

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Abigail Stephens, age 13, from "Our Morning," page 25

PLAIN OLD KATE

Will Madison accept Kate's apology?

THE NEW SOCCER SEASON

With a little help from Sarah, Noel's soccer playing gets even better

Also: A review of *Swordbird*, a novel written by a 12-year-old

JULY/AUGUST 2008

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 36, NUMBER 6

JULY / AUGUST 2008

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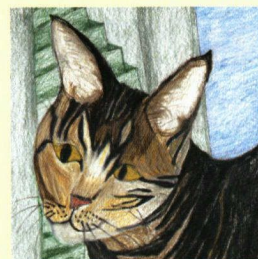
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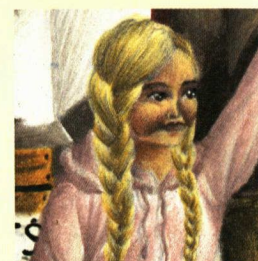
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Stone Soup

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: Abigail Stephens, originally from Williamsburg, Virginia, lives with her family in Amman, Jordan. Her father works for the American Embassy. Abigail began drawing when she was very young. She loves horses and spends as much time as possible at the stables, riding and helping out.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

Every time I get *Stone Soup* in the mail, I rush up to my room and read all of it. I especially liked "Big Dreams for Number Seven," by Emma Dudley [March/April 2008]. I was totally absorbed in the story, and I felt all of Alicia's feelings as if they were my own: her despair and at the end, her hope. I love how the story has a moral: to never give up on your dreams. I also loved the artwork by Daria Lugina. I liked how realistic the shadows were, and the way it seemed to flow off the page.

RHIANNON GRODNIK, 12
San Francisco, California

Rhiannon's poem, "Sunset," was published in the January/February 2008 issue.

As a young girl whose favorite thing to do is write, I have to say how wonderful it is to read the fascinating tales decorating the pages of the *Stone Soup* magazines!!! I love to read your magazines!!!! Publishing my work as a child really inspires me. My dreams when I get older are to write a book series and win the John Newbery Award for one of my books, or I would like to work for *Stone Soup*!!!

MOLLY COLLINS, 11
Deerfield, Illinois

I am a teacher at Colegio Trener, a bilingual school in Lima, Peru. We have visited your Web site in order to encourage our students to produce written texts. We will have a writing contest for our fifth- and sixth-graders and we will use your Web site in order to motivate our students. We value and appreciate Web sites such as yours that encourage and motivate students and teachers to have new projects.

PATRICIA RHOR, TEACHER
Lima, Peru

To motivate myself to keep writing, every time my stories don't get picked, I tell myself that my stories *almost* got published, but then you liked another one better, even though it's probably not true. But I do hope I get picked! And even when I don't, I enjoy reading the stories that beat me. By reading others' writings and bestselling books, I get better. Thanks for—in your own way—helping me achieve my dreams through practice and hopefully someday publishing!

KATIANA FISCHER, 11
Fairmont, Minnesota

I am a writer and a full-time tutor who uses your wonderful publication to inspire my students with the knowledge that they, too, have the chance to find their work in print. Thank goodness for *Stone Soup*!

JON SINDELL
San Francisco, California

I'm always glad when I get *Stone Soup* so I can read it cover to cover, but I was really impressed with the May/June 2008 issue. "Memories of Moon," by Abbie Brubaker, was so touching and well written that it had me in tears at the end. "Voice of Sorrow, Voice of Joy," by Katie Senter, was realistically written and very enjoyable from start to finish. And finally, I really liked "The Nickname Game," by Hannah Gottlieb-Graham, and the illustrations by Nancy Yan. I may be too old to contribute to your magazine, but reading stories like these inspires me to keep writing no matter what.

BAILEY ROSS, 15
Everett, Washington

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.



As Kate watched her friend draw the back leg of the dog her jaw dropped

Plain Old Kate

By Lauren Klepinger

Illustrated by Zoe Hall

“P HOOEY,” KATE SAID as she stared out at the rain. She and her friend Madison had wanted to play badminton in the backyard, but the clouds had stubbornly defied them.

“This stinks,” Madison said. “We’ll have to find something else to do.”

“Like what?” Kate asked.

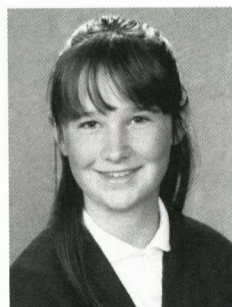
“Like... we could draw pictures. Or I could help you with your homework.”

Here she goes again, Kate thought. Offering to help me with my homework.

“Let’s draw pictures,” Kate said.

“OK!” Madison said cheerily. Kate retrieved two pieces of clean white paper from the depths of her closet and brought them to the kitchen table where Madison already sat. She gave her friend a sheet and placed one in front of herself. Then she hustled away to get colored pencils. When finally Kate was ready, she plopped down in a chair and began to draw. She drew crooked lines and erased too much. When she looked at Madison’s paper, she gasped.

Madison had drawn a *beautiful* picture. It was a collie lying on a soft patch of grass. Madison had captured every detail of it, even though the drawing was unfinished. As Kate watched her friend draw the back leg of the dog her jaw dropped. Madison’s hand flew gracefully across her paper. Kate stared at her own page. She had tried to draw a pumpkin, but it was lopsided and



Lauren Klepinger, 11
Sherwood, Oregon



Zoe Hall, 10
Rockville, Maryland



Actually, Madison was better than her at everything

crooked, and covered in ugly dark lines that had been partially erased.

"It's OK," Madison said with a weak smile, trying to compliment Kate's drawing. "It looks... happy." Kate and Madison stared at each other.

"Let's do something else," Kate said, crumpling her picture and throwing it away. She felt relieved when Madison finally left for home.

THE NEXT DAY at school Kate and Madison's math teacher, Mrs. Meyers, was passing out the most recent tests. Kate crossed her fingers under her desk, praying for a big red A. Madison, who was sitting next to her, winked and grinned. Unfortunately, Kate was about to be disappointed. When the test appeared on her desk she found herself staring at a big red C-minus.

Kate glanced at her friend's test. Hers had a big red A-plus written on the top. Madison was smiling.

"I would like Madison to come up and read us her answers. You can write in corrections while she reads," Mrs. Meyers said. Kate sank down in her chair. Madison was always better than her at math. Actually, Madison was better than her at *everything*. As Madison read the answers, Kate reluctantly wrote her corrections in a red pen. As soon as the bell rang she stuffed the wretched paper in her backpack and slunk off to her next class.

Madison happily plunked down next to Kate at lunch.

"What did you get on your math test?"

she asked.

"C-minus," Kate muttered bitterly.

"Oh," Madison said, her smile disappearing. "I could tutor you for the next test if you want."

"Nah," Kate said. "I'm OK." But Kate wasn't OK. There was an awful feeling in the pit of her stomach. Madison was so much better than her. A perfect picture, an A-plus... they were so Madison-style. A lopsided pumpkin and a C-minus were so incredibly and horribly Kate-style. But Kate didn't want them to be.

A FEW DAYS LATER Kate went to hang out at Madison's house. They were playing Scrabble. Madison used big words like "warbling," "elixir" and "quagmire," while Kate used words like "dog" and "that" and "horse." When the game was over, Kate said nothing.

"Are you OK?" Madison asked.

"Yeah," Kate murmured. "Well... no." Finally, all of Kate's hard feelings towards Madison poured out of her. "It's just that you're so perfect in every way. You're Madison, the girl who gets an A on every assignment. Or Madison, the girl who won the drawing contest. Or Madison, the girl who beats her seventeen-year-old brother at Boggle. You're the A-plus person, and I'm just a C-minus person. I wish that we could be the same. It would be so much easier to be your friend if you were the same as me. And seriously, why should you be better than me at everything? You're just miss prissy perfect lady. I feel like you're leaving me behind with your A's and

your trophies and certificates. You're popular, Madison, and I'm not. I'm plain old Kate, and you're Madison the Fantastic, or Madison the Brilliant, or whatever. I feel like I'm not as good as you. You're always wanting to help me with my homework, or finish my drawings, or something like that."

A single tear rolled down Madison's cheek. "OK," she said, "if that's how you feel about me." She got up and silently left the room.

Kate stood and reached for the phone. "Mom," she said, "can you come pick me up early?"

"Why? Are you sick or something?"

Kate steadied her voice. "No. Just... just come pick me up."

"OK..."

KATE COULDN'T get comfortable in bed that night, and repeatedly found herself thinking about Madison in school the next day—instead of the textbook. At lunch Madison sat with Hillary and her band of friends. She sat in the front of the bus on the way home, while Kate sat near the back. When both girls exited the bus at the same stop to go home, neither spoke a word to the other. They just went on their way.

Kate leaned against her bed and began her English homework. When she screeched to a halt on one question she reached for the phone beside her bed. She automatically began to dial Madison's number before she realized what she was doing and hung up. Instead, she went

downstairs to ask her mother for help.

"Is something weird going on with you and Madison?" Kate's mother asked suspiciously. "You two haven't talked much lately, and you came home early from her house yesterday. It's not like I haven't noticed." Kate said nothing. "Kate," her mom said, with a knowing look at her daughter. "Come on, cough it up."

"I said something to her that I shouldn't have said."

"What?"

"I... I said I wished she wasn't as good at everything as she is."

"Why did you say that to her?"

"I'm not even sure. I just know I said something mean that tore her down, and I really, really wish I hadn't."

"Well," Kate's mother said, sighing. "I can't tell you that what you said was right. But I can tell you how to fix it."

"I should apologize," Kate said.

"Yes, you should."

Kate nodded, tears in her eyes.

KNOCK. That's all you have to do. And hope that Madison's mom doesn't yell at you when she opens the door. Kate made herself knock on the door. Madison's mom opened it.

"Hello," she said. She gave Kate a curious look that made the girl feel a little uncomfortable.

"Can... can I talk to Madison?" Kate choked out. Madison appeared at her mother's side. Her mother left with the shadow of a smile on her face.

"What, Kate?" Madison asked a little

too firmly.

"I... I'm sorry for what I said a few days ago."

Madison raised her eyebrows. "Yeah, it was stupid."

"It was. And mean, and harsh, and... and I've realized I'm proud to have such a talented friend. I hope you'll forgive me, and we can be friends again."

"Listen," Madison said, "I don't blame you for feeling like I interfered too much. I might have overdone the whole tutoring thing, and the finishing your drawings thing, and the Scrabble thing, and the..."

"Yes, Madison, I understand. So... will you forgive me?"

Madison smiled a little.

"Of course I will. You think that one argument will ruin our friendship?"

"I... I felt like it ended for a little while," Kate said quietly, shuffling her feet. Madison put a hand on her friend's shoulder and Kate looked up at her with shining eyes.

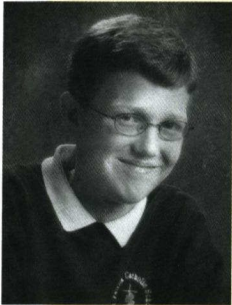
"I did too..." Madison admitted, "... for a little while. But I think it's good that we're different. I can learn from you, and you can learn from me. But please, don't yell at me like that again." They both laughed. Madison stepped forward and hugged her friend tight.

Kate whispered into her best friend's ear as they stood there hugging, "I won't. I promise." ❀



The Cool Counter

By Nicholas Wilsdorf



Nicholas Wilsdorf, 12
Rolla, Missouri

Mmmm, the man on the bench says as he plunges
a spoon into his mouth.
Aaaah, his wife says as she pulls
out a clean white spoon from her lips.
The woman at the front of the line grins.
A little girl to the left of me is dancing
like a ballerina, with a cup in one hand and a spoon in the other.
Ice is shaved into thousands of pieces.
Conversations have no meaning.
I hear an occasional mmmm or aaaah.
Finally, it is time to make a selection.
Sweet Strawberry?
Wet Watermelon?
Merry Margarita?
Ripe Raspberry?
I know, Gushing Grape.
I watch the ice being poured.
My lips go dry.
The flavors are glazed on,
and my tongue nearly falls off in anticipation
Finally, my cup is full,
and I am bouncing like a wild kangaroo.

The counter girl places it on the cool counter.
I grasp my treat and dig in.
My taste buds take flight.
Cold ice graces my tongue,
as the sweet flavors rush down my throat.
The taste gets better.
Before I know it, my cup is empty.
Yum.



My cat, Comet, has always lived the wild life

Comet Is Missing

By Annakai Hayakawa Geshlider

Illustrated by the author

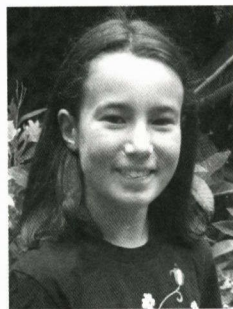
MY CAT, COMET, has always lived the wild life, ever since we adopted him as a kitten. We let him roam free outside, he won't allow a collar, he catches birds and mice to eat, he uses no litter box.

I had the worst of bad feelings on Sunday afternoon when I realized that Comet was nowhere to be found. The thought crossed my mind that maybe we shouldn't have been so easy-going about letting him out onto the city streets, especially at night. Both the closets and the dryer were empty, and there was no ball of fur on the bed or on top of the clay-firing kiln in our basement. I felt a deep pit in my stomach and I thought about where he might be out there. He was a small tabby cat and the world was unimaginably huge in comparison.

That night I lay in bed, sobbing and unsure what to do. Comet could be anywhere, in a car down the road, stuck in a garden, or maybe—I forced myself not to think about it—maybe even dead.

The next morning I awoke and rubbed away dry tears. I felt horrible about all the times that I clapped loudly to scare Comet off the computer desk, or the times when he nipped me because of the ways I'd patted him or brushed him. He was surely a very sensitive cat, but I felt guilty about his disappearance.

I spent the early part of the morning posting flyers around my neighborhood that my dad had designed the night before.



Annakai Hayakawa Geshlider, 12
San Francisco, California

Comet Is Missing!
If you've seen this rascal,
please let us know.
He could be sleeping in your yard,
eating your food,
but he's
Wanted by the Authorities

The poster offered a reward and listed a phone number. Centered on the page was Comet, just his head showing when the picture was taken of him in a brown paper bag. The color reproduction of the photo looked so real; I yearned to reach out and touch his soft, short fur. In the picture he looked so cute with his large green eyes and little pink nose. His expression was so innocent-seeming, which made me think of the times that I got up early in the morning, and Comet would swat my feet and bite my ankles out of eagerness for his food. Innocent. Yeah right, I thought, and almost smiled.

As the morning grew older, I put Comet's face all over the neighborhood, on telephone poles, light posts, and in the window of the local pet store. Wherever I looked, I saw my lost cat's face. I will not give up hope of finding him, I told myself.

I was in higher hopes when I answered the phone that afternoon and learned that someone might have found Comet. A friend of a friend had found a cat whom he was keeping at his house. I hung up the phone and prayed that it would be him.

The San Francisco weather was breezy yet warm when I walked across the street to the light green apartment building

where this person lived. I entered the building and scaled a flight of red-carpeted stairs, taking them two at a time. The suspense was too much to bear.

I was led into a bright kitchen, where food and water bowls were laid carefully on the linoleum with a litter box nearby. We went into the living room where there were couches and a view of the street. Then my eyes landed on a cat lying atop a bookshelf in the corner.

For a split second my heart sank and I lost hope. "That's not him," I said confidently, eyeing the feline who had just begun to wake up after a nap in a sun patch. But as the cat got up, the moment of realization made me ecstatic. It was Comet! He hopped down for a pat on the back, and I fed him a chicken treat that I'd brought from the cupboard at home. I couldn't stop stroking him with immense pleasure; it was all too good. It turned out that Comet had somehow gotten onto the roof of the apartment, and had gotten stuck in the light well. "My upstairs neighbor heard him meowing all night, so I found him and brought him in," said the man who had rescued Comet.

After gratefully thanking him, I gently picked Comet up and carried him down the stairs and back across the street. I felt the hard asphalt on my feet as I kept Comet in the firm cradle of my arms. Now that I had been reunited with him, I felt as if I could never let him go, but I decided to put him down once we reached the opposite sidewalk because of his restlessness.

When he reached the concrete, Comet



Now that I had been reunited with him, I felt as if I could never let him go

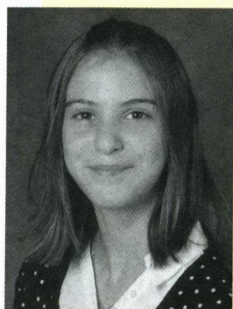
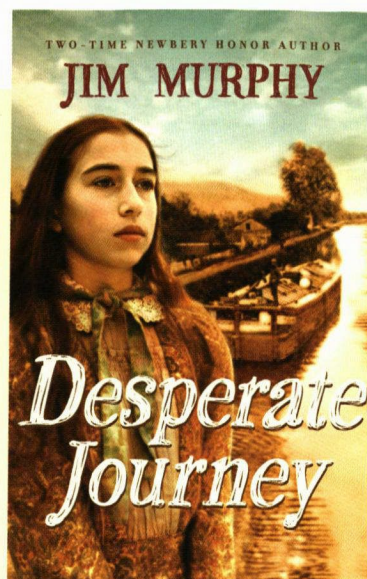
seemed unsure for a moment and stood still, and I was unsure as to whether he wanted to go home, or if he had no care for it anymore. I began to jog to encourage him forward, and right away he broke into a full-out cheetah run. When we reached

our house, Comet skidded on the concrete and came to an abrupt stop, only to continue running, taking the front stairs of my house by twos. He was so happy to be home; he beat me to the front door by a couple of yards. He always does. 🍀

Book Review

By Mia Studer

Desperate Journey, by Jim Murphy; Scholastic Press: New York, 2006; \$16.99



Mia Studer, 11
Somerset, New Jersey

SOMETHING ABOUT *Desperate Journey* just pulled me in. The author, Jim Murphy, showed me a different way of life. In the mid-1800s, many families, usually Irish, made a living by being pulled along the Erie Canal by teams of mules, horses, or any other animal able-bodied enough to pull a boat. They had to haul cargo with them and load it off, at their destination, all before a deadline. Otherwise, they didn't get any money.

I can imagine what life must have been like. Near my house in New Jersey is the Raritan Canal. It was used to transport goods such as coal, straight through central New Jersey from Philadelphia to New York City. Both the Erie and the Raritan Canals were built mostly by Irishmen, and by hand. Today, when I walk along the Canal, it is more overgrown and I see trees between the towpath and the water. My family and I bike and run along the towpath and canoe on the Canal.

In *Desperate Journey*, the main character, twelve-year-old Maggie, her Momma, Papa, Uncle Hen, and little brother, Eamon, live on water in their boat and make a living by delivering goods along the Erie Canal. Maggie's job is the only job on the towpath. She makes sure the mules don't do any mischief.

Her Papa and Momma take turns steering the boat. I can understand why Maggie feels left out. She wants to be in the nice, dry, non-muddy boat with her family. Most of all, she'd like to live on land.

Maggie's Papa also earns money by having fist fights with canal bullies. He protects weaker men from the canal bullies. I don't like the fact that Maggie's Papa fist fights, but he does it for a good reason. But one fight goes wrong. Maggie's father loses a battle against a Canadian bully and owes three hundred and forty dollars! Maggie's family doesn't have that kind of money and the only valuable thing they have is their boat. The only way to save the boat is to make a bonus shipment. Everything changes when her Papa and Uncle Hen get arrested and are accused of beating up a man. With a nagging brother, a sick mother, and an arrested father and uncle, I really felt sorry for the hard-working Maggie.

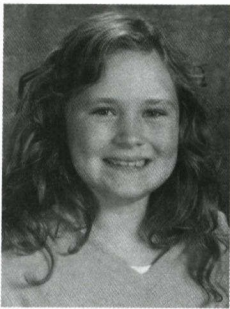
Maggie helps her family earn money. Kids today don't normally pitch in and help the family pay bills. Instead they might get an allowance and earn money from chores and get to keep it. I'm glad I get to go to school and make friends my own age. Maggie only has her brother and they fight all the time. Over the course of the book, Maggie and Eamon learn to get along. Maggie makes herself and her brother work hard to take off some of the gigantic burden her momma carries, being the only adult.

The Erie Canal has a very interesting history. I think the book is printed in brown ink to give it an old-fashioned look. It was fascinating to read about life 150 years ago, but I'm glad to live in this century. Today kids actually have a choice of what they're going to be when they grow up. *Desperate Journey* is about family bonds, luck, and tragedy, and it was captivating to read. ❀

Daydreamer

By **Hannah V. Read**

Illustrated by **Aditi Laddha**



Hannah V. Read, 9
Austin, Texas



Aditi Laddha, 11
Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

SPLASH! A clap of water crashes to my cheek. But I don't even think about that. I think about how my arms and legs are moving—well, mostly my arms moving up and down but also going side to side. I feel like a bird, a bird soaring into the gray misty sky. The heat licking at my wings, but I am free, don't have to care about school or anything else. As I soar I see a medium-sized shadow sprint through the water as it sees my big body soaring above it. My eyes narrow in closely, trying to see the direction of the fish. I can feel it, and just as it is trying to turn around, I dive. Wings back, eyes forward, feet pointed towards the clouds, and I dive, I slice into the water like an arrow and catch my prey. I begin to eat it, and then I realize that I am still underwater. But then the strangest feeling pops over me, and I am not gasping for air. In fact my body begins to shift, shift into the shape of a fish, a silvery shimmering fish, gliding through the water, towards a group of smaller fish, doing fish-like errands. I swim around and around this area, and my tail begins to feel funny. Suddenly the oysters at the bottom sure look delicious. But, I need some air. I pop to the top, slapping my heavy—heavy?—well, slapping my heavy tail against the water. And then I realize—wait a second—I'm an otter. And suddenly every single oyster on the bottom looks sooo scrumptious. And then, I dive. Dive down deep, trying to get them, but just as I do that, a huge wave slaps against me and pushes me off course. So huge, the biggest wave I've ever felt. I swim back, forgetting the delicious oysters that just lay under my eyes.



Wings back, eyes forward, feet pointed towards the clouds, and I dive

Forgetting everything except that my life depends completely on me getting out of this wave. I try kicking and steering my body to the side. I have never kicked this hard before—I will probably go limp. My heart nearly sinks as I feel the water steepen a little ways and turn my head to see a waterfall. My only chance of life is to find something that I can hold on to. And then, I see it, a rock, sticking up, just a little ways, I only have one chance to grab it, and I reach out and I let out

the first real breath that I have taken in a long time, when I feel the smooth surface of the hard rock. But just as I shift to get into a more comfortable position, one of my paws slips and I hit my head on the rock. For a second, I feel pain, ear-splitting pain, sucking my whole body into the feeling. But then, I remember. I'm just daydreaming, again. And I'm not an animal—in fact, I am a normal girl, and I swim back to my father waiting for me by the diving board.





How she loved the stately swans that heralded the start of every summer

The Gift

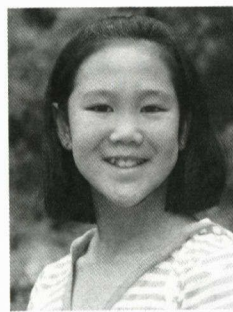
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Illustrated by **Anna Welch**

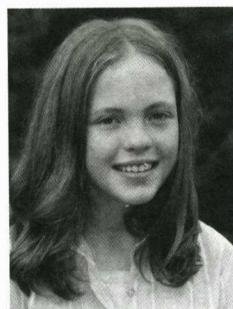
JENNIFER WAS HEARTBROKEN to learn that Grandma Bea had landed in the hospital for a hip replacement. True, the heavy-set woman with the perennial cheery disposition, with cherries in her cheeks and a twinkle in her hazel eyes, had been slowing down as of late. The diminutive eight-year-old child, with hair the color of straw, who wore it in braids that reached to her waist, had noticed that their daily strolls along the winding paths in Boston Garden were taking longer now. Lately, Grandma couldn't catch up to her and she had extra time to feed the pigeons the crusts of toast she had squirreled away from breakfast, before being gently prodded to resume the circuitous trek home. Each day, the gentle woman with the soft doughy hands met her bus stop after school, which occupied the northwest corner of the garden, and walked with her kitty-corner across the wide expanse to her mom's Beacon-Hill brownstone, which sat at the southeast corner near the shiny gold dome of the State House.

Mom was an attorney, who often had to conduct late-afternoon business luncheons at fancy hotel restaurants just at pickup time it seemed, but Grandma was always there right on cue, as steady and as timely as the arrival of the deep magenta magnolia blossoms that lined nearby Commonwealth Avenue come May.

Oh, how Jen loved Boston Garden in the spring! The fresh-smelling earth came alive with dewy stalks promising blooms with rainbow hues in the upcoming weeks ahead. The blitz of color and mixture of scents would prove tantalizing to pass-



Emmy J. X. Wong, 11
Weston, Massachusetts



Anna Welch, 13
Hancock, New Hampshire

ersby with few able to resist its unspoken beckoning. Upon entering the huge iron gate which hung on a spiky black fence surrounding the Boston landmark, resembling a crown in its full majesty, Jen thought it made her feel like a princess, and the treasures within were her personal castle garden. In the early summer, Grandma Bea and she would stop to ride the graceful swan boats which had become celebrities amid the garden. How she loved the stately swans that heralded the start of every summer. Their passengers who visited the historic city from all around the globe were never disappointed by the sauntering boats, led by the graceful swan figureheads, enjoyed by all ages. Looking out from behind their expansive sculpted wings, one could look down and see families of emerald-and-brown-headed mallards paddling alongside their revered ancestors with their rubbery webbed feet in constant motion to keep up with the legendary birds which, with a little imagination, came to life.

At the height of summer, when school was out and camp was in session, Jen remembered that Grandma and she would once again be entranced by the light raspberry perfume of the full-blossomed crimson roses that grew in the garden's center. If you closed your eyes, their hypnotic scent made all your troubles evaporate. Just one whiff could revive and elevate your spirit, so you felt as though your feet could lift off the ground, and within no time you had flown home with only the pigeons to guide you.

In the fall, as it was now, Grandma and she would often make their way over to the duckling parade, a celebrated group of siblings who made their home in the park and were always available among sun or rain showers in a cast-bronze version, although everyone knew their real-life namesakes made their domicile under the large bridge which spanned the winding river the swans made their own. When you least expected it, they tiptoed near to inquire what special delicacy you might share from your picnic cuisine or what royal fare you might have brought especially for them, perhaps a buttery mad-eleine from Montberry's French Crème Bakery atop the hill? Just last week, the grandmother and granddaughter couple couldn't stop smiling on their way home. The vermilion, Halloween-orange and lemony leaves now danced and mingled in the autumn bewitching twilight, casting an ever-changing stained-glass mosaic along the familiar path. On their route home, Jen and her best companion loved listening to the rustling leaves, whispering from the two-century-old trees which served as a canopy to the statue of Paul Revere and his horse. It was as if they held untold secrets they would share if only their Revolutionary-period dialect could be deciphered. Winter brought its own special life to the garden. Jen happily recalled how in the clear crisp blue air, the orbs on the bridge lit up just as the sun sank to resemble low-hanging stars twinkling merrily with their more distant cousins in the bright dusky sky.



Jen's heart skipped as she revealed to her uncle her serendipitous find

JENNIFER WONDERED what gift she could bring Grandma Bea on her visit to the austere hospital the day after tomorrow. It would have to be something especially delightful. Jen thought about the traditional get-well gifts, like a card or perhaps a checkered box of candy from Brigham's, the local confectionary and ice cream shop, a frequently called-upon neighbor by locals. But checking her piggy-bank stores, she knew she barely had enough, even if she scraped together the few stale and discolored coins that remained at its bottom after purchasing her

mom's birthday present just last month. But if she could scrape some amount together, what could she buy that would be special—special enough for Grandma Bea?

WHEN Grandma Bea's stand-in, amiable Uncle Harry, arrived to meet her at the bus stop the next day, Jen had an idea. She knew she would need to find something from the special afternoon walks they both cherished. A magnificent citrus-colored leaf? No, it would wither in no time and eventually crackle

into dry, brown dust. A drawing of a duck? No, the ducks had already flown south to find solace from the frigid New England winter ahead. Where could she possibly find a model that might accommodate her at this late date? With Uncle Harry only a few short steps behind her, Jen sped ahead to the covered landing where the swan boat passenger tickets were sold. The large birds were all strung together, already in hibernation until next season. I have to find something, Jen thought, looking around her at the slumbering giants. Looking down at her once-new school sneakers, Jen spied two yellow rectangular paper tickets on the asphalt. No, it couldn't be, thought Jen. Jen gingerly picked up the familiar tickets and turned them over in her hand, treasuring them as if she had just struck gold. Above the stylized picture of the entwined birds, she read, "Swan Boat Ticket, *good any time.*" Jen's heart skipped as she revealed to her uncle her serendipitous find. How was it possible? The kiosk had been closed for over a month now! They must have blown off a coveted stack housed in the kiosk awaiting next summer's arrival.

The next day, when her mom took Jen to the hospital to see Grandma Bea, the portly woman was sitting up in bed, resting comfortably on a pile of fluffy pillows. "I hope your new hip makes you good as new," offered Jen, along with a heartfelt hug and kiss. From behind her back, Jen

presented her surprise.

As Grandma Bea opened the carefully wrapped package in crinkly white tissue paper, beneath a bright chartreuse bow, she let out a gasp. In wrinkled hands, she held out a small worn paperback copy of *Make Way for Ducklings*, the one she had given Jen on her very first birthday. "Thank you, Jen, I love it," she replied.

"I gave you my best treasure, Grandma." Jen could see Grandma Bea's eyes well up.

"My favorite story... the one I used to read to you on our picnics together in the garden."

"Yep, but that's not all," hinted Jen excitedly. Her eyes shone bright with anticipation.

Grandma Bea opened the cover of the familiar children's tale and out fell the two tickets, "Swan Boat Ticket, *good...*" she started, "*any time,*" she concluded, with Jen chiming in, shouting in unison with her grandmother. "I'm sure to get better now," declared Grandma Bea in full spirits. "Can't let these tickets go to waste; we'll use them on opening day. I'll even race you to the landing," she added enthusiastically, reaching for Jen and returning an oversized grandmotherly hug, the kind that leaves you almost breathless. "But wherever did you find them this time of year?"

And in that moment of recognition, they both knew they had received... the perfect gift. ❀

Our Morning

By **Bonnie Leigh Cruser**

Illustrated by **Abigail Stephens**

I AM LOOKING forward to this.

It is my first thought as my eyes snap open. I keep them open, waiting until my dark bedroom comes into focus, which it rapidly does. I anxiously search my sister's face, and find it to be smooth and serene. She sleeps on beside me.

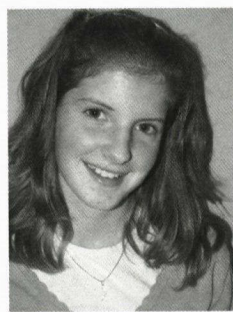
Good. I want it that way. I did not set an alarm for fear of waking her. Besides, I do not need one. I have always been able to wake up early. I can't sleep in, even though I'm almost thirteen, almost at a sleep-in age.

My bedroom window, cracked open, tells me that it is a windy morning and still dark. I can smell the earthy autumn smell—drifting through the window with the breeze—that is caused by dead leaves rotting into the soil.

It is between six and seven. I guess this, for I cannot risk turning on the lamp on my nightstand to look at my alarm clock. The main idea is not to wake anybody. Not that what I'm about to do is evil. Why does everyone associate the word "secretive" with dark, harmful deeds? I just need some time alone. Some time for me. For me, to be free of people for a little while is renewing. Then I can hop on the school bus feeling happy and industrious. Then, but first...

I am looking forward to this.

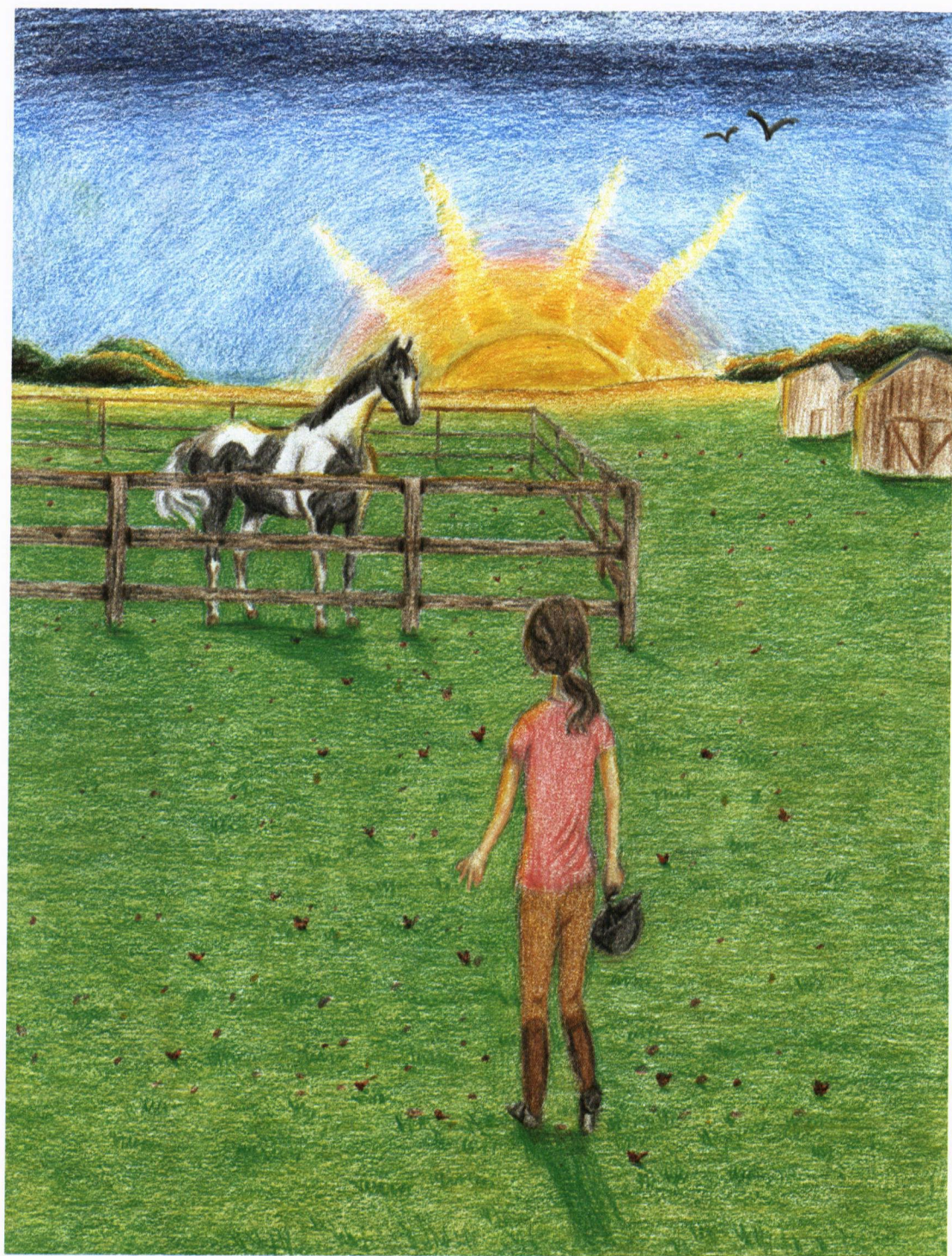
I slip out of bed, and I am silent as a shadow. My searching fingers find my dresser drawer—the bottom one. I feel the smooth brass handle, grooved with chiseled designs, and I pull. Into the drawer my hand dives. I search, I feel among the oceans of rum-



Bonnie Leigh Cruser, 13
Alpharetta, Georgia



Abigail Stephens, 13
Amman, Jordan



The sun is just tipping the horizon, lighting up the whole silent sky with amber sparks

pled cloth. Then I find them. My fingers know the fabric of my riding pants—light and stretchy. I give a pull, then slide the drawer closed silently. A slightly tattered shirt I find in the next drawer up, wooly-warm socks in the drawer to the right.

I am dressed in no time, for I know that there is someone waiting for me outside. And it isn't a person, so I have to hurry. People can wait. Ponies can't. My muffled feet glide with me down the hard floor of the hall, down the carpeted stairs. I slip into the garage, scraping the door shut behind me. I have awakened no one. I grope for my almost-new boots, and my chaps whose surfaces are worn slick from gripping a saddle so many times. I will lace them up outside. The leather chin strap of my riding helmet I have unconsciously wound around my fingers in my excitement. I step out the garage door and lace my boots, which are immediately drenched with dew. I have escaped. But I will come back. I have a life, and I appreciate it... most of the time. But it is nice to have a break once in a while. Right now.

I climb the steep, grassy slope up to our barn. My timing is perfect—the sun is just tipping the horizon, lighting up the whole silent sky with amber sparks. My favorite time of day. New, and clean, and cool, and quiet. Evening is clean and cool, too, but opportunity is lacking. Everything is set in stone. But in the morning, everything is pliable and optimistic. Anything can happen.

I can see my pony, Zorro, in his pasture. His black, dainty head is silhouetted

against the lightening sky. He is beautiful.

I hurry. Cresting the hill at last, I slowly enter our tack room at our barn. It is a sacred place—a haven that is dark and rich and quiet. It smells of the leather saddles we keep here, and the perpetual tick of the cheap old plastic clock—a tiny sound but magnified in the silence this room imposes—is soothing and permanent. I don't believe that clock will ever stop. It is an absolute to me, something that cannot, will not, break down.

I rouse myself—that clock can put one to sleep. I find Zorro's bridle and hurriedly go to him. I climb his rough wooden fence carefully and we walk to meet each other. His thick, black forelock pulses with his stride.

Oh, I am looking forward to this.

He is my favorite part of today. When my class goes on a field trip our teacher always asks us, "What was your favorite part?" And we have to write a report on it. Zorro is my favorite part most any day. I can write reports about him until my hand falls off.

We reach each other and I stroke his silky neck. Dirt crumbles off his back as I brush his body with my hand. He paces, circling around me, begging me to put on his bridle and get on. When his back is clean I pull the bridle over his ears. I fasten the straps that go around his nose and throat. Dusty, my sister's little white pony, comes over to investigate, but we ignore him. This is our time, our moment.

I gather the reins over his neck in my palm. I hold them together with strands

of long black mane. Zorro is piebald—black and white. His mane is black while his tail is white.

He is still. I bounce a few times on the ground, gaining altitude. Then I push myself into the air and land with my stomach on his back. I swing my leg gently over his hindquarters and settle myself into position.

Zorro is a pony. Soon he will be too small for me.

But not today. Not now.

I am looking forward to this.

I am riding him bareback. We walk to the gate, and I lean over to unlatch it. If Zorro were to spook or shift right now, bad things would happen for me. But he doesn't. We go out the gate and I latch it again.

I point Zorro towards the woods. His walk is a prance. Now I know how jockeys feel when their horses are led to the starting gate. Onto the trail we go, and now I cannot resist, and we are picking up speed. The sun is rising in earnest now, lighting up the foliage, turning the sky pale. Everything is beautiful.

Faster and faster we go, Zorro and I, along the wooded trail, our hearts beating rapidly in unison. My two legs grip him snugly, in a place where they can feel the thunder of his four. I can sense every one of his muscles contracting and expanding smoothly. I wrap his mane over my fingers and lean forward. My soul bursts into song. It grows and it invigorates Zorro. He pumps his legs in answer to my unspoken command.

And I close my eyes for a split second, as we whip along the trail, and praise God for this moment.

We are flying, flying in an enchanted forest, together and happy. Adrenaline pumps through both of us. We scramble up a hill and burst into a tiny sun-drenched clearing. For a moment, we, too, are saturated with sunbeams.

We zip back into the woods, still dim but cool. Ahead of us in the gloom lurks a fallen tree. A small tree, but still dangerous to jump with limited light. I try to pull Zorro up, try to be a mature, responsible horse owner, but he will not be deterred. He leaps over it like a cat.

I laugh. And I do not think anymore. I ride.

After this he slows briefly, for the path is uneven and rocky. We go for a while here, skipping and tripping over the stony ground, and then we both grow tense and excited—for ahead, we know, is the wide, grassy field that borders the lake. We quicken our pace.

We burst into the sunny field, and I open him up into a full gallop. We are both soaring now and our spirits are rejoicing and the wind is whipping us into immortals. And my soul is shouting with all its strength. We are detached from earth, flying in the clouds. The long grass covers our sound with a glorious swish. It is a wonderful moment, but it is brief.

We are both frustrated when we see ahead of us the pasture fence. The dreamer, the impractical side of me wants to fly along that glistening dewy field forever,



We are both soaring now and our spirits are rejoicing and the wind is whipping us into immortals

but my practical side reminds me that I know it cannot be. Zorro is all for jumping the fence and going on, even though he is wheezing, but I realize that the fence marks the end of our property and I am firm with him.

I turn him around and we walk slowly home. But somehow I find it is enough to walk slowly and I am eager to get home, for the practicality in me has overruled the dreamer in me. For now. And anyway, I have been among the clouds and seen the sun in all its glory and been immor-

tal this morning, and I have other things to do today. Besides, special moments are only special when they are brief. When they are fragments of perfection.

I find something amazing has happened to me. My spirits have been lifted so high during this ride that I no longer dread the school day ahead. It is a miracle. Because now I am anticipating the whole day, the whole week, that is ahead of me, instead of just my time with Zorro. Truthfully I declare:

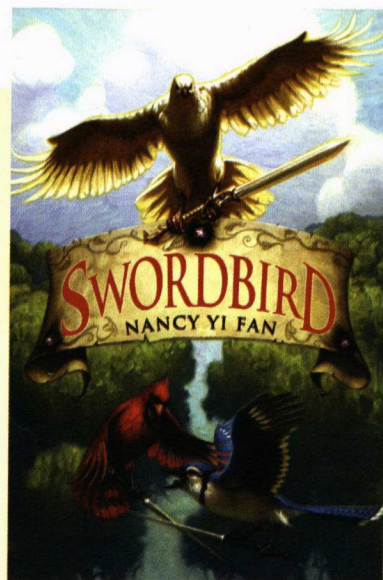
I am looking forward to this.



Book Review

By Emily Gordis

Swordbird, by Nancy Yi Fan; HarperCollins:
New York, 2007; \$15.99



Emily Gordis, 10
Berkeley, California

IMAGINE YOU LIVE in a world of birds, of flight, of complete freedom. Imagine an evil hawk comes along and tries to steal your freedom and make you his slave. Imagine being caught up in a pointless, bloody war, for which your family and loved ones are sacrificing their lives.

Well, that's a lot of imagining to do, but with the help of Nancy Yi Fan, the amazing twelve-year-old author of *Swordbird*, it becomes an enthralling learning experience. Fan makes you laugh and cry with the birds and you feel like *your* life depends on bringing this war to an end.

Swordbird is a very important book. All too often books about war for kids are gruesome and depressing or silly and shallow. Not because the subject of war has to be incomprehensible, but because making the subject of war accessible to kids is *not at all* easy. Fan does it perfectly. Not only that, she brings it all together in a moral in the front flap: "What does fighting bring us? Fear, hatred, misery and death." By the time you finish the book you completely understand and agree with that statement.


The book tells the tale of two flocks of birds, the Cardinals and the Blue Jays. They have been peaceful friends for decades. Suddenly they see their eggs being stolen by what they iden-

tify as each other. After a bloody war ensues, they realize that it is an evil hawk, Slimebeak, who is stealing. He is hoping they will fight each other so that he can capture them without them standing up for one another. Then he plans to enslave all of them and become king of the forest. The two flocks become friends again and join in a fight for freedom. Soon they realize that all that can save them is the mythical hero and king of peace, Swordbird. United, the Blue Jays and Cardinals send two birds, Aska and Miltin, on a quest for the stone that must be present to summon Swordbird.

The gentle blue jay, Aska, was my favorite character. She was living in a war-torn world and yet she was the heroine of the story, she was strong and resolute, she went on the key mission and saved the day. I really felt for her and cried for her when the brave robin, her love, Miltin, died, and it was because of her that I was really engaged in the book. I think Aska is a perfect role model because she is so good and kind in all ways.

I, however, found it confusing how new characters just kept coming. I thought that only half of them really needed to be there and I thought the extras just made it more complicated for me. I think the book would have been better with only the main characters and a few extras.

Swordbird is a magical book, a real page-turner, and though I won't spoil the end I'll tell you it's really satisfying. Fan says that the book is supposed to convey her feelings about terrorism and September 11. She says that she was in the towers of the World Trade Center a month before they were destroyed and that it made a very big impression on her. You can definitely see that in the book, though it is set in a fantasy world.

As Fan is a not a native English speaker and she is only twelve years old, it has inspired me, and I think it will inspire more kids, to see that anything is possible if you put your mind to it. 



"Do you want to get better at soccer?" she asked

The New Soccer Season

By Andrew Lee

Illustrated by Dennis Guo

NOEL SEEMED TO HANG in the air for a second before crashing into the ground. The grass rushed up to meet him as his lungs were crushed by the impact. Dazed, Noel looked around. The soccer ball was snatched away quickly as the opposition took control. The stifled laughs that followed made Noel wish he were dead. Slowly, like so many times before, he stood and walked away. No one intervened.

History seems to like repeating itself, thought Noel bitterly. The same thing had happened yesterday. And the day before that. Just as Noel was finding his stride in the soccer game, one of the kids would do something to humiliate him. Noel never said a word. He just picked himself up and walked away.

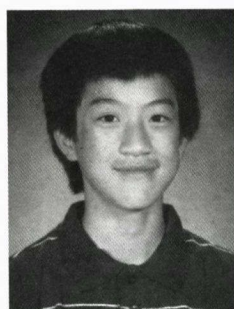
They aren't mean, thought Noel dejectedly. I'm just not one of them.

But I'm strong, thought Noel. I can wait it out. Once I make the soccer team I can meet some new people. But as the bell rang, Noel couldn't help but wish that he had at least one friend who could really understand him. Noel walked to the doors, hiding his disappointment at the day's game.

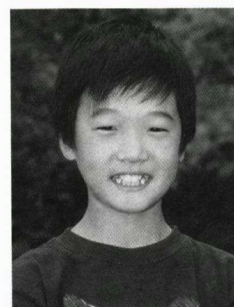
Just as he stepped into the school, Noel saw that lunch was over. He bent down to collect his books for his next class. As he stood, he was suddenly standing face-to-face with a girl from one of his classes. She stood, holding her books, flicking her brown ponytail back over her head, and blocking his path.

"Do you want to get better at soccer?" she asked.

Noel was taken by surprise. "What?"



Andrew Lee, 13
DeWitt, New York



Dennis Guo, 12
Lexington, Massachusetts

"Don't you want to show the people out there how good you are?"

Noel had no idea if she was picking on him or joking. Unsure of what to say, he blurted, "Who are you?"

She smiled. "What, you've been here for a week and you still don't know who I am? I'm in your science class, remember? Sarah Nusterwicz sound familiar?"

Now that Noel thought about it, it did. She sat in the row behind him, but they never talked before.

"Well? Do you?" Sarah looked expectantly at him. "I could teach you some stuff."

"What? How?"

Sarah smiled again. "Just meet me here after school, OK? I want to help you."

Noel was surprised at the sudden conversation. He just stared as she turned and headed off.

THE BELL RANG, and immediately a scurry of papers and books drowned out the teacher's last words. Kids rushed out of the classroom, eager to chat with their friends and enjoy the rest of the day. Noel went to his locker and got his bag. Hefting it on his shoulder, he walked slowly down the hall.

Noel saw her leaning at a corner of the hallway near the doors to the fields and courts. Her book bag was at her feet, and she was gracefully juggling a soccer ball. It hopped from her knees to her feet, then leapt up obediently to her head. Seeing Noel out of the corner of her eye, she let the ball drop to her feet, passing it to

Noel.

Noel flicked the ball up, feeling good to be touching a soccer ball again. He juggled it twice on his knees, then passed it back. Sarah caught it in her hands.

"So," she said, "you came. I was afraid you were going to get lost or something. Let's go outside."

Noel followed Sarah out. The weather was bright and sunny, small breezes pushing Noel's hair back as they walked to the field. A perfect day.

"You're new here, right?"

"I've been here for a week and you still don't know that?"

Sarah glanced at him, then laughed. "You learn fast. I hope you learn fast enough to make the team."

Noel stared at her.

"What? You aren't trying out?"

Noel was stung by her remark. "Of course I will! And why would I need your help?"

Sarah turned to face him. "Listen, I've watched you at lunch, and you're pretty good. But right now the other kids know that you're new, so they're taking advantage of you by being over-aggressive. I felt bad and decided that I'd help you."

"What's there to teach me?"

"Well, I'm just saying. There's some things you might want to know before you go try out."

Noel paused for a moment, and then smiled. He decided that he liked her attitude. "Thanks. I guess you're the only person here who has ever noticed me. Do you play soccer, too?"

"Soccer?" scoffed Sarah. "I'm just about the best goalkeeper in our grade, including the boys. Would you like to see?"

She rolled the soccer ball to him, took out some worn goalie gloves from her backpack, and stood in front of the goal, in the natural goalkeeper stance. Noel was incredulous. Shooting on a girl? Noel thought desperately of what to do. He didn't want to make Sarah feel bad if he scored. She seemed like the only friend that Noel would ever have.

But back at his old school, he was always the champion shooter on his team. Penalty kick? No problem. Bending corner kick? A breeze. He flexed his foot. As Noel swung, he glanced at Sarah. Her eyes were riveted on him, unnerving him. The ball shot low and hard towards the goal.

Sarah merely sidestepped and blocked the ball with her foot.

"You're holding back, aren't you?" she said. "Shoot like you were doing at lunch!"

Noel felt himself redden. He decided to go for an upper corner. Going for the upper corners was always his signature at his old school. As long as the ball was still and he had time to prepare, Noel could drill a shot that would match no other. All the goalkeepers at his school would be frozen, watching helplessly as Noel scored with ease.

Noel backed up, taking care not to give away which side he was committed to until the last second. He ran up to the ball, striking the ball perfectly in the center. He didn't put any backspin on it, and he didn't lean back. This was no chip shot.

It was a shot he had perfected long ago that combined height and distance without losing power.

Noel had seen Sarah shift her weight as he approached. Now, she had flung herself parallel to the ground, reaching up high with her arm for the corner of the goal. She missed, and the ball caught itself in the net. Sarah fell to the ground. Even though he scored, Noel was stunned at how quick she reacted. She had actually guessed the corner he was shooting at!

Sarah stood up and dusted herself off. "That was pretty good," she admitted.

Noel just gaped. "How did you know what corner I was going for?"

Sarah shrugged. "I looked at the way your hips were pointing. And I guessed that you were going for the upper corner from the way you planted your foot."

"Where did you learn to play keeper like that?"

"Oh, here and there. But mostly from experience."

Sarah tossed her hair back. "OK, how about some ball control? You'll have no trouble with shooting. But you need to be able to dribble, too. Try and get past me with the ball."

Noel took the ball. He rolled the ball between his feet a couple of times to get the feel of it. He dribbled forward, feinting a little with his shoulders. He took a move foreword to the left, and then spurred his heel into the ground to change directions. He flashed towards the right with the ball, tapping it ahead of him. Sarah didn't fall for it. She stuck out her

left foot casually and intercepted it.

Noel retrieved it. Trying again, he took several steps forward. Four or five paces later, he swung his leg at the ball, faking the shot and trying for her right side this time. Again, the ball never made it past her.

"You probably should learn some fakes before you try out for the team," commented Sarah. "The coach is all about 'the balance of skill' and stuff like that."

Noel took up a defensive position as Sarah approached with the ball. She swung her leg around the ball but didn't touch it, making Noel lean towards one side. She followed up with a series of scissors, weaving her feet in front and to the side of the ball, barely touching it. Noel tried to follow it all, but his feet ended up being tangled up beneath him. He felt awkward as he desperately lunged with a foot to the right at the last second.

Sarah flashed to the left, at the same time tapping the ball through Noel's outstretched legs. She took the ball up again and dribbled it into the goal. Noel couldn't believe it. He kneeled in defeat. Being nutmegged by a girl! At his school, being able to nutmeg someone and push the ball through their legs was the ultimate way to add insult to injury.

Sarah retrieved the ball and faced Noel. She looked all business.

"So. You could probably impress the coach enough with your shooting, but you need to learn some fakes. Just in case. It's hard to beat anyone one-on-one with speed alone. Fakes are your friend.

Watch."

She placed the ball in front of her. "You combine different moves to fake out the opponent. The trick is simple. You make them believe that you'll go one way, and then change direction and sprint the other. Please observe."

She suddenly performed a series of dazzling moves. "That way," she continued, "the person you are trying to get by will never know which way you will go."

She stopped and passed him the ball, grinning. "Well? What are you waiting for? Go home and practice."

NOEL WALKED home from school, bouncing the soccer ball on the side of the road. How did she do that? Noel mused. She's amazing at soccer. Noel thought of how patient she was when she taught him, too. Tryouts are in one week, thought Noel. I'm glad I met her now.

The next few days, Noel was in his element. At lunch break, he stepped onto the field and smiled. The action began. Noel introduced himself to a few teammates. They didn't seem to mind playing with him. Noel dove in, running shoulder-to-shoulder with a player until he could tap the ball away and gain control. As he did, Noel put on an extra burst of speed. He felt exhilarated. This was what he lived for!

He pounded his feet and ran towards the goal, daring anyone to try and stop him. He feinted and faked as he made his way down. One of the guys who tripped him before stepped before him, halting



He felt exhilarated. This was what he lived for!

his charge.

The guy rushed him.

Noel feinted one way, and then ducked the other way, just as Sarah had told him to. He felt the ball slide past the guy before he could react. However, this time, Noel saw the guy reaching out his foot to trip him. He jumped, easily evading him and approaching the goal. Taking a mighty swing, he rocketed the ball into the upper right corner. The goalie stood there, dumbstruck. He didn't even have enough time to react.

Noel turned away, accepting the pats and compliments from his teammates.

"Hey!"

Noel turned around to face the goalie.

"You're the new kid, right?"

"Haven't you noticed?"

"Dude!" The goalie was staring wide-eyed at Noel. "You're really good! Where did you learn to kick like that? Are you trying out for the team? They could definitely use someone like you!"

Noel just grinned.

WHEN the tryouts came up, Noel dismissed any fears he had and played all out. He dominated the field whenever he was on, earning the respect of his classmates. Soon, when people were

assigned to guard him, they gave him his space, knowing that he was skilled enough to blow right past them. The highlight of the day involved Noel scoring from five yards off the goalie box. The coach came up to him personally to ask his name.


"You have a great leg there, Noel. Don't break it. We could use someone like you on the team."

Noel laughed. "Yeah," he agreed, "but I couldn't have passed with just that. You need some footwork, too, huh?"

The day closed to a glorious end. The tryouts had given Noel a chance to prove his worth. Sarah was right. People who knew the extent of his skill now feared him on the field. Walking back, he spotted Sarah.

Catching up to her, he faced her squarely. "Thanks. I don't think I would have made the team without you."

"Oh, please," Sarah laughed, "I saw you out there. You did pretty well. Just don't mess up in your first game. I'll be watching."

Noel smiled. He had practice starting tomorrow, with the rest of the team. It felt good to know that he was a part of a group again. Sarah had brought him back to life. For Noel, being at school as the "new kid" was officially over. 

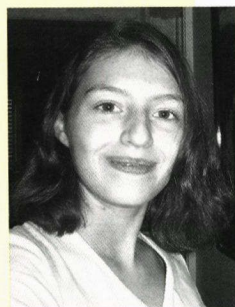
The Wolf

By Caley Scheppegrell

I sit on the porch
The dark woods around me
Insects chirping
And listen
To the distant sounds of the party
Inside.

It is a party thrown for me,
By my parents.
A party I didn't want—
Strangers crowding into our little house
People I don't know
Pinching my cheeks
Muttering lies about
"How she's grown!"

I escape to the woods
Fleeing the lights
And the cheerful, pointless chatter
And crouch in a dark clearing
Reveling in the silence
And the dark.



Caley Scheppegrell, 13
Charlotte, North Carolina

A flash of movement
And a wolf creeps into the clearing
I freeze in fear
Breath making tiny white puffs in the air
Terrified to move
Terrified to stay still.

The slim, strong, deadly animal
Looks at me
Dark, intelligent eyes.
Like my own.
We stare in silence
Caught in the spell of the winter woods.

Then I whisper,
"You're alone, too?"
The beautiful, elegant head
Seems to dip in a nod
And then the wolf
Proud, fierce, and yet gentle,
Turns and vanishes into the shadows.

I walk slowly back to the house
Returning to my party
Where I wasn't missed.
Before I go inside
I turn
For one last look.
Hoping somehow
She had come to say goodbye.

The trees are still and empty.
Disappointed, I reach for the door
And then stop—
A sound from the forest.

A long, lonely howl.
It starts out rough
But spirals up into a sweet, sorrowful note
That sounds like tears
And ends.

I think of the wolf
Alone in the forest.
I face the trees and whisper,
“Me too.”



Looking up from the black-and-white pages, Rachel saw a world of gray

Illumination

By Ariel Mia Iarovici Katz

Illustrated by Emina S. Sonnad

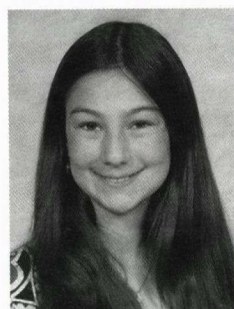
RACHEL SAT AT HER kitchen table, leafing through the Sunday newspaper. Comics, sports, politics... nothing caught her eye. She briefly skimmed the weather page, which had predicted sunshine; however, it was pouring outside.

Looking up from the black-and-white pages, Rachel saw a world of gray. The smooth gray tile of her kitchen floor, the gray of the walls, the windowpanes, the bland chairs. Gray curtains bordered the windows. Through the dirty glass smudged with water droplets Rachel saw more gray—the sky, thick with rain and smog, the skeletal trees, the snow from that morning that had turned into unpleasant slush. Gray.

Rachel sighed, lost in her thoughts. She was alone in the house, and her breath seemed to echo off the walls. She was alone more and more these days, since the divorce had taken over both her parents' lives. In fact, she probably wouldn't be in this house much longer—her mother was moving to New York City and buying an apartment, while her father was selling their current home and buying a smaller, more boring one in downtown Durham.

Rachel and her younger brother, Grayson, were going to live with their father and then every month visit New York, where their mother would be living. It would be a lot of money, and Gary, Rachel's father, would have to work another job to pay for it.

"It won't be far, Rach," Rachel's mother had said. "A two-hour plane flight, sweetie, and three seconds to dial the phone, I'll



Ariel Mia Iarovici Katz, 13
Durham, North Carolina



Emina S. Sonnad, 13
Ojai, California

pick up, and we can talk, dear, anytime. Right, Rachel?"

The truth was, it seemed like Clair, Rachel's mother, was trying to reassure herself, not Rachel.

"Yeah, Mom."

Rachel glanced into the hallway. There stood boxes, brown cardboard boxes, stacked as high as the ceiling. The boxes were neatly labeled in Gary's neat cursive, and each stack was categorized by name. To the right, a stack was labeled "Clair." Another yet taller stack was labeled "Grayson." Gary's own stack was the highest. Next to it, there were three boxes with "Rachel" written on them.

Rachel, unlike her mother or father, didn't like to keep things. Gary kept every letter he received, every doodle from Rachel and Grayson, every newspaper article about a friend. One box, Rachel knew, contained some thirty diaries, kept over the course of Gary's life.

Clair was a little less extreme, yet more eccentric. Clair's belongings were more unusual: a smooth stone with the word "believe" carved into its surface, a broken pocket watch, a Tootsie-Roll wrapper from when she was a child. Sculptures she had bought, and paintings she had created. While Gary's things were neatly stacked inside the boxes, Clair's were thrown pell-mell into the containers.

However, Rachel's possessions were minimal. A scrapbook. A photo album. Five of her most beloved novels. A spiral-bound notebook. A ragged old teddy bear.

Because Rachel didn't like *things*. She

liked memories, not little trinkets symbolizing lost moments. Her room, empty now in preparation for the move, had been arranged simplistically, painted the palest of purples and decorated with wispy green leaves. Her bed had been a simple cherry wood frame with a sage-colored bedspread. She had had a desk. That was it.

Rachel savored the memory, clinging to it, holding it, letting it comfort her.

Rachel shivered as the warmth of the memory left her. Sighing, she stood up from the table, hoping her parents would be home soon. She was bored. Rachel had no hobbies, no likings, no special talents. She had nothing that could provide solace in her life, the life that was so scrambled from the divorce. No religious group, no tradition, no cultural beliefs. She had nothing.

When the phone rang, Rachel screamed, as her ears had become accustomed to the utter silence. It felt good to scream, to let out some of the awful emotion that had entered her soul since the divorce. She screamed again, and then realized she should probably answer the phone.

No, she thought, she didn't have to. The answering machine would do it for her. She kept screaming, not caring who was calling. She didn't have the heart to worry about anyone else right now.

Rachel climbed the stairs to her dreary, empty bedroom. The quiet was haunting. It had been so long since this room had seen laughter, so long since there had been hordes of gossiping girls sitting on the

floor and talking. So long. So long since Rachel had had a friend.

THE LAST TIME Rachel had had a real friend was in the fourth grade. Now she was in eighth. The friend had been an Indian girl named Rubaina Tej. Rubaina was, in Rachel's opinion, perfect. She was smart, kind, pretty, and creative. Rachel had passing grades, but nothing compared to Rubaina's outstanding ones.

The friendship had met a harsh end, with a large fight at the beginning of fifth grade. It began with the teacher mispronouncing Rubaina's name. At recess, Rachel and Rubaina went to the swings.

"Hey, *Rub-in-ia*," Rachel had said, mockingly imitating the teacher's mispronunciation. "Why don't you get up and give me the good swing?"

Rubaina looked disgusted. "Um... I... guess so..."

Rachel quickly jumped on the swing.

"So, maybe you should call yourself Ruby, y'know, it sounds way more American, and it'd be way easier to spell."

Rubaina gritted her teeth. "I don't think so."

"Well, I think it's way better. Much more... nice and normal. I like more normal things. So, *Ruby*! What's going on, Ruby? How are you, Ruby?"

Rubaina jumped off the swing, cold flames rising in her unusual blue eyes. "You know what, Rachel Lewis? You know why you like average things? Because you are average. You have nothing special. You're not smart, not artistic, you aren't

athletic, and you don't win *anything*. You know what, Rachel? I don't have patience or time to waste my life with people like you. Your stupid jokes aren't funny anymore. They've gone way past friendly teasing. And you know what? I just don't have the time."

Rubaina turned her harsh blue-eyed gaze away from Rachel and stalked away, black bun hitting the back of her neck rhythmically. Rubaina would have nothing to do with Rachel for the rest of the year. Rubaina easily made new friends in all social groups, the smart kids, the popular kids, the artsy kids. But Rachel met no one. She waited for Rubaina to come to *her*, to talk to *her*, to apologize to *her*.

Finally, in mid-April, it occurred to Rachel that maybe *she* should go apologize to Rubaina. So, on April 15, Rachel approached Rubaina, the girl who had been her friend for so long.

It was a day that would forever stick in Rachel's mind. The sky was so piercingly blue it hurt to stare at it, and the spring sun shone lightly on the trees, dappling the gray cement. It seemed like a day full of promise.

Rubaina sat outdoors, at a wooden picnic table with her popular friends. They were laughing and gossiping and sharing food. Rachel felt a stab of jealousy pierce her heart like a lick of white-hot fire. Rubaina looked so radiant, her dark cheeks flushed, her unusual blue eyes alive, her black hair braided neatly and pinned to her head with a blue butterfly clip. Cautiously, Rachel approached her



You know what, Rachel? I don't have patience or time to waste my life with people like you

old friend. Rubaina stopped talking and stared at her.

"Um, hi Rubaina," Rachel began nervously, the words coming out awkward and fragmented. A few of Rubaina's new friends sniggered. Rachel tried to ignore them. She took a deep breath.

"I... I'm sorry for all the times I teased you, and I'm sorry about the fight we had, and... and..." There was a look of desperation in Rachel's red-brown eyes. "And I just want to be friends again."

There was silence for a moment, and Rachel could see from the lack of emotion in Rubaina's eyes that their fractured friendship could never be fully repaired. It would never be the same again.

Rubaina's brow rippled quizzically, and for a minute Rachel thought she was going to laugh. Instead, though, Rubaina stood up and jabbed a bony finger at Rachel.

"If you valued my friendship that much, you should have apologized months ago, when it was still relevant. Now," Rubaina said, her voice barely above a whisper, "it's too late."

There was a collective "oooh" from the popular crowd. The memory ended in a

blur of tears and mix of thought and reality.

RACHEL CAME BACK into the present, but instead of hearing the ominous silence she heard song. Loud, throaty, high-pitched, wistful notes. Then Rachel realized it was her. Her desperate screams had turned into music.

She listened, and let the emotions flow from her mouth, let the notes comfort her. Had she finally found an outlet? Was this her hidden talent? She didn't know, and she didn't care. It made her feel good, and it made her feel reassured. Everything was going to be all right. She was sure of it.

Divorce. Hurt. Lost friendship. Words. Just words. Just heart sores, just little hills. Life was not an ironed blouse, it was crossed with countless wrinkles and ridges.

And that was OK. Rachel would get through it.

Because even if she wasn't special, she was strong. So strong. Hurt had toughened her. She would make it through the messy divorce. In fact, Rachel Lewis could make it through whatever life threw at her. She knew it. And that knowledge was the most comforting thing of all. ❀

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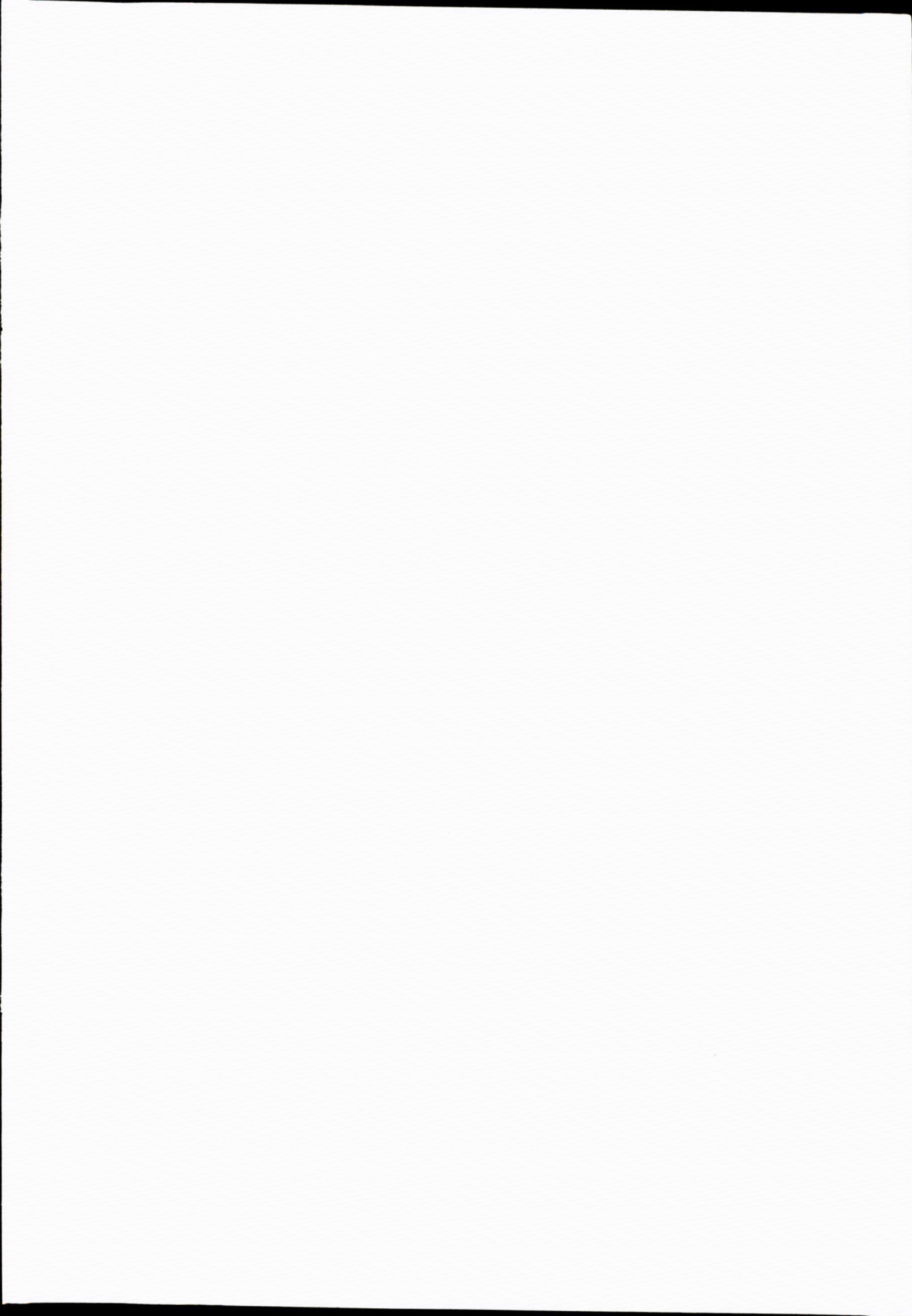
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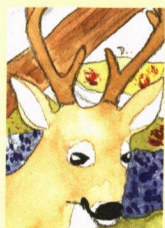
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