

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Onam, the Indian Festival," by Shaisha R. Patel, age 10, Mudra School, Vadodara, India

BROTHERHOOD

When times are tough, you really need a friend

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

First a unicorn, then a girl who looks exactly like Shelly; what's next?

Also: New stories from William Gwaltney and Bailey Bergmann

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007

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The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 36, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2007

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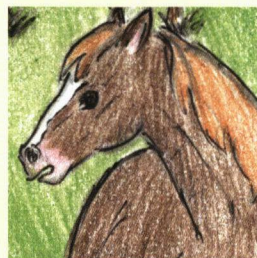
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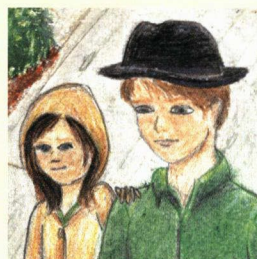
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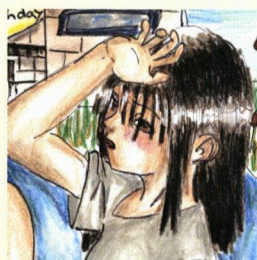
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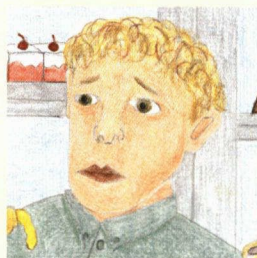
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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

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



Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site: stonesoup.com.

Story and poem authors: Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us within four weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

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

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

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

Cover: "Onam, the Indian Festival," was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the Mudra School of Fine Arts in Vadodara, India. The school offers art classes taught by artists. Special thanks to Kiran and Jayesh Kansara.



The Mailbox



Writing has always been my passion and I write every day. I have read hundreds of *Stone Soup* stories, and have enjoyed every one of them. It has been a great learning experience for me.

KEVIN WANG, 11
Brentwood, Tennessee

Kevin's story, "Brotherhood," is on page 5 of this issue.

Stone Soup magazines have great stories, beautiful drawings, creative poems and interesting book reviews. I love when I can just sit under a shady tree and read the latest *Stone Soup* issue. One of my favorites is the March/April 2007 issue. I quite enjoyed the book review on *Project Mulberry*. This book is written by Linda Sue Park, who writes many Korean books. I am half Korean, so I was eager to read on. Richard Chung, the writer of the review, writes that he and the main character, Julia Song, have much in common. They are trying to juggle two cultures at once, but don't know how. While reading the book, Richard Chung realizes, just like Julia Song, that it is useless to deny his Korean background and instead he should just appreciate it. By the end of the book, he comes to respect his culture. Keep making more of these great magazines!

KELSEY SMITH, 10
Hanover, New Hampshire

The *Stone Soup* staff is in my head constantly as I write. I picture you all as you look on the Web site and I often envision you smiling as you read something of mine or look at one of my illustrations. You help me to do some of my best work.

WILLIAM GWALTNEY, 11
Englewood, Colorado

Will's latest story and illustration are on page 28 of this issue.

As a teacher committed to writing in the public schools, and to offering children a place to express their voices, I value your magazine and the dedication to honoring their writing. Thank you for doing what you do, and providing an excellent forum for children to read, learn, and become inspired.

DEBORAH TAYLOR, TEACHER
Fort Collins, Colorado

This magazine is amazing! It really makes young writers and artists shine in many different ways. I really enjoyed the story "To Kill a Unicorn," by Abbie Brubaker [May/June 2007], and I thought the illustrations by Anton Dymtchenko were filled with brilliant detail and color. I wish I could draw like that! I also really enjoyed Meg Bradley's "A Different Kind of Lullaby" [January/February 2007]. I liked how she described the many different kinds of lullabies. Someday I hope I can get in *Stone Soup* and be acknowledged as a good writer like many young people have already been. To all the contributors who helped create this magazine, I'd like to say thanks!

LIA ASHE-SIMMER, 11
Northampton, Massachusetts

I have not been getting *Stone Soup* for long but the ones I have received have been really gripping. It has inspired me to write lots of stories and draw lots of pictures. I thought the picture on page 14 in the November/December 2006 issue by Anton Dymtchenko was really good. Well done!

KERRI YEOMANS, 12
Porwys, Wales

You can see all the work mentioned in The Mailbox at stonesoup.com

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



Bighorn River was an exhilarating place to spend our afternoon

Brotherhood

By **Kevin Wang**

Illustrated by **Brian Merte**

IT WAS A WARM, brisk Saturday afternoon, and Jack and I couldn't wait to get to the river. Crisp, dry auburn leaves were settling to the ground like fairies relishing their last ballet before reaching the forest floor. We knew they would soon be buried under mounds of snow, obscuring the path to the forest.

The wind snapped at our faces as we sprinted over rolling hills that made their way into the lush forest. We ran along the path, kicking aside piles of leaves which had formed a quilt of a million pieces for us.

Jack suddenly stopped dead in his tracks, and I stumbled, falling onto the path.

"What is it, buddy?" I asked him, as I picked myself up and brushed the crumbled leaves off my jeans.

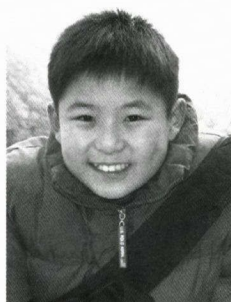
He pointed to a glorious river as long as five blue whales linked tail to tail. It stretched up into the towering snow-capped mountains and emptied into the horizon. From there, it made its way back down the mountains and plummeted steeply over the waterfall.

"It's beautiful," I said simply.

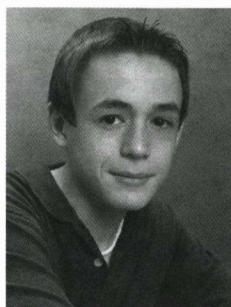
"Yes, beautiful," Jack echoed in wonder.

Bighorn River was an exhilarating place to spend our afternoon. With birds and insects spotting the sky and the river winding its way through the mountains like a gigantic snake slithering in the grass, this place was paradise.

I loved the tale of how the river was named. Long ago, many



Kevin Wang, 11
Brentwood, Tennessee



Brian Merte, 13
Wappingers Falls, New York

buffaloes tramped over this land and caused it to rumble until springs shot out of the ground, forming the river. My mind traveled to the thundering herds, rushing through the trees, eager to reach drinking water. I could almost feel the vibration of the ground and smell the musky odor of their matted fur.

"Alex, we have to continue so we can spend more time at the river." Jack's voice snapped me back into reality.

We sprinted off the path to the edge of the forest. Directly in front of us, the river was waiting. We hurtled ourselves onto the bank and sank down into the warm, round pebbles on the shore, giving our feet a well-deserved reward. Our shirts were soggy sheets of cloth, for the autumn sun was flaming on our skin.

We cupped handfuls of fresh water and splashed them greedily on our sweaty faces. The crisp, cold water washed away our exhaustion, and we gave sighs of contentment.

As trout arched across the water, the afternoon sunlight sank into the river, spreading colors of light which faded into the depth of the water. The majestic river was overflowing with life and painted with beauty.

"Jack, how are you feeling about the... the... thing?" I asked uneasily.

"Look, my parents are divorced, and I'm sent to live with my relatives. *So what?*" He glared at me menacingly.

"I mean, if you need help to sort things out, I'd be devoted to helping you," I volunteered.

He just looked down and slapped some sand into the tranquil river. Frightened baby fish quickly scattered in fear. As they gathered back together at another cattail, a significant idea popped up in my mind.

"Jack, why don't you try getting your family back together?" I suggested.

He looked at me with doubt.

"Alex, I know you're trying to help me and all that, but I just want to leave it the way it is. Really." I knew Jack was lying to cover his pain.

"Don't try to fool me, man," I replied, tossing a pebble into the rushing river. The rock sank and softly settled to the river floor.

Jack looked at me and snorted.

Both of us were mute with embarrassment. Finally, after what seemed like an hour of silent moments, I managed to utter, "You OK?"

Jack sat staring at the silent water.

"I feel bad for you, Jack. We haven't talked about the divorce a lot, but I had the feeling you could handle it," I said quietly. Jack couldn't speak, as if the words were frozen in his throat.

"Jack, talk to me! *Is something wrong?*" I shouted.

He just raised his head in sorrow and stared at me. Then he muttered, "I just miss my parents. I wish they'd come back." Tears trickled from his miserable, green eyes, making a faint path down his cheeks. He gazed up at the burning sun and quickly turned away in dismay.

A curious tadpole swam up to my big toe and circled it, wondering what this

big peach-colored thing was. As I turned away, a hungry stickleback swam up and devoured it with greed. I spat at it and it hurried away shamefully.

I sighed and looked to my right. Jack was wading in the river, heading straight for the steep waterfall. I screamed his name, but he didn't come back or even turn his head.

I jumped in the river and landed on some jagged rocks, wincing with pain. The water, piercing my skin, was as cold as hundreds of freezing daggers.

Now I knew how my mom had felt the day she lost me in the mall. I was frantic with fear. I kept my eyes glued on the figure that continued to walk away from me. I started to cry.

What was Jack doing? I wondered. He must have lost his mind!

The river's current propelled me closer and closer to Jack. Just a few more steps, I told myself. I proceeded through the water with perseverance, my legs like robotic sticks that kept me moving.

I pushed and pushed, and I was suddenly there, right by Jack's side. He was floating facedown in the water like a dead person. I quickly snatched him out of the racing water and pulled him into an upright position.

"Why? Why do you do this to me? Why!" I demanded, weeping helplessly. My tears dropped into the river and were

carried off.

Jack looked at me and took in his surroundings, and then said the strangest thing a thirteen-year-old boy would ever say, "Are you my friend?"

I gaped in alarm as he stared at me in wonder. All of a sudden, it was as though he were my brother. I dragged him ashore and we lay in astonishment, gasping for air. I could feel the tickling sensation of tiny insects crawling up my legs.

"Are you my friend?"

His words echoed in my mind.

What was that supposed to mean?


Finally, I decided to answer his question.

"Yes... I am your friend."

Jack suddenly sprang to his feet and shouted, "I can do this! I can bring my family back together! I just know I can! I can! I can!" He laughed jubilantly and whooped with joy as he cheerfully danced on the grass.

Then he looked at me and said, "*You* did it! *You* did it! Thank you! Thank you, my friend!" He suddenly hugged me with passion. I was momentarily stunned, and then returned the hug, squeezing his shoulder tightly.

He suddenly pulled away from me. Then he asked, "Are you my brother?"

I stepped close to him and laid my head on his shoulder. Then I whispered quietly, "Yes, I am... your brother." 



Patches had taken it upon herself to make sure that the horses would mind every morning

A Day at the Ranch

By **Caroline Thomas**

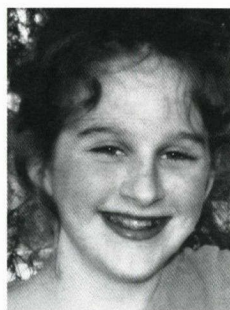
Illustrated by **Min Joo Yi**

IT WAS A BRIGHT and clear Monday morning on the Flying T ranch in Texas. Almost everyone at the ranch was still asleep, except a little Blue Heeler named Patches. She was a small dog with short brown legs and a stumpy tail. Her ears were black and she had a black patch on one eye. The rest of her strong little body was a silver-gray. She was an intelligent and spunky dog who loved to run and play. It was best to stay clear of her if you got on her bad side. Oh, and her specialty was herding the horses or anything else she thought needed herding.

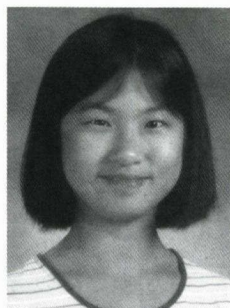
SHE SAT VERY PATIENTLY by the door of her pen. Ears pointed and alert, listening for any sound that might signal the people in the house were up. Not very long afterward she heard the rewarding sound of footsteps. Up came the rancher; he was a tall handsome man with gray hair in his early sixties. He opened up the door to have Patches, tail wagging profusely, jump up on him as a good-morning greeting.

But enough of that, thought Patches to herself, there are bigger fish to fry this morning! And away she ran on her brown little legs. First she stopped by the barbed-wire fence and barked a friendly and cheery good morning to the neighbor's dogs. When she got a mind-your-own-business bark in response, Patches trotted away. See if she ever told them hello again.

Now to the horse pastures! Patches had taken it upon herself to make sure that the horses would mind every morning. She would stealthily slip under the rust-covered iron gate and nip at



Caroline Thomas, 12
Springfield, Virginia



Min Joo Yi, 13
Bellevue, Washington

all of their heels a bit before Major Ed, the rancher, opened the big gate so he could take care of them.

That always takes all the fight out of them, Patches thought happily as she finished her daily routine. It saves the people a lot of trouble too, she commended herself warmly.

Just as she was squeezing under the gate, Joan, the rancher's pretty wife that would cook tempting tantalizing things for you until the cows came home, said, "She's going to get the snot kicked out of her some day!"

Patches puffed herself up with pride. *What* a compliment! She didn't know what it meant, but it must be something good. *What* a compliment! She was so proud and pleased with herself that she didn't look where she was going as she made her rounds around the ranch to make sure everything was safe and normal and SPLASH!!!! Water went everywhere as Patches ran at a rather fast pace, into the cold pool. If there was one thing she didn't like it was being immersed in bitterly cold water. She paddled to the steps panting, thoroughly disgusted with herself and also at the cold, wet water.

Well, Patches thought sadly to herself as she drooped her head, I guess pride really does go before the fall, or the jump in my case... She stopped short though because she heard a car coming down the quarter-mile downward-sloping driveway.

She ran around to the other side of the house to investigate, coat dripping wet and gleaming in the warm September sun-

shine. It was an unknown car! How dare it enter her premises! It could be a threat to her people that she had worked so hard to keep safe and happy all these years! Anger burned within her as she shook with fury and rage. She would take care of that car once and for all. Patches leaped into action as the unidentified car progressed slowly down her driveway. She ran at it with an aggressive speed, biting at the large steel-belted tires. The car slowed down almost to a stop. She was winning! Just as she thought this battle was won Major Ed came around and stared darkly at Patches, making her whimper.

"Patches! Patches, get over here! What are you doing?" he hollered.

"I'm protecting my property and you! What else would I be doing?" she barked in reply.

Before she knew what was happening she was dragged, claws dragging in the dirt, toward her pen. "Oh, no! Not that!" she begged. "I'll do anything, please don't put me in there!" Despite her pitiful cries of distress she was locked up, as the intruder stepped triumphantly out of his car and strode toward the barn.

Patches lay down her short-haired head, sighing a huge dog sigh. She had had quite a day. Why not rest for a bit? She stretched out, soaking in the golden rays that fell across her. Her eyelids drooped, almost closing, covering her brown eyes so that they could barely be seen. The next thing anyone knew the Blue Heeler was fast asleep, but not for long.

As soon as Patches woke up, she

stretched her legs and neck and started barking. She must get out of that pen which restrained her! She needed desperately to make sure everyone was in tiptop condition. If anything had hurt them, they would have her to deal with! That is if she could escape her pen.

Her owner Brad, the rancher's grown-up son, heard her cries of desperation and frustration and came to her rescue. As soon as he had lifted the latch Patches took off running at lightning speed without even stopping to say hello or thank you. First, she ran around the main part of the yard twice to make sure everything was normal. Then, she searched the barn. There was Major Ed and he looked just fine shoveling out the horses' stalls. Next, she sprinted over and peeked through the short wooden fence posts that surrounded the backyard. The posts were not to keep Patches out, but the housedogs in. They were worthless. All they did was bark when they felt like it and eat treats and table scraps so that they would get fat.

But not me! Patches thought, I'm very useful and needed. I make the horses behave. I make sure no snakes and other

suspicious-looking creatures of the kind enter our green lovely yard. I protect my kind people and keep nasty troublemakers out of the driveway. Yes, I'm very helpful I suppose. Not saying that to be prideful or anything though, Patches thought, eyeing the sparkling clear water in the pool.

She poked her nose through the fence, sniffing the air for anything that might be a sign of danger. Nothing, she noted as she gazed at little Lexi, who was Brad's daughter, toddling around in the tall grass, followed closely by her mother's watchful eyes.

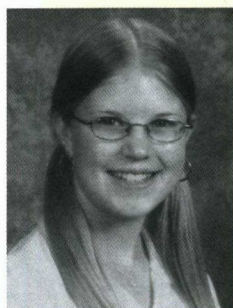
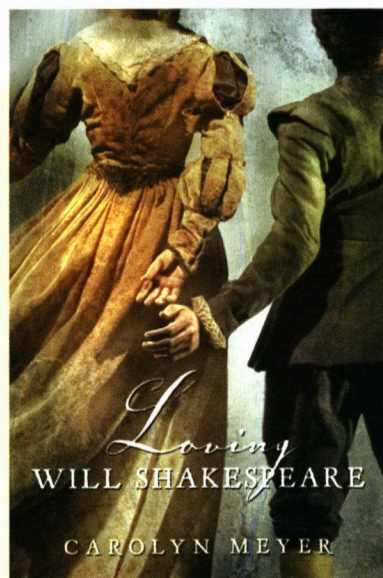
Patches turned in the opposite direction and surveyed the sprawling lawn. She determined that all was secure on the home front. By now it was getting dark, so Patches knew that it would be time to go back to her pen soon. She was getting tired too. Patches heard Major Ed coming toward her. She yawned, showing her sharp teeth. It had been a busy day! She walked willingly into her pen and lay down. As the darkness slowly settled and enveloped her she gave a good-night bark to the ranch and then fell into a heavy deep sleep. ❀



Book Review

By Kelsey May

Loving Will Shakespeare by Carolyn Meyer;
Harcourt Children's Books: New York,
2006; \$17



Kelsey May, 13
Grand Rapids, Michigan

HISTORY IS A GREAT TOPIC. When you combine that with William Shakespeare, the greatest poet in Europe, you have a story so intriguing it takes only a few days to read, once you get hooked. *Loving Will Shakespeare* by Carolyn Meyer is a realistic fiction book that takes place during the sixteenth century. It's a story of Agnes (Anne) growing up and interacting with Will Shakespeare, who's younger by seven years, who adores her. In her story, she struggles to develop relationships with many men before finally appreciating Will. Although Will pops up throughout the story, he doesn't become a major part of Anne's life until the end. It's a down-to-earth story with festivals, many births, and Anne farming the land under her cruel stepmother's direction. If you take pleasure in fast-paced stories, *Loving Will Shakespeare* is perfect for you.

I truly enjoyed reading this charming book. I often found myself advising Anne in my head because she, like all of us, makes mistakes. She is a mistreated daughter who longs to find love. She is neglected by her father, and she argues viciously with her stepmother, Joan. Although he loves her, Anne's father is too overwhelmed by his workload to pay much attention to Anne, which I find absolutely awful. Could you imagine if neither of

your parents cared in the least about you, but they expected you to care for their children and the farm as well? Throughout the story, her friends and family all find "the right person," leaving Anne unsatisfied and alone.

I can relate to Anne because both of us have to cope with rowdy, younger stepsisters. It is obvious that Anne much prefers her own sister to her cruel stepsister, Joan Little. Joan Little, an ill-tempered little girl, spies on Anne and threatens to tattle on her whenever she makes even a tiny mistake.

The author, Carolyn Meyer, proved that some relationships are not destined to be. I find Anne's struggles to be very emotionally touching. Anne discovers this through the many love disappointments in her life. First comes Kit Swallow, a poor sheepshearer with a sweet disposition. Alas, he flees from authorities hot on his trail. Next Anne encounters Edward Stinchcomb, whom she falls deeply in love with. Hob Ingram appears third. Anne's stepmother forces Anne to betroth herself to him. She is obliged to accept, but after she realizes the effect this could have on her life, she gladly declines the offer. Each man deserts her. After these numerous love letdowns, Anne couldn't have been more exhilarated to have Will enter her life.

When Anne gives Will a chance, she is thoroughly pleased with the result. They fall deeply in love, but Will pursues his true passion, poetry and playwriting. He ends up making a choice that affects the entire book. I enjoy happily-ever-after endings, so I was rather disappointed by the outcome, but that's life. Life can be both harsh and rewarding, and both are a part of Anne's adult life.

I was delighted in how true-to-life *Loving Will Shakespeare* was. It had ups and downs, a perfect balance of glamorous times and melancholy moments. ❀



The stream opened into a little pool. Curiously, it was silvery

The Journey Begins

By Anna Hirtes

Illustrated by Betsy Hochman

STORIES OF THE UNICORNS BOOK ONE

When God created the earth, he asked Adam in the Garden of Eden to name the animals. When Adam picked the unicorn to name first, God reached down and touched the unicorn's horn. This is a sign that unicorns are blessed above all other creatures.

—Nancy Hathaway, *Unicorn*

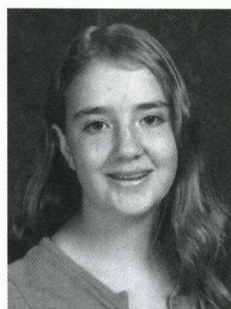
SHELLY LOOKED LONGINGLY at the big jugs of water being sold in the shops scattered along the dusty street. “Hey, hey, hey, girlie! Get off the road! You’re blocking it with your over-large body!” The voice laughed heartily. Shelly sighed. They were the rich boys and newspaper boys. Their favorite activity was to tease Shelly. They were trying to provoke her to come and hit them. Then Shelly would be arrested and severely punished by the government.

Shelly flicked her long, red, wavy hair out of her face. It fell far past her waist, and many folks thought it greatly needed cutting. Her big, green eyes swept the street floor, searching constantly for dropped or forgotten coins. The nine-year-old girl pushed her small body through the crowds. She desperately wished it was Christmas, her birthday. It was the only day of the year when she allowed herself to buy a feast.

The boys were partly right about her. Shelly was a beggar girl and was extremely scarce of money.



Anna Hirtes, 9
Basking Ridge, New Jersey



Betsy Hochman, 13
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

The cold evening wind blew her dress and hair. Shelly could see her wispy clouds of breath and decided to head back to her alleyway. When she at last reached her beloved alley, Shelly immediately curled up in her few blankets. One of them had been hers ever since she could remember. It was silvery blue with a single unicorn embroidered in the middle. The thick blanket felt a thousand times better than silk. Shelly wouldn't, *couldn't* ever part with it.

Shelly wrapped herself in that special possession and the other thin brown sheets she owned. Her box stood overhead, weather-beaten and dirty. It was so large, Shelly was sure it once held a bed frame. An eventful sleep took over Shelly.

First she dreamed she was walking in a field of unicorns. The earth turned blacker than black and colder than cold. A black-hooded figure loomed toward Shelly through the magnificently never-ending darkness. Shelly backed away and tripped over her own unsteady feet. The figure of darkness (at least that's what Shelly thought it was) gracefully curved its body downward toward Shelly's face. At that precise moment, the dreaming girl woke up, breathing hard and sweating. "It was just a dream," she told herself firmly, "just an old dream. It's not hurting anyone, and it's not real." Shelly tried to sound confident, but her voice trembled slightly.

"*Big* sign of madness, talking to your own head," stated a newspaper boy by the name of Frederick Afintger, who was pass-

ing. He smirked. Shelly ignored him.

Dawn was Shelly's favorite time of day. Most people were still snug in bed. No one shot insults at her, she was free of owners of stalls and shops shouting at her to get away from their selling areas. Shelly was sick of that. Now the girl grabbed the last of her bread loaf and headed for the stream.

It was warm, especially for this time of day. Shelly finally reached the cold, playful stream that flowed around the edge of the enchanted place, Magic Forest. The beggar girl took a long, refreshing drink from the creek. When Shelly finished munching on her bread loaf, she waded into the water. The deepest place reached up to her knees. Shelly stared absentmindedly at the horizon. The sun was still determined to climb over the mountain. The sun had almost accomplished that goal, which it repeated every morning. Shelly marched back to the bank and dried herself off. Suddenly, she glimpsed a flash of white in the trees. Shelly started. Then she saw it again, further this time.

"Hello?" Shelly called out. "Anybody there?" No answer. Shelly entered the Magic Forest and sprinted toward the white. She ran until she could run no more. A stitch had arisen in Shelly's side and her breathing was fast and hard.

She had arrived in a clearing. A small, lush apple tree stood in the corner, its fruits swaying slightly in the breeze. The very same creek Shelly had earlier waded in flowed before her. The stream opened into a little pool. Curiously, it was silvery.

It must come from here and go around the wood, Shelly thought to herself. Shelly sighed heavily for no particular reason and headed for the apple tree.

She heard a hiss and tripped over a tree root, or she thought it was a tree root. Fangs sank into her leg and poison shot through her body. Hooves pounding like thunder, and everything went black.

Everything was blurry and Shelly could hear a faint neighing sound. With difficulty, she sat up and slowly looked around. There, trotting along the path toward her, was a unicorn!

He had a long, flowing, milky-white mane, tail, and forelock. His eyes were like crystals, glowing in the bright sunlight. His hooves were cloven like a goat, and the fur was silky. It was beautifully white. He came over to her. Shelly didn't know how to feel. The unicorn started to speak in a strange language. Oddly, Shelly could understand it.

"Hello, my name is Magic Star. What is your name?" the unicorn asked.

Shelly replied shakily, "My name is Shelly. I am an orphan." For a moment, Shelly thought she saw an excited look on Magic Star's face. But when she blinked, it was once again replaced by a curious expression.

"What happened to me? Are you really a unicorn? Why are you here? Where are we? Was that a snake? If it was, did you kill it? Do you live here? Is this forest dangerous? Why is that pool silvery...?" It all came pouring out before Shelly could stop herself.

"Slow down, slow down! I can't possibly answer all those questions at once!" Magic Star exclaimed. "I will answer each one the best I can. I am a real unicorn and that was a snake that attacked you. A rattlesnake. I did not kill it. I terrified it so it would stay away from you. This place is called the Unicorn Clearing, in the heart of Magic Forest. I stay here sometimes. This forest can be dangerous at times, but you are safe with me. That pool is silvery because it is a unicorn pool. I am here because I sensed danger. Does that answer all of your questions?"

Shelly nodded. She tried to stand, but she collapsed back down at the pain in her leg.

"Does it hurt?" Magic Star asked.

"Very much," Shelly replied.

"Then I will heal it," Magic Star told Shelly, lowering his horn toward the snakebite. Before Shelly could say a word, the bite was gone.

"Thank you!" said Shelly gratefully. Suddenly, they heard hoofbeats loud and close.

"On my back!" Magic Star demanded. He quickly sunk down on his knees and Shelly scrambled on the silky white back. Magic Star leapt easily over the unicorn pool and bolted into the depths of the Magic Forest. After what seemed like hours, the breathless unicorn stopped.

Shelly dismounted and looked around. They had arrived in another clearing, except there were berry bushes here and no pool, only a lively little stream. Shelly turned back to Magic Star. She opened

her mouth to speak, but Magic Star started first.

"That was the king's men. They are after me." Shelly once again nodded. Magic Star continued, "It is not very safe for me here, but luckily I am faster than their horses." He look around the clearing, as if expecting the king's men to jump out of the trees and ambush at any moment.

Suddenly, Magic Star dashed into a standing position. Shelly had heard a rustle in the forest and supposed Magic Star must have, too.

"Get behind me!" Magic Star stated.

"No, wait," Shelly replied firmly. The unicorn gave her an annoyed look, but she ignored it. Shelly continued to move cautiously toward the trees. She passed a big brown oak tree.

Shelly looked on the other side, and her mouth fell open in shock. There, standing before her, was a girl. And she wasn't just any girl. Shelly and she were *identical*. They both had those big green eyes, long red wavy hair, and everything else. The two girls were even built the same. No difference in their appearance was visible.

"Who are you?" they said in unison. Both smiled in spite of themselves.

"My name is Shelly," Shelly answered.


The mysterious girl responded, "My name is Elizabeth. I'm very pleased to meet you, Shelly." She held out a hand identical to Shelly's.

"I am pleased to meet you too, Elizabeth," Shelly replied, taking the hand and shaking it. At that moment, Magic Star happened to come into the forest where they were.

"There you are..." He stopped in mid-sentence at the sight of Elizabeth. "Oh, great," he said sarcastically under his breath. "This wasn't the plan!"

Elizabeth asked, "What did you say?" She tried to hide her pleasure at meeting a unicorn, but was doing a very poor job of it.

"Nothing," Magic Star answered sheepishly. Elizabeth shrugged and started toward the clearing.

When she saw no one was coming with her, she turned around and said, "Well, are you coming?" Shelly and Magic Star followed the lively Elizabeth. Elizabeth started humming a tune. Girl and unicorn headed back to the clearing together. Reader, this is how the great journey began. 

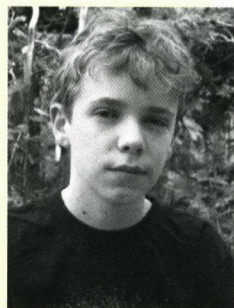


Autumn

By Gabriel Wainio-Théberge

We see autumn
As a blaze
Of red leaves, falling leaf-shaped embers
From the branch-lined sky,
A blaze
Of squirrels rushing,
Geese hurrying, of motion,
A blaze
Of jack-o-lanterns.

But around the jack-o-lanterns falls the night,
Advancing slowly through the days,
A black cat stalking the now-mouse-weak sun.
Northern winds come
Hand in hand with warm zephyrs
Above the autumn's thin skin of fire,
Waltzing around each other;
Summer to winter and back
While below,
Frost turns soil to stone,
For hardy autumn-leaf mushrooms to stand brittle
Like Medusa's stare.



Gabriel Wainio-Théberge, 12
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

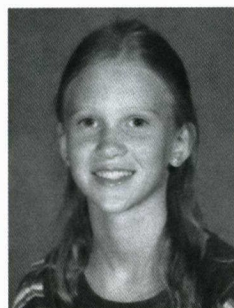
Rescue

By **Mailyn Fidler**

Illustrated by **Ashley Whitesides**



Mailyn Fidler, 13
Bloomington, Indiana



Ashley Whitesides, 13
Grand Junction, Colorado

IF YOU HAD looked at us from above, we would have seemed like three ducks waddling out of our house and into the rain. My fat raincoat flapped at my legs, and my too big galoshes clomp-clomp-clomped on the wet pavement. I glanced nervously at my sister, who held clamped in her sturdy, pale hand a small plastic doll. My dad towered above us, like a tree in his heavy green coat and black cowboy hat.

After what seemed like forever, our sojourn down the driveway ended in a rushing river: the gutter. “Ready?” my dad asked, and we nodded. Although we tried to keep our faces solemn and stern for this grand event, tiny smiles peeped out from the quivering corners of our mouths. My sister opened her wet, slippery palm and dropped the doll slowly, almost reluctantly, into my dad’s outstretched hand. My dad’s body pivoted smoothly towards the gurgling gutter of water before us. Despite my efforts to restrain it, a small sound escaped my throat. “Are you sure you’re ready?” Dad asked again. Swallowing, I nodded. My dad uncurled his fingers, and dropped the doll—*splooosh!*—into the surging stream.

For a few expanded moments, the water taunted us by pulling the doll slowly, teasingly away from us. I held my breath and kept my hands clenched tightly by my stomach as I watched the doll ease painfully through the eddies.

Then suddenly the rushing rivulet churned and swept the tiny figure away, down, down the street. The three of us broke into a run, galloping after it. With each step I took, a little of my anxi-



My dad uncurled his fingers, and dropped the doll—sploosh!—into the surging stream

ety for the doll disappeared. I flew down the sidewalk, drenched with the sky's tears. I skidded round a bend in the road. My hair, saturated with fat raindrops, flew around my face in strings. The doll shot down the hill in front of us, carried along by the churning channel of water. I hurtled after it, half-skipping, half-running. I was elated, happy beyond belief. A laugh rose from deep inside me, rising up through my throat. As it burst forth, I choked on it. My elation turned to terror. The image wavered in front of me, convulsing with my unsteady steps. A rusty, encrimsoned grate greedily gobbled the sloshing streamlet—

just a few yards away! "Daddy!" I screamed. "She's going to go down the drain!"

Valiantly, my dad leapt forward, and brought his hand crashing down into the tumultuous waters. I squeezed my eyes shut.

A few moments later, all I could hear was the water cascading violently into the sewer. Cautiously, I opened my eyes. There, above the foaming jet of water, was my dad's hand, dripping wet, suspended over the drain. And nestled among his slightly curled fingers, outlined against the pale, soft skin of his palm, lay the small plastic figure of a doll. ❀



"Look," she said, "I don't really know how to say this, so I'll just say it"

You Just Have to Trust Me

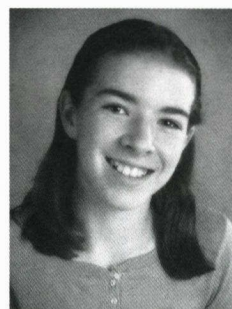
By **Caitlin Miller**

Illustrated by **Hannah Geiser**

THE FIRST TIME I ever met Erica Stevens was in Miss Moore's first-grade class at Thomas Grant Elementary. Erica had had a big first-grade crush on Tyler Applebaum, who sat across from Erica at their table. Of course, Erica, being the excessive talker that she was and still is today, chatted non-stop to poor Tyler every chance she got, whether it was during Miss Moore's addition lesson or during D.E.A.R. time, which was supposed to be silent. Finally after a few weeks Miss Moore got fed up with Erica's talking and just like every other teacher we have both had from first grade through now, she moved Erica's seat. Guess where the chatterbox got moved to? That's right, my table. Miss Moore had probably figured that since I was extremely shy and hardly ever said a word in class that Erica would have no one to talk to and that would be the end of Erica's constant chatting. Boy, was Miss Moore wrong. As soon as she sat Erica down across from me, Erica stared at me with her beautiful baby-blue eyes and I stared at her back, chewing on one of my brown braids. Then, Erica uttered the first words she had ever said to me: "Hi, my name is Erica. Do you think Tyler is cute?"

That was the start of our friendship. Erica's talking was contagious and pretty soon I had "caught" it. We talked all the time in class, which led Miss Moore to move Erica yet again.

But that didn't stop us! The two of us were inseparable, and we did practically everything together. We went over each other's houses almost ever weekend, playing with Barbie and Ken



Caitlin Miller, 13
Sterling, Massachusetts



Hannah Geiser, 13
Richardson, Texas

dolls for hours at a time (Erica pretended that they were her and Tyler Applebaum).

Even though Erica and I were best friends, we were still complete opposites. I was unbearably shy around practically everyone but Erica and never talked that much. Erica was always bold, on the other hand, and would say anything that was on her mind. She would always jump off the park swing when it was at the very highest it could swing or would sled down a big, steep hill in the winter. Then she would call after me, "Now you try, Natasha!"

"That's all right," I would say. "I might get hurt."

"No you won't!" she would holler back. "You just have to trust me!"

The years passed, and Erica and I went through so much together as best friends. We grew out of Barbie dolls and replaced them with CDs, makeup, and going to the movies. Sleepovers turned into giggle sessions complete with gossip about boys.

But no matter how much we grew up, one thing seemed like it would never change: we would always stay best friends.

However, when Erica and I started the seventh grade, things started to change. We weren't in the same homeroom like we usually were, and we didn't have the same classes.

Erica started to become more popular. She always had a huge group of girls that would surround her every minute of the day, and it seemed like every boy in the grade wanted to eat lunch and hang out with Erica after school. Whenever I tried to talk to Erica, they would act like I

wasn't there and make me feel small.

I made some new friends, and Erica and I didn't hang out as much as we used to. We didn't have our late-night phone calls anymore, and there were never any sleepovers either. I felt sad that we never saw each other anymore, but I knew I had to move on.

The months passed, and before I knew it the seventh grade was over and summer vacation had arrived. I had always loved summer, mostly because there was no school and I could do whatever I wanted during the day. Erica and I used to get together almost every day during the summer, but I knew it would be different that year.

One hot day in July my mom came in from outside where she had been gardening. She was holding a stack of envelopes and magazines in her hands.

"Natasha, mail's here," she said.

"Did I get anything?" I asked, putting down the Nancy Drew book that I had been reading on the couch. I hoped that the summer issue of *Teen Wave* had arrived.

"You got a letter," my mom replied, handing me a small, pink envelope with sparkly star stickers all over it.

I ripped open the flap, eager to see if my grandmother who lived in Florida had sent me birthday money seven months early again. But it wasn't money. It was an invitation to Erica Stevens's boy-girl summer bash at her lake house. It was to be two weeks from Saturday.

Mom peered over my shoulder and read

the invitation, which had a picture of a smiling sun with sunglasses on it.

"Erica's having a party? That's nice," she said. "I haven't seen Erica around here for a while. Is everything all right between you two?"

"Yeah, fine," I replied absentmindedly, reading over the invitation again and again. Why would Erica invite me to her party? There would probably be all popular people there, and they would all make me feel so lame. Her mom probably just felt bad for me and made Erica invite me. That's probably why she invited me.

I sighed. It would be rude not to go after I was invited, so I might as well, even though Erica probably wouldn't even notice I was there.

THE DAY OF Erica's party arrived, and when I arrived at the lake house, I knew right away that this was a big bash. The house was a small but pretty cottage on a sandy beach that was right by the lake. Streamers ran all across the porch railings of the house, and balloons were tied to the benches of picnic tables, which were covered with brightly-colored tablecloths. Tons of party food was piled on the tables, including nacho chips and a cake that was covered with chocolate frosting. A huge stereo was blasting a hip-hop song from a local radio station.

There were also tons of kids running around. I could hardly believe it—there must have been at least fifty of my classmates all over the small beach. Some of them were splashing around in the water,

and some other boys were running around, attacking girls with water guns. Other kids were at the picnic tables, munching on the food and drinking soda.

"Hey!" I heard a familiar voice call out. I turned around. Erica was running up to me, wearing a hot-pink bikini with white flip-flops. Her blond hair looked even more blond and gorgeous in the July sun.

"Hey," I replied. "Thanks for inviting me." It felt kind of weird talking to Erica again.

"You're welcome," Erica replied, grinning. "Can I talk to you for a sec?"

"Sure, I guess," I replied, wondering what she could possibly want to talk to me about.

Erica led me across the sandy beach and stopped at an old, wooden dock that was surrounded by weeds and cat o' nine tails. It was out of the way from the party.

I looked back over my shoulder at all of the kids, and then looked back at Erica. She hadn't acted so buddy-buddy towards me in a long time. Was there something strange going on that I didn't know about?

"Look," she said, "I don't really know how to say this, so I'll just say it."

I stared at Erica, and when I looked straight into her blue eyes, I felt like I had been looking at her for the first time in my life. She looked sadder than I had ever seen her before. Erica, who had always been the bold and courageous one, for the first time in her life, looked shy and... scared. But what was she afraid of? Me?

"I'm really sorry that I haven't been a very good friend to you," Erica said. "I

don't know what happened. I guess we just kind of went our separate ways. I never really wanted that to happen... it just did."

"We never really went our separate ways," I replied, almost angry at Erica. "You did. You got all of those new friends and became Miss Popular, and you left me in the dust. How do you think that made me feel?"

Right then, I thought that Erica would either yell at me or storm away angrily. Neither of those things happened, though. Instead, Erica did something that I never knew was even physically possible for her. She started to cry.

Then, like some magic spell that had been over her for all of those months had been broken, she threw her arms around me and cried.

"Natasha, I'm so sorry!" she sobbed.

I just stood there, stunned, not knowing how to react. Then, like some magic

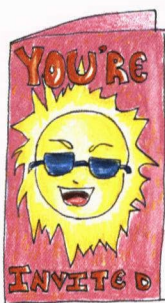
had come over me too, I hugged my best friend. I could feel tears streaming down my own cheeks, but I didn't bother to wipe them away. I wanted them to stay there forever, a reminder that this very moment had really happened. The moment I had gotten my best friend back.

Suddenly, I took Erica's hand and pulled her over to the edge of the dock.

"What are you doing?" she asked, her voice still shaky from crying.

I grinned from ear to ear and tightened my grip on her hand. "You just have to trust me."

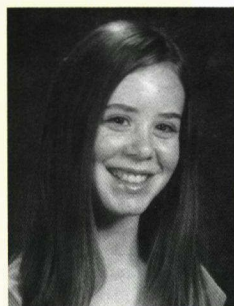
Then, before I could stop myself, I leapt off the dock, pulling Erica with me. We were in midair for a split second, and then landed with a splash in the cold, swampy water. Even though we weren't in the air anymore, I felt like I was on top of the world. When I heard Erica's familiar, friendly laugh, I knew that it would stay that way. ☸



Empty Spotlight

By Cora W. Bucher

Does anything exist at this hour,
when my footsteps crash,
and my breathing screams?
When every slight movement I make,
Feels like a leap?
When I'm all alone,
my house is quiet.
Outside the streetlights blur,
and twist themselves into shapes that
spotlight on the patch of gravel,
that's empty.
No one is there,
to stand in that spotlight,
and listen to the applause,
of the grass, blowing
in the wind.
And I am inside,
looking out,
at an empty place,
that I wish were
mine.



Cora W. Bucher, 13
Missoula, Montana

Saturday Night at the Panadería

By William Gwaltney

Illustrated by the author



William Gwaltney, 11
Englewood, Colorado

FRESH, WARM, YEASTY smell drifts through the screen door of the panadería and out onto the sidewalk. As if under some magic spell, we find that we must follow the command of the sweet fragrance and allow ourselves to be pulled inside the small brick building. As we enter the bakery, we stand, staring in amazement at all the beautiful pastries behind the glass display case doors that surround us. There are dozens of different kinds, each more exquisite and tasty-looking than the last. My mouth begins to water... Oh, how I long to sink my teeth into each and every one of them! Should I try something new this time? Or stick with trusted old favorites?

It is a Saturday night and the bakers in the panadería are hard at work, their conversations in their native Spanish washing over us like music. They are busy preparing for the following morning's crowds. Everyone will come in after church tomorrow, dressed in their Sunday best... Women in brightly colored dresses, clustered together and resembling beautiful bouquets of brilliant flowers. Men in starched and ironed Western shirts, wearing straw cowboy hats and their highly polished boots, all reserved especially for Sundays. *Abuelos* and *abuelas*, shepherding their little grandchildren into the bakery where they will stand and stare in awe... their eyes big, their tiny hands pressed against the glass doors, mesmerized by the delectable pastries inside.

Although the *churros*, long spirals powdered with cinnamon and stuffed to perfection with sweet creamy custard filling, tempt us to choose them, the rest of the pastries all call out to us as well.



Cream spurts out the sides and dribbles onto the tray. Oops...

I look around. On one shelf I see *empanadas de frutas*. These are miniature fruit pies, small enough to fit in the palm of my hand... flaky dough wrapped around fillings of apple, pineapple, strawberry, mango, lemon or peach.

There are *pan de huevos*, egg breads,

sometimes called *conchas* or seashells because that's what their concentric rings make them look like. Small plump buns, very plain and somewhat dry, they are covered with a thin glaze of powdered-sugar icing tinted in shades of pink, yellow, tan, and white. For all their pretty colors they

are still a bread instead of a pastry, and not really sweet enough for me.

I see *reposterías*, or cookies, of every description. Most are bigger than my hand. Some have frosting, others are dusted with sugar, still others are coated with multicolored sprinkles. Many of the cookies themselves are made from colored dough. Some are bright pink and others are a deep gold. The brown ones are chocolate. *Payasos* (clowns) are triangular-shaped cookies made with all three doughs, yellow, pink and brown. It's so hard to choose!

There are my favorites! *Cuernos de azúcar*, or sugar horns. They look a lot like a croissant, and like croissants some are plain while others are filled. The ones I like best are filled with rich yellow custard. All of them, even the plain ones, are coated with a thick layer of sugar on the outside. *Un sabor pequeño del cielo!* A little taste of heaven!

Unlike most other bakeries, panaderías are self-serve. I open the glass doors of the display case and, taking a pair of gigantic red tongs, use them to pluck the pastries of my choosing from the shelves. I place the pastries on a plastic tray which resembles the one my lunch comes on in the school cafeteria. As I use the tongs, I grab my *cuerno* too hard. Cream spurts out the sides and dribbles onto the tray. Oops... But what a great excuse to grab a second one! Mom doesn't say no, she is too busy looking at all the other pastries, so I take another horn, handling this one much more carefully.

I like using the tongs, so I ask the rest of

my family what they want. It turns out that what they want most are goodies that don't have the fillings squeezed out of them, so they decide to use the tongs themselves to choose their own sweets. Dad picks out a *marranito*, or gingerbread pig, and a pineapple *hojita*, a fruit tart made from *pan fino*, or sweet bread and filled with *piña*, or pineapple. My sister picks out a *pastel para los niños*, a slice of a single-layer moist vanilla cake, covered in fluffy pink frosting and sprinkles. *Pastel* means cake, and *para los niños* means for the children. My sister doesn't mind, even though she is eighteen and almost all grown up. She will normally argue fiercely that she is no longer a child, but hey, this is cake we're talking about!

My mother is already at the counter, asking for a slice of *pastel de tres leches* or *tres leches* cake. This is the only treat kept in a refrigerated case. It is a very moist, sweet cake, soaked in a mixture of three milks, with whipped cream and a cherry on top. Luckily for us, Mom can never eat a whole piece, so she always shares. A forkful or two is enough for most of us because it is so rich. I always try to get the cherry. The shopkeeper rings up our order. All our pastries together cost less than three dollars!

We walk outside, happy and content, clutching bags filled with our fresh warm pastries. We can hardly wait to get home and enjoy them. Dad says the best part about our trip to the panadería is that it's like a ten-minute vacation to Mexico. I say the best part about our trip is eating the things we take home. Mexican pastries are the best!



From Terror to Triumph

By **Bailey Bergmann**

Illustrated by **Suzannah Glennon**

A LOW GROWL VIBRATED out of his snarling jaws. Drool trickled over the cruelly glinting teeth and onto the cracked concrete sidewalk where he stood in a threatening stance. His brown eyes, which portrayed nothing but pure hatred, pierced the small toddler's who stood stiff with fear in front of him. The little girl, four years old at the time, was frozen in a trance, too afraid to run, or even tremble. A scream was caught in the back of her throat that would not escape. A lower growl from her assailer at last set it free.

"Mommy!" the girl shrieked. The dog pounced with a sickening half-growl and half-yelp, and all Asa remembered was hitting the concrete with the dog's hot breath on her neck.

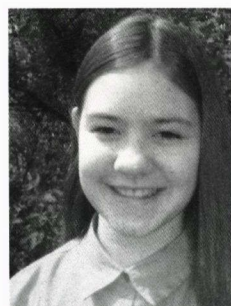
"MY FAVORITE ANIMAL has to be dogs."
"Hmm?" Asa was jerked out of that nightmarish recollection as she realized her friend Jenny was talking to her.

"Hello?" Jenny joked. "Anybody home in there?"

"Sorry," Asa replied, shifting her crystal-blue backpack to her left shoulder. "I was just thinking."

"About what?"

Asa shrugged. Not many people knew about the incident of her and the aggressive dog, even though it had been all over the news when it had happened. Asa rubbed her throat gently, running her finger along the familiar five-inch-long scar that ran along the side of her neck, curving into the middle of her throat. Jenny, like most people who knew Asa, had in the past asked



Bailey Bergmann, 12
Shawano, Wisconsin



Suzannah Glennon, 11
Greenland, New Hampshire



"Wanna hold him?" Jenny offered, nuzzling the small black-and-white Great Dane

where she got the scar, but Asa always replied evasively, "In an accident." So far, she hadn't met anyone who had pushed to know the full story.

"Well, you have to see my neighbor's new puppies," Jenny went on with her dialogue. "There are three of them, two boys and a girl, and they are just the *cutest* things in this world."

"What?" Asa interrupted, totally lost in the conversation.

"Weren't you listening to me previously?" Jenny chided playfully. "I was talking about Ella's three puppies."

Asa shuddered slightly at the thought of the huge Great Dane. "Ella's Mrs. Lander's dog, right?"

"Yup, and the puppies look just like her." Jenny gave a little skip. "They're just not as big."

Yet, thought Asa. Ella was a sweet, gentle giant, but her size intimidated Asa immensely. And the thought of three more giants like her... Asa shuddered again.

"Are you all right?" Jenny queried, looking into her friend's face. "You look pale."

"Oh no, I'm fine." Asa straightened and smiled, but it was rather strained and unnatural. Jenny looked unconvinced, but she didn't pressure Asa into telling.

"So, do you want to come see Ella's pups with me?" Jenny continued. "Mrs. Lander is letting me come over today, and..."

"No!" Asa almost shouted, with a slight tremble in her voice. Jenny's mouth fell open. Asa blushed and shuffled her feet more quickly. She was almost home. Just around this corner here...

"I better go, Asa," Jenny murmured with a half-confused, half-apologetic glance. "See you."

"Bye, Jenny," Asa sighed with a slight wave of her hand. When her friend had left her, Asa dashed down the sidewalk to her house, as if a mad dog was right at her heels. The door slammed behind her as she jumped through it and skidded into the kitchen, taking a deep breath as she came to a halt. The smell of homemade oatmeal-raisin cookies greeted her like a warm hug, snug and assuring. Asa dropped her backpack and kicked off her new dress shoes that were required for the school's dress code. Asa followed the delicious smell to the oven, where the oven light illuminated two pans of yummy goodness.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEEEEP! Asa jumped as the timer blared its warning, and the clatter of footsteps was heard on the stairs. Asa's eighteen-year-old sister, Ann, hurried into the kitchen, snatched an oven mitt, opened the oven door, took out pan number one, set it on the counter, and said, "Hi, Asa," all in one whirl of activity.

After Ann took out the second pan, she asked, "Could you get out the cooling racks, Ace?"

Asa rummaged through a cluttered cabinet and found the racks. She set them on the counter. "Ann?"

"Yes?" Ann thrust a spatula underneath one lightly toasted cookie, and then let it slide off onto a rack with a helping shake.

"Do you think that people should follow all that advice about facing their fears?"



Ann crossed her arms and leaned against the counter, thinking. "All fear affects your life, Asa"

"Well, I guess," Ann replied. "I mean, people can't just live in fear all their lives."

"But what if the fear is something minor?" Asa touched her scar briefly. "Something that won't affect your life very much?"

Ann crossed her arms and leaned against the counter, thinking. "All fear affects your life, Asa." She peered knowingly into Asa's face. "Are you thinking of dogs?"

Asa nodded, taking a warm cookie and gazing at it steadily. "I just—well, I hate being afraid," Asa admitted, breaking the cookie in two and watching the crumbs

bounce on the tiled floor and skitter under cabinets. "It's like I'm a wimp, or something. I know most dogs won't hurt me, but I don't believe it."

Ann leaned over and pulled Asa to her side, her shiny black curls touching Asa's light brown forehead.

"Did something happen at school that scared you, Ace?"

Asa shook her head. "All that happened was Jenny invited me to go see three puppies, and I freaked out." Asa sighed. "I think puppies are adorable, but they scare me to death."

Ann's brown eyes shone with under-

standing. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"What?"

"Are you going to be afraid, or are you going to face your fear?"

Asa was silent, fidgeting with the broken cookie in her hands. At last she looked up. "I think I need the phone."

"ISN'T HE CUTE?" Jenny held a floppy-eared puppy in her arms. His little pink tongue hung out of his mouth in a friendly smile, but Asa still couldn't stop herself from gulping. His teeth looked pretty sharp for a little guy like him.

"Wanna hold him?" Jenny offered, nuzzling the small black-and-white Great Dane. "He's the cutest of the three."

Asa hung back slightly. "Are you sure he won't, um, you know, bite me?"

Jenny laughed. "The closest thing to a bite this baby can manage is a slobbery kiss."

"Are you sure?" Asa said warily. "I've heard puppies sometimes bite."

"They do, but it only feels like little pinpricks when they're babies like him," Jenny responded intelligently. "But he shouldn't do it. He's a pretty mellow fellow." She giggled at her own joke before asking again, "Want to hold him? We could sit down so he's not as wiggly."

"OK," Asa stammered, lowering herself onto the green grass in the enclosed yard. She eyed Ella lying several feet from her, basking in the sun. Ella's two other puppies were chasing a small white butterfly, having already lost interest in the

two visitors.

Asa held out her hands and Jenny eased the chubby puppy from her arms to Asa's. Asa shivered, recollecting that warmth that had caused her pain early on in her childhood. Asa was rigid and nervous, but the puppy in her arms didn't seem to notice. He laid his head lazily on her tense arm, a sigh heaving his chubby middle up. A flicker of a smile crossed Asa's face, and Jenny's grin grew wider.

"Like him?" said Jenny, her head cocked to the side a bit, and her blue eyes shining from behind her lilac-rimmed glasses.

Asa didn't reply for a moment, then she giggled slightly. "Is he hiccupping?"

"He sure is," snickered Jenny. "He hiccups a lot."

Asa used her free arm to timidly stroke the puppy's back, but she steered clear of his mouth. The puppy turned his head towards her hand and Asa gasped as his little mouth lipped her fingers playfully. Asa felt the pinpricks, and shrieked. She scrambled to her feet, the puppy flopping to the ground in Asa's haste.

Jenny hopped up, too, and touched the hand that Asa was clutching. "What's wrong? Are you bleeding?"

"No, no," Asa blurted, pulling away. Tears welled up in her brown eyes, and she turned them downcast. "Look, Jenny, I've gotta go. Can you tell Mrs. Lander thanks for me?"

"Well sure, Asa, but are you sure you're all right?"

"Oh, yes, sure, I'm fine," Asa replied, proving the complete opposite.

For the second time that day, Asa dashed away from her invisible enemy.

“OH.” Asa glanced up from her bowl of Cheerios to look at Ann. “What?”

“Doesn’t a Mrs. Lander live on the next block from here?” Ann asked, scanning the article in the newspaper she was reading.

Asa’s eyes squinted in puzzlement. “Yes. Why do you ask?”

“She was in a car accident yesterday,” Ann replied, eyebrows furrowed in sympathy.

“Let me see that, Ann,” said their mother, taking the newspaper from her daughter. She glanced over the whole article briefly while Asa squirmed impatiently in her chair.

“What happened, Mom? Is she hurt bad?” Asa tried to look over her mother’s shoulder, but she could only see the bold-faced headline: “Woman injured in two-car crash.” Asa gulped.

“It says that Mrs. Lander was taking her dog and her three puppies to a veterinarian’s appointment yesterday,” her mother said, “when a driver shot through a red light and hit Mrs. Lander’s car. The other driver wasn’t hurt, but Mrs. Lander suffered a broken collarbone and other minor injuries and is now being treated in the hospital.”

The three were quiet for a while, Asa more so. She stared intensely into her cereal, as if it would somehow make the whole terrible incident disappear. If Mrs.

Lander was hurt in the crash, what about Ella and her puppies?

“Did it say what happened to the dogs?” Asa inquired.

Ann looked over and reported, “The mother dog and two of her puppies died on the scene. The third was taken to the nearest veterinary clinic.”

The third, Asa thought. But which one *was* the third?

“JENNY! JENNY!” Asa wove through the crowd of teenagers gathered at her private school’s lockers, waving wildly at her friend, who was a little ways ahead. Jenny turned, her face a little ashen.

“Asa!”

Asa stopped to catch her breath. “Did you see the paper this morning?”

“Yeah.” Jenny looked down at the floor, her brown shoe tracing a blue speckled tile. “Tragic, isn’t it?”

“But which one?” Asa blurted, knowing Jenny would understand what she was talking about. “It wasn’t that black-and-white one that I held yesterday, was it?”

Jenny shook her head. “I called all the vets around town, and finally found the one that had Ella’s puppy. It’s the same one. He’s all right, thank goodness, just a little shaken up.”

“But his mom!” Asa was now all worked up despite her dreaded phobia. “Won’t he starve without her?”

Jenny sighed. “I asked the vet there, and he said that they’re bottle-feeding him now.” She sighed again. “He also said Mrs. Lander has decided to put the puppy

up for adoption.”

“But why?”

Jenny shrugged. “My guess is she won’t be able to get up and feed him all the times he needs. And besides, she’s in the hospital right now with a broken collarbone.”

Asa saw how much her friend cared about the puppy. “Don’t you want to adopt him?”

Jenny nodded, and said, “But I already have my two rabbits and a cat. Three’s the limit, so Mom says.” Her blue eyes bore into Asa. “But you don’t have any pets.”

Asa blinked, trying to comprehend what Jenny was saying. Then it hit her. “You want *me* to adopt him?”

Jenny didn’t say anything, but she just stared at Asa, waiting to see what she thought.

Are you going to be afraid, or are you going to face your fear? Ann’s words flashed into Asa’s memory, as vivid and haunting as the day she was attacked. *People can’t just live*

in fear all their lives... All fear affects your life, Asa. Asa squeezed her eyes shut, took a deep breath, and then opened them.

“I’ll ask, Jenny.”

ASA LAY ON her stomach, watching Hiccups growl at her fingers that danced in front of him. He snatched her hand in his mouth, but Asa only winced as she gently disentangled herself from his grip. Hiccups’ tongue lolled out, and he rolled over onto his back for a belly rub, his tail thwacking the floor and his eyes innocent. Asa giggled, and rubbed the puppy’s tummy, making him wiggle all over. As the back door opened, Hiccups flipped onto his stomach, staring at Jenny as she walked in. She held her arms wide, and Hiccups shot into them. Asa smiled. Fear. It *does* affect your life. But so does joy.

Hiccups tumbled back into her arms for the remainder of his belly rub.

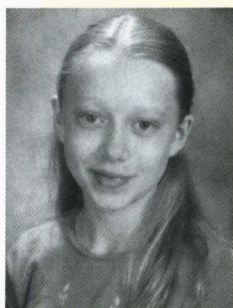
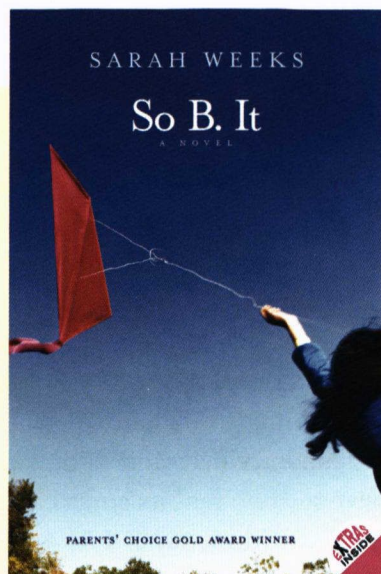
Yes, Asa grinned. *So does joy.*



Book Review

By Isabel Bartholomew

So B. It by Sarah Weeks, Harper Trophy:
New York, 2005; \$6.99



Isabel Bartholomew, 11
Salt Lake City, Utah

SO *B. IT* IS POSSIBLY one of the most moving, wonderful, descriptive books I have ever read. In this story, the main character, Heidi, is living with her mentally disabled mother and her neighbor, Bernadette. Heidi is used to living in a, well, *different* household, and has lived that way all her life. Her mother only knows twenty-three words, which they keep a list of in the cabinet. But when Heidi's mother starts saying a word that Bernie and Heidi don't know, Heidi wants to learn about her mother's past.

Something about this book that intrigues me so much is that Sarah Weeks has the ability to make all her characters incredibly real. Nobody is all good or all bad. They have lives, and, if they do appear mean, there is always a reason. While digging into her mother's past, Heidi encounters many interesting characters, all of whom are very different. There's Georgia Sweet, the clever, pretty, body-language expert, Alice, who can talk and talk and talk without the other person getting a word in edgewise, who tricks Heidi into lying continuously, and strange, vague Mr. Hill. This story has little details that many people would overlook. In this book Heidi mentions dinosaur skin, and how nobody really knew what color it was. Heidi was reflecting on what she had

just learned about her mother and states, "If truth were a crayon and it was up to me to put a wrapper around it and name its color, I know just what I would call it—dinosaur skin." She takes a look at something nobody really stops to think about.

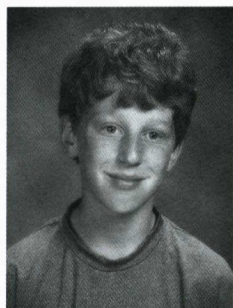
My mom and I both read this book, and we both cried. The way Sarah Weeks describes things, through the eyes of a twelve-year-old girl, makes it moving and believable—the struggles, the excitement, the sadness, of life itself. So B. It, you may be interested to know, is what Heidi's mother calls herself. When Heidi and her mother showed up on Bernie's doorstep, Heidi's mother called herself So Be It, and Bernie, thinking she had to have a proper name, changed it to So B. It. It is the kind of book that gets you hooked after reading the first page. In Sarah Weeks's other book, called *Jumping the Scratch*, it is the same thing. The main character wants to find out something (the meaning of a word, or just a word in general) and will go all out to find it. As soon as you start reading it, you will too! The way it is written gets you interested with the end, and makes you just have to finish it. It is, in my opinion, a very good and tricky writing technique.

My grandmother's sister (my great aunt) is mentally disabled, so I know what it would be like to be Heidi, although it would be very different to have a mentally disabled mother. My great aunt can be extremely unpredictable, sweet one moment, throwing tantrums the next, but we love her very much all the same. She has a full vocabulary, unlike Heidi's mother, but in many ways they are similar. *So B. It* teaches an important life lesson, as well as being a fantastic read just for fun. This was a spectacular book, and I hope I have interested you in it! ❀

Hope

By Erik Dinardo

Illustrated by Susannah Benjamin



Erik Dinardo, 13
Carlisle, Massachusetts



Susannah Benjamin, 13
Greenwich, Connecticut

THE WIND WHISTLED against his head as the leaves blew in a cyclone and rain threatened with a distant rumble of thunder. The man turned, his black overcoat flapping. Walking slowly away, he hoped his memories would not be blown away as the dry brittle grass. His hand felt empty and cold without her small hand gripping his. The streets were empty as he boarded the bus. Staring out of the window the man could almost hear her voice pointing out anything that her little eyes could see. The voice faded as the bus abruptly came to a halt, and the cracked and broken voice of a driver said, "End of the line." He got slowly up, his back bringing pains that did not hurt around her. Climbing down the stairs he saw with his hazy eyes a candy shop where they always used to get her favorite candy, licorice. As he moved closer he realized all the windows were cobwebbed with boards and tape showing that he was not welcome here. Moving a little farther he came to a park where she used to immediately pull his arm to the garden and jump into the flowers until a smiling park ranger told her to get out. But now all that remained as the old man hobbled up was the cold hard dirt, an old torn-up magazine, and one withered flower. He bent down to pick the last beautiful memory, when a sharp wind flew through the trees and snatched the flower in its fearsome jaws. It continued to howl until the man shuffled away, taking shelter in a gazebo that looked to be a thousand years old. There in front of him was a merry-go-round. The wind pushed it around and around and every time it turned a white horse, now



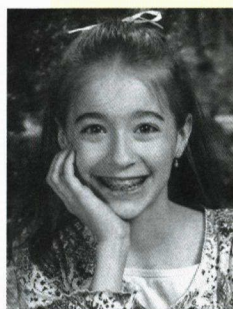
He sat there for what seemed like an eternity

faded gray, brought the laughter of a small girl with it. He sat there for what seemed like an eternity until the laughter faded from his mind. He got up and walked against the wind, his face seeming like an old grape. Leaving the park he entered a subway and bought a ticket for the next train, not caring where it went. Sitting down, he imagined picking her up so she

could grab with her small fingers the holding bars and squeak in her delighted voice, "I'm Tarzan." Then everyone would look up from his or her newspaper and laugh. But no one was on the train today and a single tear full of emotions fell from his eye. He emerged from the subway and he walked on, in front of him a ray of light broke through the clouds. ❁

Watching

By **Laine Bruzek**



Laine Bruzek, 12
Wheaton, Illinois

I lie on the grass,
My back on the soft earth,
Wind quietly whistling
Through the tall oak behind me
I watch the sky
And as the clock spins
The sky does also,
The clouds passing through
On their way
To the rest of the world
Gently waving their shape-shifting fingers
And floating away
The sun finishes its continual arch
And shows off its silent brilliance as it
Prepares to slip below the horizon
Its light piecing the rainbow on the blue canvas sky

Like an enormous jigsaw that
Just like the clouds
Shifts every day, then fades to blue
A deep, restful blue held back by the tiny pinpoint stars
That emerge from their day of sleep
And wink at the last of the sun
Then turn respectfully again towards the moon
Their moon.
Their hushed lullaby a soft glimmer
As the moon holds itself with such posture,
Such presence.
Carrying out its midnight duty.
And as I breathe it in, I feel like one of them.
Goodnight, I whisper to them.
And I truly am happy to be alive.



With a few swift strokes and a squeal of delight I stood up on perfection itself

Moonbeams into Eternity

By Colin Johnson

Illustrated by Claire Zager

SIXTY SURFERS SAT like giant black spiders, fangs bared, waiting to strike out and take one wave. Only one surfer could ride a wave at a time, which poisoned the air with the tense gas of ruthless competition. This was Trestles, a place where waves rolled like moonbeams into eternity. Because of this phenomenon, Trestles attracted crowds of people like termites to a rotting log.

My first time at Trestles was like a race in wheel-spinning mud. Of the two to three waves I caught, I only rode one all the way in. It seemed like every time I paddled for a wave, I missed the wave by five feet—just three more paddles and I would have caught each one. I felt frustration like an icy hot pad—cold with glum depression and hot with frustrated aggravation. Like a pot of moldy mush, I slunk back out to the treacherous takeoff zone on my surfboard.

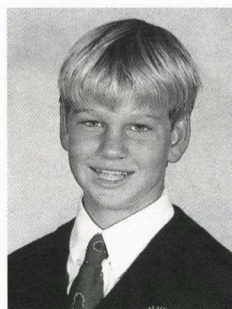
“IT’S FIRING,” Chance, my surf coach, gleefully shouted through the telephone. “The set waves are rolling in like dinner courses at a five-star restaurant.”

“Really?” I asked anxiously.

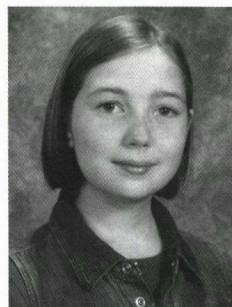
I was a little nervous about going to Trestles again after my first disastrous experience. At the same time, I was excited to give the world-class waves another try.

“Yes, it’s two- to three-foot overhead, with an occasional four-foot.”

I have gotten used to this jargon. One “head” is usually con-



Colin Johnson, 13
Laguna Beach, California



Claire Zager, 11
San Francisco, California

sidered about six feet. So in this case, we were talking about set waves with an eight- to nine-foot face and occasionally one with a ten-foot face, which is the front of the wave.

"I'll pick you up after school," Chance said cheerfully.

Excitement bored a tingly shivery hole in my stomach, and my hands started to sweat.

Swookachsh!

Chance and I stood on the beach getting ready to change while waves like charging elephants rolled through the mossy rock point. Salty mist filled my lungs with new hope.

"This is it," he said as we began to paddle through the molten cloudy fluff.

As I sat in the lineup to wait for a wave, venomous glares from the salt-crustured spiders pierced me. *Who is this newcomer?* they asked with speculative beady eyes.

I tried to return their fierce stares, but failed and only managed a shivering glance.

"Whoa, that's a big wave," I exclaimed to Chance, pushing my electric-green board through the wall of blue gel.

"Shhh!" he replied with a cranky frown. "Don't say that."

"Why?" I asked, curious at the harshness in his normally calm and easygoing voice.

"I'll tell you later, but don't say that again."

A wall of sea glass danced toward me, and I paddled eagerly toward it with a salivating smile to ride its treasures. Excitement rattled my bones. There was no one to steal it from me. I was in the right spot and had the right-of-way. My silver fingertips shattered the smooth glass wall with repeated strokes of eagerness and delight. With a push from bubbly nature herself, I glided down the face of the wave, my fins slicing the shimmering sea like silver knives through honey butter. Suddenly, the silence was shattered by the slicing of yet another board. My screaming smile suddenly shimmered and then was blown out. Frantically, I shouted and waved at the rider to get off of my wave, but he just ignored me and pretended I wasn't even there. I tried to get next to him so that he would see me, but when I got close, he snapped a big turn and sprayed me in the face. Blinded by salty sea tears, I fell and smashed into the bottom of the sea.

"HEY, GROMULET!* What's up?!" Chance cheerfully asked me a few days later. "Trestles is going off. The swell's picked up and it's going to be perfect after school."

"Can we go somewhere else?" I groaned. "Because last time I ended up at the bottom of the sea."

"Nah. We're going to Trestles. It's just that last time you did everything wrong."

* A gromulet, or grom, is a child surfer

You have to keep your mouth shut when you go out there because if you don't they're just going to take advantage of you. For example, if you say the waves are big, they will think that you are a novice and won't let you catch any waves. Also, you have to strategize and get your spot in the pecking order. Right off the bat, catch a couple waves and do some good turns to let every one know that you mean business. Oh yeah—one reminder: whoever is the deepest* has the right-of-way. So if you can manage to get the deepest every time, you're gonna get all the waves."

The next day at Trestles, I sat amongst the giant black spiders again. But this time, I was ready. When I was on the beach, I had told Chance, "If anyone wants to take my waves I say, 'Bring on the heat.'"

"That's the right attitude buddy," Chance had said, grinning.

Paddling up the point, I wore my stoniest face and said nothing. When the first couple five- to six-foot waves rolled through, I was as ready as a rattlesnake. It was my turn to strike. I nimbly paddled to the deepest place possible and dug my fingernails into the rampaging wave.

Then with one last blast of effort, I stood up and claimed my first wave for that day at Trestles. I dug my fins deep and threw huge sprays. Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw the spiders staring their beady eyes at me. But this time it was not with a look of condescension, but with admiration and respect. My eyes shimmering with happiness, I paddled out hungry for a set wave. I waited and waited, letting many mediocre sets go by. Then the wave came. It was a rumbling twelve-foot monster. All of the waves before it had washed everyone else too far in to get in my way. So it was mine, all mine. With a few swift strokes and a squeal of delight I stood up on perfection itself. Silver drops of purity choked the air with the sizzling smell of satisfaction as I chiseled pictures into the canvas of dazzling droplets. Back and forth I swished, spraying clouds of frothy foam into the sun-bleached air. We talked very little, for our sunburnt smiles did all the talking as we walked up the trail and watched the evening sun melt sleepily into the snoring sea.

Kssshhhhh...

Kssshhhhh...



* The deepest part of the wave is closest to the breaking section

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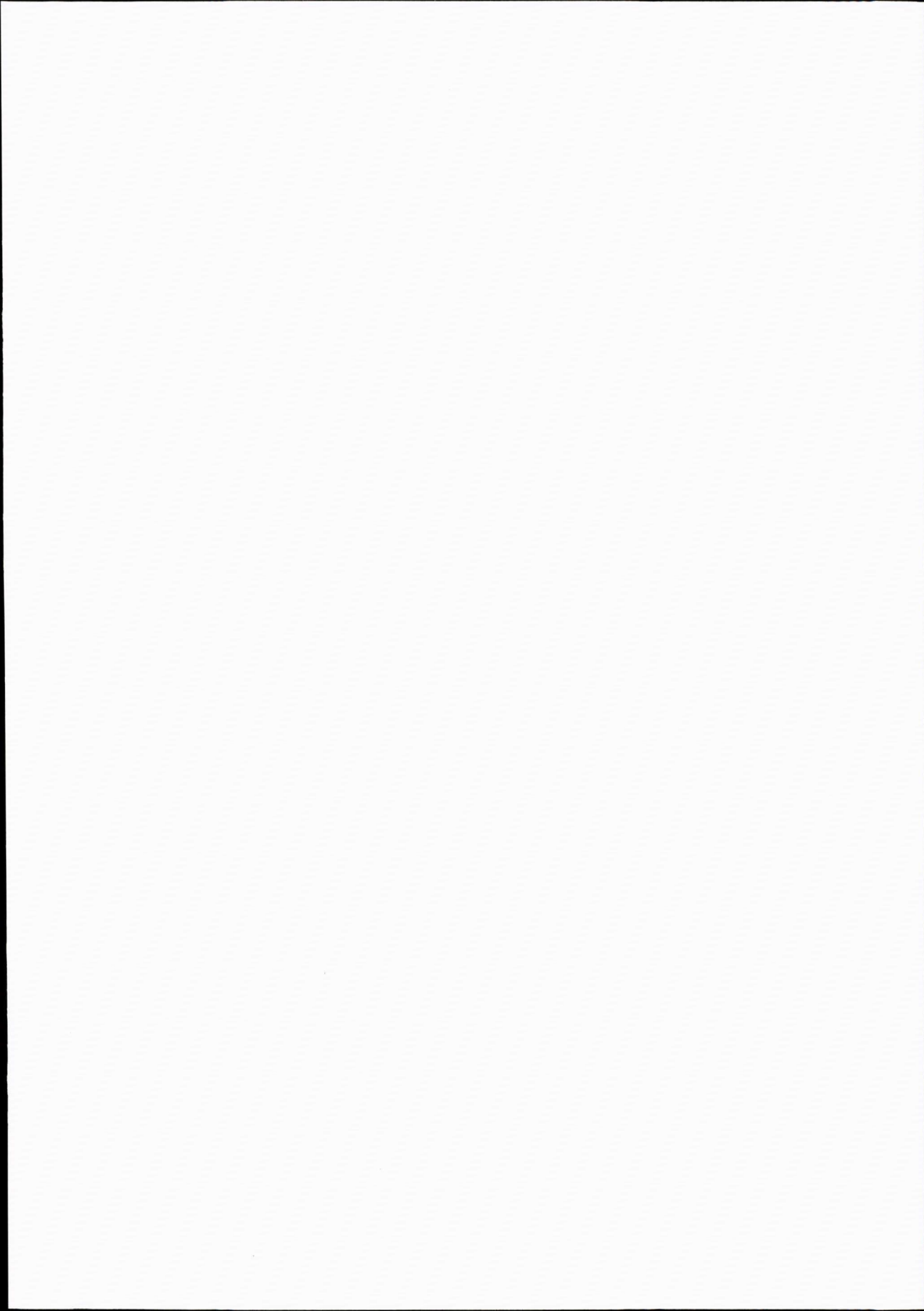
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