. The sight of the officer made me so nervous, like the officer was a cat and I was a mouse. I wondered what else he would ask me.

After asking me twenty-seven more questions, he said I was free to go on. Sara and I walked to yet another staircase. Once we reached the bottom, we stood in a line to exchange francs for dollars. I had nothing to exchange, so I just waited for Sara to be done.

Finally, we walked through the gate to freedom. Sara saw four happy gleaming faces. "This is the best moment of my life!" she exclaimed, running towards them.

As for me, Mother, I can't really say how I felt. Right after Sara said that, a huge wave of regret swept over me. There was no going backwards through Ellis Island. I would never see you again. I imagined you knocking on the orphanage door. "Where's Amélie?" you'd ask.

"She left. She's in America now," the orphanage master would say. And then you'd run out, weeping.

That image struck me so hard, I almost wanted to scream, "No! Take me back to France!" But I realized that everyone else was overjoyed, for they were finally free! And maybe I was finally free, too. Maybe someone will adopt me, and then I'll finally have a family. It won't be the same as having you again, but maybe it won't be bad. Maybe.

Maybe?

Your loving daughter,
Amélie

WHILE I WAS standing, waving Sara goodbye and listening to the cheerful orchestra of their family's footsteps, that stowaway showed up again.

"Hello! Guess what? I'm now officially an adult! And free to start a new life!" he said.

I was surprised. I had almost forgotten about him when I was going through Ellis Island. "But how did you manage to get through?"

"Oh, it was a little tough when they wondered why my name wasn't on the manifest," he said, "but I managed to sort things out."

I just then realized he had never told me something. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Well, I'm Thomas Moreau, son of Geraldine Agathe and Louis André Moreau. But don't mention my father to me. He abandoned me when I was three and went on to some woman named Marie," he said. He had a dark look on his face.

There was something odd about what he was saying, yet I couldn't make it out... "My mother was named Marie..." I said. "My father was named Louis André."

He shrugged. "Those are all common names."

"My father abandoned me, too."

He shrugged yet another time, though less certain this time. "Well, then we have something in common."

"You look like a younger version of what I imagined my father would look like. And you have brown hair, green eyes,

just like me."


He briefly had a dark look on his face, then he shrugged, and then he stopped to reconsider. "Well, my mother *did* tell me that my father had a child with another woman..." he said slowly.

But then he erased his words. "No, no, of course it can't be true..." he said. "I mean, *you're* my half-sister?"

That caught me by surprise. I had never thought of it that way. "And you're my half-brother." The words felt queer coming out of my mouth. We stared at each other for a few moments, but then I remembered I had an orphan train to catch. "I guess I have to say goodbye," I said.

"Wait," he said. "You know, I'm officially an adult now. And free to start a new life!" He came up to me and gave me a tight hug, warm arms around my cold body. I don't remember ever being hugged before.

AND THAT, MOTHER, is my story of coming to America. I've always just written these letters in my journal, but I've been thinking, maybe, if I get enough money, I can send these letters to you. I have no idea what address to put, and I know you'll never respond, but for me it doesn't matter. Maybe, just maybe, you're still out there somewhere, and maybe, just maybe, you'll somehow get the letter. Maybe you'll read this, and know that your daughter is finally free.

Your loving daughter,
Amélie Moreau 

As Seen from Above

By **Jem Burch**

Hundreds of feet in the air, the world is
In miniature, a scale model made of tinfoil, cardboard,
and glue
The green water ocean is so smooth you could walk on it
Haloed by a ring of white foam, tiny islands poke out
of the sea
They're so small none of them have a name
You could be the first to conquer them, call them your own
The wind is high, and clouds rush in
The plane rises higher
You leave the old world and enter one of pure sunlight
The only shadow is that of the plane on the clouds below
Sunset is fading fast
You chase it—
Everything ends in stars



Jem Burch, 13
Van Nuys, California



He can't lose her, not her, not his best and only friend

Twenty and a Half Minutes

By **Maeve Brett-Vasko**

Illustrated by **Lily Johnson**

HE WALKS ALONG the narrow path, skirting in-between the buildings. He knows that inside, young men and women are dressing in their uniforms and taking up their swords. Most will last the night. After that... he cannot say.

Many on the path are headed toward his destination, the walls that barricade their fort. He eyes their black armor that is lined with red. Just another thing that makes him stand out. He is dressed in the same way, except he wears a white cloak, and white boots and gloves. A sign of peace—except there is nothing peaceful about his abilities. Soldiers peek at him as he passes them, and a few ask him to tell them their fate. Whether they will survive this battle or not. So he takes their arm and glances at their palm. But what he says to each of them is the same:

“Fight with all your spirit, and do not leave this world behind.”

Their faces turn towards him as he walks on, and he knows that they will puzzle over this riddle until it is time to fight. He can't tell what will happen, and he decided long ago that if they die, they might as well go out fighting. But he knows that this time, the soldiers will fight fiercely anyway. There are over 150 refugees living here. It is better than having to die in guilt.

By now he's reached the top of the barricade and walks along the platform. When he stops, it is next to his best friend. The young woman turns, her short blond locks peek-



Maeve Brett-Vasko, 12
South Euclid, Ohio



Lily Johnson, 13
Sunnyvale, California

ing out from beneath a red cap. She smiles, but he takes her arm and turns her palm over.

Twenty and a half minutes.

His breath stops, and he lets her hand slip out of his grasp. The blood pounds in his ears. She is his one friend, the only thing in this world that he truly cares about. He can't lose her, not her, not his best and only friend.

She is oblivious to his distress. "What does it say?" she asks, twirling an arrow in her fingers. He swallows his panic.

"You know I'm not allowed to tell you, Rosamy," he replies. "Although, 'fight with all your spirit, and do not leave this world behind' comes to mind."

She laughs. It has always amazed him how she can be so cheerful, even on the edge of a battle.

"Well, then, how soon will the fight start?" Rosamy tosses the arrow into the air and catches it by the feather. He closes his eyes. He does not see darkness, but instead the field before them. Now it is filled with the enemy's warriors, and sounds of battle ring in his ears.

He snaps his eyes open. "In just a few minutes. Maybe even sooner."

An intense expression slides onto her face. "Then I shall fight until I die, or until the battle is over. Hope to sages my aim is true," she declares fiercely. There is a scream, and he turns to see a soldier duck as a scarlet-tipped arrow whistles over their heads.

A figure appears on the horizon. Even from here, he can see the flash of sun on silver. Out of the corner of his eyes he

notices Rosamy load her bow. A scream reaches him, a war cry so terrifying, he would run if he hadn't heard it before. Ten arrows thud into the wood. Then the scream is gone, and the lone figure is no longer alone.

The battle has begun.

He yanks his friend out of the way as scarlet flashes by. He glances at her palm, hoping he has beat fate, although he knows twenty and half minutes couldn't possibly have passed.

Thirteen minutes.

They stand in the center of the wall that faces the opposing force, and he steps up, pushing past their archers. He takes the edges of his cloak in his hands. Then he stretches his arms out. The cloak shields some soldiers, and he knows that they will survive, for no one may fire upon the man in white. That agreement was made five years ago, when his ability was discovered and it was decided that his life was much too precious.

He can see how soon someone will die by looking at their palm. This gift has tormented him for years, ever since he signed up to be a cadet. He knew when his friends would die, and he could do nothing to stop it. That's why he's avoided making new friends. Why the only one he has is Rosamy. Soon, she will be gone too.

The foot soldiers will not spill out of the gates until word is given. He closes his eyes and can see the warriors before them, fighting. A sea of black and silver. He whistles and lifts his eyelids. A white dove appears on his hand. He directs it

down, to the fort, then it flies to someone on the paths. He can now hear the gates squeak open. A scream shatters the air, cut short. The first casualty. The sounds of fighting attack his hearing. He ignores them, aware that there is nothing he could have done to stop this. At least most of their soldiers will survive. If the time until death extends past thirty hours, he cannot see it. And many palms he looked at were empty.

But one palm, the one palm that mattered to him, it had only minutes on it. He glances toward Rosamy, who is pulling an arrow back. He can make out the numbers on her hand.

Three minutes.

He glances behind him. There are soldiers herding the refugees into the stone buildings, the only ones that are safe from fire. Wailing rises into the air, and he sees a teenage girl, arguing with someone in red and black. He can barely hear her voice.

"My brother is missing! Can't you find him? He looks just like me, there aren't that many of us, he shouldn't be hard to find!"

He turns back to the battle, his heart stung. He hopes that girl will find her brother, because their parents are probably gone. He looks to Rosamy. And in his peripheral vision, there is a flash of

a scarlet feather, headed straight for her heart.

He leaps in front of her, blocking the arrow with his own body.

She kneels, ignoring her bow. Her best friend lies in front of her, and an arrow has pierced his hip. His white glove curls around the shaft. He tries to yank it out, and the white is stained with crimson.

"Joachim." She whispers his name, and it is so much more than a word. "I should have died. Why did you do this?" But she

knows that he did this from love, the kind a brother has. The kind that will make you die, trying to protect.

She takes his wrist in her hand, and there is the faintest beat. Blue swirls out of his arm and swirls around their hands before sinking into her wrist. Two soldiers with a cot have come.

"He's alive. Please take him to a healer," she tells them. As they lift Joachim onto the cot, she sees numbers on the back of one soldier's hand.

34:56. 34:55. 34:54. It's a countdown.

Suddenly, she understands what her friend meant when he told her about seeing someone's death. She undoes his cloak's clasp and affixes it around her neck. Then she stands, casting her weapons aside.

"I am the one who sees Death."

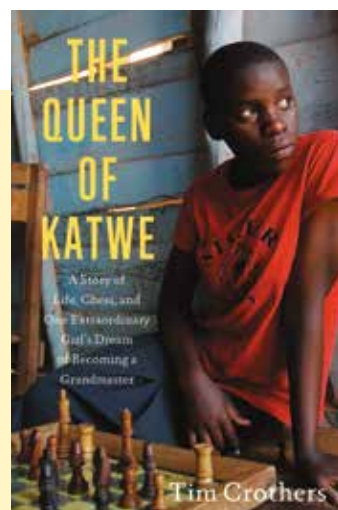


He knew when his
friends would die,
and he could do
nothing to stop it.

Book Review

By Meg Isohata

The Queen of Katwe, by Tim Crothers;
Simon & Schuster: New York, 2016; \$16.00



Meg Isohata, 12
Mountlake Terrace,
Washington


THE QUEEN OF KATWE is a true story about an amazing Ugandan girl named Phiona Mutesi. Phiona grew up in the slums of Katwe. Life in Katwe is tough—little or no education, poor sanitation, crimes, violence, and extreme poverty. People search for food on the dangerous streets and often struggle to stay in one place for a long time because they can't afford rent. This was the life of Phiona.

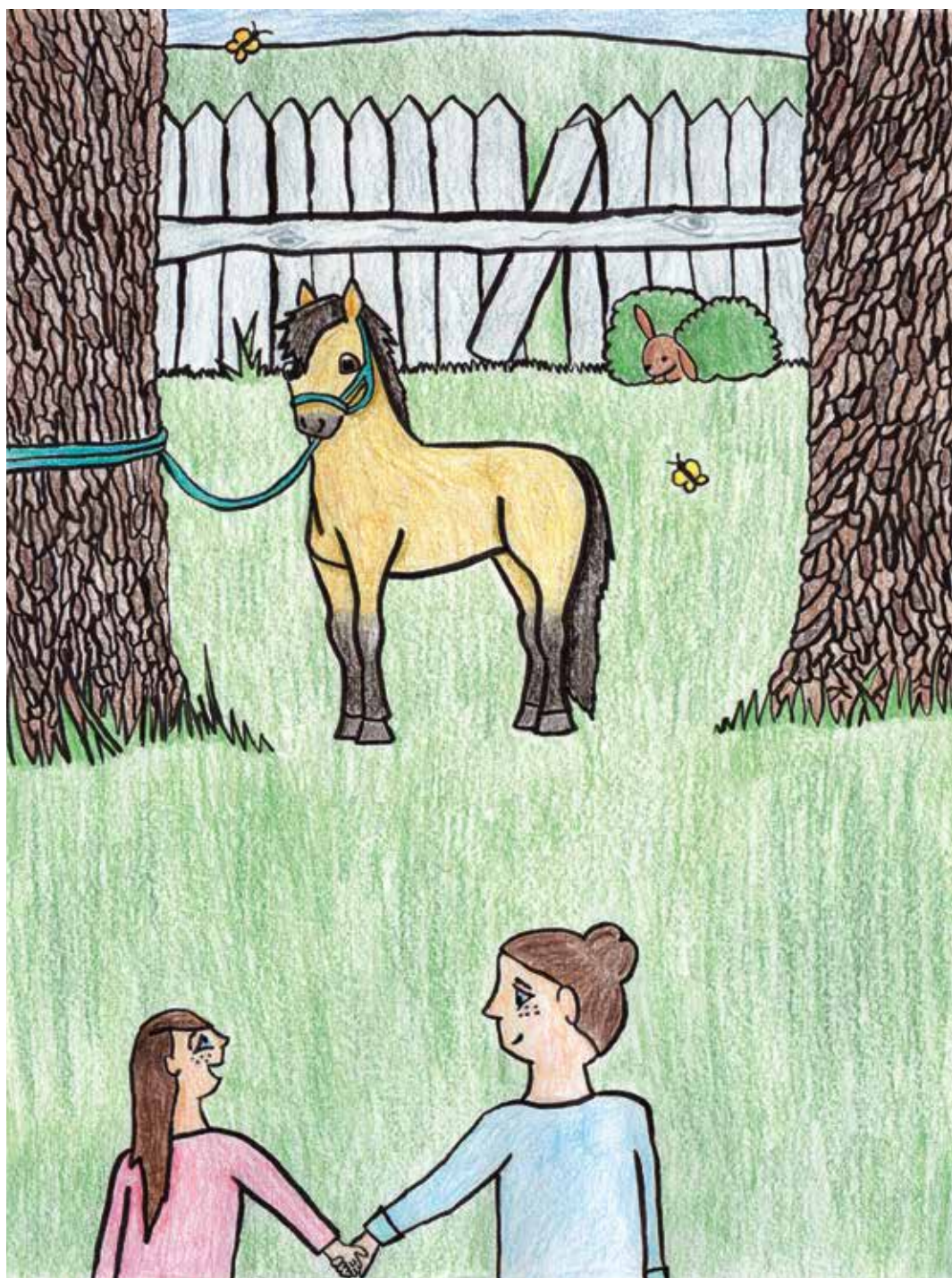
One day in 2005, while Phiona was searching for food on the streets of Katwe, she spotted her brother and decided to follow him. He led her to a dusty veranda where she met Robert for the first time. Robert was a Christian missionary who had a dream of empowering the kids of Katwe through the game of chess.

Phiona didn't know anything about chess. The boys who had already been playing chess for a while made fun of her. Robert didn't expect Phiona to come back because of all the teasing she suffered, but she came back the next day. So, Robert had Gloria, a girl younger than Phiona, teach her the fundamentals of chess. Phiona didn't like the fact that she was being taught by someone who was younger than her, so she worked hard every single day to be the best she could. Soon, she started to beat everyone, including her mentor, Robert.

Obviously, she had a natural affinity for chess, but it was her hard work and dedication that helped her become the national junior champion at the age of eleven, only two years after she first learned to play chess. By the time she was fifteen, she had become the Uganda national champion. Phiona is now a Woman Candidate Master, the first in her country's history. Her ultimate goal is to become a Grand Master, the highest title in chess.

I consider myself a serious chess player. Although I am not as good as Phiona, I practice the game of chess daily and often go to tournaments on the weekends. I feel like Phiona saw her life reflected in the game of chess. In chess, players have to persevere against many obstacles put in their path. In Phiona's real-life situation, the obstacles were poverty, starvation, violence, and an unstable family situation in the slums of Katwe. This book definitely has some parts that are sad, upsetting, and even scary. Some people may find it disturbing to read about the horrible conditions in which the children of Katwe live. In that sense, I feel that readers must have a certain level of maturity to read this book. However, the book also tells us a remarkable story of how one girl from one of the worst slums in the world found hope for her future through the game of chess.

Like chess, life is all about struggles, frustrations, and triumphs. This book teaches you anything is possible if you put your mind to it. I want to recommend this book to anyone who needs a little inspiration in life. Whether you want to become a chess champion, write a book, get good grades, make it on a soccer team, or run your first 5K, this book will inspire you to achieve your goal. You just have to remember that, just as chess requires a lot of perseverance to win, you will need a lot of perseverance and patience to achieve your goal. This book has motivated me to strive for my best every day. 



What was more beautiful than the clearing itself was what was in it

The Pony

By Mackenzie Crum

Illustrated by Kate Bailey

KRISTIENA WAS WITH her pony, Buttercup, a beautiful golden mare. She was riding her bareback through the meadows, holding onto her pretty black mane. She saw butterflies dancing, rabbits peeking out of their holes to watch the girl and her magnificent horse...

"Kristiena! Earth to Kristiena! What is eighty-five divided by five?" Kristiena's teacher, Mr. Howard, demanded.

Kristiena blushed. "Um... nineteen?" she guessed. As the other kids laughed, she felt her face redden more.

Mr. Howard ignored them. Looking straight at her, he said, "If you were paying attention, you would have known that Jackson correctly answered seventeen. Please stay after class." Looking away, he asked the entire class, "Now, what is one hundred twenty-seven divided by eight? Don't let the remainder trick you!"

After school was dismissed, Kristiena slowly made her way up to Mr. Howard's desk. He looked at her sternly. "Kristiena, you have been such a good student all year, and now, all of a sudden, I've caught you in la-la land five classes in a row. Is there anything going on?"

Kristiena shook her head. "No, sir. I'm just... finding it harder to pay attention in class. It will stop soon, I promise."

"I hope it will. If I catch you again, I'm afraid I will have to call your parents, and nobody wants that."

"Yes, sir. You won't have to, sir." And with a nod of approval from Mr. Howard, Kristiena quickly walked out into the hallway to walk home. It was a gray day, and there was a bitter



Mackenzie Crum, 10
Olathe, Kansas



Kate Bailey, 11
Bethesda, Maryland

wind. Just for once, she wished that her parents didn't have to work so late and could come pick her up from school, or at least pay bus fees.

Once she was home, Kristiena grabbed an orange and sat down to do her homework. Or at least, she *thought* she was going to do her homework. But her mind drifted back to the meadows and her dream ride with Buttercup.

The truth was, ever since Kristiena had seen the pony in the barn and saw the sign that said, "For Sale: One Mare Named Buttercup," she knew she had to have that dear pony. She had nagged her parents countless times about it, but each time their answer was the same: "We don't have enough money to spare." And Kristiena knew it was true. But she couldn't stop hoping. So, naturally, with the mixture of hope and sadness, what else could she do but daydream?

Kristiena had been daydreaming there for a while when her mom walked in. "Honey, I'm home! Is your homework done?"

Kristiena jumped. "Huh? Oh. Um, not really..."

Her mom's face fell. "Oh, honey, I know you want that pony, but you've got to stop focusing so much on it. I heard from a kid in your class you had to stay after school because you were daydreaming—for the fifth time in a row!"

Kristiena was embarrassed and, truth be told, rather upset. She loved her mom and wanted to keep her happy; for her mom to be upset *because* of her was one of the worst things that could happen to

Kristiena. "Mom, I'm really trying harder... it will stop, and soon, it's just that I really want her..." She trailed off, realizing she was only making her mom feel worse.

"Kristiena, baby, I know you wish that you were in a rich family, and you could have that pony, but you were born to this family... and I'm trying so hard... I'm sorry..." And her voice broke. Then Kristiena saw her mom do something she had never known mothers to do.

Kristiena's mother was crying.

"No, Mom, I didn't mean it like that... I didn't mean that I wanted to be rich... Mom, it's different, I just wish that... Mom..." Kristiena tried in vain to make her mother feel better, but her attempts were unsuccessful. "Mom, I don't want to be in a different family, you're the best mom ever... you and Dad are the best family for sure," Kristiena tried.

"But you hardly ever see us," said her mother, still crying and hugging herself. Feeling terrible as she watched her mother cry, Kristiena did the one thing that seemed right: She snuggled into her mother's arms and cried with her.

THE NEXT MORNING, Kristiena woke up. She felt sore, stiff. The vague memories of the night replayed in her mind: Her mom had struggled over to the couch with her when she was almost cried out and Kristiena was almost asleep. Then, her dad came home and snuggled next to them. Kristiena was asleep and just barely woke up to see him come in, then fell asleep to the background murmur of her parents' voices. After a while,

Dad had carried Kristiena upstairs to bed and they kissed her goodnight.

It was only after the replay that Kristiena looked at her clock. It was ten o'clock! She was late to school for sure. Rushing to get dressed, she suddenly came to a conclusion: Her parents must have let her sleep in! Just the same, Kristiena did her morning routine. When she was done, she went downstairs. Her parents were usually long gone by now, so when she smelled coffee brewing, Kristiena was surprised.

"Mom? Dad?" she called out as she walked into the kitchen. Her mom stood by the coffee maker as she waited for it to brew, and she smiled at Kristiena when she walked into the kitchen.

"Hey, baby girl," her mom said, rather wearily. "Come take a walk in the backyard with me. I want to talk with you."


Kristiena followed her mom out the back door into their rather large backyard. She and her mother just walked for a few minutes before her mother spoke. "Kristiena," she began, "I want you to know that, although we're away a lot, and you don't usually see us very often, your dad and I love you very, very much. And even if you feel as if we don't take much interest in your wants and priorities, I want you to know that we do. If you wanted to play soccer very badly, Kristiena, then we would look into soccer leagues. Sometimes, it doesn't work out. But then again, sometimes, it does."

Something in the way that her mom spoke, the words, perhaps, or the tone of her voice, made Kristiena feel very warm and content, gave her a feeling that she would never need or want anything else. In that walk around the backyard, her love for her mother had grown immensely, and it was wonderful.

And that is what made what came next even better and more meaningful.

Her mother led her around to the small "forest" they had in the backyard and through it to a beautiful clearing in the middle. But what was more beautiful than the clearing itself was what was in it.

There was the mare from Kristiena's daydreams, the horse she had yearned for, the beautiful, magnificent Buttercup.

FROM THAT DAY ON, whenever she felt unhappy or discontent, Kristiena would go out to Buttercup, ride her, and talk to her. When she was mad and Buttercup was too old to be ridden, Kristiena would wash the gentle horse as they talked, the human in words and the animal in neighs and whinnies. And when the sorrowful day of Buttercup's death came around, the story of Buttercup had the same power that the real horse had had; and the story of the dear old parents and the dear old horse was passed along through generations, with the power of the horse, girl, and parents' love passed along with it. 

**Her mind drifted
back to her dream
ride with Buttercup.**

Roller Coaster

By **Brooklyn Jeffcoat**



Brooklyn Jeffcoat, 12
Seattle, Washington

Sweet like ice cream in the summer.
There for two minutes then gone.
But always with me.

They possess me and my heart but always love me.
They stand by me wherever I go.
If I choose to go to the moon they will be there
listening to the silence with me.

Waiting outside, waiting for me to come out.
I rush down the stairs like a puppy when it's time
for a walk.
We see each other and smile, thinking what could be
better than this?

Now walking I feel like a leaf drifting in the wind.
Laughing so hard I can't even breathe.
Then I stop, keep a straight face for five seconds,
then laugh again.

On a roller coaster that's me and my life.
With loops and twists.
Roller coaster... an adventure. Fun. Scary.

I come home and hear silence.
I see the light from the lamp in my room.
I turn it off and fall in bed.
I stare at a wall thinking and listening to the silence.
Taking in the darkness of the room.



She couldn't imagine life without him

Maple and Marmalade

By **Fiona Mulley**

Illustrated by **Maya Work**

A LOUD KNOCK SOUNDED on Violet's dressing-room door. "Places for Act One!"

Violet leapt up from her dressing-table stool, her breath quickening. A little shiver of nervous excitement ran down her spine as she peered into the mirror one last time, checking anxiously to see that her microphone was in place. She didn't look quite like herself; the reflection staring back at her from inside the frame of lights was not the image of a thirteen-year-old girl but that of a young Civil-War-era woman. What with the stage makeup, full hoop skirt, and her normally loose hair gathered into a stately bun, she scarcely recognized herself.

Violet slipped her hand into the hidden pocket in her costume and groped about, closing her fingers around a pebble-like object. It was a small piece of wood, its surface was smooth and soft; the bark had been whittled away. She drew it out of her pocket and gazed at it wistfully, slipping into a reverie.

She could remember vividly the day she had received it from her best friend, Thomas. It was an October afternoon; they were sitting on a hill beneath a maple tree, and the ground was carpeted with crimson leaves. It was a favorite spot of theirs, and that day they had both rushed to meet each other there, almost bursting with bottled-up excitement.

"I have a secret to tell you!" Violet had gasped, grasping his hand.

"I have one, too. An important one. But you tell first," he



Fiona Mulley, 13
Pine Grove Mills, Pennsylvania



Maya Work, 12
Terrasse-Vaudreuil, Quebec,
Canada

insisted.

As they settled down on the ground, Thomas pulled his Swiss Army knife out of his pocket, picked up a stick that lay nearby, and began to whittle. Violet smiled as she watched him absentmindedly work away; it was a hobby of his. He was always carving at something during their conversations. The end result was never more than a naked, pointed twig, but Violet found the habit endearing. "Tell away," he said, looking at her expectantly.

Violet leaned forward on her elbows and said in hushed excitement, "You know how I auditioned for the musical *Little Women*? The cast list came out today. I got my first lead role ever! I'm playing Marmee!"

Thomas snickered. "Who on earth is Marmalade?"

Violet slapped his knee reproachfully. "Not Marmalade! Marmee! How can you not know who she is? She is the most inspiring character in the history of literature!"

Thomas raised his eyebrows, smiling his signature lopsided grin.

"She's the matriarch of the March family in *Little Women*," Violet continued to gush enthusiastically, her eyes locked on Thomas's hands as they continued to shave off slender ribbons of bark, revealing the smooth, creamy wood inside. "When her husband goes away to fight in the Civil War, she's left to take care of the family herself. She's so encouraging to me; she's so strong and good and wise. She is always doing little things for others

and guiding those around her. I want to be like her. And I get to play her!" Violet clasped her hands and lapsed into blissful silence.

Thomas chuckled at her enthralment, shaping the twig into a point, like a pencil. "Well then, good for you! I always knew you could do it!"

Violet smiled, feeling warm and content inside. "What about you?" she asked Thomas. "You said you had news for me, too."

Thomas cleared his throat a trifle nervously. "Uh, I'm moving."

Violet stopped. "What?"

Thomas fixated his gaze on his whittling, somewhat flustered, as he continued to carve away at the stick, which was rapidly decreasing in size. "It's just been finalized. We're moving to Oakbridge, two hours away. We leave in about a month."

Violet's excitement faded away immediately. She didn't say anything right away, but stared off into the distance, her chin cupped in her hands. She couldn't imagine life without him. They had been best friends since kindergarten, and he had become like a brother to her. She had so many joyful memories of them together; she remembered him teaching her how to pretend to be shot by Billy the Kid and fall backward off of her tricycle when she was eight. She remembered giving him a lesson on baking snickerdoodles that included Thomas swiping cookies, just out of the oven, off the sheet when she wasn't looking, and then complaining about his burnt fingers. She remem-

bered how he had been in the audience for every musical she had been in, despite all of her small, unimportant roles, and how she would rush eagerly to the lobby afterwards, where she knew he would be waiting with endless praise and a somewhat painful slap on the shoulder. Violet breathed a shallow, shaky sigh. She had finally landed a lead role, something she had been working for and dreaming about for years, and he wouldn't be there to see her.

Thomas was quiet, too, as he used slow, deliberate strokes towards his thumb to round the edges of the piece of maple. It was hardly more than a pebble by now; the shavings lay in a heap on the grass. Thomas finished, slipping his knife away into his pocket, and examined his work keenly. It was like a wooden jelly bean, with a little dent in the middle. The surface was smooth and somewhat shiny. Thomas rubbed his thumb over it, smiled slightly as if satisfied, and turned it over in his hand, contemplating what to do with it. At a loss for words, he turned to Violet and held it out in his palm. "Want it?"

Violet turned it over in her hand, smiling at it in a melancholy way. It was just a small token of their friendship, but it meant a lot to her. She slid it into her pocket, resolving to carry it with her wherever she went when Thomas had gone, like a talisman.

NOW, AS VIOLET hurried from her dressing room on opening night to take her place in the wings, a burning

feeling started to develop in her chest, and her throat began to ache. She missed Thomas terribly; he left a hole in her life that only he could fill. He had only been gone for about two months, but it seemed like an eternity. He had called her only the day before to send encouragement for the show, yet hearing his familiar voice through the telephone only made the fact that he really wouldn't be there seem more real.

The jumbled chatter from the audience died away from the other side of the curtain, and Violet could hear the school Thespians' president giving the opening speech. She was only minutes away from her entrance. Violet's stomach flipped, yet she almost enjoyed the feeling. There was nothing more exciting to her than the last moments before the curtain opened. The overture started, and Violet shivered with anticipation; the drums rumbled and the cellos droned beneath the melody, capturing perfectly her nervous enthusiasm.

With a whirring noise, the curtains opened, rippling elegantly. Violet's heart leapt. For a moment, the magic caught hold of her and she stood, enraptured, as her cast members opened the show. Watching from the wings, she smiled somewhat in spite of herself, feeling anxious excitement build up in her as she waited to enter. She loved being backstage; the feel of the curtains, the darkness in the wings, the very smell of the theater. Yet, there was a sort of dim veil over Violet's excitement.

Desperately, Violet tried to shut

Thomas out of her mind and focus on the performance ahead of her. Her entrance was mere moments away. Violet shivered. She rubbed her hands together; they were cold as ice. Breathing in and out slowly, Violet squeezed her eyes shut as she stood against the curtain. *Focus*, she thought to herself. *You're not Violet anymore; you're Marmee now. Your husband's away in the war. You have four daughters to take care of. They look up to you. You are uncertain, but you are hopeful. You are brave and strong. You can do this.*

Violet squared her shoulders, lifted her chin, and stepped onstage.

The lights shone in her face from all directions. She snuck a glance at the audience, and her heart swelled. It was a full house; the auditorium was packed. She felt a thrill as she realized they were all looking at her, but sobered when she thought of the missing person she so longed to see.

She made her way to center stage and was immediately swept up into the scene. It ran smoothly, flying by so quickly Violet was almost surprised when her cast members exited the stage and she found herself sitting on the couch, alone. The lights dimmed and the spotlight focused on her. The pit orchestra began the intro to her solo song, "Here Alone." Violet's mouth went dry. Swallowing determinedly, she shut her mind and focused on Marmee's feelings. *You're singing to your husband, who's off fighting away from you. You are lonely and afraid.* She opened her mouth and began to sing.

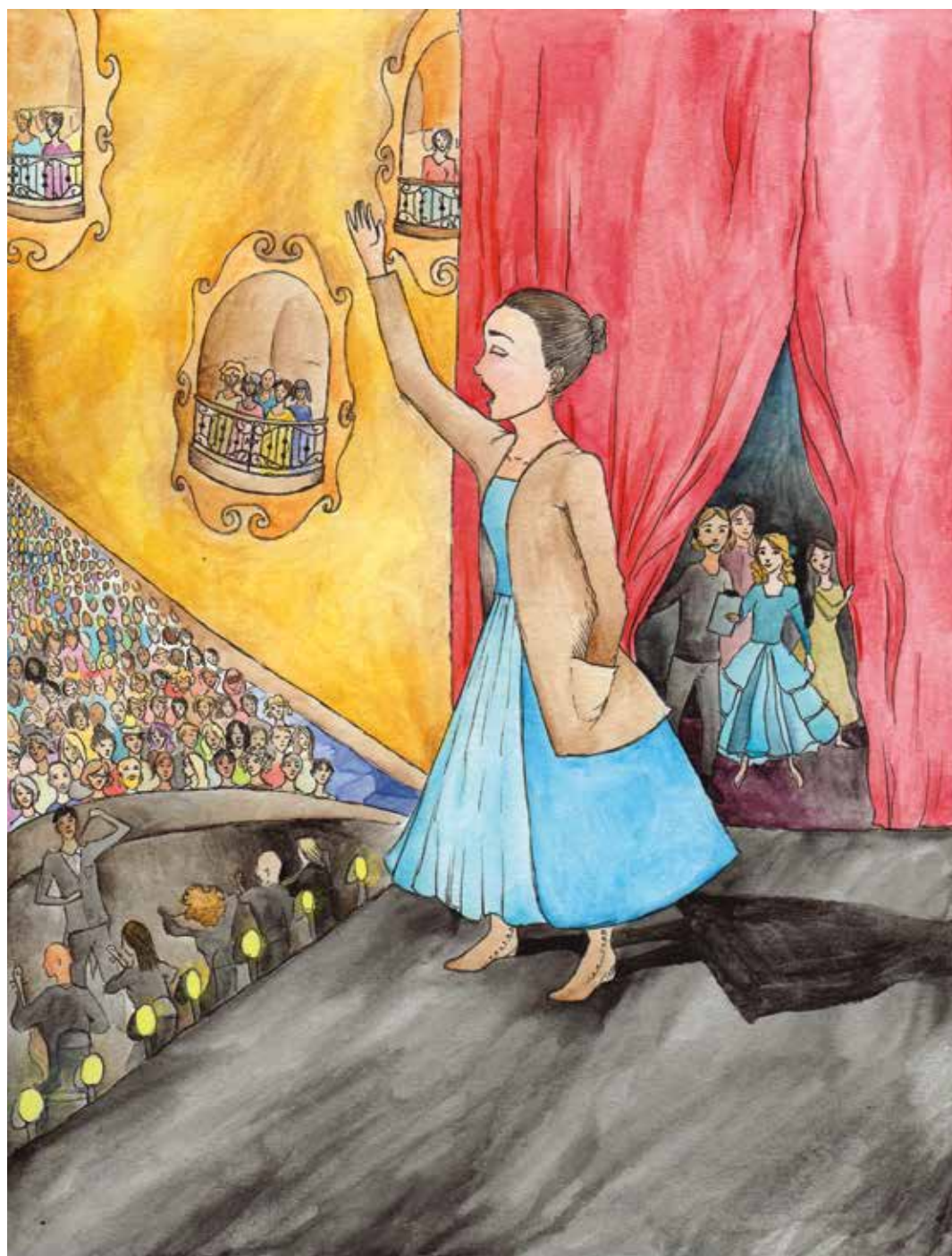
Violet paused during the interlude,

standing slowly and making her way downstage. Her nerves started to control her, and she felt herself slipping out of concentration as she gazed out at the huge crowd, all staring at her. Discreetly, she slipped her hand into the pocket of her costume and clasped her hand around the smooth bit of maple. Its silky texture was comforting to her as she remembered sitting with Thomas on their hill. *The day he told you he was leaving..* Suddenly, it clicked. Violet realized with a start how very much she had in common with Marmee. They were both longing to see someone they loved, someone who wasn't there. Violet realized she had the key to her performance in her hand. She let her mind flood with memories of Thomas, realizing that she didn't need to pretend to be Marmee to make her performance realistic. Violet continued to sing, her voice gaining strength and feeling. Her eyes filled with tears as she thought longingly of her best friend so many miles away.

Her song was drawing to an end, and she wanted to finish strong. She looked up into the lights, her big green eyes pools of longing and heartache.

The music paused. There wasn't a single sound in the auditorium; a sacred silence that brought so much meaning to the moment. Seeing Thomas waving out the car window in her mind, Violet drew in a deep breath and sang her last line.

A slight quaver in Violet's voice on the last two words made the moment more precious. The orchestra died away and the audience burst into tumultuous ap-



They were both longing to see someone they loved, someone who wasn't there

plause. Violet looked out into the auditorium and saw with disbelief countless tear-stained faces and approving smiles. The lights dimmed into a blackout onstage, and Violet exited in the dark, feeling a strange mixture of pride and sadness.

The most glorious moment of the night came to Violet during bows. The rest of the show had flown by, and Violet had kept Thomas in the back of her mind at all times. It ran smoothly, and Violet felt that her dreams had been fulfilled as fully as they could be without Thomas there to share her happiness with her. Curtain call had begun, and Violet walked out onstage with the rest of the leads to bow. She stepped forward to curtsy by herself, and the applause heightened. The air was filled with hoots and whistles. Violet looked out at the audience and saw with utter amazement that the cast had gotten a standing ovation. Violet's eyes brimmed with proud tears as the curtains closed and the show ended.

Hurrying as quickly as she could, Violet flew back to her dressing room and put her costume away. She donned a simple, sophisticated, rose-colored dress that her mother had bought her to celebrate opening night. She always enjoyed taking a few moments right after the show to be by herself and dress up before she went out to the lobby. She liked feeling stylish and grown up. As she peered into the mirror, hurriedly taking her hairpins out and shaking down an abundance of dark hair, she smiled at herself. She put on her jade earrings and matching bracelet, slid on

her heels, and walked out into lobby, feeling confident and accomplished.

Her parents came rushing to her, showering her with flowers and kisses. Violet blushed, her heart glowing. Nothing could alter the happiness she found in her parents' greeting.

"We're so happy for you, honey! It was breathtaking!" Her mother embraced her tightly, shedding a few proud tears. Her father blinked back a few of his own and rubbed her back, pretending that he was composed. Violet joined them both in a family hug, feeling that her evening had gone as well as she could have ever expected.

"Now go, greet your friends!" her father told her, glancing slyly at her mother, who nodded knowingly. "I think someone's waiting for you near the dressing rooms."

Confused, Violet made her way slowly through the lobby back to the stage doors. All of her friends had come in a group, and she had met them already...

"Violet!"

She whirled around, hardly daring to breathe. She swore she recognized the voice, yet it was impossible. Violet listened again.

"Over here!"

She peered into the crowd of people, her heart rising into her throat, when she froze. A tall, teenage boy with a lopsided grin stepped into her line of vision.

"Thomas!"

The rest of the world seemed to disappear in that magical moment as she rushed across the room to him. Thomas laughed delightedly, slapping her heart-

ily on the back as always. "Hey there, Marmalade!" he greeted her.

Violet couldn't stop laughing, her cheeks turning scarlet with joy. "What? How?" she asked in amazement.

Thomas grinned and winked. "Read your email, that's all! You told me the dates of the show, and I convinced my parents to drive down for the weekend. We don't live that far, really, and I thought it would be the perfect surprise. I'm glad I did! You were stupendous, Violet! You stole the show completely!"

Violet beamed. "You don't know how much it means to me," she said happily. "I've missed you so much."

"Me too."

They walked together back to her

dressing room. "Honestly, Violet," Thomas said, shouldering her bag for her, "I couldn't believe your performance. I've always had faith in you, but this was beyond anything I'd ever expected!" He peered at her curiously. "Tell me, what were you thinking about?" he inquired.

Violet said nothing, but pulled her maple talisman out of her pocket. Thomas winked at her knowingly. "Shall we, Mrs. March, ma'am?" he said, offering his arm.

"Please, sir, call me Marmalade," she said, playing along.

A warm feeling settled in Violet's heart.

"Thank you," she whispered. "This has been the best night of my life." ❀





"How long should I put it in for?" I asked Delilah

Sprinklers

By **Kaidince Edwards**

Illustrated by **Bowen Zhong**

I DIDN'T MEAN to set off the school's sprinkler system, it just happened. It was stupid to put my plastic lunch silverware into the cafe's microwave, I admit. Maybe I shouldn't have gone along with Delilah's dare, but I guess it couldn't have gotten any worse than it already was. Let's start at the beginning of the story, where the dares got out of hand.

It was a cold, windy night, right on the verge of being winter. The moon was out and bright, shining in my best friend's bedroom window. We were sitting on her baby-blue shag carpet, playing a round of Dare. Dare was a game we played at every sleepover with one another, almost like our own tradition. On this night, however, the dares were more intricate, more dangerous.

"Delilah, I dare you to go drink milk from the gallon!" I dared her. A scared look crossed her face, because she knew that if she drank from the gallon and was caught, she could get grounded for a week.

"OK," Delilah finally answered, "but watch my back, Alice." I nodded and followed Delilah out of her room, into the upstairs hallway, which was decorated with pictures of Delilah and her two brothers, Ellison and Penn. They were older than Delilah, but they spent lots of time with her, unlike my brother.

Sneaking down the hallway as quietly as we could, I tried to listen for any noises from downstairs, and there were none, thankfully. We snuck down Delilah's carpet-covered steps and tiptoed into her big, modern kitchen. Quickly, with me



Kaidince Edwards, 12
House Springs, Missouri



Bowen Zhong, 12
Austin, Texas

standing guard by the kitchen entrance, Delilah opened the refrigerator door, took out the gallon of milk, and took a big gulp of it. Laughing, and waiting for Delilah to put away the milk, we rushed up to her bedroom and fell into a laughing lump on the floor.

"I can't believe you did that!" I giggled.

"Me neither!" she laughed. "OK, time for your dare. You have to melt a plastic fork in the school's microwave on Monday." Delilah lost her smile, and she looked very serious.

"Really? Doesn't that seem kind of harsh?" I ask, suddenly uncertain. I nervously toyed with my long dark braid and didn't look at Delilah.

"Oh, come on! Don't be a sissy!" Delilah groaned. Neither of us had ever not done a dare, so what I was doing was like breaking tradition.

Staring at Delilah, I realized she really wanted me to do it, so I sighed and mumbled, "Fine, I'll do it."

On Monday, I wasn't ready to melt a plastic fork, but Delilah was. She was so excited, so ready, that it was like she was doing the dare. I would gladly let her do it, but I wasn't about to break my streak. When it was lunchtime, after Delilah and I had gotten our lunches and had finished eating, we went over to the microwaves.

"How long should I put it in for?" I asked Delilah.

"Thirty minutes," she answered right away.

Slowly, I opened the microwave door and set the plastic fork on the glass plate in the microwave. I quickly closed the door to the microwave and glanced

around to see if anyone had spotted me doing this. No one seemed to be looking at us, so I set the time to 30:00, then hit the start button. Delilah and I watched the plastic fork go round and round for a while, then we went back to our seats. We forgot

about the fork for the rest of the lunch period, but it didn't forget about us too quickly.

In fifth hour, when I was drawing for art class, the intercoms crackled to life. It was the secretary, Mrs. Junebee. "Will all students and staff please evacuate the building. I repeat, will all students and staff please evacuate the building."

"You heard her. Everybody up and out the door," Mr. Keisker, my art teacher, said. With a pounding heart, I stood up and followed the rest of my class out the classroom door. We went down the hallway and out the closest door to us that led outside. Conveniently, my art class stood next to Delilah's gym class.

"You think this has to do with the fork?" I asked Delilah. My face was pale, and my hands were shaking.

"No. Maybe. I dunno," Delilah answered. Mrs. Lusko, the female gym teacher, was doing roll call, and when she

**On this night,
however, the dares
were more intricate,
more dangerous.**

called Delilah's name, she piped up with a "Here!"

I turned away from Delilah, suddenly too scared to talk anymore. I felt cold, even though it was almost ninety degrees out. Mr. Keisker finished roll call for my class, then spoke into a walkie-talkie that had been attached to his belt.

A little while later, the secretary came outside and told us it was OK to go in. We were at the back of the building, so when we went inside, we were surprised to see that firefighters were scattered everywhere on the arts floor. They were everywhere on every floor, I heard from one of the teachers.

We finished the day, and after school Delilah called me. "So, did you hear what happened?" Delilah asked me, once I answered the phone.

"That a sixth-grader is going to be expelled for blowing up her school?" I asked.

"No! One of the ovens blew up in the cafe, and it took the microwave with it. I saw it on my way back to the gym. It had nothing to do with your fork, Alice!" Delilah laughed.

I suddenly felt very relieved, but still kind of guilty.

"Well, I'm going to eat dinner. Bye, Alice!" Delilah laughed. I didn't get to say goodbye before Delilah hung up the

phone.

Tuesday morning, I went to the secretary and asked for Mr. Ervin, the school's principal. "Sure, dear, right this way," Mrs. Luvaskuah, or Mrs. Luva, said. She led me down a hallway, lined with inspirational quotes, and knocked on the principal's office door.

"Come in," Mr. Ervin bellowed in his loud, teacher voice. Mrs. Luvaskuah opened the door, and there was sitting Principal Ervin. He smiled as he saw me. "Well, now,

if it isn't the plastic melter!" He laughed, then motioned for me to have a seat.

As I sat down, I asked, "How did you know about..." But he cut me off.

"Well, it was kind of hard not to notice the melted fork on the glass plate, so we rewatched the security footage and saw you. No harm done though," Mr. Ervin said with a large smile.

"I was actually coming to tell you what I did," I mumbled.

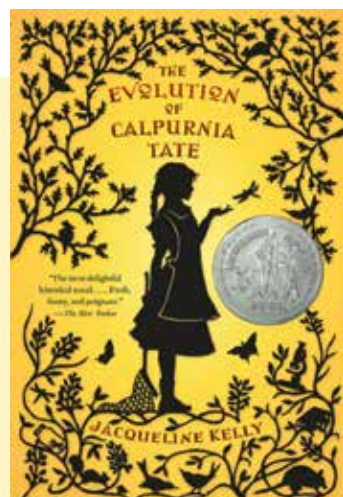
"Like I said, no harm done. I appreciate your honesty, Alice, but there's nothing for you to do. After all, the microwave did explode when the oven exploded," Mr. Ervin said with a larger smile. I smiled too, then Mr. Ervin sent me on my way to class with a tardy slip, because, after all, I had only fifteen seconds until the bell rang.

**I turned away
from Delilah,
suddenly too scared
to talk anymore.**

Book Review

By June Hill

The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate, by Jacqueline Kelly;
Henry Holt and Company: New York, 2009; \$17.99



June Hill, 13
Fort Wayne, Indiana

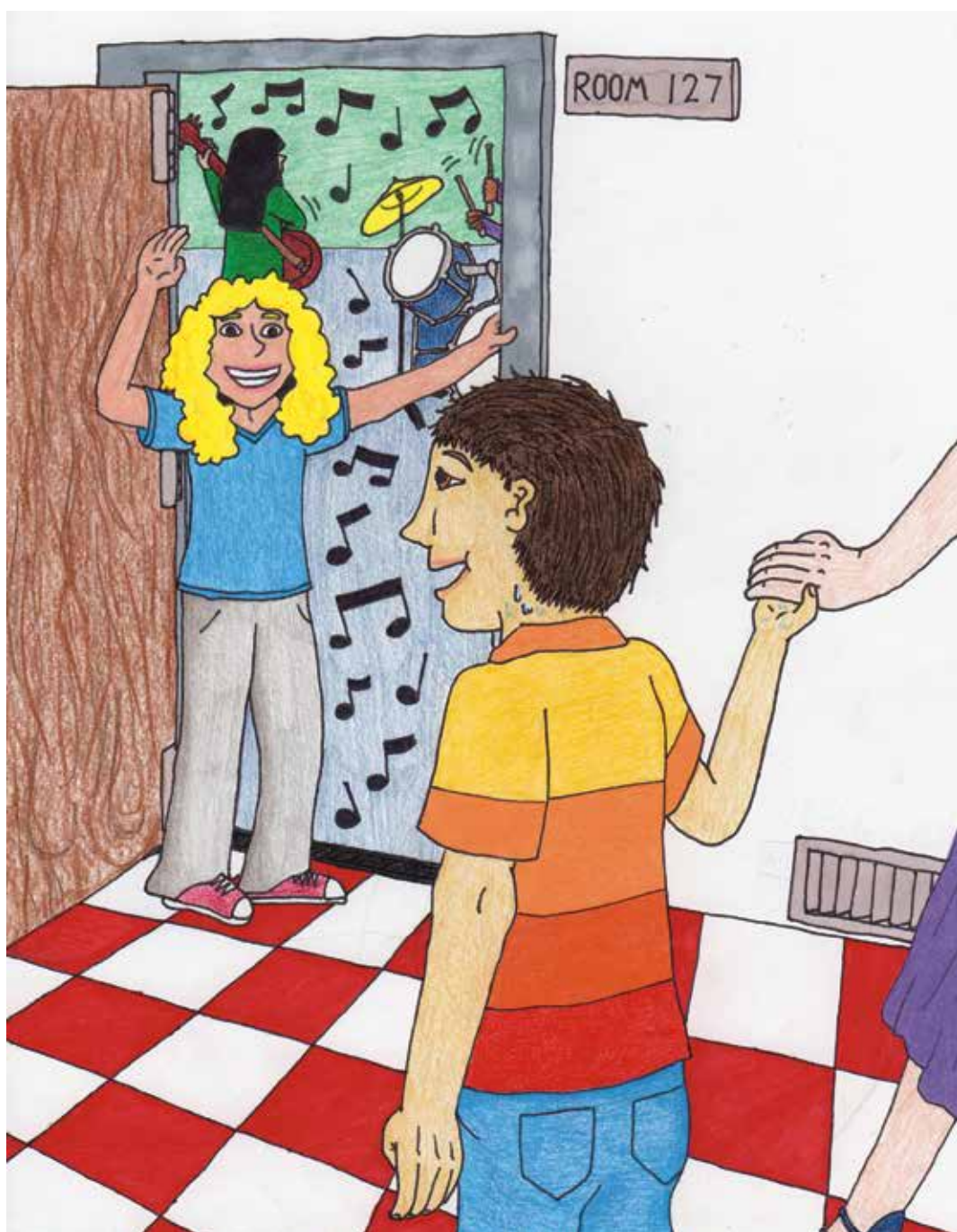
CALPURNIA TATE is the kind of eleven-year-old who is always asking questions—questions about nature and animals and insects, such as why do dogs need eyebrows, or can earthworms be trained? Such topics fascinate her. The only person who can answer them is her grandfather, who spends his time either in his laboratory, trying to make whisky out of pecans, or out in the quiet Texas woods of 1899, picking his way through the underbrush, examining plants and various toads. Unfortunately, Calpurnia finds his bushy eyebrows and scratchy voice imposing and so contents herself with writing the questions down in a notebook one of her six brothers had given her.

One day, a question about grasshoppers nags at her so much that she simply has to confront her fears and ask her grandfather. Rather than answering her question, he simply tells her, “I suspect a smart young whip like you can figure it out. Come back and tell me when you have.” This is something I hear a lot from the teachers at my Montessori school—they encourage me to figure out the problem at hand for myself, instead of having one of them solve it. Calpurnia and her grandfather end up growing closer because of their shared love of science and nature. They go on walks together, and these are some of my favorite scenes in the book, the two

of them tromping out into the woods that surround Calpurnia's home, observing, taking notes on, and collecting samples of the lush green forest that surrounds them. I, for one, can understand why she was so in love with nature. Last summer, I went on a week-long hiking trip in Michigan's Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. There were so many beautiful sights, and I loved just leaving technology behind and being able to get a close look at the beautiful world surrounding me.

In sharp contrast to her grandfather, Calpurnia's mother wants her to stay inside and act like a lady, which means learning to sew and knit, neither of which she cares for. Even worse, she expects Calpurnia to be a debutante, basically an upper-class young lady who has reached the age of maturity and is ready to be introduced to society through debutante balls. Worst of all, it means you are ready to get married, something Calpurnia views as being stuffed into fancy dresses and put up for auction to the highest bidder. So when Calpurnia announces one night at the table that she wants to go to college to become a scientist, her mother is very unhappy.

This book made me curious and had me asking questions of my own, like, How many types of trees are in the world? (about 100,000); and, How old is the oldest tree? (a bristlecone pine tree from California's White Mountains is thought to be almost 5,000 years old). The author, Jacqueline Kelly, does a wonderful job of creating the characters and giving them each a unique personality. Calpurnia's mother rules the house with an authoritative and firm grasp, daring all living under her roof to try and disobey her. Meanwhile, her youngest brother J.B.'s docility and cheerful outlook on the world manage to calm Calpurnia, especially after an exasperating lecture about ladyhood given by her mother. This book made me want to go explore outside. I would recommend this book to any scientist, as well as my fellow tree-huggers. 🌳



Suddenly a familiar girl's voice called out, "Tamari! Over here!"

Rock-Star Nightmare

By **Brian Qi**

Illustrated by **Thomas Buchanan**

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP. My heart beat like an animal, slapping its tail on the ground. Wiggly worms crawled in my stomach. My mom called it “butterflies in your stomach.” I looked up to see a domed spiraling ceiling, the only window.

I nibbled my fingers and desperately tried not to cry.

“Tamari, you’ll have fun,” my mom said to me in a gentle voice. And right after she finished her sentence, a lady appeared from down the hall.

I darted behind my mom’s pink dress as fast as an arrow and buried my head in it.

I squeezed my eyes tightly, letting hot tears crawl down my pale cheeks.

My mouth was held shut by my dry bony hands.

Oh, why did my mom take me to rock-and-roll school for my birthday present? She knows I am shy!

My teacher came click-clacking over in her high heels. The sound echoed across the empty huge, dim room.

My teacher immediately saw me and exclaimed, “Well hello! You must be Tamari, right?”

“Uh huh,” I whispered, wishing I could disappear.

Wet sweat rolled down my messy brown hair.

“We’ll go now,” my teacher, who had red cheeks and a big smile she couldn’t wipe off her face, told my mom.

Mom, please don’t leave, I thought furiously. Then the teacher pulled me down the hall.

Dim lights shone on the eerie cold quiet hallway. A dis-



Brian Qi, 10
Lexington, Massachusetts



Thomas Buchanan, 13
Newalla, Oklahoma

comforting smell of leather combined with sweat filled the hallway, as if hung by an invisible string. Rock-and-roll music sounded from each closed door.

My hands brushed against the white bumpy hallway, and the ceiling was low. The place looked like a prison.

Please don't cry. That will be embarrassing. I really wish Kamary, my best friend, was here. I hate this place, I thought.

My legs felt like Jell-O as I wobbled nervously with my teacher, who held my hand, pulling me across the hallway. Our footsteps rang throughout the empty hall, as the red-and-white stone floor creaked. The sound of the air-conditioning system echoed through the halls. The hallway was an endless row of gray doors.

My eyes started to leak out cold wet tears, like a broken pipe.

Please, I want to go home. Please, I don't want to stay. I hate my mom. I hate my teacher. I hate this place. But, worst of all, I hate being shy, I thought.

"No need to cry. You'll have fun," my teacher assured me in her loud jolly voice. "N-no I-I won't," I stammered. "I-I I'm t-too shy."

My teacher bent down and whispered in my left ear, "You'll have fun," wrapping her warm hands around me. The rock-and-roll music got louder and louder.

I walked slower and slower.

I don't like this. I want to leave, I thought.

My heart beat with every step I took. A yummy smell of a flowery perfume took over the discomforting smell. Suddenly a familiar girl's voice called out, "Tamari! Over here!"

I quickly turned my head to see a blond curly-haired girl wearing a blue T-shirt and gray long pants which stretched down to her ankles. It was Kamary, my best friend!

I raced over to her as fast as I could and wrapped my arms around her.

My heart felt like it got filled with hot chocolate. My eyes filled with joyful tears as I tried not to cry,

but it was hard. I could feel the smile growing on my face. Relief filled my forehead and my pale cheeks turned as red as an apple.

My teacher smiled and walked over, with her hands on her hips.


I could barely hear her say, "I told you."

Yes! She really came! I never knew she would come. Thanks, Mom, for bringing me to the awesome class, I thought.

"This place is so nice," I told her happily.

"Yes," she exclaimed, "with you around."

I felt like I was in a man's best dream.

Together, holding hands, we walked down the hallway to our classroom. It turned out to be all right. Rock-and-rolling is what makes me feel joyful, like a dreamy piece of dark chocolate that flows over your heart. 

**My heart felt
like it got filled
with hot chocolate.**

Orchestra

By **Solana Ordonez**

Orchestra, our favorite subject of the day.
We rush in the music room, eager to unpack
our instruments,
Grins creep across each musician's face as we unpack
Our beloved stringed noisemakers.
We tune, we play, we make wonderful
Music, did I mention... it's my favorite subject of the day!

The music brings joy to my ears as I listen to what could
be mistaken
For expert symphony players. The bows move up and down
In harmony on the strings. The melody moves gently
as the orchestra
Plays as one. Each and every player adds a unique addition
To the ensemble.



Solana Ordonez, 11
Mukilteo, Washington



"Where are you from?" was the same question they would always ask me

A Broken Promise, A Mended Me

By Heather Tompkins

Illustrated by Marietta deCastro

STRANGE, LUCKY, UNIQUE, divided, foreign, difficult... All are good descriptions of my life, but I couldn't imagine myself living any other way. I wouldn't be me if I didn't live in Mexico, if I wasn't bilingual, if I didn't clamp my mouth shut whenever my friends pleaded for me to speak English.

My blond hair and blue eyes made me stand out in a crowd, but when people learned I could speak English, and for some reason it never took them that long to find out, all hope of being overlooked vanished.

"Where are you from?" was the same question they would always ask me.

"I was born in Guadalajara, but I live in Puerto Escondido," I would say. It wasn't a lie but I knew it wasn't what they were looking for. They would look at each other and then back at me, a skeptical look in their eyes.

"But where are your parents from?" they would prod, guessing the answer before I had to say it.

"Well, they're from the United States," I always admitted reluctantly, more than anything because I knew exactly what they were going to say next.

"Ah," they would say, nodding to each other, "so you speak English?"

"Yeah." Inwardly, I would sigh. I'm not sure I really minded this treatment anymore. I'd learned to accept it and deal with it, mostly by pretending that it didn't exist.

When I went to school in first grade, I started to realize



Heather Tompkins, 12
Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca,
Mexico



Marietta deCastro, 12
Atlanta, Georgia

how different I was from other kids. My wispy blond hair, always escaping from its ponytail, stood out against the sea of perfectly combed dark hair, like a drop of yellow paint would against a perfectly painted black background. I got to leave school an entire hour early because everyone had agreed that English class would be a complete waste of time for me. Back then I did want to fit in. I wanted to have brown hair and dark eyes and not a single word of English vocabulary. I would have done anything for these things back then.

I was so determined that I decided I would never speak English again with my friends. I turned a deaf ear to my friends' pleadings.

"Heather, *please* speak English."

I refused. "No." I would not speak English, and someday I would dye my hair black. I'd be just like everyone else one day, I thought stubbornly.

"*Se forman al fondo. Correle!*" (Form a line at the back. Hurry!), the teacher yelled, spacing the final word into separate syllables for emphasis. New Year's was a recent memory and very few kids had made it to class. There was a loud chorus of *pat, pat, pat* as the small group of nine hurried to the last row of blue and yellow foam squares that covered the Tae Kwon Do school's floor, the usual commotion occurring as children shuffled to be next to friends.

"*Uno!*" the teacher says, pointing at Angeles, a girl with short black hair who's standing next to me in line. She repeats it.

"*Dos!*" I say when it's my turn.

He continues until reaching the final

girl who yells out, "*Nueve!*"

"*Ahora todos me lo van a decir en inglés*" (Now everyone will say it in English), he says, picking up a stack of neon orange cones and placing them in a line across the room. He smiles when he sees my scowl.

"One," Angeles says, pronouncing with a Mexican accent so that it sounds more like *wan*.

The entire class looked at me expectantly.

Maria, a tall girl on my other side, with jet-black hair tied back in a high ponytail, was nodding at me as if for moral support. I looked around helplessly. I doubted it would matter if I said it with a Mexican accent as I did the rare times that I spoke in English with my friends. It took me little more than a fraction of a second to realize, no, I would not speak in English. I'd always listened well at Tae Kwon Do. It wasn't just expected; it was taken for granted. Everyone did exactly what the teacher said, no exceptions, so it surprised me to find myself thinking, I don't care. I won't do it.

"*Dos!*" I said after hardly any hesitation, looking stubbornly back at the staring eyes.

The teacher rolled his eyes and the whole class cried in unison, "Heather!"

"*A ver, de nuevo*" (Let's see, again), the teacher said, pointing at Angeles. I made a pitiful face. Sometimes people would just give up once they realized they would be better off asking a rock to speak English, and then there were other times...

"One," Angeles said between laughs.

"Dos," I said. I wasn't about to back down now.

"Heather!" the kids around me grumbled. Now the teacher had joined in.

"Engleesh," Maria said in a Mexican accent. "One, two, three," she continued, until I gave her an exasperated "*Ay Maria!*"

"Pero es que yo no quiero hablar en inglés!" I said, making a face and throwing my hands up in the air. *No way was I speaking English!*

"But Heather..." my friends pleaded in Spanish.

"Your mom's looking at you," Angeles said in Spanish, pointing at my mom. I turned around. She was right. Mom was staring at me with a cross between bewilderment and laughter. "All this time and she hasn't learned to speak English. You're an embarrassment to your family," Angeles continued with mock disapproval, shaking her head at me, and then laughed.

I was laughing along with everyone else. Though many of them were staring too, as though they didn't quite know what to make of me. For a second I imagined what they must be thinking now: Heather, the only girl in the class who really could speak English, and she was refusing to do so.

"Heather," the teacher finally said in Spanish, "if you don't say your number now, then everyone gets to kick you and you have to say *all* the numbers in

English." I made a face at him. I knew exactly what getting kicked entailed, standing up in front of the class while the kids took turns hitting you—not a pleasant prospect by any stretch of the imagination. However, weighed against having to say something in English in front of the entire class, I wasn't sure which one was worse.

"But it's that I don't want to. It's not fair!" I said in Spanish, glaring at him, but he was already turning around.

"From the other side now," he said, motioning for the girl on the opposite

side of the line to start this time.

"One," the girl said.

"Two, three, four, five, six, seven." The rest of the class quickly followed.

I sighed, frustrated, glanced at the kids who were giving me anxious looks, and glared at the teacher one last time. I thought of all the kicks I would get if I didn't do it, imagined myself having to recite all the numbers. He'd get me to do it sooner or later anyway.

I hated having to go back on things, but I truly could see no other way out of this one. "*Ay. Ya bueno.* Eight." I said it with a Mexican accent, though, of course, no one noticed. I half expected him to make me say all the numbers anyway, but instead the teacher started clapping and it wasn't long before the rest of the class joined in. Maria was hugging me and tears were rolling down my cheeks I was laughing so hard.

I wouldn't be me
if I didn't live in
Mexico, if I wasn't
bilingual.



"I'm only going to believe you if you say it English"

On the bumpy fifteen-minute drive home from class, I realized I didn't even know why I so adamantly refused to speak English while around my friends—even a simple number. What was wrong with me? I'd always thought my refusal to speak English was because I wanted to fit in, but if I cared about that, I could have done what everyone else did and said the number in English. I hated speaking in English with my friends, but I also hardly ever spoke Spanish if I could avoid it with my family.

It felt strange and wrong to speak English with my friends. "Just say a word

in English, Heather. Any word," they would plead. In a strange way, I wanted to speak English to them, but every time, something inside of me would clench up, not in anger, simply in dread. Why, I didn't really know. "Don't speak, don't speak," a little voice whispers in the back of the head.

It had started as a want to be like everyone else. I had clamped my mouth shut, refusing to speak English. As I got older, however, the want to fit in faded. Why wish for something that was impossible? I was just gearing myself up for failure. Slowly, I accepted my fate, but still it

wasn't easy to back down. Even though I no longer believed in the reasons why I didn't speak English with my friends, it had been nearly three years that I had been refusing to do so. I wanted to speak English, but some of the stubbornness that had supported me for almost three years remained.

Three years is a long time to never speak English out and about and never speak Spanish at home. Without even realizing it I had split myself into two people. I realized I could create an entire new person when I was with my friends, fix the mistakes I'd made with the person I was with my family. I could stop being sulky, sarcastic, and cynical. I could practically remake myself. The fact that I didn't even speak the same language made it easier. At home I stayed the sarcastic, critical, book-loving girl I'd always been. With my friends, I became a quieter, happier version of myself.

It had started out as language but it had become more than that. It was like having two entirely different personalities. For a while I thought it was me living a double life. Now I realize it was a double me living the same life. I have to learn to live not with myself but with the two parts of me.

Only a few weeks after I was forced to say the number in English, Maria and I had to fight in combat. We bumped knees and both got huge bruises. One day, when she was limping across the mat

and complaining about how much it hurt, I couldn't help it. "*Perdon*," I said. Usually she hated it when people said sorry after she got hurt.


"It's combat," she would say, her usual smile vanishing, turning into a cold glare. "Don't say sorry." But, although I knew she was rather exaggerated, I couldn't help it.

She simply waved me off. "I'm only going to believe you if you say it English."

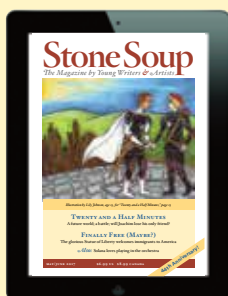
I sighed, looking at her. She had a teasing, hopeful smile on her face she

wore whenever she wanted me to speak in English. Over the years it had become more teasing than hopeful, as though she didn't really think I was going to speak to her in English after all. Usually I would have rolled my eyes and said, "Don't be silly. Do you really think I'm going to speak to you in English?" but now I realized that the only person I was hurting was me. Who was the one who had split herself into two parts? Me. Who was the one that had to patch herself back up? Me. I had built the wall that divided me. And only I could knock it down.

I opened my mouth and said the first English word I'd said willingly in a very, very long time. "Sorry," I said and hugged her. The tiny word felt strange in my mouth, like I really was speaking in a foreign language.

She hugged me back. "That's why I love you, Heather." I shook my head. I don't think she knew why I was smiling. 

It was like having
two entirely different
personalities.



Honor Roll

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

— *The Editors*

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On Our YouTube Channel

- *Stone Soup* authors and illustrators talk about their work.

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- All of the above in mobile form!

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