

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Anna Welch, age 13, from "Flynn," page 5

ZITZA

Sometimes it seemed like Zitza had the spirit of a girl, not a zebra

BOWL OF STRAWBERRIES

After Jack hears Grandpa's story, he promises to win the 400-meter dash

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 2

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2008

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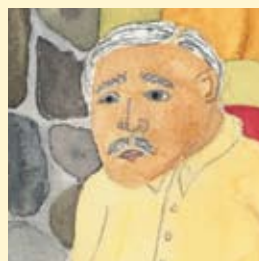
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Stone Soup

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, heartfelt 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: Anna Welch and her sister, Gwyneth, are triplets (they have a brother too) who have each illustrated three stories for *Stone Soup*. You can see all their work at stonesoup.com. Sadly, we say goodbye to Anna and Gwyneth with this issue, since they just turned 14. Thank you both for your spectacular artwork!

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I am writing to congratulate Emmy J. X. Wong on her story, “The Gift” [July/August 2008]. It was a sweet and enjoyable story. The mention of *Make Way for Ducklings*, a story I love, made me smile. Emmy made me feel Jen and her grandmother’s positive relationship strongly. Jen is so innocent and fairy-like that I want to hug her! Also, the illustrations were awesome. Anna Welch made Emmy’s characters come alive through drawing. The shading, use of color, and details were all amazing. Go Anna!

RACHELE MERLISS, 11
Lincoln, Nebraska

See Anna’s new illustrations in this issue (cover and “Flynn,” page 5).

I just wanted to say thank you for creating your wonderful Web site. I’m a young adult and love both reading and creative writing, and over the past few days, I’ve been reading the stories and poems of various young authors, and I must say that I’m impressed. Although I’ve never sent any of my work to you, I know that I’ll at least consider it. You’re the best Web site/magazine I’ve found so far for aspiring authors, poets, and artists. And that’s not putting it lightly—I’ve looked at dozens of Web sites. Keep up all of your flawless work.

ARIANNA ZANDER, 13
Brasov, Romania

When I received my copy of *Stone Soup* May/June 2008, and I looked at the illustration for “The Final Race,” I was amazed. Indra Boving is such a good artist! Everything looked so real. Congratulations to Indra Boving!

CLAIRE CONWAY, 12
South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Even though I have only read three issues of *Stone Soup*, I think it is the best magazine for kids. I loved the story “Comet Is Missing” by Annakai Hayakawa Geshlinder [July/August 2008]. I loved the plot of the story, and how it seems so real, like it is happening right in front of you. I also like the emotions she goes through when she finds out Comet is missing. I think the artwork was so realistic, I thought Comet was going to jump right into my hands! Great job, Annakai!

WILL JEWKES, 8
South Burlington, Vermont

One story that really caught my eye was “Illumination,” by Ariel Mia Iarovici Katz, in the July/August 2008 issue. In the story, Rachel, the main character, shares the same problems as me. It gave me a whole new perspective on my parents’ divorce, and it made me realize that there is hope.

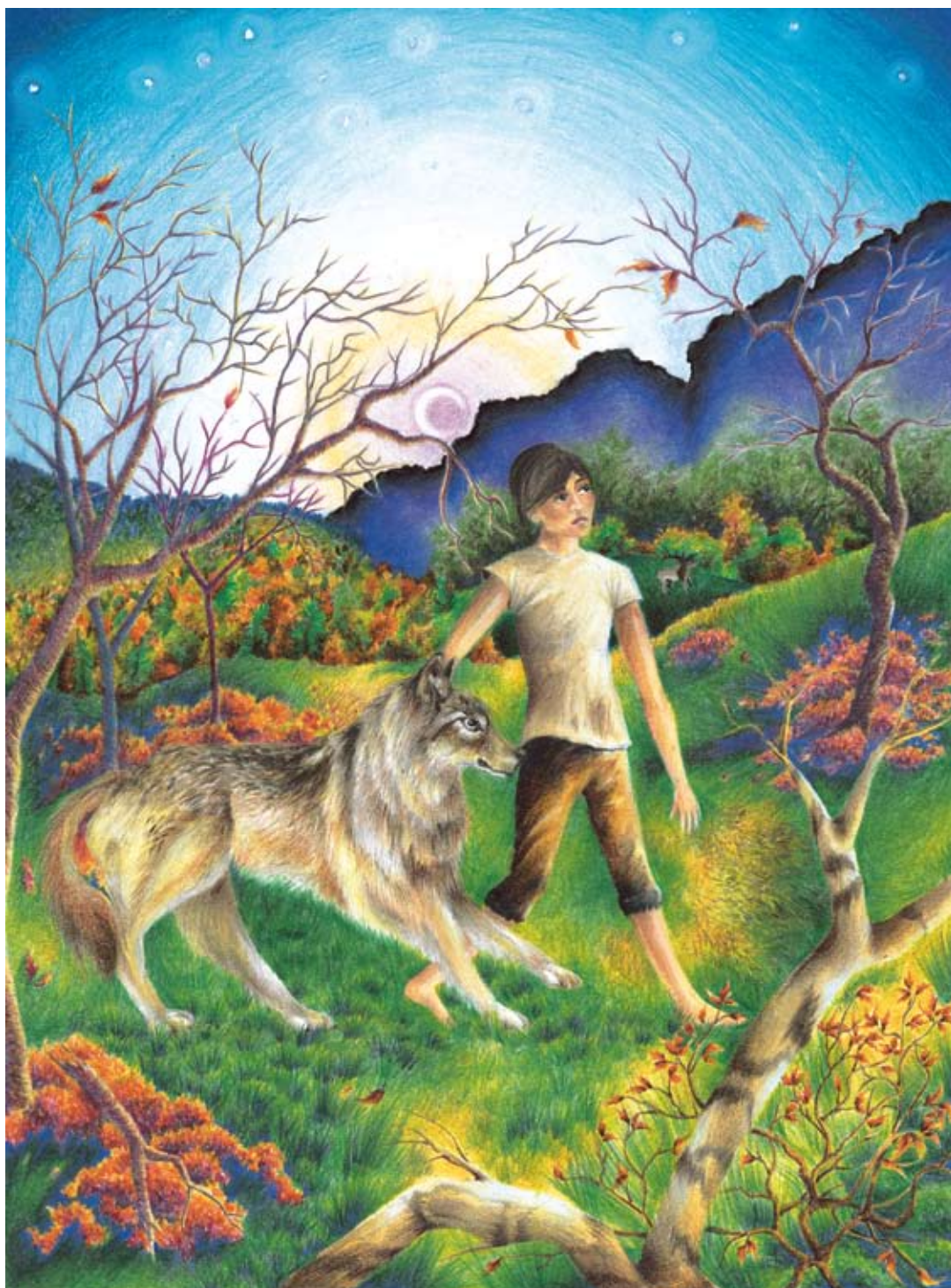
SOPHIE FRANK, 12
Langley, Washington

I love your magazine! It has inspired me for a long time now, even if I’ve never actually been published. I love the quality of the work, and I also like the idea of publishing work by children. It has inspired a whole lot of kids to keep on writing. Whenever I read a story that I really like or see an amazing piece of artwork, I always feel really happy for the writer or artist, even when I have absolutely no idea who they are!

GRACE EUPHRAT WESTON, 11
San Francisco, California

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

Note to our readers: Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We 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.



It was getting dark. He knew that he needed to head back to the cabin

Flynn

By **Hugh Cole**

Illustrated by **Anna Welch**

FLYNN CADARA LOOKED up at the sky. It was getting dark. He knew that he needed to head back to the cabin. It would be dinnertime undeniably, and he didn't want to miss it.

"Tam!" Flynn called out.

A large, wolf-like dog appeared, heading toward Flynn at a slow trot.

"It's time to head home," Flynn said. "Did you find anything interesting?"

"There's a large herd of elk not far from here," Tam said to him, looking up at Flynn's face as they headed up a low hill. "You should tell your father. Winter is coming, and he hasn't been able to get much meat."

"I'll tell him."

"Also, bear tracks," said the burly dog.

"Agh, blast and confound it all! Why bears!"

"Just tell the bear to stay away from the sheep and the horses," Tam said, unconcerned.

TALLINN CADARA, Flynn's father, peered into the darkness from the porch of a small cabin. He saw Flynn come out of the dark and into the warm glow that the oil lantern was casting. The boy was tall for his age, ten, and was skinny and lanky. He was wearing tough britches cut just below the kneecaps, and a short-sleeved shirt, and no shoes. His hair was a gray-brown color, and his face's details were sharp.



Hugh Cole, 11
Moscow, Idaho



Anna Welch, 13
Hancock, New Hampshire

"What took you so long, son! And what have I told you about those, those... pants! Winter's not a month away! And you don't even have your boots on!" Tallinn called out in frustration.

"My boots are too small, and these pants are more comfortable!"

"Oh, well, we'll go into town tomorrow to get you some more boots, but if you wear those, those... shorts anymore before winter is over, I'll burn them. Come inside, we're having supper. Your mother is worried sick about you."

Tallinn was a strong man, a kind but firm father. Flynn understood that he didn't want him to get pneumonia or anything, but his "shorts," as Tallinn had called them, were much more comfortable, and his legs didn't get hot or stuffy.

Flynn came inside and approached his mother, Selenia. She was setting the table with stew and bread and pale cider. When she saw Flynn come in, she crossed her arms and gave him a large scowl.

"I have a mind to not let you eat, young man," she said in a voice shaking with concern. She hugged Flynn and sat him down at the table. Tallinn came in and sat down. Selenia said the grace, and they all began to eat. Flynn had worked up an appetite, and he ate large portions of food. Tam, who had found his bowl, was tearing at the slab of meat ravenously.

"Did you see anything interesting or important today?" asked Selenia, to see if Flynn had an excuse for being so late.

"Yes. There's a large herd of elk, not far

from here," he said, slurping up a spoonful of the stew.

That seemed to redeem Flynn to his father, who was grinning widely. "Get the bows ready, and we'll head out tonight!"

A spark shot through Flynn. They were going to go hunting! This meant that they could go farther than he was normally allowed, so he would be able to explore more. What's more, they were going at night. He felt bad, though, for the elk, as they would be killed.

"No, you won't leave tonight," Selenia broke in, "at least not until my son has had some sleep."

"Selenia! I don't nee-" protested Flynn.

"Don't you argue with me, young man. You're not going hunting until morning, and that's that."

Flynn knew that he had lost the argument, short as it was. He went to his small bed in one of the corners of the two-room cabin. He pulled off his clothes and crawled under the warm blankets. He thought about all of the familiar territory he had crept through that day, all of the birds and squirrels he had chatted with. He thought about his strange ability to talk with animals, something that he had not shared with Tallinn or Selenia. He pondered this subject for a long while before he fell asleep.

FLYNN JERKED UP in the middle of the night. He hadn't told Tallinn about the bear, and he hadn't yet had a chance to talk to him. The sheep! He dashed up, pulled on his clothes, and

dashed to Tallinn's bed, which was across the room from his. Selenia was slumbering fitfully, but... Tallinn wasn't in the bed. Flynn looked over at Tam's small bed. Empty too.

"Come on, are you coming or not!" whispered a voice below him, making him jump. It was Tam.

"What?" Flynn whispered back.

"We have to get to the elk as soon as possible. We won't have this chance every day. C'mon!"

"Selenia said..." Flynn began.

"Don't pretend that you don't want to go hunting, Flynn. I'm sure Selenia will understand when she has meat for the winter.

Convinced, Flynn hurriedly put on several layers of clothes and rummaged under his bed for his old, small pair of boots. He grabbed his wool cap and then followed Tam outside, where his father was waiting.

"Ready to go?" asked Tallinn, rubbing wax along the string of his long hunting bow.

"Yes."

"Good."

They headed out into the thick woods as silently as possible, Tam trotting ahead, showing Flynn the way to the elk.

They made good progress, speeding through the woods. Flynn couldn't bring himself to tell Tallinn about the bear, for his father would undoubtedly kill it when he most certainly did not need to. All Flynn could do was hope that they came across the bear before it killed any sheep.

"Flynn! Up ahead!" Tam barked.

"This is where the elk were," Flynn told Tallinn, pointing ahead.

"Now we must go slowly and silently. If the elk are still there, then they'll hear us if we're not careful. You stay here, and I'll scout ahead." Tallinn crept forward through the forest and down into the steep valley. Flynn stayed where he was, and then he heard a huge roar. A roar that couldn't be the bear.

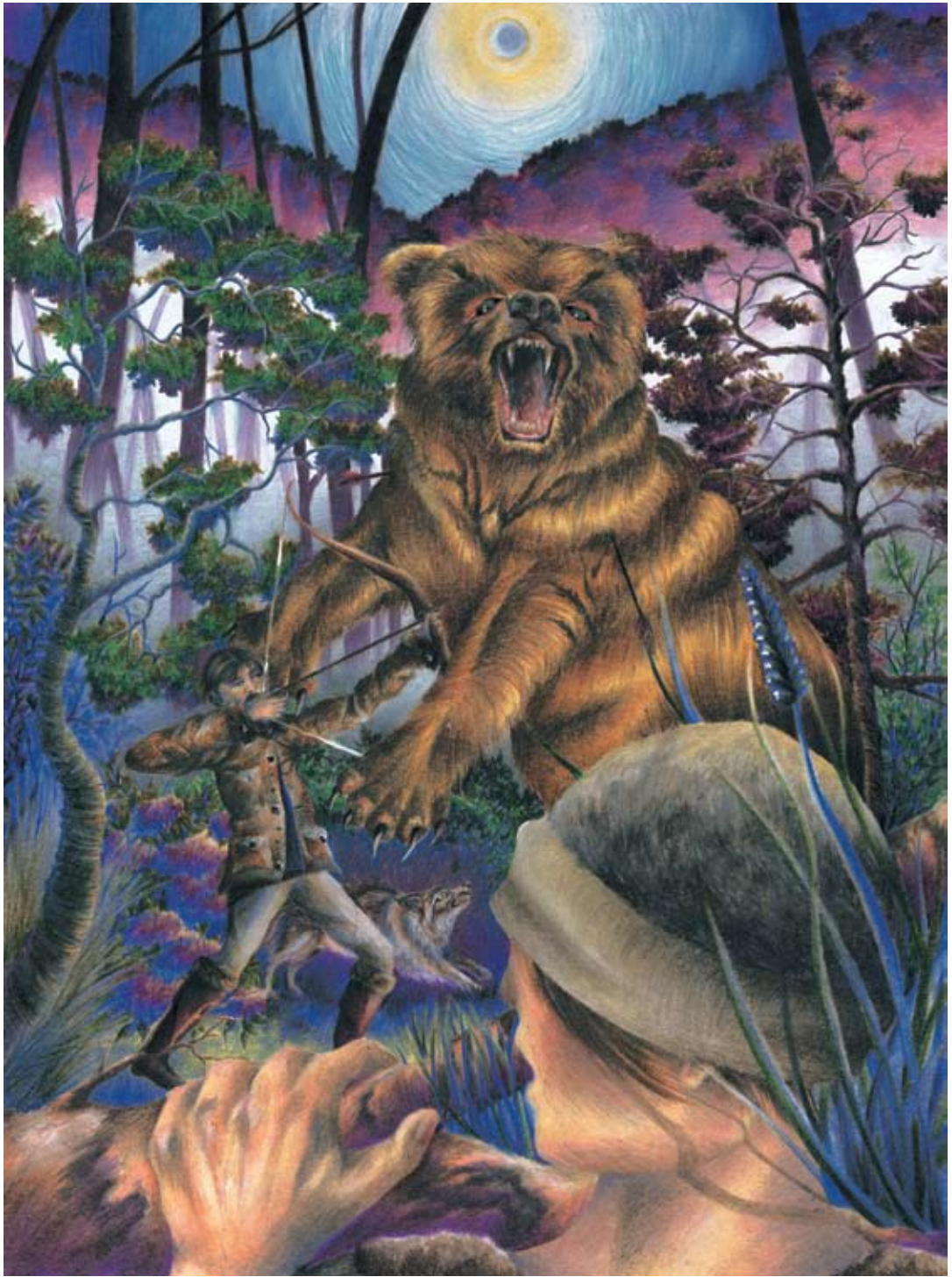
Flynn heard his father yelp and Tam scream his challenge to whatever was down there. Flynn dashed forward and gazed down.

Tallinn was loosing arrows at a huge monster. Tam was dashing in at it, biting and tearing at its legs. Flynn squinted down at the beast, trying to figure what it was, but he couldn't.

It looked like a bear, though much larger. It roared out into the night and looked over, directly into Flynn's eyes. A huge, fiery pain shot through Flynn like an arrow. He felt dizzy and fell to the ground. The shapes of Tallinn and Tam and the thing below him grew to shadows and shades, and then Flynn's mind went blank, and he fell, unconscious.

Flynn WAS ROUSED back into consciousness by the cracking of trees being mowed over by the wailing beast. It was crashing off through the forest.

Flynn stood up gingerly and slowly walked down to Tallinn, who was panting, crouching next to Tam. The big dog was gasping in ragged breaths. Tallinn stood up.



It roared out into the night and looked over, directly into Flynn's eyes

"What was that!" Flynn gasped.

"I don't know," Tallinn said, but Flynn wondered if he really did.

"What made it run away?" Flynn asked Tam quietly as they walked back to the cabin.

"Your father hit it in the eye."

"How did he know to do that?" Flynn inquired, but they were back at the cabin. Tallinn and Flynn slowly crept in, took off their clothes, and got into bed, trying not to disturb Selenia.

THE NEXT MORNING, Flynn got up and asked his father if he could go out.

Tallinn said no.

Flynn understood, but he still needed to find the bear. So he went out while his father was chopping wood behind the house.

Neither of them had spoken a word of the last night's incident to Selenia, and for good reason. While Flynn searched for the bear, he thought about the huge monster. And then a huge idea hit him like a thunderbolt. Why hadn't he tried to talk to the thing! Probably because he was glued to the spot, petrified, but he should have tried.

When Flynn found the bear, a huge grizzly, he talked to it for a while, asking it about the monster. The bear said that he didn't know anything about a phantom beast. Finally Flynn asked him to leave the sheep alone, though told him about the elk, which seemed to interest the bear greatly.

WHEN FLYNN got home, relieved that Tallinn didn't find out about his outing, he went inside. That night, Tallinn called Flynn out to the porch of the cabin.

"Don't ask me any questions, Flynn, just listen," said Tallinn. "What we saw last night was an Alarcon. One on a mission. No, don't ask any questions," Tallinn repeated, seeing that Flynn was about to speak. "I think I know what its mission is," Tallinn continued.

"What?"

"To capture you, and use your powers."

Flynn couldn't believe his father's answer. "What?"

"You can talk to animals, can't you, son?"

"How did you know?" asked Flynn in alarm.

"I see you continually, conversing with Tam, in a way that couldn't be just friendly dog-talk. And I know that you are special. If the Alarcon comes back looking for you, you're going to have to leave."

"What?" Flynn asked confusedly.

"Eventually, it will get to you, and I don't want to let that happen—will not let that happen. You will flee, with Tam, and get as far away as you can. I'm pretty sure that Tam knows of a good place to take you. Though you must go, without arguing."

Without waiting for Flynn to reply, Tallinn began to push him into the house.

"Wait, Tallinn, what about Selenia?" Flynn asked.

"I will talk to your mother."

"One more thing."

"What?"

"How did you know about the monster?"

Tallinn hesitated. "Ask Tam to tell you, and I'm sure he will."

"OK," Flynn said, and he went and got into his bed.

OVER THE NEXT few weeks, Flynn rarely went out. He constantly asked Tam about the monster whenever Selenia was out of sight, though the big dog refused to give any details. He continuously told Flynn that he would tell him when the time was right, though Tam didn't say when the time would be.

Tallinn told Selenia about the entire ordeal, which of course made her very angry. Just before she was about to burst, they all heard a wail, and then a roar, that sounded awfully familiar.

They all stood for a split second and then snapped into action.

Tam dashed outside to keep watch, while Tallinn urgently gave Flynn instructions. "Follow Tam. Stay with him, and heed his commands. He will keep you safe. Don't look back. Your mother has a pack ready for you. Go!" Tallinn then rushed for his bow and ran outside.

Flynn rushed into the hands of Selenia, and she pressed a kiss onto the top of his head. She handed him a sack of food and gear. "Forgive your father for that rough farewell, though he wants you safe. Be safe, be brave, and be wise. Good luck. I love you," she said.

Tears pouring out of his eyes, Flynn followed Tam out of the back door, and, just as the cabin was out of sight, Flynn heard the wail of the beast.

Tam ran Flynn hard for several hours after the wailing of the beast was out of earshot. The dog wanted to keep going, but Flynn insisted that he needed a rest. Tam gave him a few minutes.

Flynn sat down with his back to a tree and dug into his sack. He saw a small knife, lots of food, a canteen of water, a little bottle of medicine, and some extra clothing. He pulled out a chunk of cheese and got a slice of bread. He devoured them hungrily and then took a short nap.

Tam woke him up after he too had had food, a small porcupine. He didn't make Flynn run, but rather walk quickly.

Then the dog, rather suddenly, began to talk. "Now, Flynn, the time is right. The thing that you saw, and is most likely chasing us, is called an Alarcon.

"I know already. Tallinn told me a little about it, though keep going," Flynn said, anxious to understand the Alarcon completely.

"It's sensitive in the eyes, and it's the fiercest, most brutal, most savage beast in the entire country. Somehow, it knows that you can speak to animals, and it clearly wants that ability. And it can get it. Its eyes are how it does it. If it looks you in the eye, it slowly drains you of your powers and takes them for itself."

Flynn remembered the pain that had pierced through his body when the Alarcon had looked him in the eyes.

“Explain my powers,” Flynn asked.

“You have your ability because your great-great-grandfather didn’t kill an animal when he was starving to death and when he had the opportunity. The animal granted him the power and then showed him food. That’s all. And the power was passed down in your family,” Tam said quickly and simply.

“Wait,” asked Flynn, perplexed. “If it passes down in the family, why doesn’t my father have the power?”

“It was on your mother’s side, though she lost it when she married a man from a different country.”

Flynn thought about the sacrifice his mother had made.

And then, cutting off the conversation, was the roar of the Alarcon. It was close. Very close. Too close.

A huge tree toppled not a foot away from where Flynn stood, thrown by the huge beast. It was right there, and uprooting another tree.

“Run!” Tam barked, and Flynn ran, the Alarcon following close behind the dog

and the boy.

Flynn was soon tired, and the Alarcon was almost on top of him.


And then, Flynn fell, and Tam fell, and the Alarcon fell. They plummeted down, having run head-on off of a cliff.

Flynn gazed down, horror rising up in his chest. They were falling into a rock field. Huge, sharp, jutting rocks stuck up out of the earth, and they were not a hundred yards from the huge stones.

And then, a huge condor was under Tam, and Flynn, and shot back up to the edge of the cliff, leaving the Alarcon to burst apart on the crude rocks.

THE CONDOR flew back to the cabin, which was now in ruins. It appeared that the Alarcon had stepped on it, and more than half of it was crushed. Tallinn and Selenia were well, though quite upset about the cabin.

Flynn thanked the condor, who nodded and flew off.

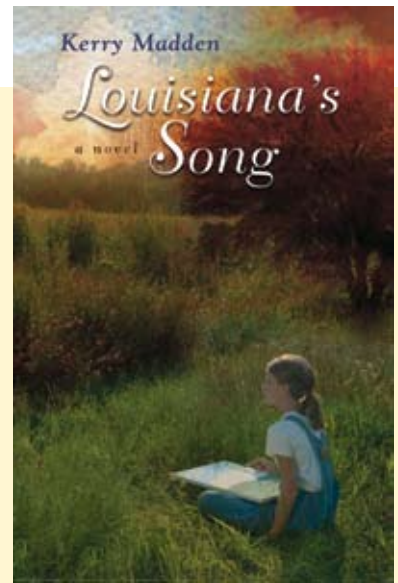
Flynn ran into the arms of his parents. 



Book Review

By Anna West Ellis

Louisiana's Song, by Kerry Madden; Viking Children's Books: New York, 2007; \$16.99



Anna West Ellis, 11
Orono, Maine


“WE JUST KEEP WALKING but going nowhere.” This statement, spoken by Livy Two, the main character in *Louisiana's Song*, explains the children's difficulty in reconnecting to their father after his car accident. The car accident leaves him without any memory of his family and his past. This situation gives the Weems family an unexpected opportunity to discover what matters most in their family and in their mountain holler.

The Weems family is growing up in rural North Carolina in 1963 and life is anything but easy. When their father, who was involved in a serious car accident, comes home pale, thin, and listless in the back of an old pickup truck, he doesn't look like a man anyone knows. Hope only remains in a few hearts, like Louisiana's. Louise, as her family calls her, is convinced that Daddy has the power to get better, and just as she sees the shades of blue in her paintings, she sees the light of hope in her father. Together, Louise and Livy Two make a powerful team, but some things just can't be fixed without magic, like Daddy. Then again, other things can.

Trouble is in store for the Weems as their money supply vanishes, and the older children are forced to find jobs, including

Louise, the artist of the family, who is shy and tall, forever longing to get out her brushes and paint, leaving the rest of her complicated world behind. Louise too knows the true meaning of hardship, and with Livy Two by her side, she takes life into her own hands and gathers enough courage to paint portraits on the street for strangers, beginning to sing a song of her own.

As Louisiana ponders her own complicated world, I as the reader have questions too. The whole time I read *Louisiana's Song*, I found myself thinking the same thing over and over: why does tragedy always strike in the most powerful and meaningful books? I wondered why, in the many books I've read that have affected me to the level that *Louisiana's Song* did, why was there always a tragic death or accident that changed the characters' lives and personalities forever? I am almost sure that I've found an answer. Books must use tragedy to reveal life more openly, and help people understand our world today is full of things that may not be noticed, but once they are, change your perspective on something forever. For example, in *Louisiana's Song*, readers get to see how a tiny miracle can feel like so much when the Waterrock Knob tragedy strikes, something that wouldn't have been possible without a catastrophe earlier in the book. Also, I feel like in this book in particular, I have a relationship with the characters that goes far beyond the pages of this book. At first, Louise seems like an average character, confined to just one type, but as you read on, her personality and the personalities of all the characters emerge and become more complicated. I was even shocked to see how they were all full of surprises when I had started to think this was just a regular book.

Livy Two's voice as narrator will always stay with me, and when times get tough, I'll remember Louise, naming the shades of blue. I think that *Louisiana's Song* has helped me to understand both literature and the world a little bit better, and I'm positive that this book will do the same to you. 

Zitza

By Alexandria Lenzi

Illustrated by Joan He



Alexandria Lenzi, 13
Stockton, California



Joan He, 11
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

ZAMBIA SAT IN a rare patch of green grass, surrounded by the tall yellow straw-like plants that made up the African savanna, her homeland.

This was her place. She came here to be alone with her thoughts and escape life's anxieties. A feeling of peacefulness washed over her every time she lay down there. She'd lose herself in the warm breeze rustling the golden stalks around, welcoming the feel of the soft grass on her callused feet.

But nothing could cure her sorrow now. A tear slid down Zambia's dark cheek and landed in the dirt, disappearing almost immediately as the thirsty ground drank it. She was reminded of how much she wanted water, and how long she'd been waiting for some.

Zambia thought she'd lived about fourteen Dry Seasons, though she didn't know for sure. Dry Season seemed to be getting longer and longer lately. This season had been especially arid, and water and food were scarce.

The water had sunk into the ground and the plants had shriveled up, killing or driving off all the animals. All but one that is.

Zitza had stayed. Zambia had befriended the zebra when they were both young, long before the drought and the sorrow it'd brought. Zitza was the only one who accompanied Zambia to the soft grass.

The zebra dropped her striped head down to Zambia's, nuzzling her cheek. Zambia reached up and entwined her fingers in Zitza's mane, closing her eyes and wishing for rain. Sometimes



Sometimes it seemed like Zitza had the spirit of a girl, not a zebra

it seemed like Zitza had the spirit of a girl, not a zebra.

Zambia and her tribe were starving, and many had died from lack of food and water. Many were dying now, including her mother. There was nothing she could do about it. Just wish for rain, rain, rain.

She stood and hoisted herself up onto Zitza's back, wrapping her arms around her friend's neck. A gentle nudge with her foot signaled Zitza to start walking.

She knew where to go. They started off at a trot, breaking into a canter towards

home. Running her hands over Zitza's back, Zambia recalled what her father would say about them.

"Zambia's as close to Zitza as Zitza's black stripes are to the white ones," he'd say.

A smile played briefly across her face but vanished as quickly as it'd come. Her father wasn't like that anymore—not since the drought.

They reached the small village they lived in. It was mostly mud and thatch huts with a little altar and figurine at the

center.

Zambia's family hut was the farthest away from the others—and the closest to the Bush. When they arrived, she slid off Zitza's back and led her to her arena, which she'd made years ago for the zebra.

"Good night, dear Zitza," she whispered, and went inside.

Her father greeted her solemnly and said good night. Zambia knelt by her mother, who was lying down already, her eyes closed. It hurt Zambia to see her so thin and her stomach bloated with deprivation of water.

After kissing her hot forehead, Zambia retreated to the opposite side of the hut and prepared herself for sleep. She closed her eyes and dreamed of cool, clear water raining down out of the heavens.

ZAMBIA AWOKE to her father gently shaking her by the shoulders.

"Wake up, Zambia!" he said, his voice hushed so as to not wake her mother. "I need you to go look for insects to eat."

"But father," she answered dazedly, "no one's been able to find any."

"Please, Zambia." He looked into her eyes, his own filled with sorrow. She knew he needed her to leave. Was it something to do with her mother?

"Please."

She nodded and got up reluctantly. Her father hugged her, to her surprise, and Zambia could see tears in his eyes. *What was going on?*

"Go," he said, not unkindly, and gave her a push towards the door.

Confused, Zambia walked out, past the arena, and into the rough golden sea of tall grass. She thought about bringing Zitza, but when she looked back at her, she decided to let her rest. The zebra had been sleeping against the fence, reminding Zambia of her starving mother who was still asleep.

Looking for insects was a very hard task, seeing as there weren't any to find. But the thought of locust cooked over an open fire, its scent traveling on the breeze, its crunchy outside giving way to her teeth, kept her going. It had been so long since she'd eaten.

Zambia finally decided to give up, for it was already midday, and she couldn't find anything. She didn't want to disappoint her father, but the task he'd given her was impossible.

She walked into the village at the opposite side of where her hut was. She passed many homes, a few with owners no longer living. Zambia had almost reached her home when she saw it.

A zebra skin was stretched across the ground.

Zambia's stomach lurched. She stopped and gasped for breath. *No!* she thought. *No!*

Her father came out of their hut and saw her. He rushed towards her and held her to his chest.

"I'm sorry, Zambia!" he cried. "Zambia, child, I'm so sorry! But your mother..."

Zambia broke away from him and staggered over to the arena. Empty. She stumbled into the tall grass screaming, "Zitza!"

Zitza!” frantically scanning the field for black-and-white stripes. “Zitza!”

Zambia shot off at a run, still screaming, until she fell onto soft grass. She pressed her face into the ground and tore at the plants with feverish hands. *When I look up she’ll be there, grazing in our special place*, she thought.

Slowly she lifted her head. Nothing. She was alone. Her head dropped back onto the ground, her body shaking with sobs. *No, no, no! Not gone! Not my Zitza!*

Zambia stayed there until it got dark. Finally she dragged herself back to the hut. She had to pass Zitza’s hide.

She remembered how she used to count her stripes and wonder, “Zitza, are you black with white stripes or white with black stripes?”

Zambia turned away. She couldn’t bear it! How could they kill her? Her *best* friend? They had eaten her like *jackals*!

Suddenly furious, she charged into her hut. But when she entered, Zambia stopped abruptly, for sitting up, her eyes bright and her body nourished, was her mother.

Zambia rushed into her arms and held her close.

“Your Zitza saved me,” said her mother. “She saved us all.”

Zambia could see tears in her eyes and in her father’s. She could feel them running down her own cheeks as well.

Because of Zitza, her mother wouldn’t starve. In a way, Zitza would still be with Zambia, for her spirit would live on in her mother. Zambia hugged her mother again, bringing her father in too. Suddenly they heard a noise on the thatched roof.

Plip.

Then another.

Plop.

And more and more. Zambia rushed outside to see what was going on—and got a face full of water! Wiping her eyes, she gazed up at the sky, letting the drops fall onto her hot, dusty skin. Zambia opened her dry lips to let the water slide down her parched throat, sending out a prayer of thanks to whatever god had finally had mercy on them. *Thank you, thank you, THANK you!* ❀



Winter

By **Danica Lee**



Danica Lee, 12
Sanford, North Carolina

The flowers call
Their last farewell
To the woods
As winter comes
To wilt their petals.

The snow falls
Upon brown leaves
Fallen on the roofs
Of houses strung
With sparkling lights.

The crisp air
And glittering frost
The little puffs of breath
And mugs of steamy tea
Only come in winter.

Stille Nacht

A World War I Christmas

By **William Gwaltney**

Illustrated by author

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1967
ISLINGTON, LONDON, ENGLAND

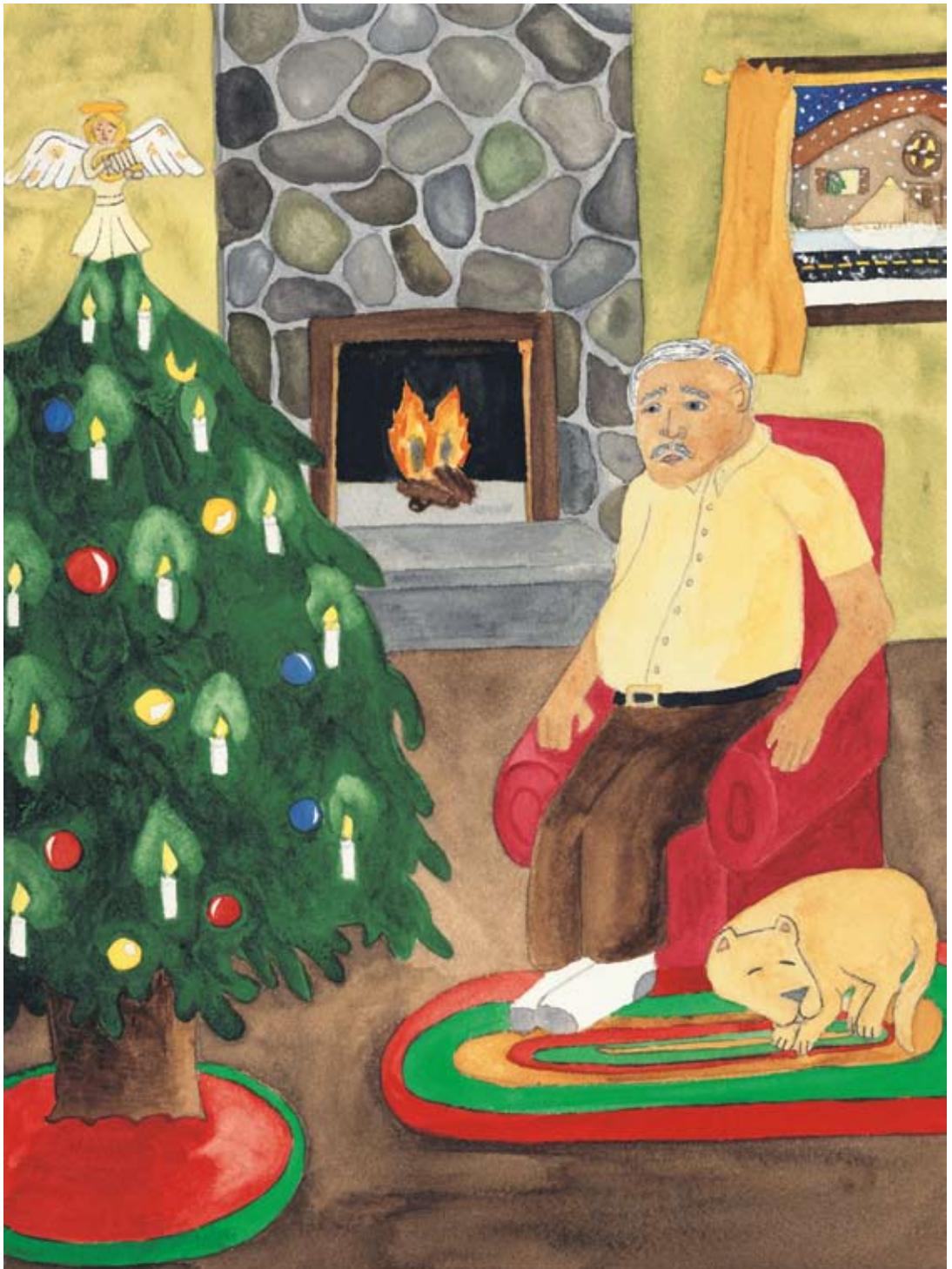
OLD TOM FOXLEY sat in his living room by the fireplace hearth, the logs of the fire burning brightly. His dog, Mack, lay next to his armchair, like a pile of laundry, his shadow flickering on the wall behind him. The warmth of the fire was the only warmth Tom felt this Christmas, for many of his friends were now gone and his dear wife, Elizabeth, had passed away the previous spring.

In the corner, a beautiful Christmas tree towered above the room. The golden halo of the angel which adorned the top brushed the ceiling. She had been in his family a long time, dating back to an era when his parents had lived in this very house. Her once-white robes were ivory now; her wings, originally covered in soft downy feathers, were more than a little bit spotty. Yet she still played her celestial harp, her eyes closed in quiet concentration, her face showing nothing but goodness and peace.

The giant fir seemed illuminated by the many gleaming orbs that hung from its fragrant limbs, even though they made no glow of their own and only reflected the light from dozens of glowing candles that lined the tree's branches. Certainly not the safest of decorations, the candles were a reminder of a special long-ago Christmas, and it just never seemed right not to have them on his tree. Tom sighed as he thought of how Elizabeth used to complain about the fire hazard they created. He decided



William Gwaltney, 13
Englewood, Colorado



The warmth of the fire was the only warmth Tom felt this Christmas

that he missed her fussing almost as much as he missed her. He gently reached down to stroke old Mack's head, remembered more happy Christmases of the past and then... the most memorable that he had ever witnessed.

IT WAS Christmas Eve Day, 1914, and the continual barrage of shells and gunfire seemed to pound his ears like a hammer. Young Tom, just seventeen years old, kept as low as possible as he moved through the sloppy trench, the water in the bottom rising well above his knees. As explosions rocked the earth, dirt was sent hurtling over the crest of the trench, where it fell into the water, mixing into a muddy soup. The place reeked of death and decay, for the bodies of his fallen comrades could not always be removed from the trench safely. Snipers were everywhere, and their fire was an ever-present danger.

Holding his rifle above his head in an effort to keep it dry, Tom plunged through the water, moving toward a firing step. The man already on the platform ducked as bullets whizzed over his head. Then he gratefully stepped down, allowing Tom to take his place. Looking over the edge of the trench, Tom could see bodies scattered across No Man's Land, the area between the German and the English trenches. In this war, gains came at great cost. They had been trying to hold this single trench for weeks as the Kaiser's army had advanced across France like a puddle of water across a stone floor, seep-

ing slowly but steadily in every direction.

When Britain had entered the Great War the previous summer, no one had expected it to last this long. They'd thought victory would be theirs in a matter of months. Now here it was Christmas, with no end to the war in sight, and the men were all miserable and longing for home.

Tom glanced up and saw Fred Mooring trudging toward him through the trench. Fred was struggling through the muck, lifting his legs high in an effort to evade the mud that was threatening to suck the boots right off his feet. If only the weather would turn colder, they might have some relief from living in standing water. That alone would be a blessing. A German mortar round suddenly landed nearby, the roar of the explosion causing temporary deafness.

One minute, Fred was there. The next he was buried under a wall of earth as part of the trench collapsed. Tom leaped forward, grabbing his spade. He attacked the earth, digging furiously, struggling to uncover Fred, while straining to keep his own body upright in the slippery mud. Finally, he found Fred's leg. Grabbing hold and using all his strength, he pulled Fred from the earth. Fred was gray but breathing, alive but unconscious. Medics ran to his aid and carted him away on a stretcher. Tom collapsed from exhaustion on a pile of earth. This war was dirty business, in more ways than one.

The medics offered to tend to him as well but he pushed them away, wanting only sleep, something he hadn't had in

days. No one slept well in the trenches. Some men simply slept standing on their feet, while others preferred to sleep in dugouts, small holes crudely cut into the earthen walls of the trenches. They were cramped and damp, and sometimes rat-infested, but not nearly as wet as the trenches themselves.

Tom went in search of his sergeant. He found him at a small table set up in the driest part of the trench, consulting with the lieutenant over a series of maps laid out in front of them. Tom saluted and waited to be acknowledged. When the men finally looked up, Tom couldn't help but notice the exhaustion etched in the lines of their faces. "Corporal Foxley," the sergeant said, "what is it?"

"I'd like to retire for a few hours, sir," said Tom.

"Very well," replied the sergeant, "but first, take this package." He handed over a large box wrapped in plain brown paper. Tom took the box and saluted. A look at the return address, 23B Lancaster Street, Islington, London, England, told him that this package had come from home. Mum had chosen to brighten his Christmas in the only way she knew how. Inside the box, Tom found his favorite chocolates, some butterscotch, tobacco for his pipe, and a sweater, obviously knitted by his Aunt Fiona.

The sweater made Tom smile. Only Fiona could create something this dreadful. She had obviously run out of wool numerous times, the colors in the sweater changing from red to gray to green. One

of the sleeves was longer than the other, and the neck was thin on one side and bulky on the other. Yet the wool was soft instead of scratchy, the sweater smelled of home, and Tom knew that it would keep him warm even if it got wet. He smiled as he slid it over his head, and climbed into an empty dugout. Curling into a ball, using all the relaxation he could muster, he somehow managed to fall asleep.

He awoke several hours later, with Fred shaking him violently. It was full dusk, the sky a thick velvety navy blue, the stars just beginning to appear between wispy, scattered, ghostlike clouds. It took a moment for Tom to realize that the cool night air was silent. Gone were the sounds of gunfire and grenades. He looked questioningly at Fred. "The barrage stopped several hours ago," Fred said, "and now... well, you're never going to believe it if I tell you, so you might as well come up and see it for yourself. Come on now, Tom, hurry up!"

Tom blinked the sleep from his eyes as he crawled from his shelter, feeling much better now that he had rested. He followed Fred to the front trench and peeked over the side. Thousands of eerie yet beautiful little lights illuminated the edge of the German parapets. "What *are* those?" said Tom in a loud whisper.

"They're Christmas trees!" exclaimed Fred. "The Germans began setting them up several hours ago, but they've just now begun to light the candles on their branches. Private Henshaw shot one of them down right after they put it up,



Thousands of eerie yet beautiful little lights illuminated the edge of the German parapets

but one of the Saxons climbed out of the trench to set it right again. A wilder thing I've never seen. He was in full view of our gunners. But there he was, plain as day, without a care in the world. It was almost as if he was daring us to shoot him!"

Suddenly, a beautiful sound filled the crisp night air. "The Jerries are *singing*," said Fred, his voice filled with awe. "*Stille Nacht*," that's 'Silent Night'!" Oddly enough, the hymn sent joy surging from Tom's heart right into his very soul. He felt happier and lighter than he had in months. He found himself singing softly, the tune the same but his words in English. More surprised than ever, he realized that others in his own trench were singing along as well. When the hymn was complete, applause rippled through the trenches on both sides.

Suddenly, without prior warning, the Germans began climbing *en masse* from their trenches. Some shouted out, "No shoot! No shoot!" their hands in the air, while others held up crudely lettered signs that read, "Happy Christmas." Everywhere Tom looked, the German troops were risking death to reach out to soldiers on the opposing side. A voice suddenly rang out of the darkness. "Englanders!" it cried, with a decidedly German accent. "Will you come out to meet us in No Man's Land?"

Thinking back on it, it wasn't something Tom consciously decided. Instead, his muscles seemed to act of their own accord. Before he knew it, he was out of the trench. Looking down, he realized that a

hard frost had frozen the ground, making the footing the most bearable it had been in months, and coating the landscape with glittering white crystals that sparkled in the moonlight as he'd seen crystal chandeliers do back home.

"Tom!" shouted his lieutenant from somewhere behind him. "What are you doing?! It's trickery, I tell you! It's got to be! Get back here before they kill you, man!" But as Tom walked slowly but steadily through No Man's Land, the enemy guns remained silent. He could see the men now, just beyond the barbed wire. Surprisingly, except for the difference in their uniforms, he was shocked to see that they looked no different than he did... they appeared to be young and tired, muddy and wet.

A tall, thin German approached him. "Are you the commanding officer?" he asked Tom, his English clear though accented. Tom found him difficult to understand. Not because of his accent, but because his teeth chattered as he spoke. Now and then, a thick, nasty cough rumbled from deep within his chest. Tom was about to reply when a voice behind him said, "No. I am. I am Lieutenant Bowers of the Third London Rifles, and this had better not be a trick!"

"It is no trick," the German replied softly. "We wish to offer you a truce. For the rest of Christmas Eve and all of Christmas Day, we will not fire if you do not fire." He looked down at the bodies scattered across No Man's Land. "It will give us a chance," he said, "to bury our

dead with dignity.”

And, thought Tom, to celebrate the holiday as it was meant to be celebrated: in peace.

The lieutenant looked thoughtful for a moment. Finally, he saluted. “Very good, sir,” he responded as they reached out to shake hands over the wire. The German smiled, but only for a moment. Then a fit of coughing wracked his body, causing him to turn away. As he began to return to his own side, Tom called out to him. The man stopped.

“How long have you been sick?” asked Tom.

The German sighed. “Forever,” he replied.

“You sound terrible,” said Tom.

The German chuckled, then paid for it with another bout of coughing. “I don’t feel quite as horrible as your sweater looks,” he said, his eyes smiling. “But it is hard during the war, is it not? Men get sick in the trenches, the woolen mills run out of dye and...” but the coughing had started up again and he couldn’t continue.

“This sweater’s not the work of the war at all,” said Tom, smiling himself now. “It’s my Aunt Fiona. She’s always been a bit daft, but her heart’s in the right place.”

“Ah,” replied the German, “a good heart is what matters. Look,” he said, pulling a tattered photo from his coat pocket. It showed a beautiful young woman, holding a grinning baby. “My family,” the man said softly. “My wife has a good heart as well. I cannot tell you how much I miss her and my little one. It is beginning to look

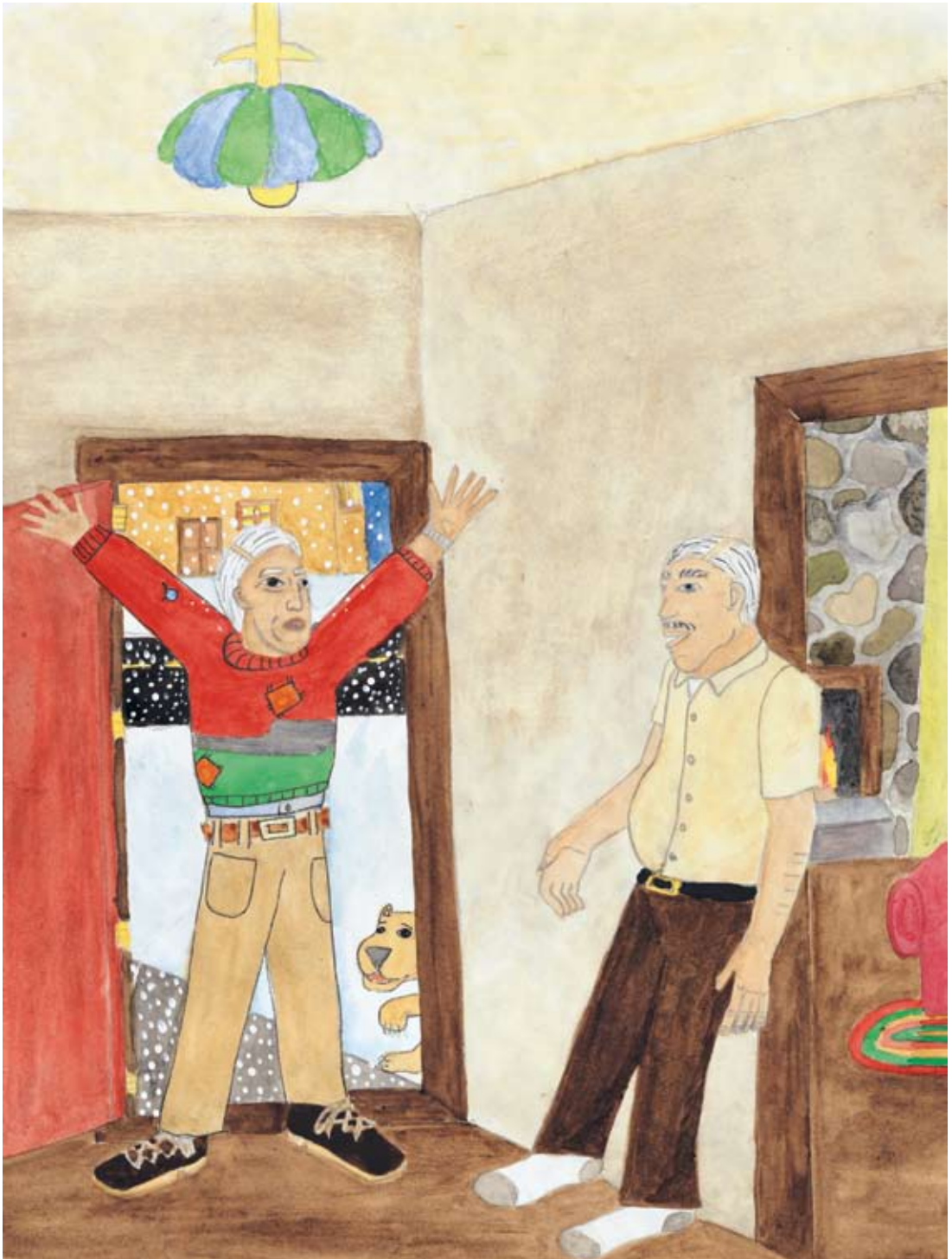
as if he will be all grown up by the time I get home.” They chatted for a while longer, while all around them other soldiers clustered in groups. Germans stood with British troops and both sides exchanged whatever they had to give—small gifts of canned meats, cigarettes, candies and cakes. Finally, after a particularly bad fit of coughing, the German said, “I must go.”

“Wait!” Tom said, more sharply than he intended, causing heads to turn all around them as men looked over to see what was going on. Tom carefully removed his new sweater, folded it with great care, and handed it to the German. “Merry Christmas,” he said. It is not pretty, but it will keep you warm. And it was made by a woman with a good heart,” he added, since he could think of nothing else positive to say about the ugly sweater. “Perhaps that means that it will bring you luck, and get you safely back home to your family.”

“I couldn’t possibly take it,” replied the German. “Your aunt made it just for you.”

“Yes,” replied Tom, “but you’re sick. She would have wanted you to have it.”

The German smiled gratefully. “*Danke*,” he said, as he slipped the sweater over his head. Then he pulled a small ledger and a pencil from his pocket. “Tell me your address,” he said, “and I will mail the sweater back to you after the war.” Since Tom still lived at home, he slowly recited his mother’s address. The German wrote it carefully in his book. When he was done, he touched Tom briefly on the shoulder, and then he was gone.



Tom could hardly believe his eyes. The man looked much different, but the sweater was the same

A LOUD RUCKUS brought Tom back to the present. Mack was barking insistently. Tom decided that he must need to go out. Heaving his seventy-year-old body up out of his chair, Tom headed for the door. He had, of course, never seen the sweater again, but that was all right. Tom only hoped that it was because the German had lost his address, or perhaps lost the sweater, or simply gotten too busy once he returned home to his family to think about sweaters or war or young men back in England. Tom did not like to think about the alternatives, that the soldier had possibly been killed in battle, or that the ominous cough had been some type of infection that had killed the man slowly over time. These thoughts made Tom shudder despite the warmth from the fire.

Reaching the door, Tom threw the bolt, letting Mack out into the cold. The dog charged forth into the darkness and the swirling snow. Closing the door, Tom leaned against it. He didn't want to go far because he knew that on a night like tonight, an old dog like Mack would want to come back in soon. As he waited, he looked once more at the tree in the corner. The light from the candles flickered

and danced, and would forever remind him of the magical night on the Western Front so many years ago.

Once more Mack began to bark, this time from outside. Tom opened the door to see not only the dog, but an ancient man with snow-white hair standing before him in a hideous wool sweater. "Englander!" shouted the man in a pronounced German accent. Tom could hardly believe his eyes. The man looked much different, but the sweater was the same. There was no mistaking Aunt Fiona's handiwork, old and tattered as it was. "My son is grown and gone," the man said, "and my wife died just last month. In going through her things, I found that old ledger with your address inside. With Christmas so near at hand and no family to share it with, I thought that I would come and return your sweater to you. It is about time, no?"

"Come in," said Tom. "May I interest you in a cup of tea?"

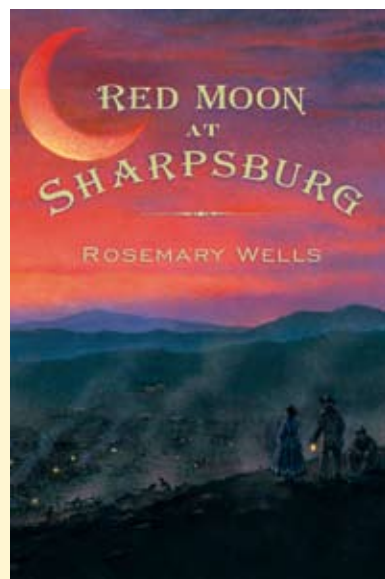
"I would love that," his friend replied.

"By the way, I never caught your name," said Tom, as the two of them walked into the kitchen to make tea and share another Christmas together. ❁

Book Review

By Nora Katz

Red Moon at Sharpsburg, by Rosemary Wells;
Viking Children's Books: New York, 2007;
\$16.99



Nora Katz, 13
Riegelsville, Pennsylvania


WHEN I FIRST GLANCED at the cover of *Red Moon at Sharpsburg*, by Rosemary Wells, the rich hues and hypnotic detail drew me in. A fire bursts out of the sunset as a young girl and two men look on, entranced. This fire burns deep inside India Moody, a fourteen-year-old girl caught up in the Civil War behind Rebel lines.

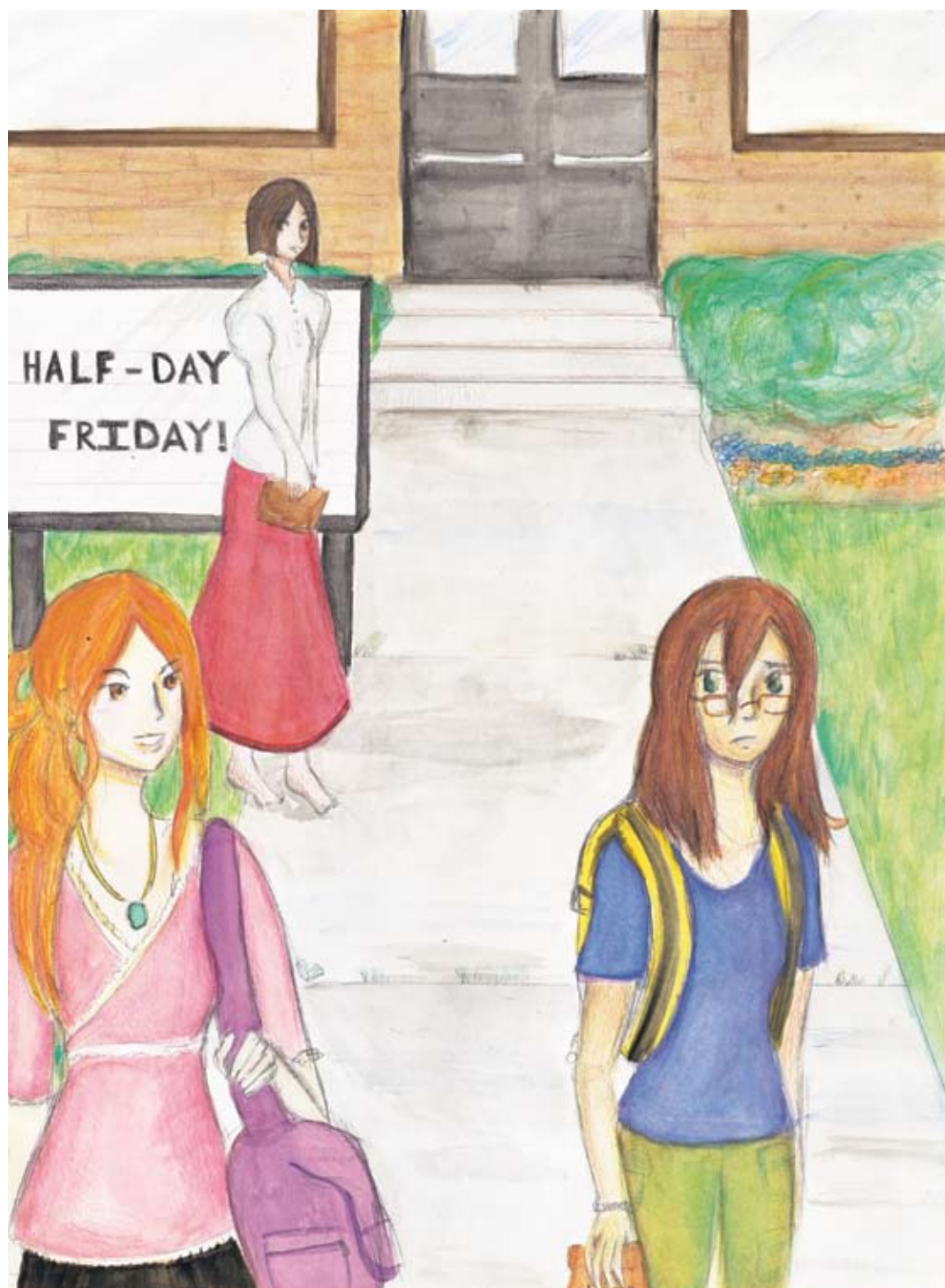
In a letter from a friend, India learns of a college in Ohio that accepts women. The story goes on to tell of India's survival in a male-dominated world, where women traditionally stay at home, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, and certainly not attending college. Many activities that I participate in, such as cross-country, are very dominated by males, so I share the struggles that India has as well. Reading about life in this time period makes me extremely glad that I live in a world that accepts women as equals.

Emory Trimble, the son of India's godparents, takes her in as a student, where she is supposed to learn feminine wiles and scripture. Instead, India is swept into Emory's studies, becoming interested in what her mother calls "men's science": chemistry. Fueled by her passion, India becomes Emory's assistant and spends more time in his laboratory than she does at home. India

and Emory have plans to publish a paper on popular European studies—medicine, bacteria, and disease. India transcribes Emory's letters and they prepare for a breakthrough in science that will have lasting impact and save millions of lives. India believes in the Rebel cause, yet she is primarily concerned with curing victims through preventative medicine. Because I am a believer in pacifism, I see myself working as India did, doing anything possible to help those affected by war, no matter which side they are on. I am glad that India had science on her side.

I have a lot in common with India Moody and Emory Trimble. India feels torn when she travels to see her father on the battlefield at Sharpsburg: timidity at what new experiences she may encounter, alongside courage and curiosity about what lies ahead. When I departed from my elementary school, I also felt like I was being torn in two. Part of me wanted to remain where I had been and been loved, but another part of me wanted to move on and see the great opportunities that were ahead of me. Emory decides to become an army medic so that he will be treated with respect. I try to gain respect by being courteous and by treating others kindly. I also try to gain respect while leading by example—doing well in school, having a role in a play, and participating in a chorus. At home, India uses her knowledge from Emory for the wounded, but she feels insecure without him by her side. I have often felt that insecurity when I am asked to do something without a strong companion.

Throughout the book, India tests her strength, perseverance, and allegiance as stability collapses, leaving her with only a few remnants of her old life. *Red Moon at Sharpsburg* is a story that will be cherished by readers of all ages. It is the telling of a life spun out of balance, a true test of loyalty, and a girl who witnessed the gruesome tragedies of the Civil War on the other side of the history books. 



"So," says Cheryl, "how have your precious drawings been going lately?"

Irah, the Princess

By **Lena Greenberg**

Illustrated by **Zoë Dong**

SHE IS LEANING against the school sign that reads “Half-Day Friday!” Her brown hair comes only to her chin. In her hand she carries a plain, brown book. I have never seen her before, but I know at once she is my friend.

“Kara, don’t forget your lunch bag,” my mother says from the front seat, jerking me from my thoughts. I nod, take it from her and start across the lawn.

“What did your mommy want, Kara?” Cheryl Reyes asks, striding over to me.

“None of your business.”

“So,” says Cheryl, “how have your precious drawings been going lately?”

“Leave me alone.” Cheryl knows I’m sensitive about my drawings; it’s my way of escaping from a world in which I am neither academically brilliant nor popular at school.

I turn to see the girl holding the book looking over at us. Cheryl sees her too and rolls her eyes.

“Who’s she?” I ask Cheryl.

“The new girl. She’s so ugly!”

I didn’t see how. She wasn’t a fashion model, but she had a kind smile.

“I- I don’t see...”

“Her clothes are old-fashioned, and did you see her feet? She’s barefoot!”

“Barefoot?” I follow Cheryl’s gaze, and I see that the new girl’s feet are naked.



Lena Greenberg, 10
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Zoë Dong, 12
Akron, Ohio

Cheryl sniffs. "She's weird." But when the bell rings, I notice that Cheryl is careful to avoid the new girl's eyes.

"CLASS, WE HAVE a new student today." I look up from my sketching to see Ms. Reynolds, our teacher. "I hope you will all treat her nicely. Would you like to come up and introduce yourself?"

The girl I saw on the playground looks up from her journal and nods. As she walks to the front of the room, I see that she is still barefoot. Ms. Reynolds notices as well. "Where are your shoes, please?"

"I left them at home," she says simply. Her voice is like music to me, but everyone else is sniggering. Ms. Reynolds is uncomfortable. Spitballs and loud students she is used to, but never a student forgetting his or her shoes.

"Um, well, OK. Try to remember them tomorrow, will you?"

"I promise," the girl says.

"All right. You may introduce yourself now."

The girl stands there, seeming oblivious to all the whispers and giggles. "My name is Irah Anders," she begins, but one of the boys interrupts.

"Irah—is that Italian or Japanese?" He laughs.

"My parents liked the sound of it, but it's short for Amirah, which means princess. I love to write. My favorite school subjects are literature..."

"Oh, you can't say plain English?"

"Rob Wilson," cuts in Mrs. Reynolds, but Irah finishes.

"...and princess training."

"Where's your tiara?"

"Yeah! Princess!" the class taunts, but I don't join in; instead I hide my face in my notebook.

The kids laugh. But Irah holds her head high, staring straight ahead with a mysterious smile on her lips.

"Yes, I am a princess," she says finally. The class goes silent. "A princess," she repeats. Cheryl forces out a laugh. Still Irah stands defiant.

Irah, the princess?

IT'S RECESS, my least favorite time of the day. Kids can tease me without having to be worried a teacher will catch them. And I've never been one for the playground equipment, the running, and the noise. The only thing that seems remotely interesting to me is the patch of woods right near the playground. I've always wanted to explore them, but I usually prefer to sketch, or else kids tease me instead. And sure enough, Cheryl and her friend Marianne corner me against the brick wall.

"So, what's up, Picasso?" says Cheryl.

"Nice clothes—hand-me-downs?" adds Marianne.

It's not the teasing that I mind so much. I'm used to the insults of middle-school girls. It's Cheryl, Cheryl who I'm afraid of, Cheryl, who I've never been able to stand up to. I can't stand it anymore. I push past them and run to the small patch of woods, faster than I've ever run. I run so fast and hard that I have no idea how

far I've been running until I stop, hearing a soft cry of surprise.

Something—or someone—jumps down from the tree overhead. Then I see her—hair messed and tangled now, but otherwise looking as she did in the classroom.

Irah, the princess.

She smiles at me with a mysterious, beautiful smile, reaches down, and pulls up an obscure little wildflower I'd never noticed before. One of the leaves is cracked and brown.

"This is a pretty one, don't you think?" she asks.

"Um, yeah." I want to ask a million questions, but I'm still too awkward with this barefoot princess girl.

"Here, do you want to hold it?" She hands it to me, cracked leaf and all. "Didn't I see you in Ms. Reynolds's class today?"

"Y-yes, I- I think you did."

"I thought so," she said. "What do you think?"

"Of what?"

"Of me."

I look puzzled for a moment until she explains.

"Whenever I meet another person, I like to check them out."

"What did you think of Cheryl?" I ask, preferring not to answer the original question.

"She is very nice," Irah says.

"I mean the one who laughed at you."

"I knew which one you meant, and my answer remains the same."

I don't quite understand, but I do not

want to press her.

"I saw you drawing earlier," she says. "It reminded me of what I imagine I look like writing. Writing and drawing are two of the best ways to express your feelings."

"Yes!" I say, excited that she understands. "But it is hard to do when I'm teased."

"People are ignorant when they tease others. But when you look past cruelty and differences, you will see beautiful people."

How I wish I could speak such wise words! My own words are clumsy stones.

"May I see some of your artwork?" Irah asks.

"Sure." I pull out one of my sketch pads from my backpack and show her the drawings. Each one tells a story, a story I thought I drew just for myself. But Irah looks over them, and her eyes light up. She understands.

I am sorry when we hear the bell. Recess is over.

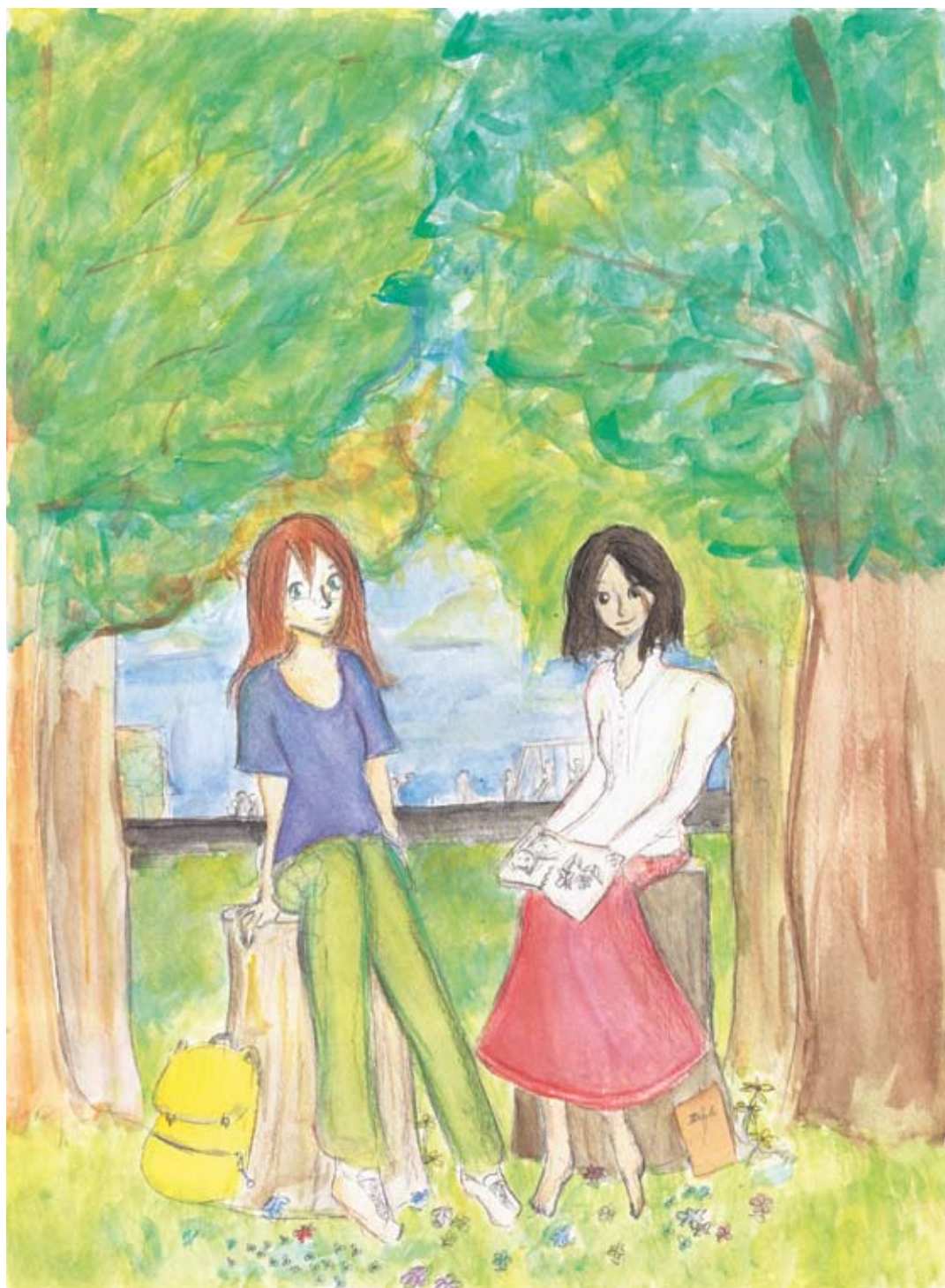
"Maybe we could meet here again tomorrow after school?" I ask.

Irah smiles. "Of course." Even her voice is like a princess, which reminds me of the class making fun of her.

"Are you really a princess?" I blurt out.

"Yes, I am," she says, smiling mysteriously before sliding off the stump, waving goodbye, and running ahead of me into the school building.

"WELL, LOOK who's here," says Cheryl the next day as Irah and I come off the bus together. "Picasso and



Irah looks over them, and her eyes light up. She understands

the princess!”

The “princess” eyes the girls without any kind of hatred. Instead, she smiles slightly before taking out her journal and leaning against the wall. I, “Picasso,” however, grow brick-red in the face.

When I see Irah, however, I suddenly remember what she said the other day in the woods, about Cheryl being “very nice.” What did that mean? I wasn’t sure. But all I knew was that if a princess could think Cheryl was very nice, I could too.

AFTER THAT DAY, something has changed. Irah is the reason I don’t daydream in class, and I don’t dread every school day. But there’s something else, and I’m sure it’s something that happens when Irah and Cheryl happen to catch each other’s eye. Cheryl has been hateful when she’s with her friends, Irah forgiving, but when Cheryl is alone, they can look each other in the eye as equals. And when Irah and I go into the patch of woods every day at recess, I feel fearless. I have a friend. She understands my artwork. We play together in the woods, when only the forest can see us holding hands together.

But not everything at school is perfect. The others, led by Cheryl, taunt Irah when they happen to get a peek at her lunch.

“Is that dried seaweed?” teases Cheryl. Irah only smiles slightly and proceeds to eat it. But I worry. I know that in the company of her friends, Cheryl will not dare be nice to her, or me.

In fact, the teasing is worse now. It’s

bad enough I was weird before. But now, being seen with another weird girl is even worse. I wish I could somehow be able to be friends with Irah without being teased for it...

IT IS ALMOST summer break, and I am glad. Going to school keeps my nerves on edge, and it’s lunchtime, a vulnerable time for me.

Just then Irah sits down at my table. “Hi, Kara.”

I can see Cheryl, just a table over from us. The only thing that could save me from her teasing is starting to tease Irah.

Cheryl leans over to my table and says in a stage whisper, so Irah can hear, “You aren’t friends with that barefoot girl, are you?”

I wish I could ignore her, as Irah would. But I can’t. If I stand up for my friend, the one who brought so much happiness into my life, I will be teased. I will be as weird as the girl who goes barefoot. But if I don’t stand up for her, then I will not be a good friend.

“I didn’t quite catch that,” Cheryl says, waiting.

“No, I’m not her friend,” I mumble.

What? What did I say? I can’t imagine that I, Kara Haley, gave in to Cheryl and betrayed my friend. But I have. And I can’t undo it. I blink back tears. Cheryl slides back into her seat triumphantly. Irah, on the other hand, looks at me for an instant, smiling her mysterious smile, and then leaves.

Irah, the princess.

IRAH DOES NOT show up in class for the rest of the day.

I cannot concentrate on school. The numbers and letters blur together into one confusing shape. I only think of Irah, and how I have hurt her. I hope that maybe tomorrow she will be back in school. But she is absent.

After school, I go back to the patch of woods, hoping that maybe Irah will magically appear to reassure me. I find no sign of her. Finally, Ms. Reynolds brings us news in class.

"You all remember Irah Anders," she says. "She is moving, out of the district."

Irah is leaving. Is it my fault? There's only one way to find out.

I know where I'm going after school today.

IRUN OUT OF the schoolyard as fast as I can. I don't know when Irah leaves, or if she's already left.

But Cheryl blocks my path.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?"

For the first time ever, I look her straight in the eye and say, "To Irah's house." Then I run.

Once Irah told me where she lived, 12 Evers Lane. I must go there. People look at me as I run past, but I don't mind.

As I reach Evers Lane—8 Evers, 10 Evers—I know it is all pointless. The curtains are closed on 12 Evers. I know no one is at home.

She's gone.

The whitewashed houses all look the same. *How could Irah live here?* I wonder.

The houses look too ordinary for her grand palace. The yards are too small.

But as I draw closer, I see a package on the porch of 12 Evers. A small envelope with "For Kara" sits on top of it. The package says, "For My Classmates."

For us? For me? The ones who teased her? The one who betrayed her?

I leave slowly now, carrying Irah's box. I want to see what she left us, but I don't have the courage to look yet.

Closer to home, I approach the small patch of woods by school, where Irah and I would sit on that old stump and play, show artwork, and talk together. Had I realized, then, how lucky I was to be sitting with a princess?

I take out the envelope first and open it to see a letter.

Dear Kara,

How cruel it is we had so little time together! I am writing this quickly because my mother just told me bittersweet news—we are leaving for my father's kingdom in a few days. I am happy to be going back home, but sad to be leaving my friends here, especially you and Cheryl. You two taught me that life is not always a fairy tale, a valuable lesson, harsh, but valuable all the same. You both welcomed me in different, but just as special ways.

I know everyone wanted to know if I was a princess. I am, and my mother and father are queen and king. Our kingdom is built on the strength of imagination. Imagination leads us to believe wonders, doesn't it?

Anyway, thank you for your friendship,

Kara. I have enclosed something for you and your classmates to share—I hope you like it.

Your loyal friend,
Irah, the princess

We helped her understand about reality? I thought she understood everything. But under it all she was just a girl, like Cheryl and I were girls. She wasn't a magical spirit. All she did was look past differences and see people underneath, like I was seeing her now, not as a magical creature, just as a friend. But that was all I had wanted—a friend.

I unwrap the package next, and find a small homemade book titled *Poetry*, by Irah Anders.

Tears well up in my eyes as I flip through the book made of homemade paper with pressed flowers.

Suddenly I hear a rustle of the leaves and a crack of a stick. Cheryl emerges, shame-faced.

"Oh, Cheryl."

"Did you catch Irah at her house?" she

asks hopefully.

Just by looking at my face she can tell the answer.

"She left us this book," I say, holding it out to her.

Cheryl looks up. "She—she did? For you, right?"

"No," I say, "for all of us."

Cheryl stares at me for a moment and then says, "You read it."

So I choose a poem:

Forgotten bird
Too small for flying
Left behind for winter
I'll take care of you
Even though you're different
You will become a princess soon.

"Hey, Cheryl!" calls one of Cheryl's friends. "What are you doing in the woods? Let's go to the mall!"

Cheryl shakes her head. She doesn't care about the mall. The friend sits down on one of the stumps as more and more people come toward us, drawn at first to Cheryl, then someone else.

Irah, the princess.



One Night in Autumn

By Rhiannon Grodnik



Rhiannon Grodnik, 12
San Francisco, California

The wind
Is blowing strongly into my face.
It feels good.
I close my eyes and lie back
In the wet grass.

It is dark out and everyone else is sleeping.
Everyone but me.
It's a nice feeling, being alone
Out here.

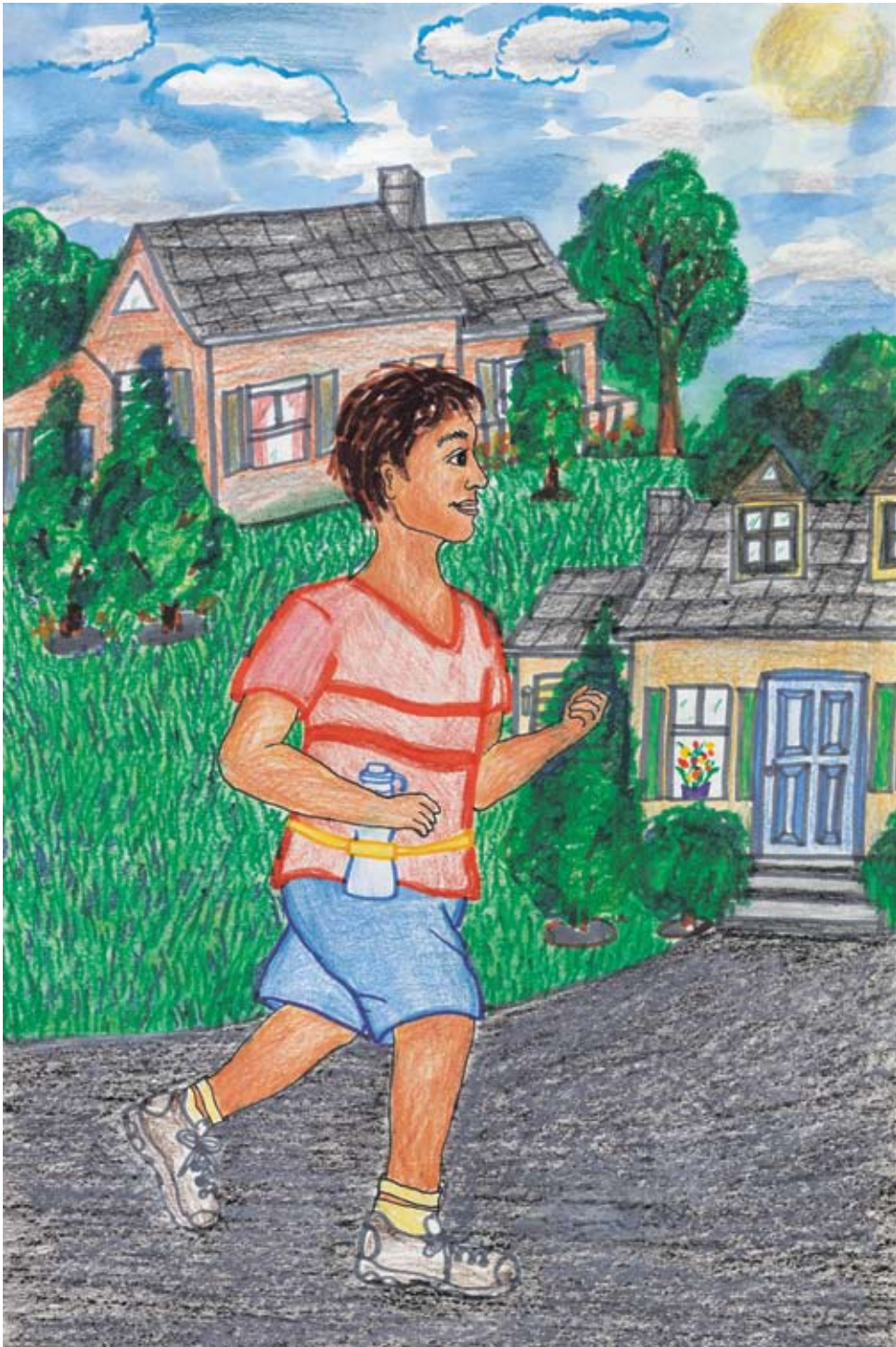
Ticktock.
I hear the sounds of my watch,
Every second, every minute.
Why does my watch have to remind
Me of the time passing?
It was nice to forget
About time.

Always people are so busy,
They never have time to think
About who they are
And who they want to be.

Am I really here, all alone, so close to my home,
Yet so far?
Is this a dream?
Everything that happened and everything that will happen
Rides away on the wind—
Up, up it goes
Past the moon and into infinity.

Dawn creeps in on me and I quietly let myself
In through the back door.
I tiptoe up the stairs into my bedroom—
Like a burglar in my own house.

Safe in my bed again,
I pretend I'm sleeping.
No one will ever guess where I was that autumn night—
But I will never forget it.



Jacky kept a steady pace, enjoying the scenery around his neighborhood

Bowl of Strawberries

By **Andrew Lee**

Illustrated by **Chasen Shao**

JACKY KEPT A STEADY PACE, enjoying the scenery around his neighborhood. His old, worn sneakers kissed the asphalt every time he took a stride. The sun was out, and clouds scattered the sky like the stuffing from a ripped pillow. Jack felt his heart pound in line with his breathing. His legs slowly relaxed as Jack continued on his run. It was good to be alive and moving.

As he approached his house, Jack slowed to a jog and stopped on the front lawn. He sat down and stretched, easing the muscle he had just warmed up. The grass felt cool against his thighs. He took a sip from his water bottle, stretched some more, and walked inside.

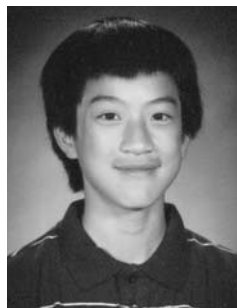
“How was your run, Jack?” Jack’s mother greeted him. “Was it hot out?”

“It was fine, Mom.”

“Well, it’s nice to know that you’re not wasting this beautiful day.”

Jack’s mom had dark brown hair that matched her eyes, with a serious smile that radiated her affection for her kids.

Jack plopped down at the kitchen table. Grabbing an apple, he opened the track-and-field magazine his grandfather had given him. It was a collection of a bunch of neat articles about the different events in track and field, tips for staying fit, and how to have a healthy diet. His grandfather had given it to him as a birthday present, knowing that Jack had recently made his school’s track-and-field team.



Andrew Lee, 13
DeWitt, New York



Chasen Shao, 11
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

"Hey, Mom? When's my next meet?"

"I wouldn't know, honey. Why don't you go check the calendar? I'm sure it's sometime this week."

Jack smiled. He threw the apple core into the trash and walked to the family calendar, tracing his finger over the paper.

"Hmm. My practice on Monday goes until 5:15 this week, Mom. My meet is on Tuesday. You're all coming, right?"

Jack's mom came into the room, wiping her hands on her kitchen apron. "This Tuesday? I'm sorry, Jack, I forgot to tell you. Grandpa said he wasn't feeling well these past few days. I have to go stay with Grandpa on Tuesday, but I think your dad might be able to come. I'm sorry about your meet, but your grandpa will have to go some other time."

"What's wrong with Grandpa?" Jack looked at his mother. "Is he all right?"

"Yes. He's just feeling a little ill. He complains that his ankle hurts more than usual. Why don't you go visit him after practice tomorrow? You could run there, and I'm sure Grandma will be happy to see you too."

"OH, IS THAT what she said, ill and not feeling well?" Jack's grandpa chuckled the next day. "I'm as fit as a violin."

When Jack gave his grandpa an odd look his grandpa merely said, "I never really liked fiddles."

"I just have to stay in bed for a few days. My doctor said my ankle's acting up again. Nice of you to come though, Jack."

Jack put his backpack down, relieved at seeing his grandpa so well.

"Good to see you too, Grandpa. I'll have Dad tape our meet for you."

"Your meet on Tuesday? I haven't forgotten, you know, but I'm sorry I won't be able to come. But you know what? I used to be on the track-and-field team too, back in high school."

"Really?" Jack looked surprised. "You never told me that, Grandpa."

"I haven't now? Didn't I ever tell you how I busted my ankle?"

Jack shook his head no.

"Well. It was a very long time ago. My junior year, I think. I had joined the track-and-field team and was as excited as ever for our last meet. Let's see now. I was doing the long jump and the 400-meter dash. Huh, I never was good at jumping." Jack's grandpa sat up higher in his bed.

"My baby was definitely the 400-meter dash. Fastest on the team, I think, except for maybe the few seniors that were too lazy to sprint more than 200 meters. I was pumped that day, expecting to break my personal record."

"Did you?" Jack asked.

"Well, almost." His grandpa gave a sigh of disappointment. "I was coming around that last bend for the straightaway when I saw one of the runners from the other school gaining on me. I sprinted as fast as I could, but he kept on getting closer. I was about 50 meters away from the finish line when he closed in to just a pace behind me. Suddenly, I felt something clip my heel, causing my right leg to buckle. I

tripped and fell hard onto the track. I tell you, it wasn't pretty."

"He tripped you?" Jack was indignant. "That guy should have been disqualified!"

"No one ever proved anything, and the official wasn't exactly paying attention," explained Jack's grandpa. "Heck, I don't even know myself. I might've tripped myself by accident. But I learned to accept it over time. After all, if life throws mushy apples at you, you can always make applesauce. Anyway, I twisted my ankle and felt a deep pop. Heard it, more like. I didn't feel the pain until five seconds later, sprawled there on the track. The people had to call 911 for a stretcher to bring me to the emergency room. Well, I could still walk then, but I had to be extremely careful. In my old age now it's been bothering me more and more. I spend so much time in bed now I wish I could have just finished that last race. If I had kept my lead over that kid and ended the race, I would still be up and walking now."

Jack looked in wonderment at the determined look on his grandpa's face. "The 400-meter dash? I'm doing that for Tuesday too, Grandpa!"

"Really now? Well, good luck, Jack. I wish I could watch, but I'm still expecting great things from you." His grandpa beamed at him.

"I'll win the race just for you, Grandpa. I promise."

JACK'S HEART thumped in his chest as he gulped. He repeated those words he had said to his grandpa just yester-

day in his head. The day of the meet had come.

He was standing on the field, watching the events before him. The meet had started with hurdles, then proceeded to the 200-meter dash and 1500-meter run. Already Jack felt his heartbeat speed up. His hands started to sweat as he gripped the bar of the bleachers. Watching his teammates perform so well made him even more determined to win the 400-meter dash.

The gun for the 100-meter dash rang out, and the flurry of sprinters took off. Jack watched as they pounded the track, pumping their arms and breathing wildly. They stumbled across the finish line, panting and gasping for breath. People cheered for their friends. And then it was Jack's turn.

"Calling all 400-meter runners. 400-meter runners, first call." The official spoke into his microphone, then loaded his gun with another blank.

Jack stepped out into the track, balancing his feet in his new racing flats. He felt light and full of energy. Almost feeling faint with a mixture of excitement and nervousness, he took his position in lane three.

"Calling all 400-meter runners. 400-meter runners, final call."

Jack stretched, took a deep breath, and shook out his legs. The runners from the other schools lined up in the lanes on either side of him.

The official came up to them for a brief explanation of the rules. Jack nodded

dumbly. The official stretched the runners along the stagger positions for lanes two through six. He walked out of the way and held up his gun.

"Runners to your marks!"

Jack spread his feet apart, leaning forward.

"Get set!"

He tensed.

"Bang!" The starter gun went off.

Jack's stomach leapt to his throat. And then he was off, sparks flying off his feet. He sprinted fast to gain a bit of lead. Jack concentrated on his pace as he rounded the first curve. Now the race was just him, the track, and his own fatigue. Jack fought the tiredness that seeped through his muscles as he dogged ahead of his opponents. He strove to stay ahead as he coasted down the second hundred meters of the track.

Jack's feet pounded the ground as his breathing became hard and labored. His lungs were giving way. But Jack still did not give up. He saw the runner on his left inching his way up to him. How did he catch up? Jack increased his pace, sprinting for all he was worth.

Jack thought of his grandpa. He thought of the promise he had made to win the race for him. Jack's chest screamed as he continued his mad pace, but Jack's mind screamed back in defiance. He felt his feet burn as they dug into the shoes.

And now the runner to his left was gaining as the second curve played the advantage to the inside lane.

Jack felt his feet falter. His arms turned to stone as his oxygen-deprived muscles started to shut down. The man on his left started to pass him. Jack's heart cried out. His grandpa would be disappointed.

But Jack was not done yet. Determined, he gritted his teeth, ignored his pain, and willed his feet to turn faster. The straight-away for the last 100 meters loomed up.

Jack imagined his grandpa tripping, the ankle snapping. He closed his eyes and ran as fast as he ever had. The soles of his shoes seemed to be burning off. The finish line was getting closer, but Jack knew he couldn't let up. The man to his left was neck-and-neck with him. At the last few meters, Jack summoned all his energy into the final strides, breaking the finish line just as his body gave up.

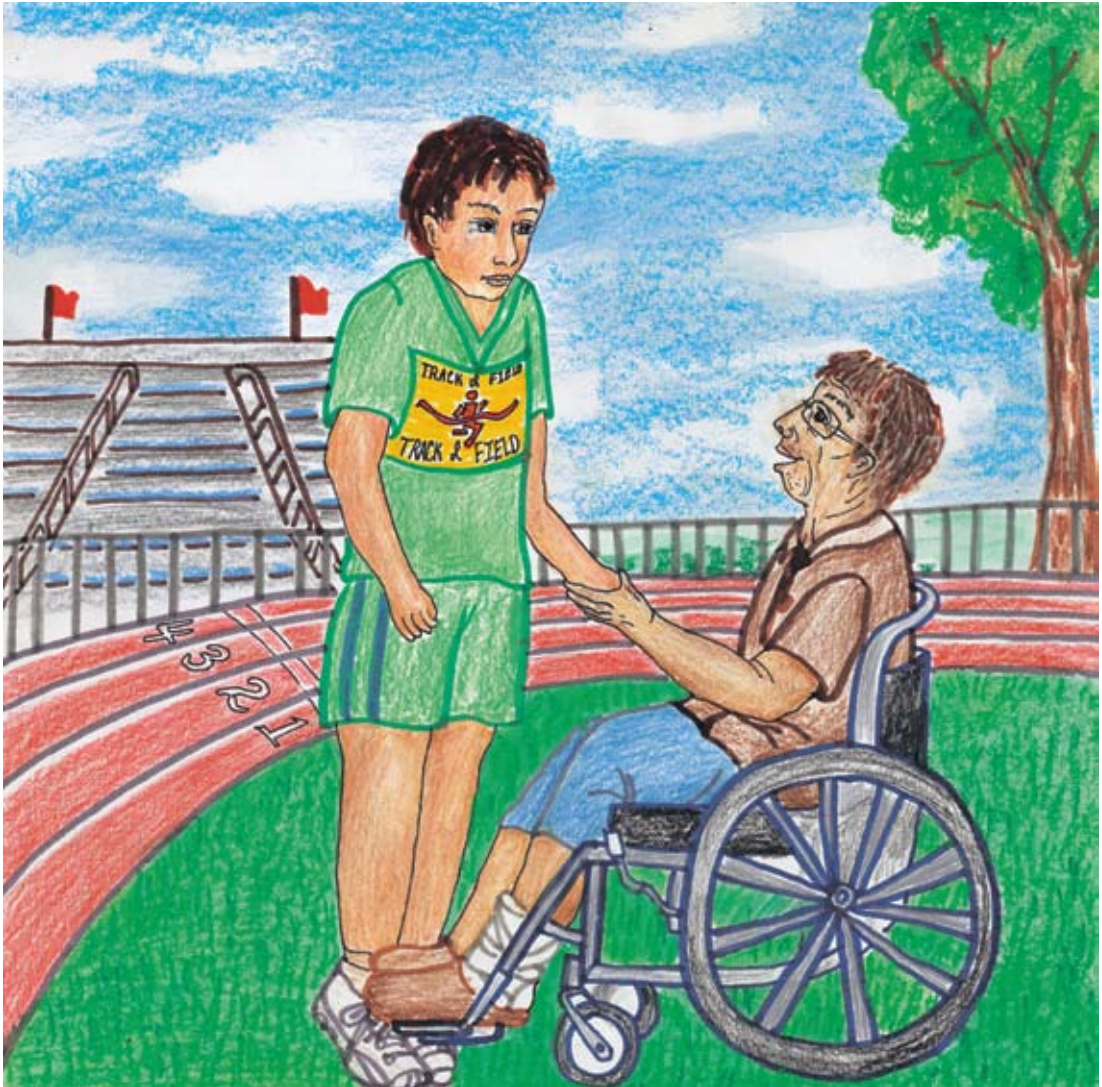
But it had not been enough.

He stumbled, and then crashed. Jack heaved as his chest strived for oxygen. The track was hot, and he lifted his face. Second place. Jack felt as if he had failed. Everything was blinding. He saw dark, and a crazy, dizzying feeling swallowed his mind. All he could think of was the promise he had made to his grandpa. Second place. But suddenly, his grandpa appeared in his dream.

"Grandpa?"

Jack's vision cleared and he saw his grandpa in a wheelchair next to him on the grass. "Is that really you?"

"You bet it is," said his grandpa cheerfully. "I was feeling chipper so I decided to persuade your mom into hightailing down to your meet. That was a nice race, Jack."



Jack felt tears spring to his eyes. "But I lost, Grandpa. I promised you I would win"

Jack felt tears spring to his eyes. "But I lost, Grandpa. I promised you I would win."

He sobbed, grief overcoming his exhausted body. He saw a few parents staring, but he didn't care.

"Jack." His grandpa looked him straight in the eye. "I'm proud of you. Never for-

get that. I wanted to come to thank you personally for finishing my race. I owe that to you. You did well to place second. And now I want you to enjoy it. Life's just a bowl of strawberries, you know."

Jack smiled through his tears. His grandpa was right. It had been a good race.



Silence Is Golden

By Aviva Leshaw

Illustrated by Sarah Jessica Osburn

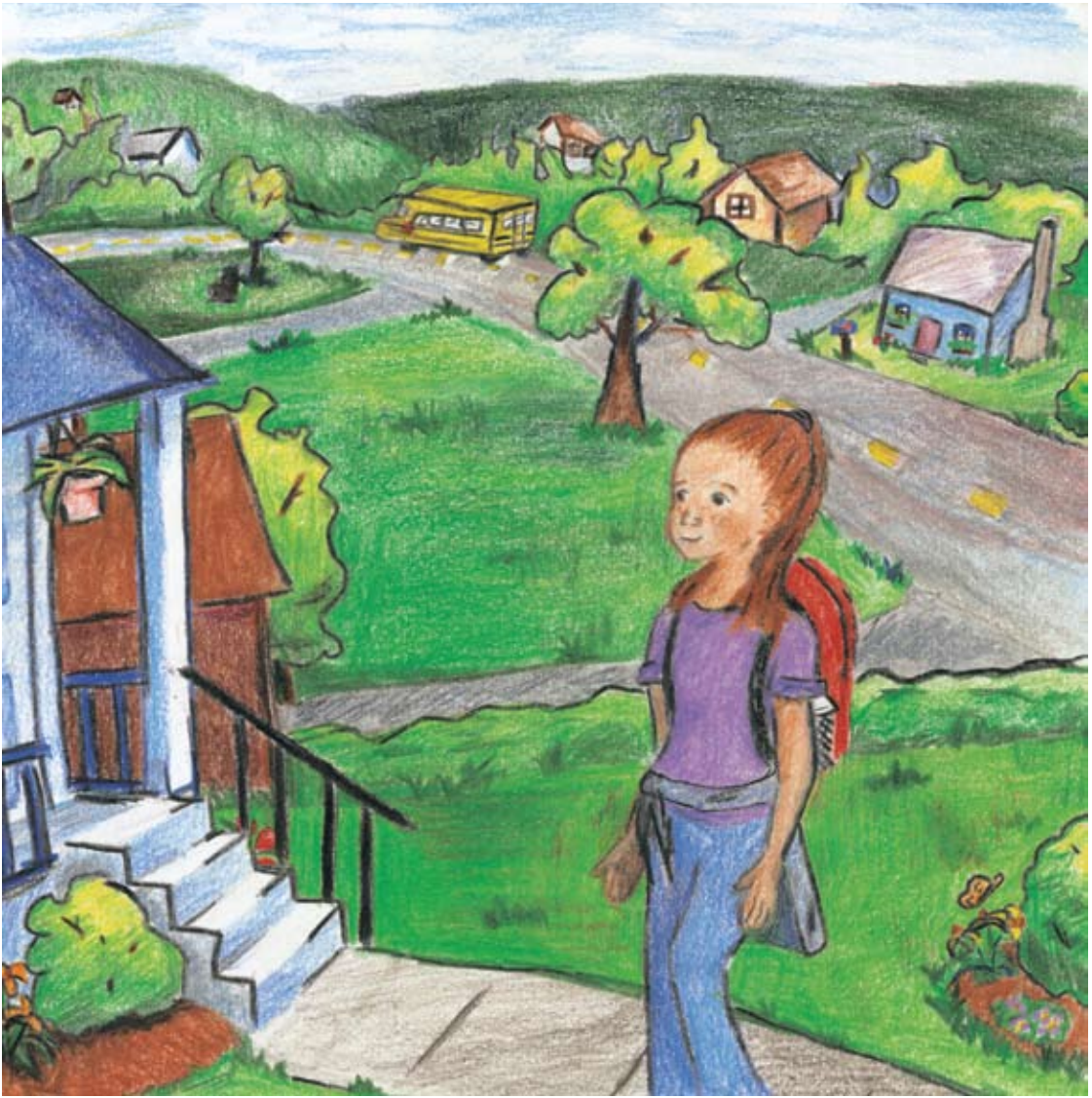


Aviva Leshaw, 13
Teaneck, New Jersey



Sarah Jessica Osburn, 12
Lindley, New York

EVERY DAY, WHEN I arrive home, I step off the bus after chatting loudly with my friends. The bus engine roars, and the passengers' voices swell, and then the wheels begin to turn. And I watch over my shoulder as I walk up the drive. The bus shrinks in size as it trundles down the tree-lined street. And now, the only things heard are the faint sound of my shoes on the concrete or a squirrel pawing at the ground for an acorn. As I walk up the steps, I fish for the key in my bag, find it, and with a satisfying "click," open the lock. Once inside my house, I kick off my shoes and put down my bag. I walk towards the kitchen, now dark and empty. With the flip of a switch, the room is flooded with light and the little blue tiles on the wall twinkle. I stand in the middle, surveying my surroundings. At this time, every day, I realize something. I realize that, though I am alone, and all is quiet and still, the world outside still goes on. I can stop and stare at the plastic carrot magnet on the fridge for an hour, seemingly going nowhere, pausing time and space, but no! Other things happen, the universe progresses, time continues... Ken across the street finishes mowing his lawn and the Mougins girls begin a game of baseball in their front yard. Three blocks away, the pizza place cashier rings up a mushroom slice as a gum ball zigzags through a maze into a child's hand. Many, many miles away, a little blond pigtailed girl is celebrating her birthday, and an old woman holds her daughter's hand in a sterile, white hospital ward. An airplane takes flight, another one lands, the president signs a



The bus shrinks in size as it trundles down the tree-lined street

document, and an audience erupts into applause. And yet, all the while, I stand in my quiet little blue-tiled kitchen, the silence enveloping me.

And at that moment, I may not be adorned with diamond rings and bracelets, but I am the richest person in the world. Why? Because silence is golden. ❁

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