

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"A Day Before Marriage," by Aneri M. Amin, age 10, Mudra School, Vadodara, India

THE TALE OF THE STRANGE NOBLEMAN

Lord Paul is in prison, and only Lady Thione can set him free

MEMORIES OF MOON

Has there ever been another cat as lovable as Moon?

Also: Rachel plays her bassoon at Carnegie Hall!

MAY/JUNE 2008

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The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 36, NUMBER 5

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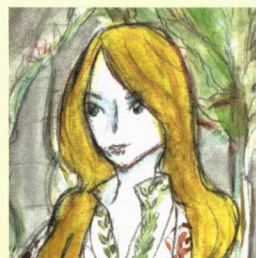
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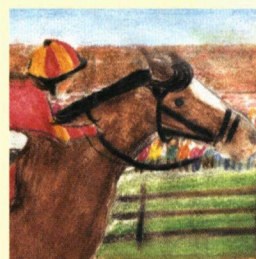
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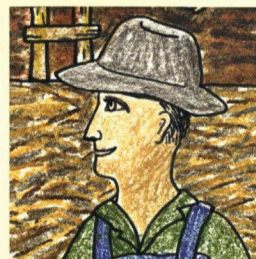
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Stone Soup

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 35 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: "A Day Before Marriage" 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



LBP, 9

While searching your Web site, I stumbled upon an amazing story, "With Kisses from Cecile," by Marie Agnello. The story was touching, and so realistic! The photographs for illustrations added a beautiful touch, and the story was so well written. It reminded me of an experience I've been having with my pen pal. My pen pal and I are thirteen minutes apart, and very close. We've never met, and have been keeping in touch for about three years now. I raved about the story to her and my family after reading it, and we all gave it a billion and plus stars.

SADIE LEBOW, 13
Tempe, Arizona

I was so proud and excited to have my story in the November/December 2007 issue of *Stone Soup*. The layout was beautiful and so was the illustration by Patricia Lin. I also really enjoyed the other stories, poems, and book reviews. It feels wonderful to be part of such a creative endeavor.

ANNA BLECH, 11
New York, New York

Anna wrote the story "School Daze."

Thank you so much for creating this magazine! I'm not a very good writer, but I'm always reading *Stone Soup* for inspiration. It shows all young writers and artists that they can do anything as long as they set their mind to it. I really liked Colin Johnson's "Moonbeams into Eternity" [September/October 2007]. The way he described everything so vividly was totally amazing. It made me feel that I was there, watching everything that was going on. This magazine is fabulous—I absolutely love it.

ELEANOR NEWCOMB, 13
Sacramento, California

I recently read "A Window by the Sea" by Alison Citron [September/October 2003] in the magazine *Stone Soup*. It is very exciting. It is mostly about a foster girl named Eve. The illustrations are great, like one of the pictures where Eve discovers a mermaid. There is one thing I do not like and that's the ending. I think it's bad because it seems to stop in the middle of the story. When I say it stops in the middle I mean it stops at "She began to swim." Otherwise it was a very good story. I would read more stories like "A Window by the Sea."

SOPHIE LUBRANO, 10
Hanover, New Hampshire

I love the illustrations for "Thoughts of a Sunny Day," by Brigid Cami [May/June 2007]. Hannah W. Smith, the illustrator, had me staring at her works of art for ages. Hannah, I love the way you made the colors melt together and overlap; it looked like the water was really rippling! I paint too, but I could never bring a picture to life like you did. Keep up the good work! I'm hoping to see more of your artwork in future issues!

SARAH RAGAN, 12
Allentown, Pennsylvania

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed "Saturday Night at the Panaderia," by William Gwaltney, in the September/October 2007 issue. The way he described everything brought the reader right to where the story took place. Great job!

EMMA STEARNS, 10
San Francisco, California

You can read all the pieces 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 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.



The king could not believe his eyes, for there was the arrow, right in the center of the wreath

The Tale of the Strange Nobleman

By Talitha Farschman

Illustrated by Zoë Dong

ONCE UPON A TIME, there lived a beautiful noble lady whose name was Thione. She was loved and cherished by all of her people, and her wisdom was prized for miles around. Her husband also was a brave and noble man, and loved by his people just as much as his wife. His name was Lord Paul, and he was lord over many of the king's provinces.

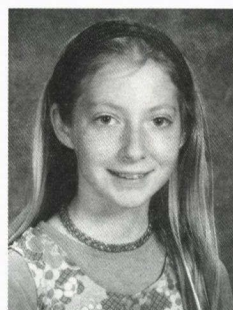
And so when the king invited him to a feast to celebrate his own marriage, Lord Paul had to attend, and his wife, Lady Thione, stayed to govern the castle during his absence.

The journey was hard, but after weeks of travel, Lord Paul and his retinue entered the king's palace. The feast was indeed as great as the king had said in his letter of invitation, and the splendor and aroma of the food made even the pickiest of the courtiers' mouths water.

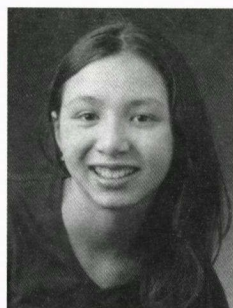
There was fruit in abundance, meat stews, beef, pork, and chicken, a great variety of cheeses and breads, and wine that came specifically from the king's cellars in honor of his bride.

Yet happy as he was, Lord Paul also felt lonely for his fair Lady Thione, for he felt that the beauty of the new queen did not rival her, and soon this loneliness shown forth not only in his heart, but in his face, and the king, being keen of eye, noticed, and being slightly drunk from the overabundance of wine, was offended and inquired of his lord's woe.

"How can I be happy, o my king," Lord Paul answered, "when I long for my own wife whose wisdom is famed in the provinces and whose beauty goes unrivaled?"



Talitha Farschman, 12
Roseville, California



Zoë Dong, 12
Akron, Ohio

Then the king was furious for he felt that his wife's beauty would surely surpass any who dared to boast in such a way. Therefore, he, in anger, had Lord Paul sent to the dungeons, until "the woman of whom he boasted should prove her wisdom to be greater than his queen's."

So he sent his decree to Lady Thione, convinced that nothing could rescue Lord Paul from his sentence.

YET, AS ALWAYS, Lady Thione thought wisely and devoted all of her time to thinking of a way to rescue her husband on the king's terms. Many days and nights she stayed in her tower, thinking and praying, till on the morning of the third day she emerged with a scheme. Quickly she commanded that a great and beautiful bow, inlaid with gold and silver, be made, along with a quiver of arrows of equal workmanship.

Then she called to the blacksmiths for gauntlets and leggings of mail to be made, along with an iron helmet. Then she and her maids set to work on the finest embroidered shirt and tunic that could be made out of fine silk and velvet, stitching in many patterns, making it as beautiful an attire as possible. For one entire month they worked, none knowing what she was scheming.

Finally, on the first day of spring, Lady Thione and her maids finished the strange-looking garment.

She arrayed herself with the heavily embroidered shirt and tunic, tying them in place with a green silk sash into which she

thrust two foreign knives. Then she did up her hair and put on her helmet, along with the chain-mail leggings and gauntlets, and a few articles of gold, finally slinging on her bow and quiver.

In that strange array, she looked like a young formidable prince from a far land, and her presence struck awe into her servants' hearts. So she mounted her black mare and rode to the king's palace.

THE KING COULD make nothing of the lordly stranger, except that he must be a great prince from a faraway land. His display of wealth was either the rashness of a fool, or he did not fear that anything would be stolen. The king decided upon the latter when he recognized the youth's quiet, cold, yet courteous attitude.

So he politely invited the travel-stained lordling into his hall, and asked him why he had come.

The disguised Thione replied using a strange accent, "I have journeyed for many miles, as it is the custom of my country to learn of those who live beyond our great borders."

The king was nonplussed. But his wife was a little more suspicious and, whispering to the king, said, "O my king, I would be wary of that one, for something in me says that that is no man, but a woman who lies beneath that barbarian apparel."

The king looked at the waiting prince and softly replied, "Perhaps, Queen, but I feel inclined to test this noble stranger before making such a judgment. If it would ease your heart, then I shall have you de-

wise what three tests should be given him."

To this the queen agreed, and the king turned again to the foreign prince. "In honor of your stay, we shall hold a feast, and events appropriate shall be named, of which I hope you will partake." The strange nobleman nodded and the king continued. "Should you win all three of these events, I will grant one wish to you." The prince bowed, and the king dismissed him to be guided to his quarters.

The feast was held the next day, and the food was indeed great to behold. But the prince did not eat with his hands but withdrew from his sash a pair of wooden sticks that were pointed on one end and dull on the other. Positioning them like claws in his hand, he ate his meal in that fashion, much to the surprise of the court.

All doubt that had been in the king's mind until then was gone in that instant. The prince not only looked different, he acted different!

The first event was an archery competition among the younger nobles. When Thione's turn came, he walked calmly to the line and gazed at the target two hundred yards away. Yet to the surprise of the courtiers he shook his head, and cutting himself a small branch, he wound it into a wreath barely the size of his palm. Espying a page, he commanded the boy to nail the wreath to the center of the target. The boy obeyed, and Thione carefully chose an arrow and aimed but for a moment before shooting. The king could not believe his eyes, for there was the arrow, right in the center of the wreath.

Turning to his wife, the queen, he asked, "Do you yet doubt? He is the best that I have ever seen!" Yet the queen was not convinced, and so it came time for the second event. It was a chess match, Thione against the king.

It was a long game that lasted till mid-day. Finally, using strategies that the king had never seen before, the prince won the game.

It was then decided that the third event would be held the next day. So the king went to bed more mystified than ever.

The next day all woke early for the final test. Sir Mark, the strongest man, was selected to challenge the foreign nobleman in a wrestling match.

The boundaries were marked and Thione and Sir Mark faced each other, listening for the command from the king to begin. The sharp call cracked through the air. Mark lunged for the strangely clad figure. Yet every time he lunged toward the stranger, the prince seemed to disappear and would turn up in the least expected places, doling out small kicks and slaps while never receiving a blow himself. Sir Mark grew angrier and soon his blows were going wide.

That was when the stings became blows and Sir Mark admitted defeat.

Amazed, the king congratulated Thione upon his three victories, saying, "Now you have proven your skill, wisdom, and strength, therefore one wish I shall grant you. Reveal your desire."

The stranger looked at him and to his amazement drew off his helmet, and



"I am Lord Paul's wife. You have sworn to me one wish"

though once tied back, Lady Thione's hair cascaded down in golden showers and she curtsied. Then she said, "I am Lord Paul's wife. You have sworn to me one wish. That wish is that you release my husband, for in his boastings he never thought to slander your queen."

Then the king laughed, and its merry

sound echoed throughout the hall, and he commanded his guards to release Lord Paul, for his folly had been amended.

Then was a great feast held, and Lady Thione met her bewildered husband, and he was glad, and his joy was full and without loneliness. And so they lived happily ever after. ❀

Early Spring

By Ava Alexander

The ice and snow are almost melted,
Winter's biting cold has mellowed,
Mountains brown and bare for so long,
Show an almost imperceptible haze of green.
The sky is the delicate shade of thrushes' eggs
Soon to be laid in a nest of mud and twigs.
A mole furrows the earth's brow with his tunneling,
Cautious tongues of green make their way
Through last autumn's leaves into the balmy air.
The first robin pecks at the newly softened ground,
And drags an unwilling worm into the light.

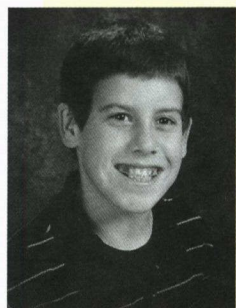
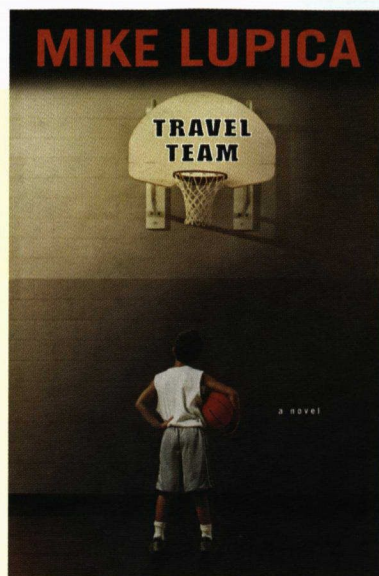


Ava Alexander, 11
Dalton, Pennsylvania

Book Review

By Zach Hoffman

Travel Team by Mike Lupica; Penguin Young Readers Group: New York, 2004; \$16.99



Zach Hoffman, 12
Cincinnati, Ohio

HELLO, I'M ZACH HOFFMAN and I'm twelve years old. I'm going into the seventh grade and I love to read and play sports. I like reading books in which kids play sports with their friends and teach you lessons on confidence, pride, and teamwork. When I read the book *Travel Team*, by Mike Lupica, I was taught all of those lessons.

Danny Walker, age twelve, is the smallest but best seventh-grade basketball player in Middletown. To Danny's misfortune, when he arrives at the tryouts for Middletown's travel basketball team, he finds out the Vikings are looking for a bigger team this year. After two nights of exhausting hard work, Danny is told after the tryout that he didn't make the team. Danny is told up front by the coach, Mr. Ross, that he didn't make it because he knew his dad as a kid. Everyone else got a phone call at home. Danny takes his tryout misfortune too personally and thinks about quitting basketball altogether. Danny's parents are divorced. Danny lives with his kind mom, who's an eighth-grade teacher. His dad, who was a basketball child star and former NBA player, lives out of town. When Richie Walker hears his son didn't make his old Middletown travel team, he arrives back in Middletown and at Danny's side. Danny's confidence is beginning to rise back up to start playing again. His dad creates

another travel team. This immediately boosts Danny's confidence and he can't wait to start. Danny is put in charge of contacting all of his friends that didn't make the Vikings and all the other kids he wants to play on the travel team.

Last summer, my dad created a basketball team and put us in a summer basketball league. Like Danny's team, we didn't start out too hot. But throughout the season, we got better. I realized that it isn't always about winning, but having fun and getting better at what you love to do.

It was my first year to try out for my school's A team in basketball last fall. I was really nervous that I wouldn't make it and everyone would make fun of me. I practiced really hard every day. Every day I practiced, I got a little better. By the time the tryouts came, I knew I was ready to show the coaches what I could do on the court. After the two nights of tryouts, I waited a long week for the call to finally come. I had done it. I had made the A team! After all the hard work I put into it, I had succeeded at reaching my goal. Up to this day, my confidence has stayed with me and I know I can accomplish anything.

There was one part of *Travel Team* that I especially liked. Danny's Middletown Hawks had made it to the play-offs. To the Hawks' disadvantage, they would have to play the Middletown Vikings, the team Danny had originally tried out for. Mr. Ross's son is equally as good as Danny and is also a very good friend of Danny's. Ty got mad at his dad for not letting him hang out with Danny and his other friends on the Hawks. So before the big rivalry game, Ty becomes the newest member of the Middletown Hawks. When the game starts, the Vikings go up by a couple points. But Danny and Ty work up some plays to get the Hawks right back in the game. In the end, the game is won by the Hawks, after Danny makes a left-handed pass to Ty for a layup.

I really enjoyed this book and hope to read another one by the magnificent author and ESPN sports reporter, Mike Lupica. 🌀



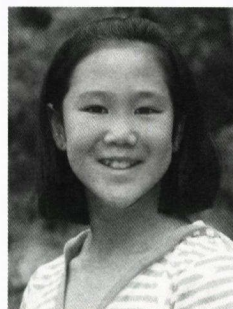
How could her mom do this to her?

A Faraway Place

By Emmy J. X. Wong

Illustrated by Julianna Aucoin

NAN STARED DIRECTLY into the gray fog, letting the present day obliterate into the cold ethereal wetness. Standing defiantly on the pitching deck of the fast ferry, the Flying Cloud, which had left Hyannis only one hour earlier, she stared blankly at the emerging and unwelcoming, rocky shoreline in front of her and the cream-colored moorings that dotted the horizon fast approaching. How could her mom do this to her? she questioned. She was referring to her mom sending her here, or was it... nowhere? How could her mom send her to the place the Native Americans called "that faraway place, Nantucket"? she asked herself. It just wasn't fair. "She knew what summer vacation meant to me," Nan declared stubbornly. Nan relived the worn-out argument she had had with her mom at the ferry terminal just before her departure. She didn't want to understand why she had to take care of Grammy Armstrong in 'Sconset for the whole summer while her mom stayed behind to work as a nurse at Cape Cod Hospital. She and her mom had moved to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, less than a year ago, just after the divorce. Her mom had said she wanted them to be closer to her family. Little did she know then she'd be sent to take care of an aging grandmother she hadn't seen since she was five years old! "It's not fair," she heard her pleading words now echo aloud to an unsympathetic, weathered seagull who had come to perch on the cold, steely railing next to her. "I won't see any of my friends this summer." But no one was listening. She thought about the stolen sleepovers she and her



Emmy J. X. Wong, 11
Weston, Massachusetts



Julianna Aucoin, 13
North Andover, Massachusetts

new best friends, Molly and Claire, had carefully planned, the lost trips to sandy white beaches under azure skies that the Cape was famous for, and the lazy days she had planned to bank reading beneath the generous awning of a shady maple in the backyard before starting seventh grade.

Just then a single blast of a horn sounded to interrupt her reverie. "Prepare for landing," she heard the captain's voice bellow across the crackling loudspeaker.

The auburn-haired girl pulled her nubby, evergreen sweater tighter around her waist and wiped away a tear before finding her bag and departing down the gangplank with a crowd of tourists. When she reached solid ground, Nan dutifully pulled out her cell phone, dialed her mom first to tell her of a safe arrival, then the cab company owned by her uncle. In no time at all, a cheerful man of few words, simply dressed in a khaki pressed shirt and a sea captain's hat, Uncle Tommy of Tommy's Taxi, had scooped her up and headed for the eastern part of the island where she would spend her entire summer totally bored to death, no doubt.

When Nan arrived at the natural shingled two-story clapboard Cape on the leeward side of the island, she was immediately taken by the ruffled carmine-pink roses that grew in sprays from bushes hugging the bleached-shell driveway and the lacy blue hydrangeas in the front garden. The sunlight was peaking out from behind the clouds, now casting a cheerful wash of sunshine over everything in her path. She stole a quick glance upward at the black

iron weather vane forged into the shape of a whale, which sat atop the roof, and wondered if it held any special significance. Upon entering the house through the side entry, Nan was enveloped by warmth that felt as comforting as her mother's old calico patchwork quilt she used to drag from the hallway closet whenever she was sick. There was a familiar feeling to the place. Nan headed up the uncarpeted narrow steps to the breezy second-story bedrooms where Uncle Tommy had promised she would find her gram, before he had to hurry off to pick up a paying customer.

Immediately upon eyeing the frail woman with the dancing pale-blue eyes and mop of snowy hair, Nan knew she was home. "I'm so happy to see you, my Nanette," exclaimed the older woman, with enthusiasm. "I hope I won't be a burden to you," she added meekly, her voice withering. "Ever since I caught pneumonia last winter, my Yankee stamina just hasn't been the same." Nan hugged the elderly woman firmly and returned a wide grin. She was genuinely happy to see her gram and hoped she would be on the mend soon. She now wanted to be of some help to the sprightly woman she felt close to but barely knew.

The next day, Grammy Armstrong was sitting up among the patchwork covers and working her hands to create what looked like a neatly woven basket. "It's a lightship basket," she informed Nan. My great-granddad was a lightship keeper in the early days, as were many in my family."

"What's a lightship, Gram?" asked Nan

with keen interest.

"A lightship is like a lighthouse, only it's a ship that floats offshore to keep sailors from crashing on the shoals," she began to explain. "These waters south of Nantucket are some of the most dangerous seas you'll ever come across. Hundreds of ships have wrecked in these parts, so the lightship was the answer to warn sailors in the south shoals." It seemed Nan now had more questions, not fewer, after her gram's studied reply.

"What's a shoal? But how is the basket related to the lightship? Do lightships still exist? Can I go see one?" Nan anxiously fired back a flurry of questions.

"Come with me," Gram beckoned, taking Nan by the hand and leading her downstairs to take up a comfortable corner in the warm, sunlit kitchen. Over steaming mugs of peppery Earl Grey tea and sweet raisin scones lavished with heaps of tangy rose-hip jelly, Grammy Armstrong told her tales of lightships and stalwart Nantucket whalers. The whole time, the older woman's leathery and freckled hands never stopped weaving the lightly colored reeds to fashion the most beautiful basket Nan had ever seen. Nan thought Gram seemed delighted to share her tales and the apt skill she had perfected over her lifetime making the highly sought-after baskets prized by both locals and tourists alike.

Nan's time on the island soon became a string of lazy days spent in the backyard staring down at her brown hands and arms which had been gingerly kissed by the

summer sun as she gleefully but industriously worked her baskets. She didn't even mind the necessary interruptions by her frequent bike trips into town to pick up Gram's medicine at the small pharmacy atop cobbled Main Street, which also gave her a chance to window-shop at the local toggery or sample some of the "world's yummiest fudge" at Auntie's Fudge Shoppe next door. The days of summer soon flew by faster than the Flying Cloud, like they always do, and Nan was surprised how quickly she had picked up the art of making the elegant but simple baskets. "It's in the genes," Gram Armstrong had whispered to her one day, "just like the salt in the air," she grinned. "Your great-grandfather was a whaling captain who built this home, and your grandfather was a shipbuilder on the mainland in New Bedford."

Nan smiled back. Soon it would be time for Nan to return home. She cherished her time on the island. Her favorite pastime though had become her beachcombing excursions when she used the smallest of her baskets to carry her treasures home, including perfumed saltwater rose hips, heliotrope bivalves and glassy pebbles. She was content here and experienced a sense of belonging that she had never known before.

When it was time to say her good-byes, Nan was happy to see her grandmother looking so high-spirited and healthy. The lilt had returned to her laugh. She had apples in her cheeks and she was able to get up and move about the former whal-

ing captain's house more agilely. "Come back next summer, and bring your friends with you, my Nanette. Now that I am back on my feet, I could use your help restoring Sankaty Head Light." Nan let her thoughts drift to the well-known landmark nearby and the pride she felt in the light with its signature red and white stripes. Her daydreaming however was interrupted by the kindness in her grandmother's melodious voice. "Or you and your friends could hunt for relics for the whaling museum." Nan pictured the prominent edifice standing tall at the end of Steamship Wharf that she had marveled at when she first arrived. "You were named for this island, you know," she heard her grandma shout after her as she entered the familiar yellow taxi. "It's in your blood."

Nan looked down at the sturdy, rounded lightship basket carefully perched on

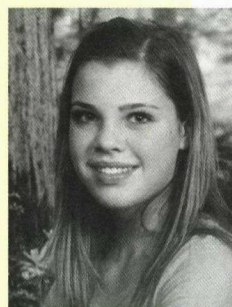
her lap that she and Gram Armstrong had lovingly woven together at the start of the summer, which was now taking on a caramel patina. Nan thought about her savored trips to the local beach only steps away, the cool ocean waters lapping eagerly at her sun-baked shoulders and the welcomed salt spray that cooled her tanned face and made her rusty curls coil more tightly. She would miss this place. She had loved her quick jaunts to the shoreline to watch the rainbow fleet bob merrily by, engined only by the refreshing westerly winds. It had been a great summer and the best part of all was time spent listening to her gram's stories about her family's lore as keepers of the lightships and making beautiful baskets to while away the hours. Smiling to herself, Nan knew her gram was right. She would come back to this faraway place. Maybe someday, she might even call it home. ❁



The Lonely Star

By Cayley Ziak

The rustle of rough leaves awakens me from my rest
And I gaze up at a dark sky as vast as the sea
And laugh as the stars tumble into my hair
“How green your leaves are!” the stars whisper in my hair.
“How bright with happiness you are,” I sigh.
“No. The sky is cold and lonely,” the stars moan.
“At least the birds don’t peck at your arms
and the squirrels don’t hide nuts in your armpits.”
“But the birds sing to you and the squirrels tickle
your bark.”
“True, I’m lucky to be a tree.”
“Alas, my nearest neighbor is ten light-years away.”
“But you guide people through the darkness.”
“Yes, we do,” the stars whisper, their voices tinted
with new light.
And as a blue jay’s soft feathers brush my arms,
I inhale the sharp green sent of pine,
and I laugh



Cayley Ziak, 12
Coto de Caza, California



"Do you want one, Jackie? Mommy says that they've all got to go today"

Memories of Moon

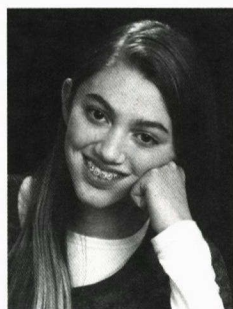
By **Abbie Brubaker**

Illustrated by **Frances Chan**

WHEN THE WIND blows on a funeral, it cries with the heartbroken. It mourns with the tearful. It drops bright leaf handkerchiefs from its shaking fingers. When the wind watches as a coffin is lowered into the ground, it bows its gray head in sorrow. And even as the last regretful people get into their cars to leave, the wind stays a moment longer, fingering the fresh grave, before whipping away to think of what it has witnessed.

But when the wind blew on Moon's funeral, it didn't cry. It didn't mourn. It didn't even need a handkerchief. The coffin it should have watched was too small for its tastes, the mourners too few for it to even deem this a proper funeral. After all, it was spring, and the wind was no more than a lazy-boy breeze, blowing loose things around like a bored child kicking at tin cans. The wind didn't care about Moon. But I did.

MOON HAD HER START as a small white kitten in a pathetic little "Free to Good Home" basket at a yard sale. Mom and Daly were digging through piles of stained clothing and broken toys as I wandered around, bored out of my wits. Yard sales were ridiculous to me, like saying, "Here, take this stuff. It's so gross I don't want it anymore," or "We were too fussy to sell our stuff on eBay, so we'll sell it here at the same outrageous price." I had just skirted a large haystack of skis and bent ski poles when I saw the basket. It was across the street, at the very foot of the driveway, too obvious that these kittens



Abbie Brubaker, 13
Lancaster, Pennsylvania



Frances Chan, 13
Hudson, Ohio

were unexpected and unwanted.

I was a cat-lover born and bred, growing up in a house where it was impossible to wear anything black in public or to escape the dreaded litter-box routine. I was totally ready to bring another member into the family, as one of our three cats, Smoky, had died of old age just a few months before. So when I saw that basket, there wasn't anything to stop me. I practically plowed over Mason, the neighbor's seven-year-old, as he stood in front of the basket. He looked up at me with big sweet eyes and asked, "Do you want one, Jackie? Mommy says that they've all got to go today." How could I resist? Carefully, I inspected each of the darling little creatures. They were all white but one, which was gray. I was drawn immediately to the gray one. He likes to stand out from the crowd, I thought in amusement. However, I could see that he was skittish and shy of people, backing away from my hand as far as he could. Mom would never let me make a project out of accustoming him to people, so I turned to the next. That was Moon. She was as friendly as her brother was nervous, and I was able to pick her up and rub my fingers through her silky kitten fur. She was the one for me.

"NO, JACKIE. Absolutely not." That was Mom's first reaction to Moon.

I begged, "But Mom, Smoky's been gone for *months*, and I need another cat in the house to complete our trio."

"We don't need any more vet bills than we already have. Vaccinations cost money,

and we're still paying off Smoky's heart medication." She looked down at Daly and held up a hideous pink T-shirt with orange fringe that I strongly suspected had been white when the shirt was new-bought. "How's this, Daly?" Mom asked, changing the subject.

Daly hopped up and down, babbling as only a four-year-old can: "Mommy, Mommy, my shirt! My pink shirt!" Mom looked satisfied and slung the shirt over a growing pile on her left arm.

"So can we, Mom?" I asked, thinking she might be in a better mood now. "Can we?"

"No."

My attempts to persuade her failed miserably for several minutes, until my stroke of genius saved the day. I was dragging my feet as Mom flipped through racks of women's clothes. Daly, likewise, was whining and sighing with boredom. Then it hit me. Slyly, I asked, "Hey, Daly, do you want to see a kitty?"

She faced me, pouting. "We've got kitties already. I want to see yours!"

"But we don't have kitties like *this*." I took her hand, careful not to pull too hard, and added, "They're a lot smaller than Oreo and Tiger. Come on, let me show you!" She finally stopped digging in her heels and, reluctantly, followed me across the street.

Her hesitance evaporated when she spotted the kittens in the basket. With a squeal that made Mason cover his ears, she pounced on the gray kitten and was about to scoop him up when I quickly tugged her hand away.

"No, that one is scared, Daly. Look at this one." I placed her small fingers on Moon's head, and the kitten, playing her part perfectly, began to purr and rub against Daly's hand. My sister was enchanted.

"Jackie, let's get this one," she cried, and I didn't stop her when she picked up this kitten. I trusted Daly with holding cats; like me, she had grown up surrounded by them—Dragon, Floss, Smoky, and our remaining cats, Oreo and Tiger. Triumphant, I led Daly and her precious bundle back across the street, where I faced Mom with a grin.

"And thus, our new kitten joins the family." I gestured to my sister. Daly proudly held up the small white kitten. Mom really did try to rally her forces and resist, but her genes and mine were too closely linked. She was as much a cat-lover as her daughters.

"All right. We'll keep it. Boy or girl, and what's its name?"

"Girl." I closed my eyes for a moment to think of a good name and the image of the kitten's face, round and white as a full moon, slid behind my eyelids. I looked at Mom with an even larger smile. "Her name is Moon."

I REMEMBER the night we discovered Moon's worst fear. She was about three months old, a family cat, who got along well with Oreo and Tiger. She was also my favorite. That terrifying night, I was curled on my bed with a mystery novel, a bowl of chocolate pudding, and

a cat. Outside my window, the storm was just getting underway, with a gale blowing and rain pounding the glass. Moon purred comfortably in my ear, as if she knew that the storm wouldn't be able to hurt her while she was in here with me. Of course, that was when the first thunderclap came. *KA-BOOM!*

It was the loudest I had ever heard, making me jump and almost spill my snack. But Moon didn't just jump; she *flew*. I think she must have hit the ceiling, then she hot-footed it out of there like a flash. Another clap of thunder, softer this time, drew a high-pitched yowl from the bathroom. I put down my book, carefully placed my bowl on the bedside table, and went looking for Moon. See, I knew that some cats had irrational fears—Tiger wouldn't touch any body of water larger than his dish, my grandma's cat, Mint, absolutely cowered before dogs—so this wasn't too surprising for me. "Moon?" I called, flipping on the bathroom light. She was crouched behind the toilet, all her fur standing on end, her green eyes flashing with terror. I made a slow movement forward, murmuring, "It's all right, Moon. It's OK," over and over. Moon gave a shiver, though she stayed in place. I could see that her fur was beginning to lie flat as I came closer; she seemed ready to come to me when, from the bathroom window, I saw a huge flare of lightning. Oh dear, I thought, knowing what would come next. In the split second between the lightning and the thunder, I slammed the bathroom door to keep Moon from escaping. And

then the power went out.

When the thunder hit, it was loud enough to make me wince, no comparison to what it did to Moon. She sounded ready to break down the door, running around like a maniac, hissing and spitting. I could see her glowing green eyes in the dark, and for the first time, I was afraid of a cat. "Moon," I said shakily, trying to reassure her. There was nothing of the old Moon left to reassure. I jumped up on the toilet and decided that I would just have to wait it out.

The storm lasted for a good half hour, the power staying off until around eleven PM; by the time the last thunder rumbled away, Moon was exhausted and I was shaking. As the lights flickered back on and I finally got down from my perch, she came up to me, giving a tired little meow. I gathered her into my arms and hugged her tight. That first crazy storm was the worst ever during the time Moon was with us. After that, we learned to keep her in a small space with a comforting person, usually me, when the thunder came. Even when I had learned her fear, I loved her more than ever.

I ALSO REMEMBER the time she almost drowned. Moon didn't mind water, and in the summer we'd sometimes go wading in the slow creek that was back behind our house. She would come along, and I'd lower her gently into the water. By the time a few first trial runs had taken place, she had figured out a sort of cat's doggy-paddle and could out-swim Daly. It

was the summer I turned fourteen, when Moon was about two years old. We went down to the creek, me in my tankini, Daly in her flowery little one-piece and waterwings, and Mom in her capri pants. Mom didn't do much wading, even in steamy August.

"Jackie, look at me!" cried Daly, splashing furiously up and down in the sluggish water. From the bank, dabbling my feet in the water with Moon sitting beside me, I nodded at her.

"I see you. You're doing good." Apparently excited by Daly's efforts, Moon jumped right in, leaving me to laugh and cheer. Mom was on the other bank, and together we acted as a sort of lifeguard, calling out occasionally, "Daly, let go of Moon, you'll pull her down," or "Daly, kick a little harder and you'll go faster!"

Further downstream was a section of rocks and currents that Mom had forbidden us to go near, though it wasn't strong enough to pull me down anymore. It was certainly strong enough, however, to pull down a small, white cat. On that hot day, we were too busy trying to coach Daly in her swimming techniques to notice when Moon set off to explore. I yelled, "Come on, use your arms!" Daly looked up and glared at me, spitting water. "I'm *trying*, Jackie." She turned in a slow circle, allowing herself to be carried by the slow waters towards the rocks.

"Daly, come away from there," called my mom anxiously. Daly didn't respond, instead going closer to the stones and twirling waters. "Daly! Now!" Mom was



"Jackie, look at me!" cried Daly, splashing furiously up and down in the sluggish water

standing up, yelling, her fists clenching with worry.

"But Moon's over here!"

"*What?*" The voice was mine. Daly continued floating downstream, and Mom looked over at me, but I was already in the water. With strong strokes I passed Daly, pausing to shove her away from the danger zone, then I dove under. Swimming as fast as I could in the general direction of the place where two rocks formed a deep cleft, I was panicking with the thought that Moon had been out of my sight for at least five minutes. It was impossible to see anything in the murky creek; I felt around furiously with my hands, wondering, How long has Moon been under? Is she even still alive? Oh let her be safe, please... My hands were scratched and scraped by the rocks by the time I touched fur. Grabbing the furry object with both hands, I pulled it the few inches to the surface. Moon's lifeless body was plastered wet and small in the dappled light. I screamed, "MOM!" She came running through the water, not even bothering to roll up her pants. Taking one look, she grabbed Moon out of my battered hands and jumped out of the water.

Mom was in the car heading to the vet in minutes, Daly and I barely managing to get in our seats before she drove away. Like I said, Mom is just as much a cat-lover as I am. Doctor Peter Handsen, our trusty vet for all our cats, made dripping-wet Daly and me sit in the waiting room while he and Mom closed the door behind them. My little sister looked up at me

with frightened eyes. "Is Moon dead?"

"*No!*" I saw instantly from the hurt in her face that my momentary anger had scared her. As big as she was, I picked her up and hugged her. "She's not dead. Doctor Handsen will make sure she's OK."

It was a long time in that waiting room. I watched the clock, counting the seconds, the minutes... Daly just stared at her bare feet. We were hungry and scared by the time the door opened again and Mom came out. Her eyes were so solemn and grim that for one heart-stopping moment I thought I had been too late in rescuing Moon. Then Mom smiled gently. "She's going to make it." I squeaked with joy and hugged Mom so hard she gasped. Daly wrapped herself around Mom after I was done, and Mom picked her up, adding, "Doctor Handsen is keeping her overnight to make sure she hasn't caught anything, but he says she's a tough kitty. She'll make it." I admit it, I cried, right there in the waiting room, with a wet-dog smell in the air and the receptionist behind the desk snapping her gum. Mom gave me another hug and dried my tears on her shirt.

"Let's go home."

When Moon was returned the next day, she seemed thinner than before. We had to give her pills that she absolutely loathed, we had to make sure she stayed out of any drafts, and we had to keep her quiet for a week. Moon didn't want to be quiet. She unrolled toilet paper from the downstairs bathroom; she knocked over Mom's favorite vase, which landed luckily on the carpet; she wanted to play every

moment of that whole week she was supposed to be “kept quiet.” Moon was never a cat to be too obliging.

NOW I REMEMBER the past few weeks, all silent in our house, started by that one loud event which took Moon away from us. I was enjoying spring break, a few days of rest before launching into the last desperate leg of the school year. The morning it happened was blissful with peace, until the first scenes of the disaster began to play out. The phone had been ringing, Mom trying to answer it, coming in from the patio through the screen door with a scrub brush in one hand and a bucket of soapy water for scouring the tiles dangling from the other. Moon was lying on the arm of Dad’s favorite chair, her eyes only half closed. When I think of it, I realize that she was probably not asleep at all, just waiting for Mom to open the door. That chair was directly across from the screen door.

Mom, rushing, yelling, “It’s for me—don’t get it!” banged through the door, leaving it half open. I was sitting on the couch, reading another mystery novel, when Moon bolted. She made it through the doorway, onto and off of the patio, and almost into the road before I threw down my book and followed her at a dead run.

“MOON!” She was an indoor cat, strictly indoor, never to be let out; I threw the door open wider as I pushed out into the spring air. Wet grass slipped under my feet and I fell, biting my tongue, still calling after my cat. “Moon, come back!”

I didn’t see the car, but I heard it. A squeal of brakes, a horrible crunch, and a yowl that I had never heard before. Gasping, half-crazed with fear, I managed to skid into the road. “MOON!” I yelled again, my voice torn by shock this time as I saw the scene. A lump of white fur, stained red, in the road, overshadowed by a huge, boxy car. The driver was leaning out his window, calling, “I didn’t see it! Sorry!” Before I could say anything to him, he reversed, then drove around the tiny, lifeless body in the middle of the road, and disappeared over the hill.

Just as when Moon had almost drowned, I screamed for my mother. There was a slam, a clatter, then she emerged from the house, looking totally freaked out. I played back my own voice in my mind and realized I sounded as if I was the one who was hurt.

“Jackie, what’s wrong?” As she spoke the words, she saw Moon.

“Oh my,” she gasped, then stopped still. Wordless. Breathless. Then she was in motion again, silent motion that brought her to Moon, then back to me with Moon wrapped in her jacket. She spoke in a voice that scared me, it was so cold. “Call Doctor Handsen, Jackie. Right now.”

I don’t remember calling the vet. I don’t remember actually getting into the car with Mom in the driver’s seat and Moon in my lap. I remember the car ride, though. We sped through scanty afternoon traffic, cold silence between me and my mother. It wasn’t that we were mad at each other, it was just that we were both so afraid

for Moon... I felt like if I said anything, she'd slip away. As it was, she was barely breathing, her eyes closed, no hint of the energy she usually had. Blood was seeping through the towel Mom had grabbed on our way out, and I tried to ignore it. I wasn't trembling exactly, only giving an occasional shudder, and I never took my eyes off Moon. We were at the vet's office in hardly a moment, yet it seemed hours to me. Just as had happened before, Mom and Doctor Handsen were about to close the door to the examination room behind them, and leave me to wonder and wait in agony, but I stopped them.

"Let me come." It wasn't a question, and for a moment I thought Mom would be angry at me for saying it. Then she nodded, and Doctor Handsen nodded, and we all entered the steel-shiny room. I sat down in a chair against the far wall and watched.

I thought I would die myself when I saw the blood. Moon's blood, staining the metal table. Doctor Handsen shook his head as he peeled back Moon's eyelids and checked her breathing. He did more things, but I was too shaken up to understand what they were. It was cold in the examination room, deathly cold, a feeling I didn't want around me. Mom and Doctor Handsen talked in hard voices that were too quiet for me to hear the words; both adults' voices sounded to me like metallic bumblebees, droning with a dulled edge of despair. In a dreamlike state, I wondered if Daly had any idea of what happened. Her school didn't have spring break, so she

would be in a classroom somewhere with the orderly life of elementary-school days around her, pencils and little kids who teased each other in a one-big-family way. Did the man who hit Moon have children in Daly's school? Would he drive his big boxy car to pick them up? And would Daly somehow understand that he had killed our cat? *Almost* killed, I reminded myself sternly. Shuddering, shivering, I looked over at the two adults next to the examining table, and did a double-take. *No... It couldn't be true.* Mom was crying. That shook me right down to my toes; Mom didn't cry. She wasn't that kind of person—she was a Wonder Woman, strong as iron, ready for anything.

"Mom?" My voice was soft and ragged, a tiny piece of broken glass among all those shiny metal surfaces. "What's wrong?"

"Her injuries are too severe, Jackie," said Doctor Handsen gravely. "I'm afraid Moon is dead."

It was as if, by saying those words, "Moon is dead," he unleashed every horrible feeling I've ever had in my life. It wasn't just sorrow, it was anger like when our first cat had to be put down, it was rebellion like the first time Mom sent me to my room, it was shock like when Moon had almost drowned—all mixed up into something equivalent to a witch's brew of emotion. The angry part of me screamed, *Doctor Handsen should have been able to save her!*, while the rebellion muttered, *Moon can't be dead, she can't be dead*, even as shock blurred everything in my sight. Or maybe that was tears, when I stumbled to the



With only the heartless, fleeting wind for a pastor, and only memories left

examination table and saw for myself the motionless body, stained red with blood and black with dirt from the road. *Moon is dead*, I realized dazedly. That put a stop to all the other emotions raging inside me. *Moon is dead.*

AND HERE I am now, at a funeral with only three other mourners: Mom, Dad, and Daly. With only the heartless, fleeting wind for a pastor, and only memories left. Only memories... memories of Moon. ❀

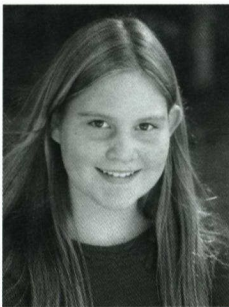
The Final Race

By Hayley Jones

Illustrated by Indra Boving



Hayley Jones, 10
Portland, Oregon



Indra Boving, 12
Hope Valley, Rhode Island

THE RACETRACK IS FILLED to bursting with clamoring people. Heady aromas of buttery popcorn and sticky cotton candy fill the air. Rose and I stand apart from the other horses. They mill around like ants on an anthill. My mouth is as dry as a desert. This will be the last race I ride with Rose. She will be turning four soon and I want to retire her.

Cheers and yells coming from the crowd are earsplitting. They sound like logs being ground up by a sawmill. The neighs of the horses mingle with the deafening noise, creating a cacophony. Finally, out of all the noise I hear a whistle. It's the whistle for the horses to come to the starting gates. We line up. They smell distinctly musty, as if someone had not washed them in years, maybe centuries. Well, that's how old the racetrack is. I pet Rose on her soft silky coat, calming her. It would not do to have her strength wasted before the race even starts.

John Thompson, the jockey of another horse, Angel, whispers smugly to me, "Angel is too good for Rose. We'll win!" I try to ignore him. He's too crazy. His remark makes me even more nervous though. There are elephants in my stomach instead of butterflies. Why can't the starting pistol fire? CRACK! The noise of the pistol firing nearly makes me leap out of the saddle.

The gates spring open with surprising agility for something so old. Rose bolts forward as fast as lightning. I taste her rough mane in my mouth as I'm jolted onto her neck.

Angel is jostling us ferociously. My foot loses its grip on the stirrup. Wind rushes past me as my leg swings wildly in the air.



I grip fiercely at the reins. "Come on, Rose! You can do it!"


It's slowing Rose down! We're way behind at the half-mile mark.

My fumbling foot finally finds the swinging stirrup. Luckily, it slips in. We've got to do this! This is our last chance. We can't let Angel win. The pounding of hooves is deafening. I hear the other jockeys yelling at their mounts to go faster. The wide home stretch is in front of me, perfectly straight and flat. My saddle is sticky with sweat. I grip fiercely at the reins. "Come on, Rose! You can do it!" The wind almost blows my words away,

but not quite.

I can feel Rose lengthening her strides. She must be going thirty miles an hour! The finish line is just feet ahead. Angel is neck-to-neck with us. I will Rose to win...

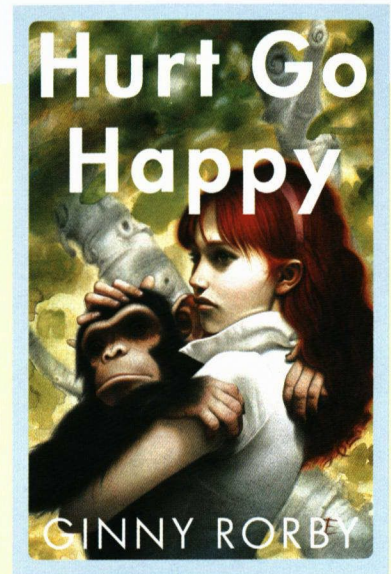
She leaps across the finish line!

The thought sinks into me. We won! By a nose. I inhale the fragrant scent of the roses on Rose's back. They match her name. I hug the chilly golden cup. It is but a mere symbol of what I really feel. Rose's thoughts seem to connect with mine as she rears up in exaltation. 

Book Review

By Leah Wolfe

Hurt Go Happy by Ginny Rorby; Starscape:
New York, 2007; \$5.99



Leah Wolfe, 10
Florham Park, New Jersey

I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT life would be like if everyday sounds, such as the voices of my friends and family, weren't included. I'd need to read their lips or communicate in sign language with them, which would have to be tough. Joanne "Joey" Willis, the main character of *Hurt Go Happy*, faces this situation. She is almost completely deaf, but can speak. Making it even harder, her mother, who is ashamed of her deafness, does not let Joey use *any* sign language. The young teenager feels painfully lonesome, what with the constant teasing from peers and the fact that many individuals' lips are impossible to read. One of these individuals is her own stepfather, whose facial hair covers his mouth. If Joey wishes to speak with him, her mother (or someone else whose lips are easy to read) needs to interpret.

I have felt a bit left out before because I practice the Jewish religion, which is fairly uncommon in my area. Many of my good friends follow the Christian religion, and they sometimes talk about Christmas, Easter, and other Christian holidays. I don't know much about these special days, so I can't exactly contribute to their conversations. Most of us have had our share of these feelings, which is why we can relate to Joey. She feels isolated and as if no one wants to be her friend. She feels as if a gigantic chunk of her life is missing.

That is, until she meets an elderly man named Charlie. He lives near Joey's California home, and she comes across him accidentally. But their meeting is the beginning of something wonderful, something remarkable... Charlie introduces Joey to an interesting pet of his: a chimpanzee named Sukari! The most exotic pet that anyone *I* know has is an iguana! But still, there's more. Sukari is unlike most of the chimpanzees often found in zoos. She can communicate with humans through American Sign Language! Charlie converses with her in the unique way of talking, and Joey is enchanted.

Charlie and Sukari become Joey's true friends, but her mother disapproves of her seeing them. She doesn't want them to influence Joey to study the unusual language. If she used it in front of others, her deafness would be apparent to them.

Has anyone ever tried to stop you from following your own path? I began dancing at the age of five, and it is now a very significant part of my life. If my parents had discouraged me from pursuing ballet, I would have felt quite troubled and confused, trying to decide whether to fight my way down my own path, or give in and change direction. Joey is stuck between these two options. As she begins to pick up several of the signs, she secretly selects her own path.

Charlie plays a crucial role in Joey's life. He gives her the inspiration and spirit to continue down *her* road, not her mother's road. Finally, after much convincing, her mother surrenders. The girl is overjoyed and incredibly grateful. She has won this war at last!

But soon, when tragedy strikes, there is another war to win. In the midst of mourning the loss of one dear friend, Joey is fretting about the life of the other.

Based on a true story, *Hurt Go Happy* is a brilliant novel with an intriguing plot and excellent character development. I would recommend it for both boys and girls ages nine and up. ❀



I felt like I was being reborn, my spirit echoing throughout the hall...

Voice of Sorrow, Voice of Joy

By **Katie Senter**

Illustrated by **Brynna Ziegler**

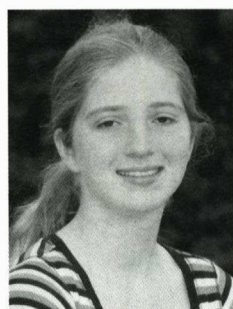
IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON on a humid Thursday in June. The air seemed to wrap everything on Long Island up in a sticky, sweaty bundle, even despite being near the ocean. The heat certainly didn't help my already sweaty palms and flip-flopping stomach that made me think of a beached cod. Ugh! New York City should be evacuated on days like this! I thought.

"Rachel, it's time to go! Are you all ready for the concert? Grandma and Grandpa just pulled into the driveway and the drive will take an hour with traffic." Mom's voice had a slight air of impatience.

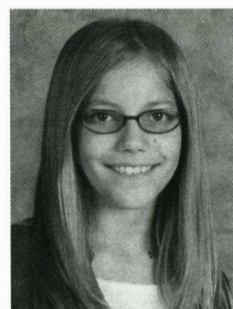
"Yeah, I'm ready!" I called down to her, stepping out of my room, music and bassoon in hand. I almost fell down the stairs wearing the high heels Mom had bought me the day before. Good thing we didn't have to walk anywhere too far, or else I would probably break my ankle!

Everyone piled into our burgundy Ford Windstar, and we jerked backwards out of the driveway. I felt the contents of my stomach slosh around. Grandpa Solomon had insisted on driving, and with his attitude of scaring cars out of his way, it was a wonder that all of us hadn't already been killed in an accident.

After getting on the highway to head into the city, I started feeling carsick. I tried to zone out and ignore everything around me—my brother Isaac's humming to his iPod, the adults' talk of how proud they were that I was playing at Carnegie Hall, me being only thirteen years old! Just how did I do it between Hebrew School and homework and lessons, they wanted to



Katie Senter, 13
Wellesley, Massachusetts



Brynna Ziegler, 11
Boalsburg, Pennsylvania

know? At least my five-year-old sister, Rebecca, was sleeping, or my head would have been exploding by now! I closed my eyes. Deep breaths, Rachel, deep breaths. My mouth tasted sour, like rotten milk, acidic and green. I felt like I was going to throw up. "Mom, Mom, I feel sick," I moaned.

"Sweetie, just relax. We'll be there in half an hour and you'll be fine," she said, very unsympathetically.

Grandma looked at me. "Helen, she does look a little pale. We won't be late if we stop for only a couple of minutes."

However, my mom was not going to miss this opportunity, even if that meant that we had to roll down the windows and I had to use the plastic grocery bag in the back seat. "Rachel, find a bag back there in case you need it. We can stop, but only if you actually do throw up."

Choruses of "Ewwws!" rose from everyone except my very serious mother. Gripping my music and disfiguring the perfect black marks, I choked on bile, and quickly my grandmother grabbed my dark, shiny brown hair, opening the bag just as I let loose all the things I had eaten in the past twelve hours. Thank God there was an exit coming up.

TWENTY MINUTES later, we were back on the road, and thirty minutes after that I was opening my heavy eyelids to the sight of the Empire State Building. Fortunately, I had slept, because that's generally what you do when you're sick, right?

Carnegie Hall was bathed in light, since it was early evening. The sun was dipping below the skyline, casting shadows of the tall, steel monsters that New York was famous for. Mom and I got out of the car at the entrance, where we were supposed to meet my father. He came running up to us and hugged me tightly, smelling like work offices and cologne, then planted a kiss perfectly on my mother's lips. "How's my gorgeous girl doing today?" he asked. "Or should I say, my two gorgeous girls?" He grinned.

I led the way up through the heavy glass doors and into Carnegie Hall. Mom walked up to an employee and asked where performers were supposed to go. "You can head right to the backstage," he replied in a professional manner. "All the musicians are warming up back there." He pointed us to a door labeled BACKSTAGE, painted on with neat gold letters.

Inside, everything was utter chaos. Music was lying everywhere and stands were interspersed randomly throughout the room. An Asian violinist was playing an amazing, staccato piece so high that I doubted piccolos could even beat *that*! He looked about my age, maybe even a little younger. I was shocked. Mom and Dad said that they had to leave now and that they would see me after the show. Each of them wished me good luck and kissed me before they disappeared out of the backstage door and into the growing crowd of people on the other side. It was all up to me, now.

It was hot inside the backstage area, so hot that beads of sweat soon dotted my forehead. As I was putting my bassoon together, the tenor joint slipped from my hands and made a terrible thud on the linoleum floor. All heads turned to look at me. I felt my face flush with embarrassment. "Sorry," I squeak-choked. I prayed, and I mean *prayed*, that my hands wouldn't slide off the keys when I played my piece. Luckily, no more awful things happened—I didn't even spill my reed water! But by the time I was all set up to play, almost everyone else performing tonight was there. After a quick chromatic scale, the introducer and conductor for tonight tapped on a music stand to get our attention. In a second, silence had overcome the room. He cleared his throat and began.

"Hello, fine young musicians, and welcome to Carnegie Hall. My name is William Bostrovsky, and I will be introducing all of you, as well as conducting two pieces that will be played by the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra tonight. Here is the order of performances for this evening. Up first, we have Rachel Levine on bassoon."

My heart stopped beating. Oh. My. God. This can't be happening. Please tell me I'm dreaming. No. It has to be wrong. I can't be first! I'll die! I'll faint! It will be awful!

"... and last we have Michael Chen on cello. Any questions?" I realized that he had finished with the list and I had been so freaked out that I had missed it. I tried to raise my hand to say that I couldn't possibly go first, except that my arm didn't

seem connected to my body anymore. I was totally paralyzed with shock.

"OK then. Miss Levine, are you all set? After I introduce the performers, one of the stagehands will call you to the stage through the side door. Is everyone all set for a great performance? We have a full house tonight and everyone is very excited to finally see perhaps the best young musicians ever at Carnegie Hall. Break a leg, everyone. Good luck!" With that, he disappeared through the side door to take the stage. I heard him welcome everyone and the crowd applauding.

"Miss Levine? Excuse me, you're needed onstage. Make sure to bring your music. Ehhemm, Miss Levine?" The stagehand was impatient.

"Oh, sorry. Yes?" I'd only just heard the unfamiliar voice. "Could you repeat that?"

"You're needed onstage. Bring your music now and hurry. He's already introduced you." The little man with a black mustache grabbed my hand and pulled me from the chair.

"I can't do this. No! I'm not even warmed up!" I protested.

"Sorry. No time now. Go!" He thrust me through the door; the door to my death. Bright lights blinded me and all I could see were blue, oily-colored splotches. I felt myself sway, but then my vision cleared and I was able to safely walk across the polished wooden floor to my seat. I adjusted the seat strap on my bassoon, and had an almost-heart attack! My music wasn't there! In my hurry to get onstage, I had mistakenly left my music book beside my

case, even though the annoying stagehand had told me to bring it! Every swear word I knew popped into my head. Deep breaths, Rachel. You know the piece. You can do it.

But deep down, I knew I couldn't. Shoot! The conductor was looking at me to play, yet I didn't even remember the first note! So I guessed. I closed my eyes, took a final deep breath, and played the first note I could think of—an A. It was terribly, but wonderfully, strange what happened next. I don't know how I did it. The note came out as smooth, yet crisp, as a freshly picked apple. And before I knew what I was doing, more notes came flowing out of my mouth and through my bassoon. Low, chocolaty, decadent Bs and high, vivid, tangy Fs. Alien, dark G-sharps

and playful, naive, chirpy Cs. The whole time this was happening, my eyes were closed, but I could feel the audience watching me, hearing me sing through my bassoon, my newly found voice. I felt like I was being reborn, my spirit echoing throughout the hall, surrounding everything, encasing myself in warmth. Even melancholy notes found joy in my ears. I think that maybe what happened was that I finally realized my true need, my true love, my true best friend. What really made me *happy*. It wasn't school, or sports, or even friends or family. My true passion was my bassoon. My music. My soul. I hadn't even noticed it before, but now I knew, my voice of sorrow, had been transformed, into a voice of joy. ❁



Poet

By **Claire Wilhelm-Safian**

Illustrated by **Chasen Shao**

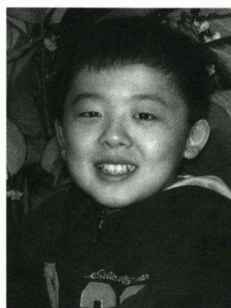
DUST PARTICLES DANCED in the shafts of moonlight that filtered through the holes in the barn roof. The sight wasn't much, just a regular old barn, but the sounds, ah, the sounds were special. Galileo, the owl, hooted from the rafters of the old building. Bella, the foal, shuffled restlessly in her stall, while Sugar, her mother, tried as well as she could to ignore the feisty young horse. In the chicken coop, Cara, the old hen, ruffled her feathers uncomfortably, yet remained sitting, protecting her future chicks from the cold. The five piglets of the barn, Penny, Sally, Marvin, Wendy, and Dennis, snuggled up to their mother, Whitney, snoring softly. Catherine's cowbell jingled quietly as she moved into a more comfortable position.

Slowly, the old barn door creaked open and the silhouette of a man was visible against the moonlight. The man stood there for a while, contemplating his surroundings. Galileo turned his owl head around and stared at him with his penetrating yellow eyes, though he soon relaxed. The man was usually here during the night, writing his poems.

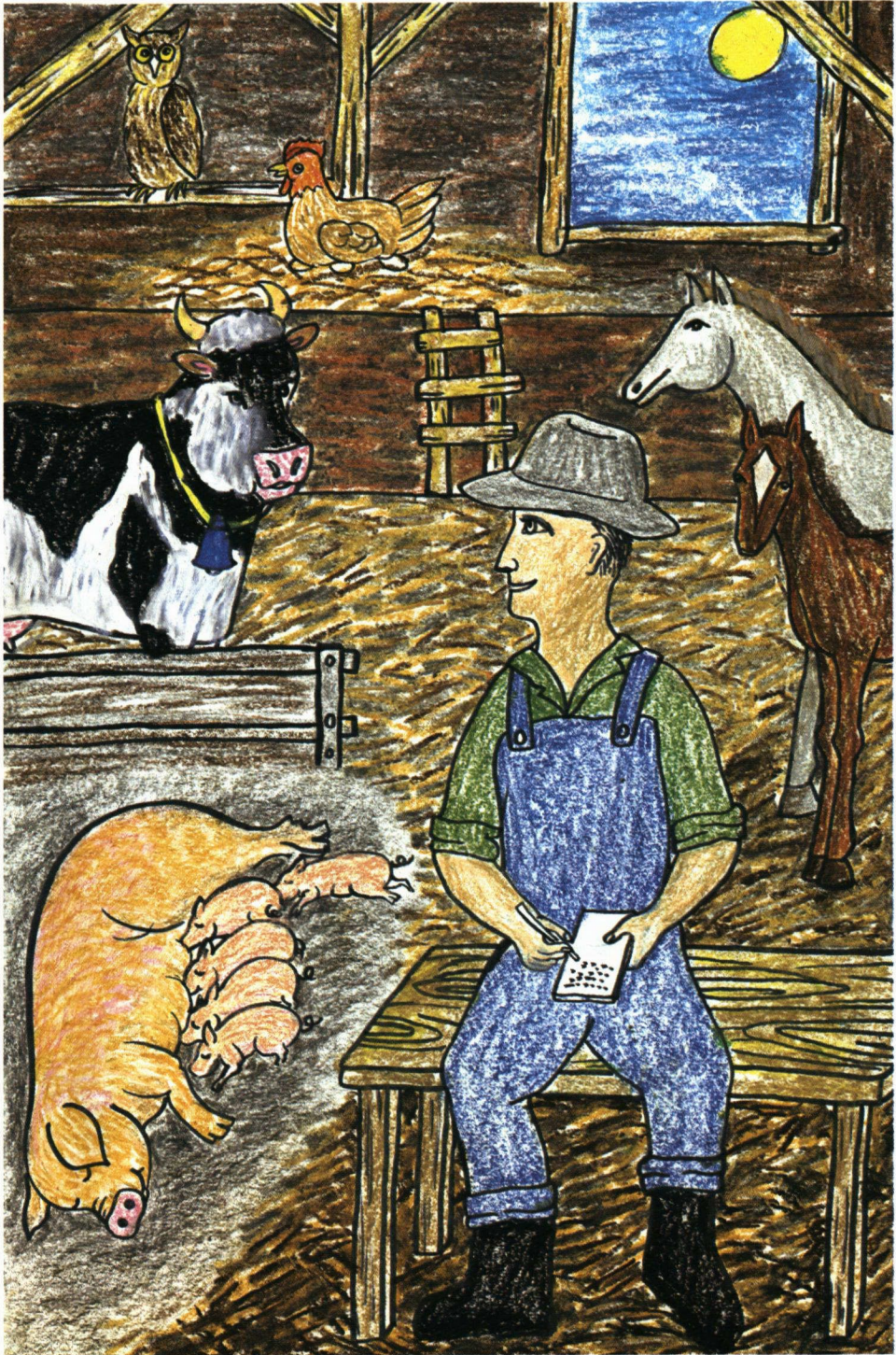
The poet fiddled with a flashlight. Once on, he pointed it at the ground so as not to disturb the sleeping animals and swung the barn door shut. He looked around at the farm animals, all deep in the realm of dreams, that is, except for the horses. Sugar was obviously annoyed at Bella, who ran around the stall with chaotic energy. The man walked over to the foal and, after rummaging around in his pocket for a few seconds, stretched out his



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The only time he had peace and quiet was at night in the barn


hand. Bella accepted the carrot without hesitation and allowed the man to pet her muzzle. The loving strokes soothed the young horse and she calmly lay down in her stall.

Once the foal was asleep, the man walked towards the back of the barn, his footsteps muffled by the straw that littered the floor. Next to the pigpen there was a wooden bench. He sat down and pulled a small notebook from his pocket. He opened it to the bookmark. The page was covered with crossing-outs and mistakes. He had tried to write during the day. He often found it to be challenging inside the house, with the baby crying, his young daughter spilling his ink all over the floor, and his wife yelling at his teenage son all the time. The poet sighed heavily and put his notebook to the side. The only time he had peace and quiet was at night in the barn. Here, he was in his element.

The poet listened for a minute or two. He was surrounded by the night sounds, the crickets chirping outside and the rhythmic breathing of the farm animals. He let the sounds take control of his body, control of his mind. In the air the sounds were trapped, but on the page they were free, free to be admired for their beauty.

The sounds were restless to escape and they took control of the poet and he was the portal, the portal that led them to the real world. Without noticing it, his hand inched slowly towards his notebook and quill. He began writing.

He wasn't sure what he wrote, the verses of the poem just poured out of his soul and onto the clean page. The strawberry-red ink flowed smoothly, guided by his hand... no, by his heart. He wrote of the owl's constant vigilance, the hen's patience, the cow's indifference, the foal's incessant energy, the pig's role as a mother of five. He wrote how all of them and the melodic sounds of the night were intertwined like strong rope. It seemed to him that they belonged together.

Before he knew it, the man had filled two whole pages. He smiled. The barn had worked its nighttime magic once again. He felt much more relaxed, ready for another day in the fields, another day of work. He stood up and strode towards the big barn door, past the pigpen, the chicken coop, the stalls. The poet opened the door and took one last look around the old room. Then, he quietly swung the large door shut. And the dust struck up a dance. 



It's too rare a moment to pass up, and it brings such joy

The Nickname Game

By Hannah Gottlieb-Graham

Illustrated by Nancy Yan

RAIN AND WARM MIST stick to the windowsills. My face is leaning towards light, pressed against glass. It's a sun shower. Always such an unnerving thing, as most adults put it. I think we need more of these sun showers in life. It's too rare a moment to pass up, and it brings such joy.

I am sitting on one of the various window seats that my home-decorator mother insisted on for our house when I was born, the last of seven children. There is one window seat for each of us, with cluttered cubbies and our names underneath. Other than my parents, we kids don't care whose window seat belongs to whom, and we take whichever is available. I'm currently sitting on Mark's.

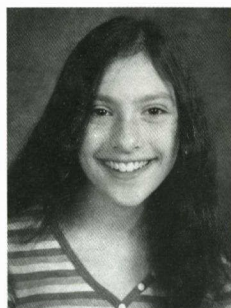
For the past couple of days I've been thinking more intently than I'm used to, and less selfishly than my thoughts usually turn out to be. I'm thinking about people, and what I'm missing when I look at them.

I MET LORALINE at art camp, at the beginning of summer.

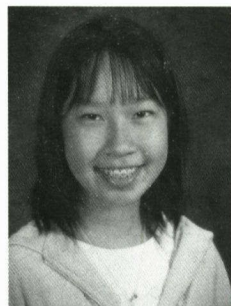
She came up to me, popped a big bubblegum bubble in my face, and asked, "Are you the new camper?"

"Yes," I'd answered, a bit shell-shocked, not so much because of what she'd asked, but because of her forwardness, and her appearance: a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, overalls, and wild, dirty-blond hair.

"Of course, you *gotta* be," Loraline said, hitting her forehead with her palm, "how many new campers are there! Simonee said



Hannah Gottlieb-Graham, 12
Urbana, Illinois



Nancy Yan, 13
Louisville, Colorado

one new camper, not *plural*, more than one. So you're obviously it." I was already a bit frazzled, but the sudden mention of a girl with an odd name like Simonee—not Simone—made me even more confused. I asked who Simonee was, and she just laughed.

"Who's Simonee! Good one, real good one. I'm Loraline. You'll get used to me blowing bubbles—I use gum for my art projects. I'm very original."

Now that that was established, I didn't ask anything else about this mysterious Simonee girl—until I met her. There was such an anticipation to meet the girl who apparently everyone except me knew that I found myself asking, "When will Simonee come to camp?" about every minute of my first day.

"What, are you in love with her or something?!" joked Gabriel, who Loraline had introduced me to as "the calm guy." Gabe smiled gently beneath his curly brown hair, and he indeed didn't look like someone who liked arguing. In fact, he was the one who had suggested the idea of creating a clay music box to the camp counselors—a project that we were working on today. I was painting mine with waves and mermaids, for the calming ocean. I noticed that Loraline's was bright pink, and had pictures of ballerinas popping bubbles, and that Gabe's had faces of smiling people looking straight at you. I wondered what Simonee's music box would have looked like if she were here.

My second day at camp, Simonee arrived. And ohh, did she arrive in style.

"There she is!" Gabriel pointed out, as she strutted through the doors to the art room. Everything surprised me. First, I overheard that she was fourteen. And I thought I was short! She could pass for an eleven-year-old, honestly. The second surprise was that when she entered with her four dalmatians and huge fur coat and mittens (in *summertime!*), the three camp counselors—Stacey, Joe, and Abigail—cleared a sort of path for her, as did the campers. The four dalmatians barked wildly as Simonee got them to shut up for a few minutes, leading them off to a corner where they obediently stayed put. She shrugged off her heavy fur coat and handed it to Joe, who quickly hung it up.

Just as Simonee was walking over to our art table (I'd figured out by now that Gabriel and Loraline were her friends, and by establishing myself with them, I was too) and I wasn't ready for more surprises, every single camper minus myself sang out, "Hi, Simoneeeee!"

Simonee ignored the cheers and claps for her and plopped down right next to me.

"Tell me your name," she commanded.

"Why?" I couldn't help asking.

"Tell it."

"Deliah."

"Deliah," she repeated, gazing at Loraline for a minute, then at Gabriel. "Hmmm. We'll have to think up something for you."

"Think up something for me?"

I was shot a look that had never before been aimed at me: a look that told me

right off that I was an ignorant fool with gravy for brains.

Simonee's answer was simple. "A nickname. Are you mentally challenged?"

"No, she's just new," said Loraline, quickly. She was immediately shot The Look of Dumbnosity.

"Newbies always start out mentally challenged. Some, like me and you and Gabriel, get over it, and some..." Simonee looked straight at me "...might not."

THE THIRD and fourth days of camp were a blur of Simonee bossing people around, Loraline constantly popping her bubbles to re-use them for her art projects, and Gabriel acting as the peace-maker, while I sat silent as a mime. On the fifth day, Simonee poked me during collage-making. Loraline, obviously, was looking for pink backgrounds to match her bubblegum scene, Simonee was trying to find cute dog pictures, Gabriel was on a hunt for caramel colors to match his skin in the self-portrait he was making, and I was on the lookout for pictures of children—especially friends. I'd never experienced friendships with kids as different as these three, and I wanted my artwork to reflect upon them in some way.

"Don't you ever talk?" Simonee asked simply.

"Yes, I do talk. I just haven't been given much of an opportunity to prove my chatting skills yet. At the right moment, I assure you that I will please you with talk." Apparently I had answered correctly. Loraline blew a bubble and tipped her

cowboy hat at me, and Gabriel gave me a thumbs-up. Simonee just smiled slyly, and I felt a sense of triumph for getting her lips to turn upward.

ON THE SIXTH day, at snack time, Simonee sat beside me at a picnic table, her bright white feather boa resting statuesquely on her shoulders. She bit into a small cracker with expensive-looking cheese slathered on, and said, "We have started a club of names. The club consists of me and Gabriel and Loraline, and it doesn't serve much of a purpose, but it's fun. During summer, we have our nicknames, and in the school year, we're back to our normal ones." I don't think I had yet heard—or imagined hearing—the word *fun* being uttered out of Simonee's lips. But it did sound interesting. I wished I could be part of the club.

"So what's Gabe's nickname?" I had asked.

"Gabriel."

"Oh. So what's his real name?"

Simonee stared at me for a minute—a piercing look, eye-to-eye. "You'll have to ask him."

I was shocked. "You mean you don't know?"

"Of course I know. I just don't give out that sort of private information."

Gabriel rolled his eyes. "Julian," he said. Now that I'd gotten used to his soft smile and rational nature, I couldn't imagine Gabe having a name as cold-sounding as Julian. I turned to Loraline.

"Jasmine," she said simply. Now *that*,



"Nobody knows what her real name is," said Loraline, "and I doubt anybody ever will"

I wasn't prepared for. Loraline, with the somehow distinct but soft southern accent and cowgirl-wear, was a Jasmine? Loraline suited her *much* better.

"And what's your real name, Simonee?" I asked, wondering what it was. I couldn't imagine her anything *but* Simonee.

Simonee put down her cracker and gazed into my eyes—not giving me The Look or the Too Private for Me to Say stare that I had received just moments earlier—and I saw real fear in her eyes. Without saying anything else, she got up from our picnic table, threw her crackers in the garbage and shrugged off her fur before walking back inside to the building.

"Nobody knows what her real name is," said Loraline, "and I doubt anybody ever will."

SIMONEE'S DALMATIANS went with her everywhere, like a four-dogged posse. Her favorite, Rootbear, was the only male, and Simonee gave him the most affection possible. She'd scratch behind his ears and pet him and pat his belly and kiss him, and be the Ice Queen to everyone else. But the strange thing was, they didn't seem to mind.

On the seventh day of camp, the suspense was killing me. I had to ask Loraline.

"Why does everyone let Simonee treat them like dirt?" I questioned, while Simonee lingered in the bathroom.

My three new friends were getting used to my constant questions, and now just rolled their eyes before answering.

Loraline blew another bubble and said, "Her father owns this building."

"And all the other buildings, too," added Gabriel.

"Other buildings?"

He and Loraline exchanged eye rollings. "The camps. They're famous summer art camps, scattered around all fifty states," said Gabriel.

"And her dad's addicted to art," stated Loraline. "They're filthy stinking rich and that's why she gets away with furs in summer and a bunch of dogs and walking all over people."

There was a short silence.

"But we all love it," I said, already understanding. "We love that she treats us like crud."

"Exactly," said Gabriel.

Loraline popped a bubble that splattered all over her face, and, while wiping it off, added, "And we don't know why."

MY MOTHER, after each day at camp, asked me how it was. My siblings, too, were curious about how I spent my days. I was happy to share, since as the youngest, I'm not used to shining on center stage. At the same time, I didn't want to reveal too much, because it felt like a secret that had taken me some time to figure out. The nicknames and the rich family and my three new friends, who were different and strange, and that's what I needed. So I told everyone about the collages and beaded jewelry and pottery and music boxes that I had made. It wasn't a lie. Just not everything.

IN THE NEXT four days of camp, I learned about art, and names, and people. I lay awake in bed all night thinking about impressions. Would I have been able to tell that Gabriel's real name was Julian just by looking at him, before I knew his nickname? What do our names say about who we are as people? They were hard questions. It was a hard world, I was figuring out.

"THIS IS IMPORTANT," said Gabriel on Tuesday, right as camp was about to end, grabbing my hand and pulling me into the hallway. "You're going to be dubbed."

"Dubbed?"

"*Dubbed*. It's a big deal. Huge deal!"

Loraline, at that moment, walked out of the girls' bathroom and nodded solemnly.

Slowly, carefully, I took my first steps into the World of Nicknames. I had yearned to get a nickname, to be part of the club. And here I was.

"I'm ready for you," Simonee said abruptly, the second I entered the bathroom. I looked behind me and noticed that Gabriel hadn't followed. I looked quizzically at Loraline.

"He's like the bouncer," she explained. "He makes sure that no one else comes in during the ceremony."

I opened wide my anxious, dark blue eyes and looked at my reflection in the mirror: my brown hair dangled scruffily off my shoulders, my thin lips were pursed shut in anticipation. I wondered if I would

feel or look different with my nickname. Just as Simonee was whispering into my ear, I noticed a tiny crack on the mirror. It was like a hole, almost. I thought of this ritual—a small hole where a new name began, and as it becomes more used, like a real name, the hole grows bigger.

It took a few seconds to process the name that I had just heard.

"Excuse me?" I asked, bewildered. "Marshmallow?!"

"Yes," proclaimed Simonee. "Marshmallow."

"Marshee for short!" added Loraline.

"We've put much thought into your nickname," Simonee chided, "so take it or leave it."

"I take it, I take it!" I said quickly. "But I don't understand why I'm Marshmallow."

"It's because of the softness of your soul, and how you mean well with everything you do," Simonee explained. "You are mushy and sweet, yet fiesty like the fire you can be put on. You are Marshmallow." And so I was.

CAMP WOULD END after our art show. Dalmatians and fur coats and overalls and bubblegum and Gabe's soft eyes would be over until next summer, when I planned to come back. I didn't want to wait that long to see my friends. But mostly, I couldn't wait to be Marshmallow again.

The day of the art show, I displayed my favorite creations for my family—the music box and collage, which lay on a

table in the art room. I felt proud of my work, and glad to have gone to camp.

While my siblings and parents admired one of my self-portraits and talked to my counselors while munching at the refreshment table, Loraline, Gabriel, Simonee and I snuck away to the hall.

"I have something important to say," said Simonee, suddenly looking more emotional than ever. "I've never felt like this before," she continued, "but I'd like to share it. My real name." None of us had expected this to happen. Ever.

And then the words came out. "My real name is Simonee." There was a silence like no other that I have experienced before, and it was broken only by the sound of Simonee's tears. "I didn't want anyone to get upset with me!" she sobbed. "I'm so... useless. I made up the nicknames because I thought it would be fun to have a new person inside of us. But I'm such a fraud. Please don't be angry."

"You don't need a nickname," I told her. "Your name suits you perfectly."

Simonee lifted her eyes and smiled

shyly, as if thankful for what I had said. The four of us walked back to the party, where her dalmatians licked us and barked and stole one of Loraline's cookies. We exchanged e-mail addresses and phone numbers and promised to return to camp next year. Me as Marshmallow, Julian as Gabriel, Jasmine as Loraline, and Simonee as Simonee.

SUN SHOWERS are such rare but beautiful things that, now that I think about it, I'm glad they don't happen every day. If they did, their utter remarkable-ness would be an ordinary, expected rainfall. It reminds me of my secret name. If I were Marshmallow every day, Julian always Gabriel, Jasmine always Loraline, and Simonee the Simonee that she is at camp, life would always be the same. With these nicknames, we are allowed to change our personalities. I'm quite willing to wait for Marshmallow next summer—when my name will last as long as a sun shower.

That's what makes it special.



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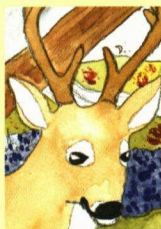
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