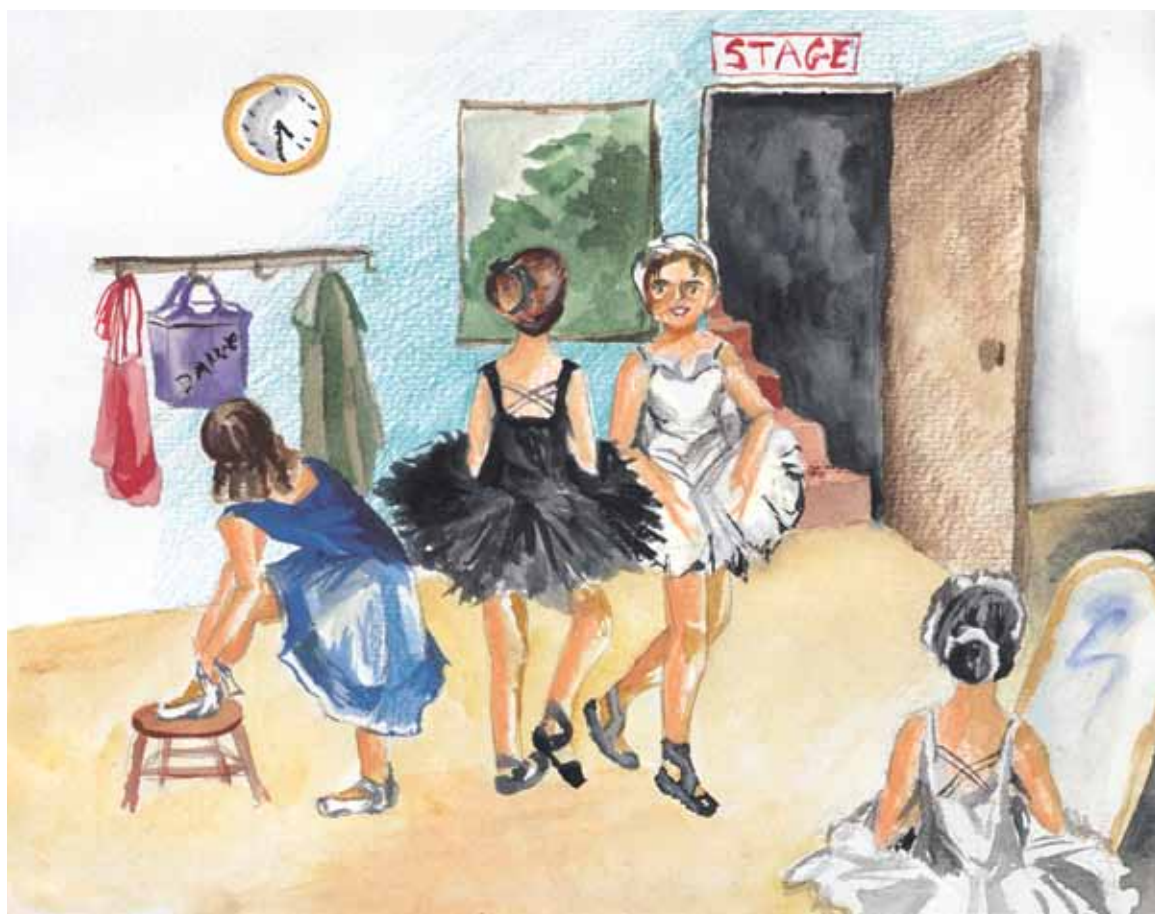


# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*Illustration by Daria Lugina, age 12, from "To Be a Swan," page 35*

## THE BLUEBERRY FAMILY

Jessie clings to the past, while her older sister wants to move on

## TO BE A SWAN

Sydney wishes with all her heart to be Odette in Swan Lake

MARCH/APRIL 2009

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 4

MARCH / APRIL 2009

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GERRY MANDEL  
WILLIAM RUBEL

Editors



NIKKI HOWE

Subscriptions



STACI SAMBOL

Design and Production



BARBARA HARKER

Administrative Assistant

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

**W**ELCOME 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](http://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, phone number and e-mail.

**Cover:** Talented artist Daria Lugina, one of *Stone Soup's* regular illustrators, has been drawing for as long as she can remember. She won the Massachusetts School Library Association bookmark contest for Division III last year. Daria's parents are from Russia; she has a twin brother, Arthemey, and "a very cute awesome cat," Liapa.

# The Mailbox



Your magazine is one of my favorites and includes art and writing that fascinate me!

**CALEB CLAYTON, 10**  
*Deltona, Florida*

A story to me is like a river: you never know when it's going to stop or get better, or completely change direction. When you read a story from someone else's thoughts, it's like you are almost in *their* river, and you are carried by the current into a pond—this is where the story ends—or a lake, and at this moment, you let out your feelings about the story, and so the pond becomes yours to share with other people who flow with the river. *Stone Soup* is wonderful because it allows the average person to express his or her feelings in a way of his own. Catherine Babikian did this in “A Different Kind of Light” [September/October 2008], showing her sorrow for death. Even if this never happened to her, she's Amy and she's feeling the pain of losing her mother, and so Catherine explains how she feels with the excellent story. “Our Morning” [July/August 2008] is one of my favorite stories because I love how Bonnie Cruser showed the happiness in herself as she rode her horse: “our spirits are rejoicing and the wind is whipping us into immortals.” The art was also beautiful, and inspiring. I've noticed, though, that there are some writers that stand out in the crowd. William Gwaltney is an “imaginary” writer. His stories give *Stone Soup* a twist, and really make all the different words by all these different people flow together in a never-ending sea. When I look at *Stone Soup*, I see something really nice. It's like a big field of flowers, and every flower is different, and special, and grows in its very own speed. Amazing.

**TABATA VISO, 12**  
*Seattle, Washington*

I wanted to write and thank Anna West Ellis for her beautiful and thoughtful review of my novel, *Louisiana's Song* [November/December 2008]. I have heard from so many people who now have read the review and took the time to write to me. My agent couldn't believe she was only eleven. It's the most sensitive and thoughtful review of any of my books. Thank you very much for your beautiful magazine. I do a lot of writing workshops with kids, and I always encourage them to submit to *Stone Soup*.

**KERRY MADDEN, AUTHOR**  
*Los Angeles, California*

I have been reading your magazine for several years and really enjoy it. Usually I read the whole magazine the first day I receive it.

**MILO KELLER, 13**  
*Graton, California*

I want to thank Leah Wolfe who wrote the book review for *Hurt Go Happy* [May/June 2008]. I don't usually read book reviews, but for some reason I read this one. Then I asked my mom to look for it. She got the book and I read it. I really liked it. It made me cry a few times, but I still liked the book a lot. Thank you, Leah. I am recommending this book to my school's library.

**RACHEL SILVERBERG, 9**  
*Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada*

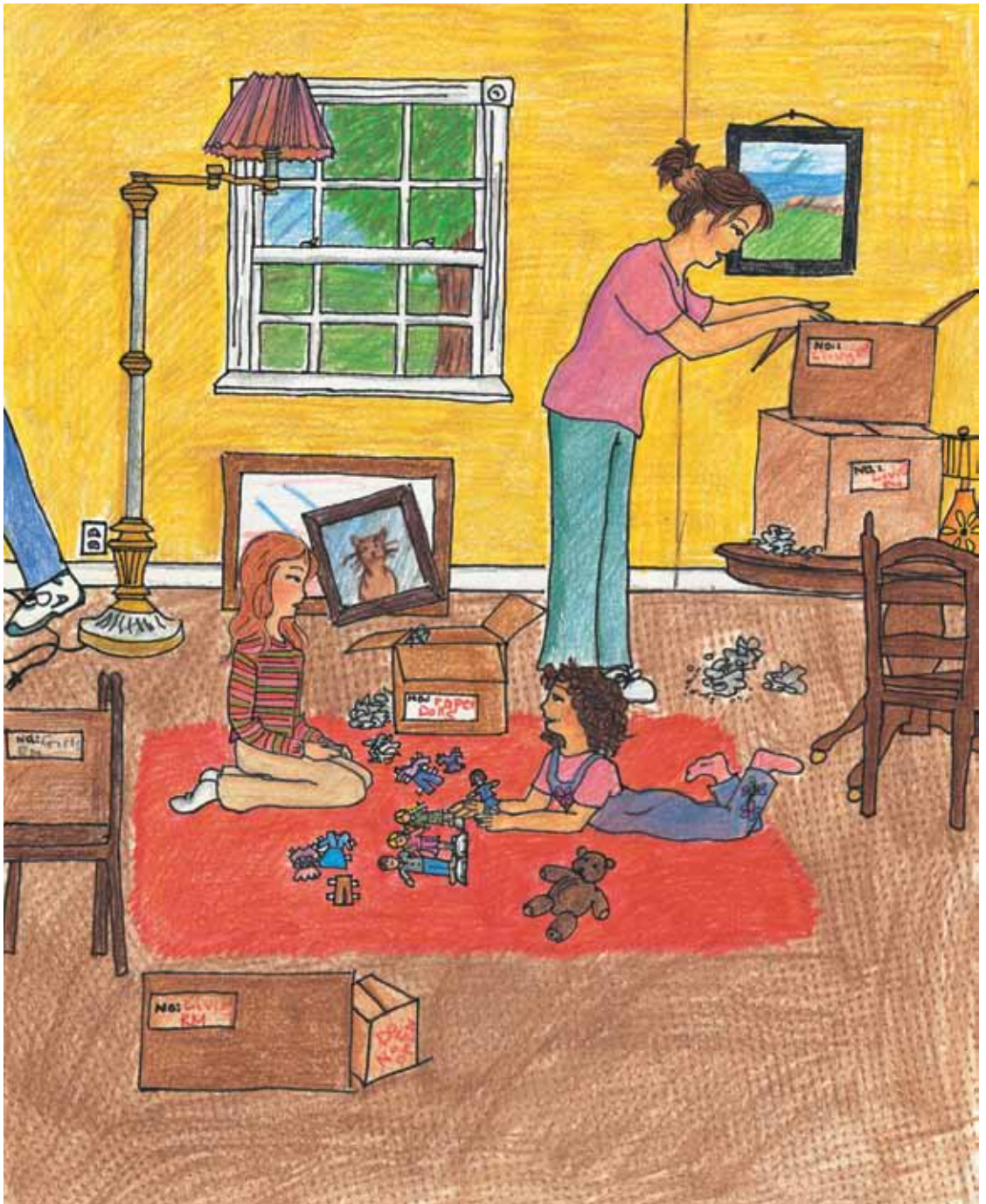
*Leah's new review is on page 16 of this issue.*

**Corrections:** Keysun Mokhtarzadeh, who illustrated “The Forgotten Fort” in the January/February 2009 issue, is from Tehran, Iran. On the cover of the same issue, muskrat was misspelled.

*You can find all the work mentioned in The Mailbox at [stonesoup.com](http://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, birthdate, home address, phone number and e-mail.





*"Allie, play with me?" the little girl, Jessie, said*

# The Blueberry Family

By **Lena Greenberg**

*Illustrated by* **Laney Haskell**

**T**WO GIRLS SAT on a small, colorful carpet in the living room of their new house. The older one, a lanky seven-year-old redhead, sat up tall and poised, her feet tucked underneath her. The younger one, a chubby four-year-old with brown curls, was sprawled out on her stomach, paper dolls scattered around her.

"Allie, play with me?" the little girl, Jessie, said. She was tired of all the moving boxes, and her parents' distraction. Unfortunately, her parents loved moving and did it frequently, due to both their work, their spirit for adventure, and restlessness. But playing with her sister, the gorgeous, poised Allison, would make up for it.

Allison smiled. "OK. Do you want to play with these paper dolls or with the new game Mommy brought us?"

The little girl scrunched up her face in concentration. "Paper dolls," she decided.

"OK," Allison said. "Now, who do you want to be?"

"It's a family," Jessie said. "I'm the oldest child, um... Andrea."

Allison giggled. "And I'm the youngest child, Jenna. What's their last name?"

"Um... Blueberry!" Jessie said, remembering the fresh, sweet berries they had tasted when they lived in Maine.

Allison sighed. "That isn't a real name. What about... Smith or something?"

"No. Blueberry," Jessie said, still able to savor the sweet berry.

"OK, Blueberry it is."



Lena Greenberg, 11  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Laney Haskell, 12  
Powell, Tennessee

And so the Blueberry Family was born.

**I** KNEEL ON the hardwood floor, peering into a moving box with the set of paper dolls we used as the Blueberry Family. Allison and I are helping unpack in our new Connecticut home. I take out the packet of paper dolls and smile as I hold it up to Allison.

"Hey Allison, remember these?" I call out, but Allison continues unpacking. Silent. I sigh and look down at the packet. I had actually never forgotten the Blueberry Family, where I was the bossy older sister and Allison the cute younger sister. Allison and I shared a brilliant imagination despite our three-year age difference. The story we made up was magical: in the Blueberry Family's world, Jenna and Andrea lived at a magic amusement park near a blueberry field with their parents. At night, after everyone had left the park, the Blueberry Family tried out all the rides and even slept on the Ferris wheel. Sometimes Allison would draw pictures, illustrating our Blueberry Family stories. The Blueberry Family kept me stable through all our moves.

"Allison?" I say again, louder. "Remember the Blueberry Family? Maybe we could play with them again one of these days? Hey, remember that one story we played with them when the merry-go-round..."

She sighs. "Look, Jessie, I liked playing with you and everything, but we're older now and I think we need to find our own friends."

I feel numb with hurt.

True, I had seen it coming. The graceful, poised, child Allison has grown into an outgoing, social fifteen-year-old Allison, who isn't interested in me. Once I had adored her, and that felt special, now it seems everyone adores her. Allison gets better and better at making friends, while I continually struggle to find just one. Worst of all, she's too old for magic amusement parks and paper-doll families.

One of the things I used to admire in Allison was her unique way of thinking, so unlike all the other kids her age. When she was nine, she told me that she never believed in magic as in flying, but magic as in friendship. Even as a six-year-old I recognized the wisdom and sophistication of the statement. But she hasn't said anything like that for a while.

I leave the room. She doesn't seem to notice.

"Jessica?" My mom looks over the staircase to see me. "Look at this house, Jessica. Can't you just feel the spirit?" She takes a deep breath.

I don't respond.

"No? Well, you will, soon enough. There's everything we need here. This is a wonderful town. This is where we'll stay."

Even though she says that every time, it gives me a boost just to hear it. Maybe Connecticut will be different. Maybe I'll find lots of friends here, more than Allison. Maybe I'll find a secret door leading to a magic amusement park... I'm not too old for those kinds of dreams.

"Donna, you can't promise that," my



father says, stepping over a moving box. The living room is cluttered with them.

"Why not?" she demands.

"Because of my job, and besides, that's just the way we are," Dad says.

I sigh and edge back up the stairs.

ON THE FIRST DAY of school, I decide to bike there instead of taking the bus. I want to be away from the prying eyes of children who tease newcomers.

"So I'll see you later," I say to Allison as I take my cereal bowl to the sink.

"Mhmm," she says.

"Maybe later we could play, um, do something together?"

She stands up, almost knocking her chair to the floor. "Jessie, I'm going to the mall with Lucille after school. I don't think there'll be time for that today."

"Who's Lucille?"

"Oh, you haven't met her yet? She has a sister just about your age, I think. She lives across the street," Allison points, "and she's the coolest."

"Right," I say vaguely. I miss the days before "coolest" became part of Allison's vocabulary.

"Jessie, you need to get going. School starts at 8:20," says Mom. She looks out the window and sighs. "Look at this town. We're staying here, Jessie."

"Humph," Dad says.

"Well, we are!" Mom cries.

"It's best not to get their hopes up, Donna."

"What's wrong with getting their hopes

up?" Mom asks. Both of them have forgotten that Allison and I are in the kitchen too. I look at Allison, hoping to share an eye-roll, but she looks out the window.

WEARING MY backpack, I dash up the old oak tree right outside our house and find a comfortable spot.

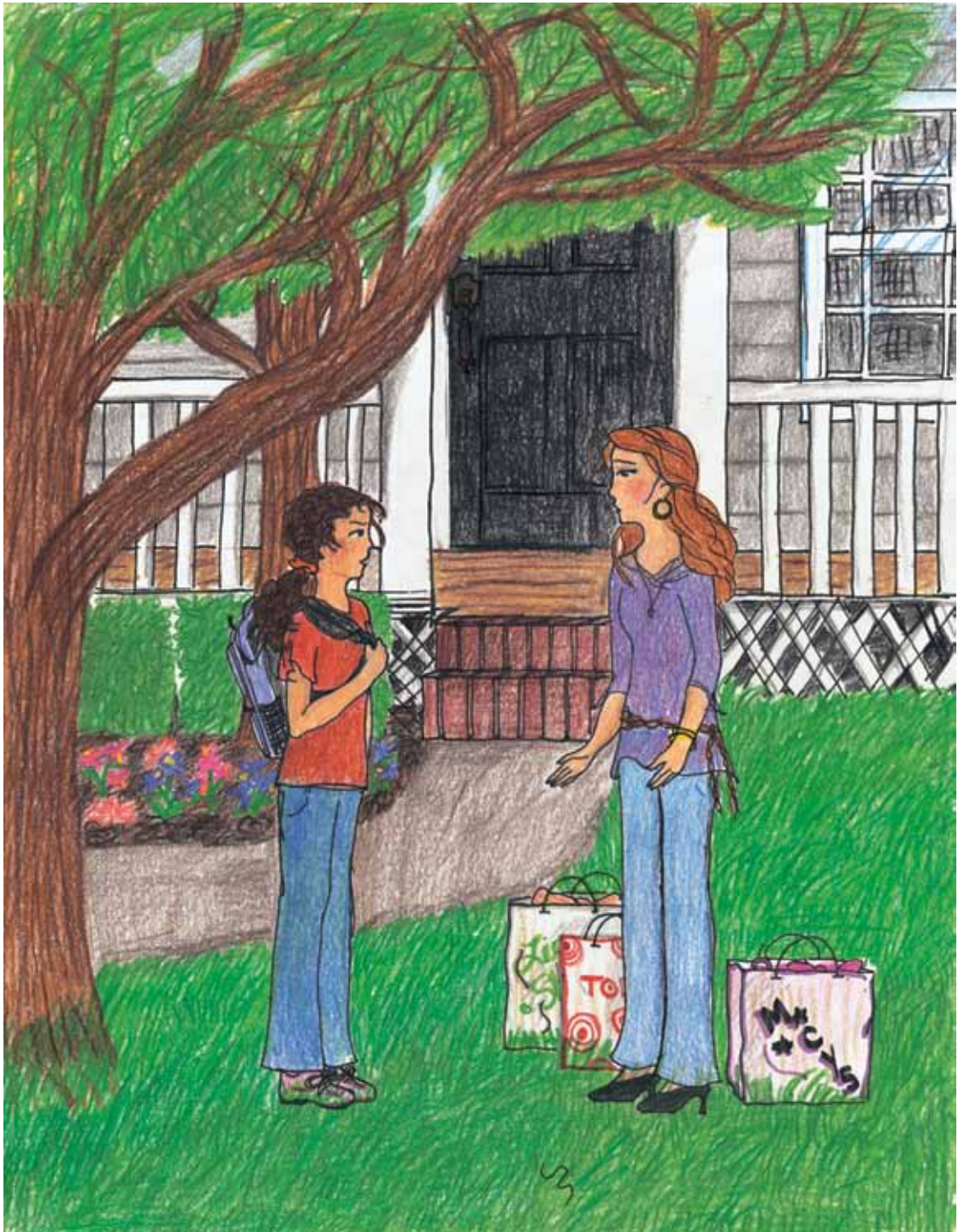
No one seemed to see me as I introduced myself in class, ate at an empty lunch table, and sat alone at recess. If we move again soon, away from this school district, I won't mind.

While I do my homework, I see Allison cross the street to a car in front of Lucille's. I see her jump in the car, laughing and smiling, her jovial voice carrying across the yard. I see the car drive down the road, and, after about an hour, I see it come back. I climb down the tree and wait for Allison to finish waving and calling out to Lucille about future trips, et cetera, et cetera. Then I plant myself in front of her as she walks towards the house.

"Can we do something now, Allison?" I know better than to use the word "play."

She drops her three plastic clothing store bags, her eyes glinting with anger. "You know what your problem is, Jessica Taylor? Well, I'll tell you. You need to get a life instead of clinging to me for support all the time. You need to have friends your own age, who like normal things instead of weird amusement parks. You need to grow up. You're always holding onto what we did as kids!"

I glare at her and notice her golden earrings, swaying in the breeze.



*"I've stopped caring now, Allison," I say, surprised to hear how harsh my voice is*

"If you want to make friends here, Jessie, start out somewhere that isn't blueberry families."

I blink back tears. I just can't let go of seven-year-old Allison, so willing and patient to give up her normal name of Smith for Blueberry.

That isn't the Allison who stands before me, shopping bags at her feet.

"I've stopped caring now, Allison," I say, surprised to hear how harsh my voice is. "Everything I once admired in you is gone. You aren't what you used to be." I turn and walk inside the house.

ALLISON AND I don't speak to each other for over a week. Every time I see her, I feel a pang of regret for my outburst—I don't want to lose her—and a pang of anger—how could she change so much?

School doesn't get any better. No one notices me, not even Lucille's sister, the one my age.

But my teacher, Ms. Carolyn, is nice. She gave us each a private journal to write in over the course of the year. I like to fill mine with my poems. It relaxes me. I hand in some of the poems for creative writing assignments, and they usually get A-pluses. Ms. Carolyn has also assigned a project for her class this year: to choose from a list of jobs to help around the school. I've volunteered to help with the younger kids in the after-school program. It's a fun job. The little kids' make-believe games are entertaining. Whenever I watch them, I think of Allison, and our

fight, and the Blueberry Family.

ONE DAY ALLISON leaves early for school. She and Lucille want to do something together before school starts. I don't know what and I don't really want to know, either.

As I am leaving, Mom calls out to me. "Jessie, Allison left her lunch here. Can you please take it to her?"

"Sure, Mom," I say.

But inside I worry. What will Allison say when I approach her?

At my elementary school, I lean my bike against a wall and look out at the many kids: running, shouting, giggling, chatting. Across the street, at the high school, I spot Allison with her friends. She still has her beautiful red hair and her poise.

I look back at the kids at my school-yard.

I see some kindergartners and imagine how they will grow up, change, and become high-schoolers across the street. And I remember what Allison said: "You're always holding onto what we did as kids." But I can't let those things go. We move so much. Everything changes around me. What's wrong with holding on?

Warily, I cross the street and approach Allison.

"...so I decided to use soft tones here." Allison holds open her sketchbook. She still draws?

"Allison?"

She almost drops her sketchbook.

"Y- you forgot this," I say, showing her the lunch bag. She puts away her sketchbook and takes it. I walk away.

"Wait—Jessie?"

"What?"

"I need to talk to you—in private," Allison says.

I look over at her friends.

"Oh, everyone, can I just say something to my sister here?" Allison asks.

"Sure," Lucille says, as Allison leads me around the bend, away from her friends.

"Um—what's this about, Allison?" I ask, looking at the ground, at the jungle gym across the street, at my sneakers.

"Well, I'm sorry, Jessie."

I look at her.

"I'm sorry that I've been kind of harsh with you," Allison continues. "I just wanted to help you."

"Oh," I say. "Well, I'm sorry too."

She raises her eyebrows.

"Maybe you were right," I say. "Maybe I am holding onto the Blueberry Family too much. But don't change so much, Allison. You're the only friend I have!"

"I was trying to help you find new ones," Allison says. "I love you, Jessie, but I need to leave behind the stuff we did as kids. You do too. It will help you find friends."

"But I don't want to change," I said.

"I don't think we ever completely change," Allison says. "I think we just... take what we used to love to a different stage. You have a wonderful imagination, Jessie. You'll always have it. But you can use it in different, more mature ways. I hear you're doing well with your writing assignments—maybe you'll be a writer."

I can't help but smile. Allison hasn't lost her wisdom after all.

"Thanks for lunch," she says, and smiles back. "You're a great sister."

"So are you," I say.

"Well, see you around, I guess," she says, and walks over to her friends. Squinting just a little, I can picture her kneeling on the floor, paper doll in hand. Then I open my eyes. I don't need to see her as a seven-year-old anymore. That was then. This is now.

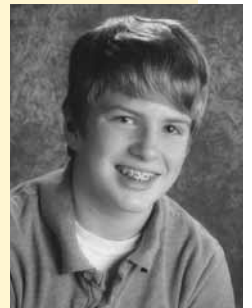




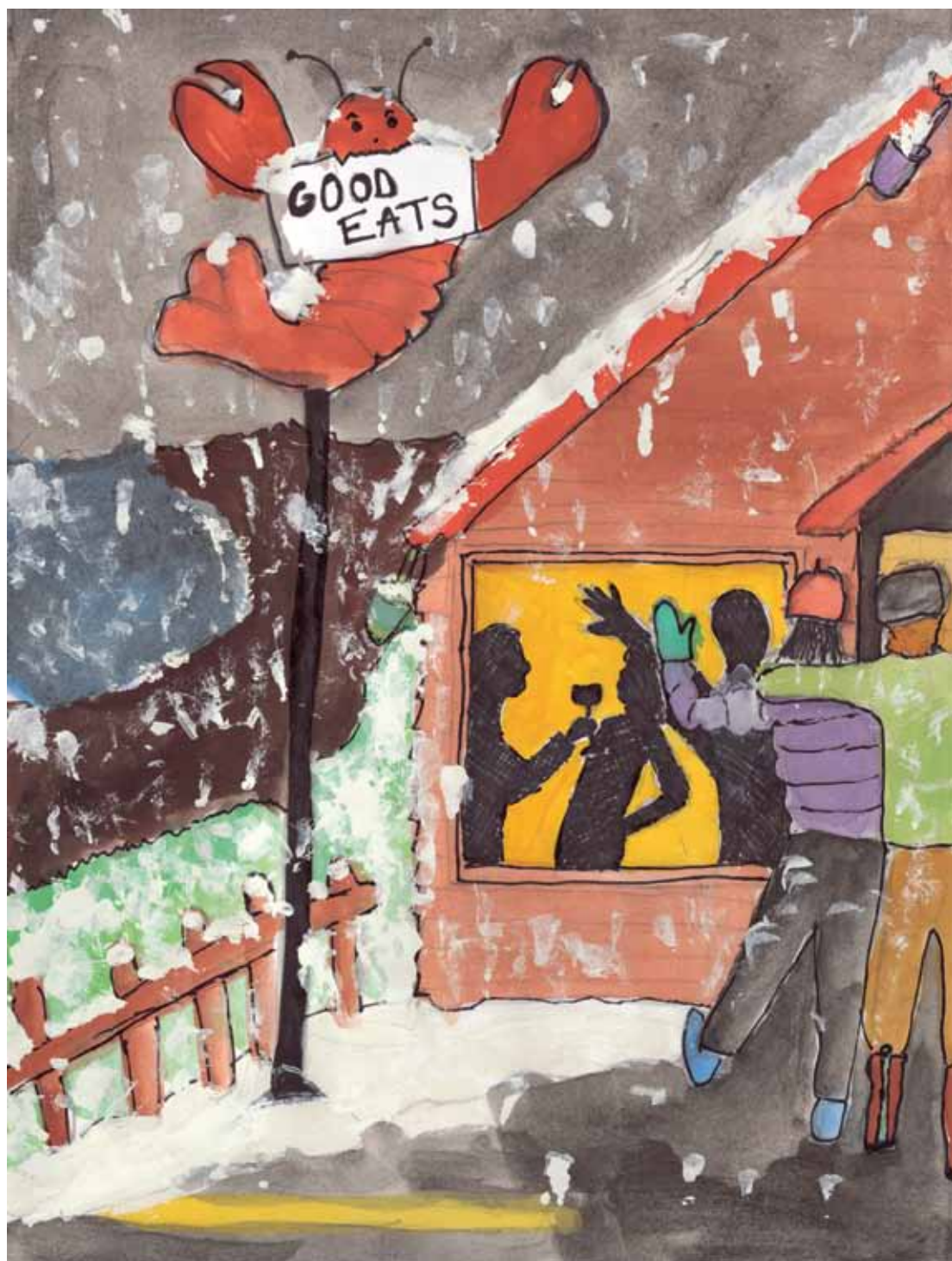
# Maui

By **Eddie Mansius**

Waves are crashing all around me,  
The sun is casting its yellow rays upon the island.  
I hear a yell but it is oh so distant:  
“Go! Go!”  
I turn my head to see a wall rapidly approaching.  
I thrash my arms and kick,  
But it seems too late for me.  
I push up onto the board and stand,  
Keeping my balance.  
The timing is perfect,  
I sail onward to the palms in the distance.  
I am flying.  
No, I am face down in the sand,  
Waves lapping at my feet.  
For a moment I think I am dead,  
But my board slithers up beside me.  
I smile and laugh.  
I did it.  
I surfed.



Eddie Mansius, 13  
Charlotte, North Carolina



*In danced Mom and Dad, rolling their mittened hands and sauntering to the beat!*

# Good Eats

By **Emmy J. X. Wong**

*Illustrated by* **Charlotte Eisenberg**

**J**IMMY CULPEPPER LOOKED out through the bay window fogged up with lazy steam. He couldn't believe his eyes. There was a squall shaping up outside, a true-life Maine nor'easter. It wasn't so much that he minded a good ol'-fashioned nor'easter so much as he minded it today, *now*. This was the celebration he and his older sister, along with his grandparents, had plotted so long and hard for. Today was his parents' twentieth wedding anniversary and the gala send-off party for the honeymoon they never had. Today it was their job to make dreams come true. Squinting his pale gray-blue eyes out over the horizon, he thought he saw a fountain shoot straight up from a spout yonder in the distance amidst a heavy shower of snow and hail, but he couldn't be sure. If he had, it would be a lucky omen. High above Blowhole Bay, Jimmy kept his hopes alive, that the day would turn clear. He couldn't believe his sorry luck rolling in with the six-foot black choppy waves crashing on the sandy seaweed-strewn shore below.

"It's gonna turn out all right, Jimmy. You gotta believe." It was his ever-optimistic granddad, slapping him on the shoulder with the force of conviction. Granddad Culpepper, who spent much of his life raising a family on the Hungry Lobster, through its good times and bad, its ups and downs, always believed that you made your own good luck. You didn't wait for it.

Jimmy though wasn't a believer, at least not yet. The restaurant was his family's livelihood, passed down through each generation. He knew the restaurant had paid his dad, Ollie's



Emmy J. X. Wong, 12  
Weston, Massachusetts



Charlotte Eisenberg, 11  
Peaks Island, Maine

(short for Oliver), way through Bowdoin College where he had met Anne, his mom, both business majors, and now was making good on his sister's college education at Bates College in Lewiston. Still, he saw his parents worry about making ends meet and it wasn't easy for them to get away. There wouldn't be a second chance.

As a youngster, Jimmy remembered sitting in the back seat tickled pink, enamored and mesmerized by the playful roadside signs that led up the steep incline to the red-roofed stucco building overlooking the bay. A collection of signs half a kilometer apart enticed hungry travelers up to the original seafood diner. The first sign questioned, "Hungry?" The last, which sat high above the rooftop on a pole, showed a mischievous red lobster cartoon with a half-eaten sign in its mouth that lit up, "Good Eats." His mom and dad had been married in 1989, the year his granddad retired. Mom and Dad, who had helped Grandma and Granddad out every summer during their college careers, sunk every penny of their treasure chest back into restoring the diner and converting it into a modern-day summer shack, putting off any notion of a romantic honeymoon.

But today was their day, their twentieth wedding anniversary, and they were scheduled to finally lift off to a long-awaited honeymoon adventure, only a restaurant, two yellow labs and two children later. But now—it didn't look good.

"Mr. Mavery, is it clearing up?" Jimmy

asked hesitantly to the incoming customer ringing the bell over the front door, already knowing the answer to that naive question. Mr. Mavery was Dad's best friend from college who owned a gift shop in the tourist town.

"I'm afraid it's not good news, Jimmy," he offered, brushing the thick white snowdrifts from his dripping yellow McIntosh. He continued, "Can't plow the roads out to the local airport quick enough before it's all right back. I don't think any planes will be gettin' out to Portland today, ayah?" Jimmy's heart sank. Today, his parents were supposed to fly to Portland, then on to Nassau, Bahamas, the land of endless sapphire skies, sun-splashed beaches and a buyer's paradise filled with colorful straw markets.

But just as Jimmy felt like throwing in the towel in frustration, he heard, "Let's get this party started!" It was Grandma Culpepper coming up behind him. "I just put up the tinselly palm trees, set out the large scallop-shell platters, and dug out the steel drum CD I found at last summer's yard sale on the Commons. Let's get going." Just the sunny grin on her face caused a break in the clouds, he was certain.

Jimmy and Helena, now home on college winter break, tidied up the chairs and tables and Grandpa lit the broilers and deep fry-o-lators. Fish chowder was already boiling on the cooktops, producing tissue-paper-thin clouds of hazy steam. Before long, Jimmy could hear sizzling from the hot fat. Grandpa had cut



up a bunch of chewy quahogs and cherry stones in an attempt to approximate conch fritters. Before long the restaurant's parking lot had been cleared by Mr. Mavery's employees, and guests started to fill in the open spaces quickly with their hearty pickups and four-wheel drives. There was a party on today!

Before Jimmy could dwell on misfortune further, the front door blew open with a gust of arctic wind. In danced Mom and Dad, rolling their mittened hands and sauntering to the beat! He couldn't believe his eyes. Mom and Dad were shaking and shimmying like he had never seen before. They didn't appear worried. Judy Mavery had shared the surprise party on the drive over, and Mom and Dad were clearly in the mood, whether or not blue skies dawned.

Unexpectedly, his older cousins Billy and Samantha produced bamboo poles and a limbo line was started. The steel drums blared in the background and the

aroma of salty conch fritters permeated the dining room. Someone turned up the thermostat. Somehow, they had all been transported to Snug Harbor. They were all in the Bahamas! Mom and Dad were the first to bend under the limbo stick. Jimmy quickly joined the conga line and the easy laughter, letting his wrinkled brow and shoulders relax. All his fears evaporated with the steam. He looked over at Mom and Dad who were in an embrace. They seemed so happy. They were already celebrating their anniversary. It didn't seem to matter that they were going to miss their trip of a lifetime.

As if reading his mind, his granddad ventured a guess, "They're already on their adventure of a lifetime, son, ayah?" Jimmy looked out at the hovering sign of the Hungry Lobster smiling at him, enshrouded in his parka of fresh snow. The heavy mixture of sleet and powder poured down more heavily now in sheets.

"Say, did he just wink at me?"



# Book Review

By Leah Wolfe

*Schooled*, by Gordon Korman; Hyperion  
Books for Children: New York, 2007; \$15.99



Leah Wolfe, 10  
Florham Park, New Jersey

**H**AVE YOU EVER been the target of teasing? Or have you even been the one doing the teasing? Most of us have, as I'm ashamed to admit. But the story of *Schooled*, written by Gordon Korman, will teach you the true meaning and importance of peace.

I've witnessed certain people in my own school and neighborhood being bullied and harassed, heartlessly and thoughtlessly. I've heard biting remarks like "You're an idiot," and I've even seen violence. Just the other day, two boys at my school decided unreasonably that fighting was the best way to resolve a disagreement. That decision fought back with them, though, and I know for sure that at least one of them was sent to the principal's office. We are the ones who are causing this, and we have total control to stop it. Sometimes, though, we simply choose not to.

I recommend *Schooled* for anyone, really, of either gender and any personality, no matter what age, because it teaches a wonderful lesson that is crucial for everyone to learn. If you truly commit yourself to making a difference in your and your neighbors' everyday life, this story can give you the boost you need. It will help you realize how much better everything would be if

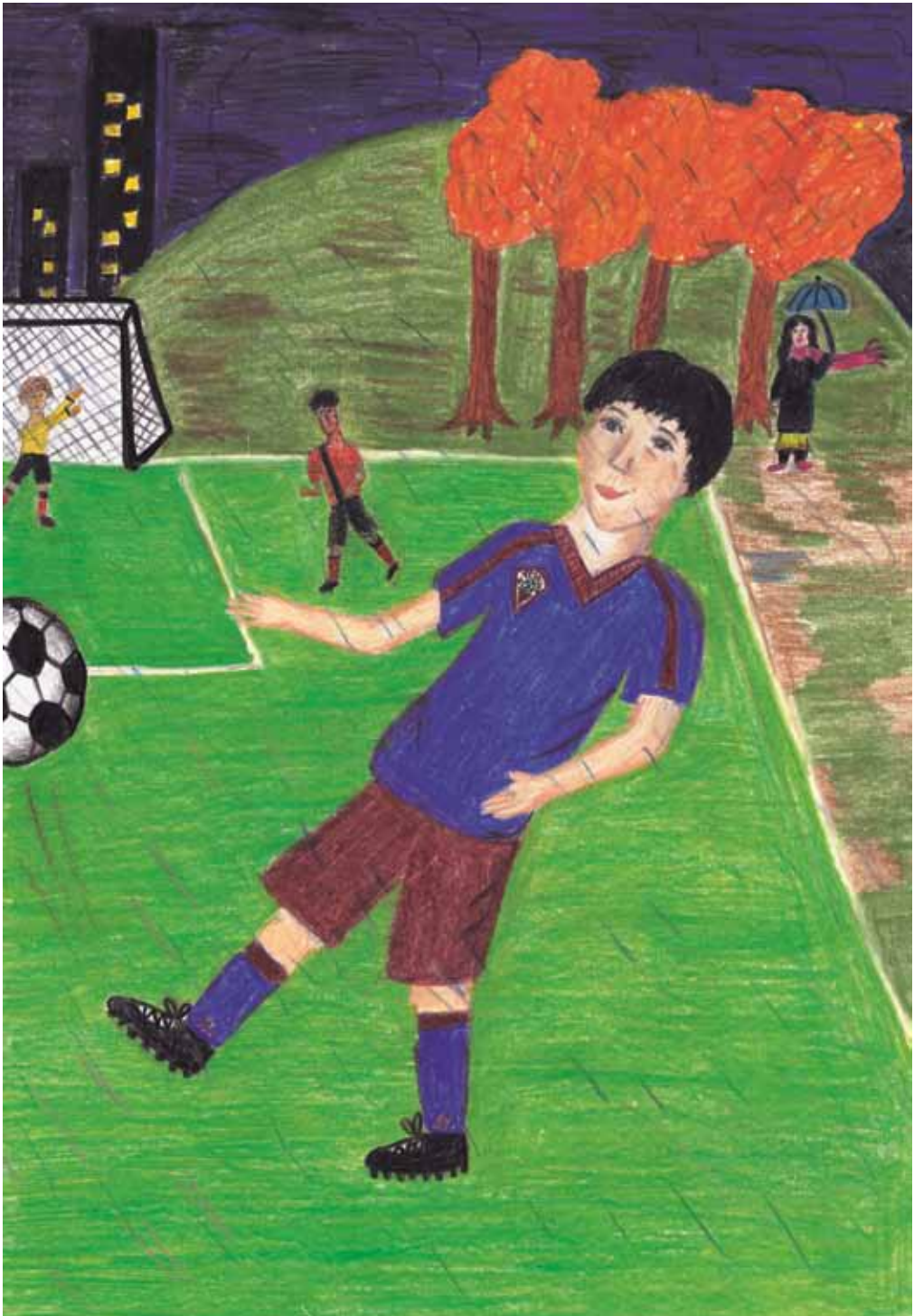
we only tried to feel compassion for others and to judge them on their heart and soul, instead of on their appearance and social status. In fact, today's system of being "nerdy" or "popular" wouldn't even exist if friendship were blind, and if we could all patiently get along. *Schooled* will not allow you to tune these things out.

Capricorn Anderson has no sense of reality at all while he lives on a hippie commune called Garland Farm, with his hippie grandmother, Rain. He is homeschooled, and he rarely leaves his deserted community. (Well, it's deserted except for Cap and Rain.) He learns to drive at the age of eight. He doesn't remember who his parents were. They were killed volunteering for the Peace Corps when he was younger, but he *had* known them at some point. Still, they had blurred in with everyone else at Garland Farm because, there, everyone belonged to everyone.

How many people do you know well? You could have too many friends to count! At least I know that I have loads of people to value in my life. Unlike me, Capricorn only has one. The only human being that he knows well is Rain! Even with this being true, he isn't lonesome. He doesn't even know what it's like to have several friends. So he's perfectly satisfied.

But the tables are turned (and shaken wildly about) when Rain is thrust into the hospital, and Cap is thrust into public middle school. This thirteen-year-old is now the target of all of the teasing, but he never—not once—loses his temper. And when an awful prank is played, Cap is put in charge... and in trouble.

How does this peaceful character deal with his job as eighth-grade president? Well, I won't give that away now. But you can find out for yourself by reading *Schooled*, by Gordon Korman! 🌸



*My shoelaces connected with the ball as it swung in a frenzied arc*



# A Night for Soccer

By **Andrew Lee**

*Illustrated by* **Erin Wolf**

**I**T WAS BITTERLY COLD. Standing by the bench, our team huddled in a group, shivering as we listened to our coach. Gusts of freezing wind blew around us, pelting us with miniscule drops of rain that stung our skin. The moaning of the trees sung in the background. And the sky was dark.

I wrapped my hands in my sleeves, waiting as the referee walked up to the semicircle formed by the players. My teeth chattered as he inspected our cleats. I saw my mother on the sideline, wrapped cozily in her overcoat, raising an umbrella to shield her from the rain. She waved, giving me the thumbs-up sign, trying to encourage me. I smiled bleakly, and stomped the ground, trying to find some warmth.

The game started at the whistle. It was our last game of the season, and I was determined to end it with a victory. The field was ominous, huddled figures bent over, trying to fight the overpowering wind as they strove to control the ball. I quickly ignored my discomfort. My freezing arms could come later. Right now, it was time to play soccer.

I sought for an opening in their defense, immediately attentive. Together, our front line moved in formation, advancing upon their defensive men. We followed the flight of the ball, waiting, like hyenas stalking a herd of zebra. And there was our chance. We pounced, each covering our own man as our striker attacked the ball. The timing was perfect. We quickly gained possession of the ball. I struggled against the wind, running up to join in the attack. Our striker swerved left, dragging two de-



Andrew Lee, 13  
DeWitt, New York



Erin Wolf, 12  
Seattle, Washington

fenders with him. Branching off, our forwards ran up, threatening the opposing defense. The goalie looked nervously at our executed patterns. My breath came in ragged gasps, the cold air stinging my lungs. My lungs. They were burning, yet my legs were still frozen. I forced them to move. We moved in intricate patterns, each looking for the opening and the pass.

“Jimmy!”

A single word.

Jimmy turned and sent off a high cross. Perfect. I ran up with my teammate, zeroing in on the exact spot that the flight of the ball would end. The defender was slow to react, he turned and tried to intercept the pass. But I watched the ball closely as it came spinning down. The ball bounced once, and I saw that I was at the edge of the box. Possibilities sprang into my mind. I was suddenly overcome with indecision. Should I attempt a shot? Or get closer? I saw Jimmy running back from the sideline for a pass. My mom was in the background, yelling support, drowning out all the other people like only moms can do. My mind clicked in the split second it had taken me to assess the situation.

I forgot the cold. My lungs relaxed as I focused on the ball. I swung at it hard

and low. My shoelaces connected with the ball as it swung in a frenzied arc. The ball shot off, and I turned to watch. The goalie was desperate. He flung himself at the incoming shot, holding his arms high. He missed. The ball was going past his outstretched hands, into the goal...

Ping! The metallic sound sang, announcing the verdict. The ball bounced off the crossbar and into the air. The goalie recollected himself and easily caught it. The crowd sounded as one in their disappointment.

I shook my head in frustration, then turned to watch my mom. I thought for sure that would have been a goal. My mom smiled brilliantly, mouthing for me to keep trying. My teammates scattered around me patted me on the back, exclaiming their confidence and faith in me. My mood lifted as my teammates' support soothed my dented ego.

Yes, I thought. There were still fifty-nine minutes to go. I looked up at the sky, defying the weather as it continued to buffet around me. Now the darkness and pelting rain only exhilarated me. This was what I lived for. I turned and jogged back a few feet, ready to receive the next probe by the opposition. The cold was suddenly gone. And I was right at home. ❁

# Shifted

By **Erin Cadora**

*Illustrated by the author*

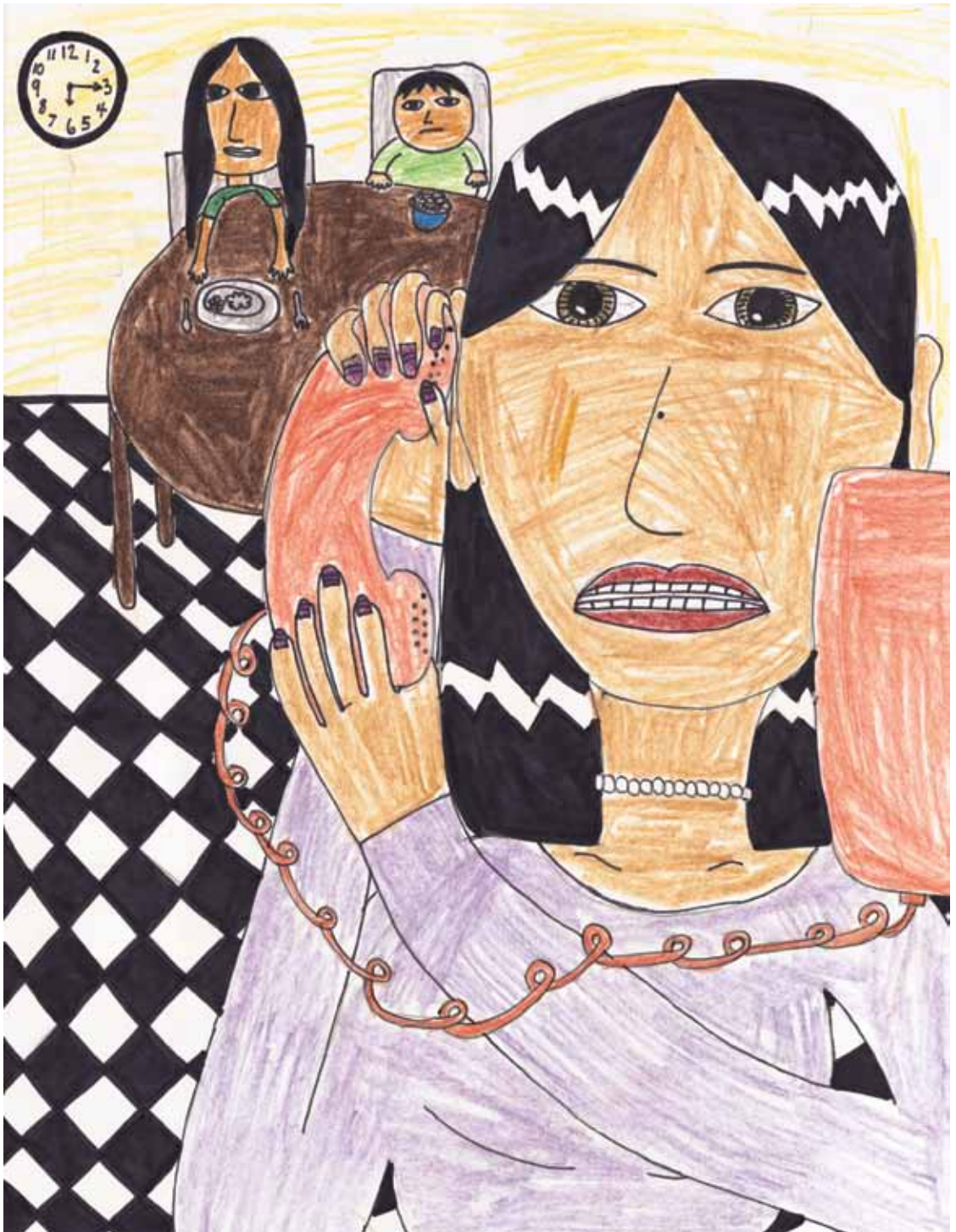
**A**NEESA SAT WITH her legs tucked into her chest, her chin sat limply on the worn denim that covered her knees. Her shoes were a well-loved pair of classic black Converse, the rubber parts entirely decorated with Sharpie. Her dark brown hair, so dark it looked black at first glance, hung over her face, putting a veil between herself and the world. She always wanted a cover from the world, even if it was just a hood or something small. She felt very delicate compared to the vast world so brimming with dangerous, frightening, unpleasant things and ideals. She felt that life had already taken enough blows at her, and she never wanted to be caught unarmed again.

She pressed her cheek against the car window, watching her breath creep across the glass and then drawing spirals in it with her fingertip. Right now she hated this car, this vehicle that was driving her away from her home and bringing her to yet another unfamiliar place. She took a glance at her brother, who was rubbing his thumb back and forth over the left ear of his raggedy old stuffed rabbit. It had once been terry cloth but was now almost completely threadbare. She looked at him, thinking about how lucky he was. He hadn't even known Daddy, she thought. He was only six months old when it happened.

**I**T HAD BEEN four years and she could still remember, exactly as it happened, that day, the day he died. She, her brother, and her mom were eating dinner when the phone rang.



Erin Cadora, 11  
Brooklyn, New York



*Her polished fingers trembled horribly on the phone until finally she dropped it*



Her mother had just stared at it for several seconds before she hesitantly and slowly got up to answer it, as if she *knew* it would be simply awful news.

"Hello," she said.

Aneesa and her brother couldn't tell what the person on the other line was saying but they didn't really need to. Their mother's lips clenched into a tight, white, thin line and her eyes had a petrified glimmer that neither of them had ever seen before. Her polished fingers trembled horribly on the phone until finally she dropped it. In the utterly silent room the clatter was like thunder.

"Mrs. Ahmed? Mrs. Ahmed?!" shouted the man on the other line.

"Yes, I'm sorry." She picked up the phone again. In a shaky, weak, almost defeated voice she asked, "What hospital did you say?" She took out a pencil and paper, briskly wrote an address down and hung up the phone.

"Mom," Aneesa asked, "is everything... OK?"

"No, hon, it's not," she replied, running her fingers through her daughter's hair. Suddenly tears were rapidly streaming down her cheeks.

"Your father," she said miserably, turning to Aneesa's brother and kissing him on the forehead, "your father got into a car crash, a very bad car crash. He suffered massive internal bleeding and they... they don't think he has more than a few hours to live."

Aneesa remembered thinking about how in movies, when parents die, the chil-

dren just feel numb and don't cry until someone tells them it's OK. She remembered wondering if there was something wrong with her because the moment those terrible words left her mother's lips she had broken down sobbing. She had sat almost limply on her chair with the tears relentlessly gushing from her eyes. She remembered her mother holding her, trying to comfort her, but she too was sobbing hysterically. Aneesa remembered her mother's cheek pressed against hers, and remembered wondering if it was her tears or her mother's she felt on her skin. She remembered that her brother, a mere infant, who couldn't have possibly known what was going on, began crying, just because he could feel the despair in the room. She remembered the horribly, devastatingly silent car ride to the hospital. She remembered the hospital lights were so bright, the walls were so white, and the floor was so clean it was like some disgusting alien world that she certainly didn't want her dad to spend his last moments in. She remembered dashing out of her dad's room the moment she saw him, and waiting right outside the room for her mother to say goodbye, with her back against that whiter-than-white hallway wall. It was just too much to bear to see his body so immobile and riddled with bandages, blood, tubes, and beeping machines.

**Y**ES, ANEESA remembered that day exactly as it was, and it tortured her.

"Hey hon, you OK?" her mother asked,

running her fingers through her daughter's hair.

"I'm fine," Aneesa replied.

"I know you're only nine, and your brother's only four, and I know this is hard to understand, but I am very sorry that we've had to move so much, it's just that, houses are so expensive these days, and on only one income it gets hard to pay the rent. This new house is a little smaller, but it has a backyard, and don't you think it will be fun to have a little garden? And with some outdoor space I might even consider getting you that dog you were bugging me about a year ago."

"It's all right Mom, don't worry, me and Jakeem are fine."

"I love you more than anything, you know."

After a thirteen-hour car ride, Aneesa, Jakeem, and Mrs. Ahmed arrived at their new home. It was a pristine fall day, with a playful breeze, a glowing blue sky, and crisp leaves gently descending to the ground. It would have been a very pleasant day, Aneesa thought, if not for the fact that her life was being shifted once again. This house was in a small apartment building in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. Aneesa studied the contents of the windows of the already-inhabited apartments. One was lined with stuffed animals and children's drawings, another had dully colored, half-open curtains that revealed a windowsill filled with books. Mrs. Ahmed opened the noisy metal door and the family walked into the hallway. She took out a silver key, put it through the keyhole of

the door to their new home and struggled with the lock for several minutes before getting the door open.

Mrs. Ahmed pointed out things about the house to Aneesa, trying to sound positive, but she just stared at her shoes. Every one of her friends had signed them. She sighed and crossed her arms, thinking of how she would have to make new friends at a new school in a new neighborhood all over again, she would have to explain her life to the kids at school, why she didn't have a dad, why she moved so much. She bit her lip, but then quickly released it, realizing that she had drawn blood.

A NEESA, JAKEEM, and Mrs. Ahmed had lived in their apartment for a month now. They had generally settled in, although a few unpacked boxes remained. Although the house was small, the family had decorated it fabulously and it looked very homey. In Aneesa's opinion, the best things about the house were the gorgeously embroidered traditional Arabic pillows, which Mrs. Ahmed had kept since her childhood. Aneesa liked the fact that her mother had grown up in Rumalah and was quite proud of her Arabic heritage.

Aneesa sat on the bright orange couch with her knees tucked to her chest, staring rather blankly at the television.

"Hey hon, why don't you do something besides watching TV, I feel like that's all you've done since we moved here," her mother said.

"Whatever," she replied.

"You could go do something in the

backyard. I've been working on it; I think it looks much better than it did before and you haven't been out there much."

"OK."

Aneesa bitterly grabbed her Calvin and Hobbes book and briskly walked to the backyard.

Mrs. Ahmed sighed and put her face in her hands, thinking about how lately her daughter had been so unhappy and she just had no idea what to do about it. Jakeem was OK, she thought, he was young and adaptable, but Aneesa was taking moving so much harder, she was getting tired and worn down.

Aneesa sat outside, reading her comic book. She wondered why her mom had wanted her to come out here; it was almost winter. Then she figured that her mom thought she was pretty secluded lately, maybe her mom thought the fresh air would do her a bit of good.

She heard a small, odd sound she couldn't quite recognize, it was coming from under the stairs that led to the house. She peered over to see what the noise was. She was amazed when she saw a tiny nest of young mice. She looked around, but there was no mother mouse to be found.

"Oh my gosh!" she exclaimed. "You little guys are all alone, aren't you?"

She ran inside, grabbed a carton of milk, and ran back out. She dipped the fingertips of her right hand into the milk and offered it to the mice. She giggled as their tongues ran along her skin. She went inside again and came out with a piece of

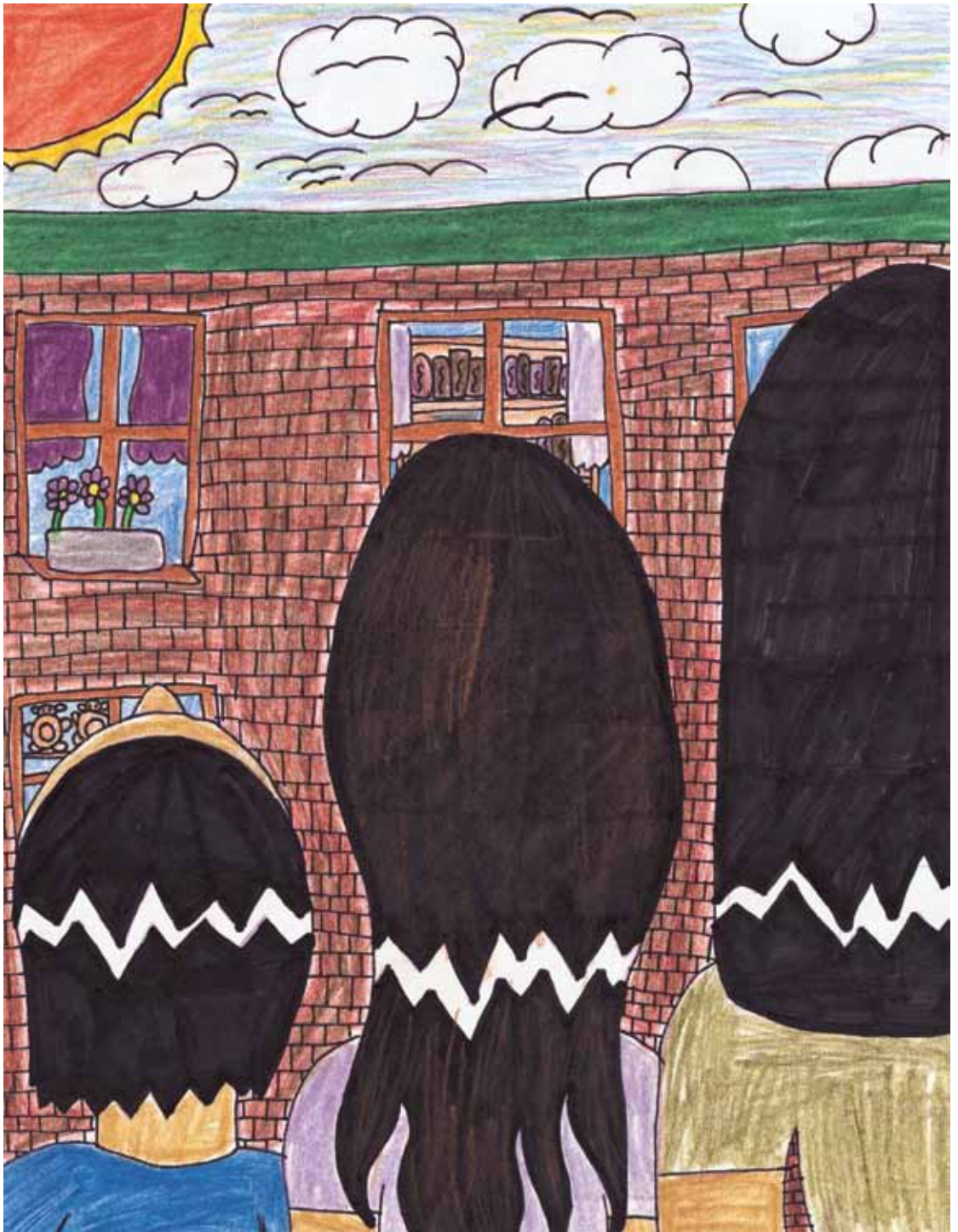
bread. She pinched crumbs off the slice and threw them to the mice.

"You could have died if I hadn't discovered you," she said to the tiny animals.

Aneesa continued feeding the mice milk and bread as well as some lettuce for the next two weeks. Mrs. Ahmed noticed that her daughter was a bit perkier lately. Aneesa had begun to regain that glimmer in her eyes that only belongs to people who rather enjoy life. She hadn't been watching as much TV and she had been out and about more, no longer so secluded.

Aneesa got home from school, threw her backpack on the couch, and went outside to check on the mice she cared for. She realized that ever since she had discovered them, she had been happier. She felt that she had a purpose now, and the fact that something depended on her made her feel responsible, and she thought the idea of dwelling on her own issues irresponsible. She decided that she would name the five mice. She went outside and looked at them, trying to decide what each of them should be called. Eventually she chose Itchy for the all brown mouse, Moosy for the all white mouse, Phoebe for the mouse that was almost all brown except for a dot of white on its forehead, Gigi for the mouse with a white body and a brown belly, and Rosie for the mouse with a brown body speckled with white all over.

THE NEXT DAY the weather had begun to take a turn for the worse.



*It would have been a very pleasant day, if not for the fact that her life was being shifted once again*



Mrs. Ahmed had made Aneesa and Jakeem wear their winter coats, and even though there was none, the weather forecast had predicted snow. When she checked on her mice, Aneesa was devastated to find Gigi's body limp and motionless. With tears running down her cheeks, she went inside to find her mother.

"Mom," she said desperately.

"Oh, hon, what happened?"

"Well, you know those mice in the backyard?"

"Yeah."

"One of them died, Mom!"

"Oh, sweetie, I'm so sorry. But you know they would have never gotten as far as they did without you, with their mother gone and all."

"I want to get a cage for them. There's still four left and I want to get a cage for them or else they'll die from the cold too. It's pretty much winter now and if I don't take them in they won't have a chance."

"Well, OK, I guess, I know how happy these mice make you. But you know they will be all your responsibility."

"Yeah, I know."

"We'll go to the pet store tomorrow."

"No, today, we need to go now, Mom. Moosy and Itchy and Rosie and Phoebe need me."

"Can't it wait just a little?"

"Mom, please, if I wake up tomorrow and another one is dead it will be all my fault and I don't think I can bear that."

"All right, go get your brother and I'll get the car started."

IT HAD BEEN one year since the mice that Aneesa had cared for had moved into her house when all finally seemed well. Her mom had found a stable job with a good salary and the family was able to stay in their house. Although Aneesa was still a little secluded and still liked to be a little shielded from the world, she was generally happy, was making many friends at school, and enjoyed showing her mice to them. One day as Aneesa went into her room to feed her pets, she realized that she had not saved them, they had saved her. ❀



# Riding the Gondola

*By* Anna Elizabeth Blech



Anna Elizabeth Blech, 12  
New York, New York

New York at dusk  
When shadowy sun  
Rests on skyscrapers  
And in the park  
In the city  
Dragonflies murmur  
Birds hum  
As the little gondola  
Glides across the silver lake  
That parts between my fingers  
The tenor of cheerful chatter  
From the restaurants  
The whispered conversations  
Of the couples  
On their sunset rowboat trips  
The swan  
Splashing  
Preening its feathers  
One by one  
As night comes to the city that never sleeps

The man on the gondola  
Sings in a resounding baritone  
*“Venite all’agile  
Barchetta mia  
Santa Lucia  
Santa Lucia”*  
“Come to my  
Swift little boat  
Santa Lucia  
Santa Lucia.”

# The Migration

By Christopher Fifty

*Illustrated by* Indra Boving



Christopher Fifty, 11  
Churchville, Maryland



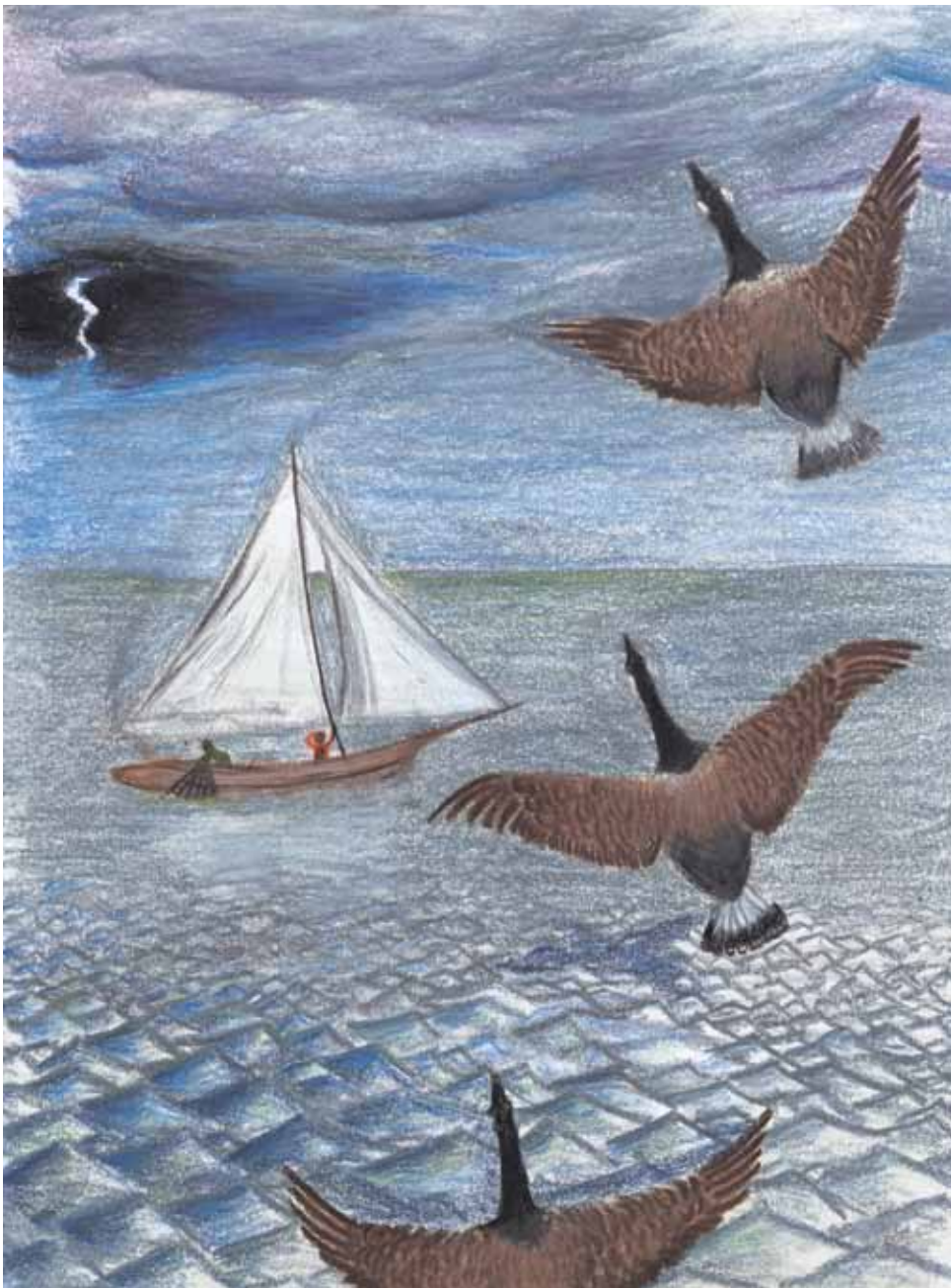
Indra Boving, 13  
Hope Valley, Rhode Island

A PACK OF FIFTEEN GEESE flew over the mainland and then out to sea. They were migrating to a warmer place. As they flew over the sea, they looked down; the sea was rough with choppy waves. The geese spotted a ship, a skipjack. It looked as though the three-man crew were catching oysters. The ship sat low in the water, obviously full of oysters.

Suddenly a strong gust of wind blew, and the geese had to adjust a few feathers. Strong gusts of wind, choppy waves—the geese were no fools, a storm was coming, a big storm at that. The geese squawked, “A huge storm is coming, we better fly faster.” The skipjack started to rock back and forth. The geese heard a human shout, but they couldn’t hear what he said over the wind. Suddenly another human joined the one at the wheel. The third human, the one at the oyster thongs, pulled up the thongs. The wind was blowing stronger now. The human who had just pulled up the net let the sail out.

The geese were forced on despite their curiosity. The lead goose squawked, “Move closer; it is going to get very cold very fast.” The geese moved closer, so instead of a V they were in two straight lines. The brave geese flew on through the flashes of lightning, and the boom of thunder, through the insistent pelting of the rain, and the gusts of the wind. The geese were wet, tired, hungry, and annoyed. Why did the weather have to be terrible on their flight over the murky, green waters of the sea? Finally, the head goose squawked, “Almost there; I see





*The geese were no fools, a storm was coming, a big storm at that*

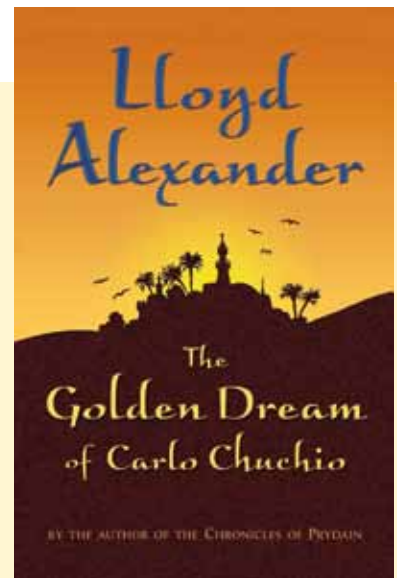
land.” The geese breathed a sigh of relief. Finally they would get a chance to dry and

preen their wet feathers. They would get a chance to sleep during the migration. ❁

# Book Review

By **Julian Axelrod**

*The Golden Dream of Carlo Chuchio*, by Lloyd Alexander; Henry Holt and Company: New York, 2007; \$18.95



Julian Axelrod, 12  
Los Angeles, California

**T**REASURE HUNTS HAVE long captivated the minds of children and adults alike. And treasure hunters, such as pirates or explorers, intrigue us just as much.

But in Lloyd Alexander's book, *The Golden Dream of Carlo Chuchio*, the "fearless hero" is a young, cowardly, inexperienced "chooch" (fool), living in the fictional port city of Magenta with his merchant uncle. In fact, his only reasons for trekking across the desert with a motley crew of misfits are a dream and a map found in a book of tales! This unlikely protagonist lies at the center of a unique adventure, a character we can't help but love.

Although there is one overlying plot, the author makes each event its own little vignette. Many of Carlo's escapades (including being attacked by bandits twice, being robbed of everything but his undergarments by his right-hand man, meeting a possibly psychic artist and hermit, buying used dreams from a street merchant, and going through countless identity crises) come across as episodes in a grander story. Each small story is another step in Carlo's journey.

While Carlo is the most relatable character, my favorite is definitely Baksheesh, described as "the world's worst camel-

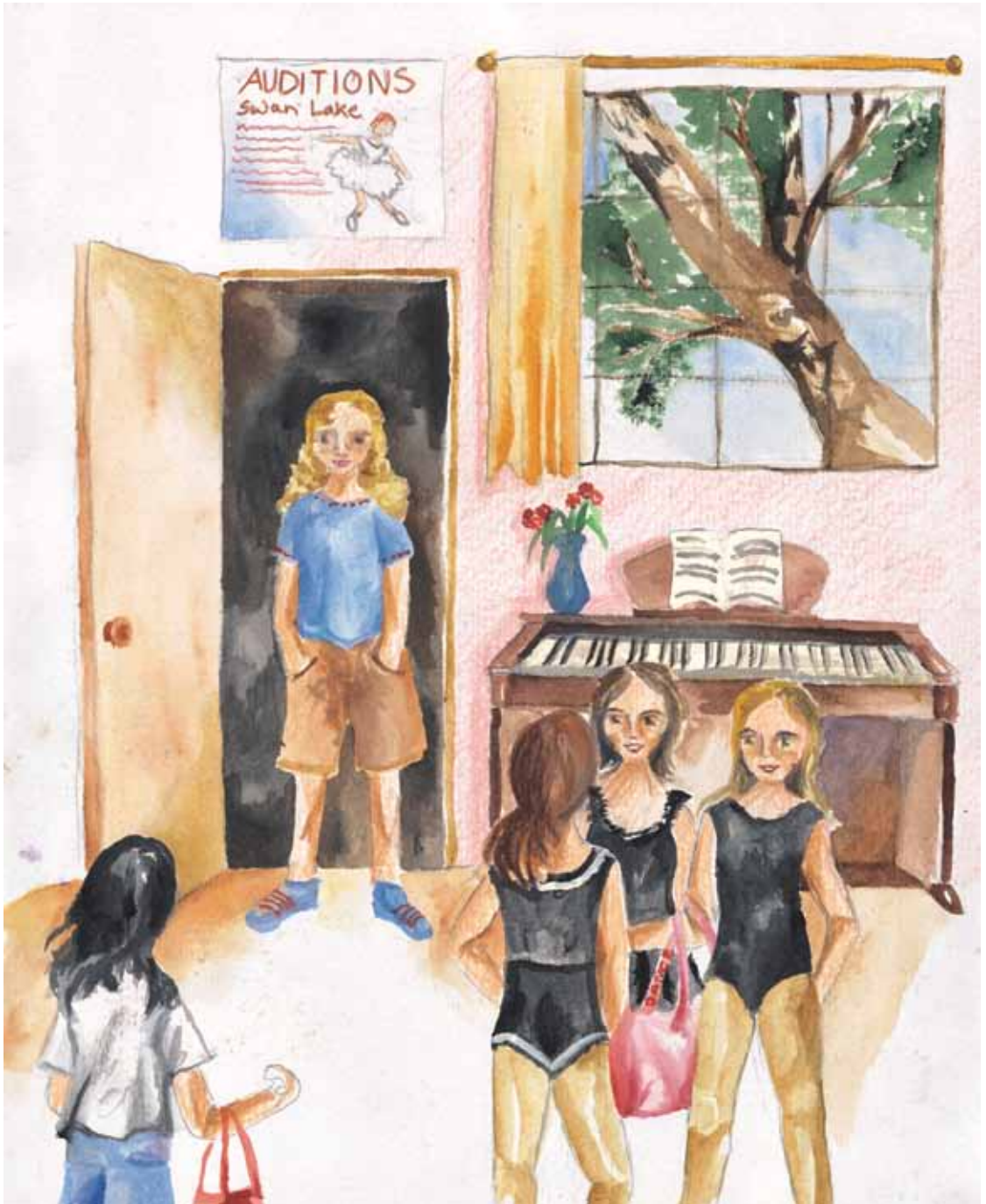
puller.” His personality is hilarious. He exalts anyone who is willing to pay him, and is fiercely loyal, though most of the time it is only to save his own skin. I think we all know people like this, who befriend people just long enough to get what they want. I once knew a girl who acted as though she genuinely wanted to get to know me. But it turned out she was just using me to get closer to one of my friends because she liked him.

But Baksheesh truly has a good nature. Salamon puts it best: “You are sometimes a thief, frequently a liar. The list goes on and on. But you have a tender heart... whether you like it or not.” Another aspect I love about Baksheesh is how he constantly tries to help others out of a sticky situation, but usually gets them much farther into it. I have a friend like this who, although his intentions are good, just makes things worse. He unwittingly gives me horrible advice, tries to include me in jokes that make me cringe, and just makes all-around bad social decisions that cause other people to think less of me.

The only problem I had with the book was the ending. While it wasn’t necessarily predictable, Alexander used a plot device involving maps, which I felt like I had seen in books before. After a story with such an original story line, the ending was somewhat disappointing, especially for such a legendary author as Lloyd Alexander.

But it says a lot about *The Golden Dream of Carlo Chuchio* that this was the *only* flaw in the book. This was the late Lloyd Alexander’s last work, and I am glad to say that he went out on a good note. His story, characters, and description are impeccable, and he really inspires you to persevere for something you believe in. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone who loves adventure with a fair bit of humor mixed in. 🍁





*"And remember, auditions for Swan Lake are tomorrow!"*



# To Be a Swan

By **Alison Buick**

Illustrated by **Daria Lugina**

“**A**ND REMEMBER, auditions for *Swan Lake* are tomorrow!” Sydney’s ballet instructor, Elise, chirped. “Ballet class is dismissed!”

“Syd, who are you auditioning for?” Sydney’s best friend, Natalia, asked as they walked into the dressing room.

“Odette, the Queen of the Swans, of course,” Sydney laughed as she tucked a loose blond curl behind her ear.

“I heard Michelle is auditioning for Odette, too,” Leila, another friend of Sydney’s, said, catching up to them.

Sydney groaned. “Michelle! She’s the best dancer in this entire dance school! Why does she have to audition for the role I want?” She sat down and began taking off her pointe shoes.

Leila laughed sympathetically. “It is the main role in *Swan Lake*. Who wouldn’t want to be Odette?”

“Me!” Natalia spoke up. “I want to be Odile, the evil girl who tricks the handsome prince into thinking she’s Odette.”

“What about you, Leila?” Sydney asked.

Leila rolled her eyes. “Oh please. I’m not a fabulous dancer like all of you. I’ll just hope I’m a swan.”

Sydney stood up and put on her black coat. “I’ll see you guys tomorrow, OK? Rest up.” On her way out, she bumped into Michelle.

“Watch it,” Michelle snapped, flicking away a loose ebony wisp of hair.

“Sorry,” Sydney mumbled as she walked out the door.



Alison Buick, 13  
Sycamore, Illinois



Daria Lugina, 12  
Northborough, Massachusetts

AS THE SUN peeked over the glittering Lake Michigan, spreading its rosy glow over the city, Sydney sat in her mom's car, twiddling her fingers nervously. Sydney's mom eyed her. "You'll do fine," Mom reassured her.

"I hope," Sydney said weakly.

The remainder of the twenty-minute car ride was in silence. Michelle's sure to get the part of Odette, Sydney thought miserably. That thought did not cheer her up whatsoever. She doesn't deserve it. I deserve it. I've worked so hard for this part!

"Sydney?" Mom's voice interrupted her thoughts. "We're here."

Sydney took a deep breath. "Bye," she said.

"SYD!" NATALIA exclaimed as Sydney walked into the dressing room. "Are ya ready for auditions?"

Sydney cracked a weak smile. "I've felt better."

"Well, hurry up," Leila said, tying the ends of her pointe-shoe ribbons. "Elise said we're starting soon." Sydney nodded, slipping a perfectly worn pointe shoe onto her foot.

A few minutes later, Sydney heard Elise's delicate voice. "Group One audition: Abigail, Kelsey, Jessica, Leila, Molly. Group Two audition: Megan, Britney, Ashlee, Natalia, Selena. Group Three audition: Michelle, Britta, Samantha, Kylie, Sydney. OK, girls, let's get started!"

Elise taught all three groups a combination from a scene in Swan Lake. It wasn't

hard, Sydney recalled later. It wasn't easy either, seeing as her legs were still shaking with fear.

"Group One!" Elise called. Leila flashed Sydney and Natalia a smile as she started to dance to the light piano music.

"Group Two!" the ballet instructor shouted a few moments later, and Natalia walked to the center of the dance floor, along with the four other girls. As the delicate music began to play, Leila sat down next to Sydney.

"Did I do OK?" she asked. Sydney nodded, eyes closed, and Leila understood. "Don't be nervous. Just pretend you're in ballet class."

Distantly, Sydney heard Elise's voice call, "Group Three!"

Sydney took her place next to Michelle. "Break a leg," Michelle smirked. "Thanks."

"No, really, break a leg."

Sydney rolled her eyes.

Faintly, she heard the music start. *Glissade, soutenu, développ  *, Sydney thought to herself, going through the steps in her head. She was soaring through the steps, dancing with her heart and soul, and enjoying every minute of it. Sydney was quietly aware of Michelle beside her, doing as well as, if not better than, herself. It didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was ballet.

The dance ended and Sydney smiled radiantly at Elise, who she saw was scribbling notes on her clipboard. "Very good, everyone," Elise said, beaming.

"You did so good, Sydney," Natalia

raved as they were walking into the dressing room.

"Thanks, Nat," Sydney said, "but you're not the one who chooses the parts."

As Sydney left the studio, she decided that she'd done the best she could do and she could only hope for the best.

"SYD!" NATALIA squealed the next day as Sydney entered the dressing room. "Hurry up! Elise's going to announce the cast as soon as everyone's here!" She grabbed Sydney's hand and they raced onto the dance floor where all the dancers were crowded.

"Well, it looks like everyone's here," Elise said. "OK. So the person who will be Odile is... Natalia Windson!"

"Yes!" Natalia shrieked. "I did it!"

Elise smiled. "Now we have our party guests, present at the party in Act Four. They will be Samantha Grayson, Kylie Johnson, Leila Mason, Selena Lopez, Megan Elsen and Ashlee Rolf."

Leila looked grimly at Natalia and Sydney.

"Next is our group of swans. They will be Kelsey Bishop, Jessica Bergmann, Abigail Michaels, and Sydney Miles."

Sydney stood there, stunned. "No," she whispered. Her head was spinning and her heart pounding. A swan? Me?

She faintly heard Elise saying, "Odette will be played by Michelle Thompson." Sydney's eyes welled up with tears and she brushed them away, disgusted with herself.

"Next we have understudies. The un-

derstudy for Odile will be Jessica. The understudy for Odette will be Sydney." Elise looked up from her clipboard and smiled at Sydney.

"See? You're an understudy!" Natalia poked Sydney. "You still have a chance to be Odette."

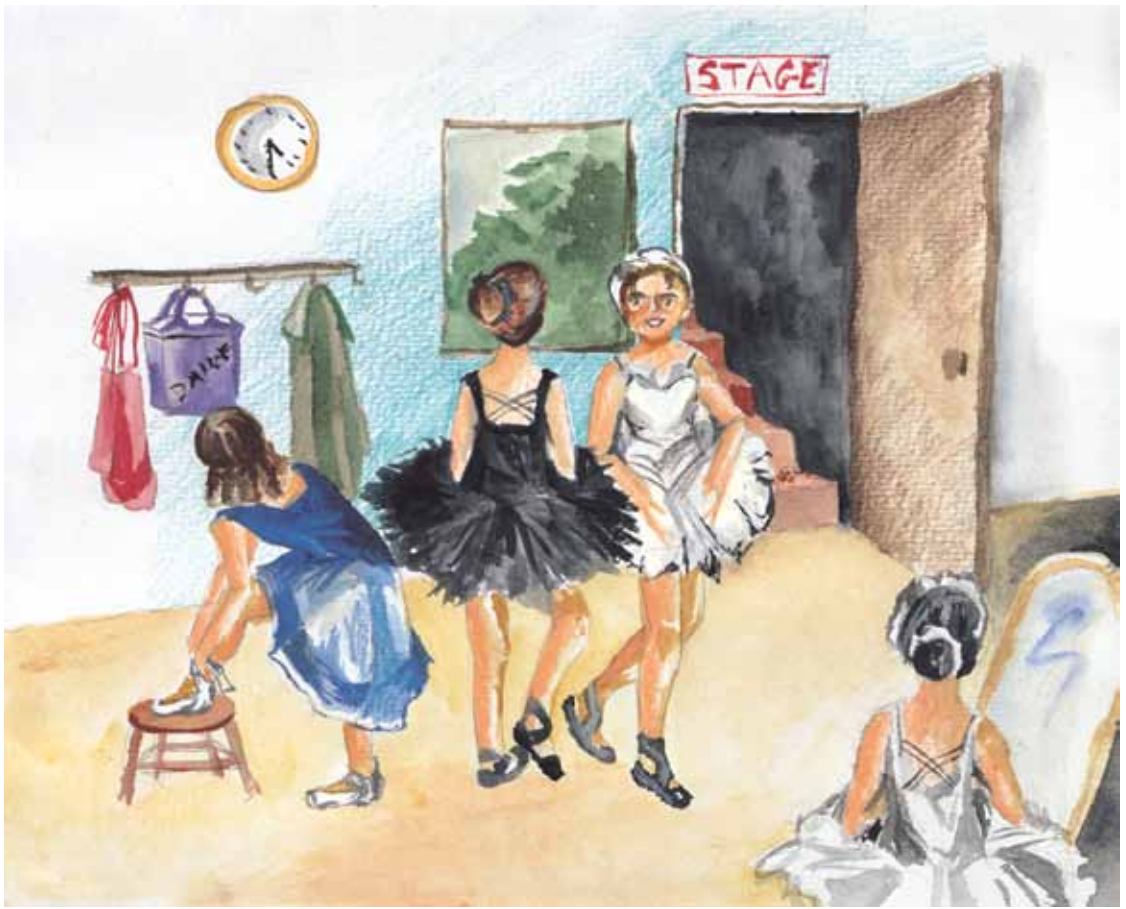
Sydney groaned. Great. I have to go to extra practices for nothing, she thought to herself.

"Syd. I'm so sorry," Michelle said in mock pity. Sydney brushed past her and walked out the door, seething.

THE DAYS TURNED into weeks and the weeks turned into months and the first show drew closer and closer. Sydney learned her swan part and the part of Odette. She even practiced the grand *Pas de deux* a few times with Michael, who played the Prince. Sydney loved Odette's part and wished with all her heart it was truly hers. I should've been Odette, she'd say to herself.

"OK! MICHELLE! Let's do the part that starts with ba bum bum bum." Elise mimicked the music, making Natalia, sitting in the audience, stifle a laugh behind her hand. Sydney caught Natalia's eye from where she was standing in the right wings. Natalia flashed her a thumbs-up as the music started and Sydney ran out on the stage, fluttering her fingers to look like feathers.

It was dress rehearsal, the day before the first show. Sydney was prepared for both roles, a swan and Odette. She never



*“Syd!” Natalia squealed. “You look fabulous!”*

stopped hoping she would get a chance to be Odette.

“That’s a wrap, everyone! Good job, now go home and get some sleep! See you tomorrow!” Elise said.

That night, Sydney couldn’t sleep. She was so excited, yet disappointed at the same time. I should’ve been Odette, she thought bitterly.

**T**HE NEXT DAY was warm with a cool breeze, a mild day for mid-June. Sydney arrived at the theater at five

o’clock, two hours before the show started. She stretched a little, then proceeded to put her costume on. Her costume was a white-and-silver tutu with silver feathers and a white headpiece. Sydney’s curly hair was pulled back in a bun.

“Syd!” Natalia squealed. “You look fabulous!” Natalia was wearing a black tutu with black tights and pointe shoes to match.

“So do you, Nat.” Sydney turned around and saw Leila who, as one of the party guests, was wearing a silky blue

dress and a frilly lace petticoat. Her hair was done in brunette ringlets with a turquoise bow perched jauntily on top.

"Unfortunately for us, so does Michelle." Natalia gestured over to the large mirror where Michelle stood, attaching glittery fake eyelashes to her eyelids. She was dressed in a tutu as white as snow, with sparkles glistening like snowflakes. Her silky white pointe shoes seemed to shine in the overly intense lightbulbs.

"Ten minutes until showtime, girls!" Elise chirped. "And boys," she added, glancing at Michael.

"I'm getting nervous," Natalia shivered, rocking from side to side.

"Relax. You'll do great," Leila reassured.

"What if I mess up?" Natalia said.

"You won't."

Sydney left her two friends and started to walk over to where Michelle stood. I should've been Odette.

"Hey, Michelle..."

Michelle turned around.

"What?" the raven-haired girl spat.

"...Break a leg." Sydney smiled half-heartedly. She walked away, leaving Michelle with her mouth wide open.

The music started and Michelle ran out on stage, fluttering her arms and flashing a diamond smile. Sydney and the rest of the swans followed and they proceeded to do their opening dance. Sydney danced her heart out, but she knew it would be hard to notice a lowly swan in the back. I should've been Odette...

They were about halfway through the

dance when it happened. It seemed like Sydney knew what was going to happen half a second before it did. Michelle started to do a single pirouette *en pointe* and she mounted wrong. Her ankle bent awkwardly, and she fell, the shimmering body of a swan, lying crumpled on the stage. The audience gasped and Sydney rushed forward, helping Michelle off the stage. She heard Elise's voice, "We will have a brief intermission," ring through the theater.

"Are you OK?" Sydney whispered, even though she already knew the answer. Michelle nodded, breathing heavily. She tried to stand up, but moaned in pain and bent over Sydney's arms.

"I'm fine," she whispered hoarsely. "I've worked so hard to be Odette! I have to keep going."

Sydney blinked. Michelle also wanted to be Odette. I wasn't the only one... I should've known. Michelle's just a person... just like me. She looked down and saw that Michelle was crying, her mascara running down her cheeks.

"Michelle?" Sydney asked tentatively. The dark-haired girl looked up. "I'm so sorry... for everything. I was so jealous and I thought... I was so sure that..." Sydney looked at Michelle and saw that she'd already been forgiven.

"I can't believe you're apologizing to me." Michelle wiped a tear that had almost reached her chin. "After how rude I was to you, I never thought you would help me like you just did. I'm really sorry, Sydney. I was jealous of you, too. I mean,



you're always so confident about everything. And then there's me... always second best."

"What?" Sydney giggled. "I always thought you were the best dancer here!"

"Really?" Michelle laughed, too.

"Oh, Michelle!" Elise rushed over, a doctor following. "Are you OK? What hurts? Your ankle?" Michelle nodded.

"Well, let me take a look at it," the doctor said, lifting up Michelle's foot. "Could you take off your pointe shoe?"

"Sure," Michelle whispered.

While the doctor was examining Michelle's ankle, Elise turned to Sydney. "You have to be Odette," she told her.

"What? Me?" Sydney squeaked. "But... but..."

"Sydney, you have to! You're the understudy, you know the part."

Sydney closed her eyes. I should've been Odette. How many times had she thought that? Now she was going to be Odette. I should be thrilled, she thought. But why does it feel so wrong? "I don't have a choice, do I," she said, more to herself than to Elise.

Elise put a comforting hand on Sydney's shoulder. "You'll do great. You know we do ten shows. Maybe Michelle can be in some of them."

Sydney took a deep breath. "OK."

Ten minutes later, Sydney stood backstage in Michelle's Odette costume. She only vaguely heard Elise announce, "Thank you for your cooperation. We will now resume the show." She only vaguely heard the audience applaud. She only

vaguely heard the music begin to play. All she could hear was her own voice. I should've been Odette. "No," she whispered, "Michelle deserved it as much as I did." Sydney smiled and ran onstage, fluttering her fingers.

THE APPLAUSE was thunderous. It seemed like every person in the audience was standing, giving Sydney and the rest of the dancers a standing ovation. "It's over," Natalia whispered to Sydney as they stood backstage, waiting for their turn to go onstage for a bow.

"The first one, at least," Sydney smiled at her. "Now, go!" she prodded Natalia in the side.


Natalia ran onstage and curtsied gracefully. People clapped louder than ever and there were even a few playful boys that booed.

Sydney took a deep breath and ran onstage. The applause for her was the loudest, she noticed. She took center stage and waited for Elise to come onstage like she always did.

Elise walked onto the stage and with her was... Michelle. Her ankle was wrapped up, but other than that, she was walking fine. Michelle smiled almost shyly and curtsied. She backed up so she was standing next to Sydney. "You were great," Michelle whispered.

"Thanks," Sydney said. "I'm sure you'll be even better."

"Friends?" Michelle asked timidly.

"Friends," Sydney grinned, and the two girls hugged as the curtain closed. 

# That Foggy Brick Wall

By **Cassie Armon**

*Illustrated by* **Jessa Fogel**

ONE SIDE OF my heart is for myself and the other half is what other people see. Nestled deep in that half of my heart for me is a large black stain. That is where deaths have landed. Grandpa; Grandma; Mrs. Brown, the mother of my fifth-grade friend Tiana; and many others sit there. And Marie.

When I was eight years old, I took a visit to my ancestors' home, green Ireland. I remember Dublin, I remember cows, but mostly I remember Marie's farm. Marie was my mother's cousin—and my friend. She lived with a crowd of other friendly, elderly people. I remember one man with large hands and thick, dirty clothes from staying out all day.

Marie was sixty-nine, a bit older than my parents. She was a kind woman and, although I did not remember her, it was as though she was always my best friend.

The two of us set out tea and sat close to the stove—their only heating appliance. Being traditional Irish farmers, they had an old-fashioned home and heated only the main room during the day—a common practice throughout Ireland. Later, I'd spend time picking dewy, green Ireland flowers with my sister, Libby. We gathered them into great bouquets and I always gave mine to Marie.

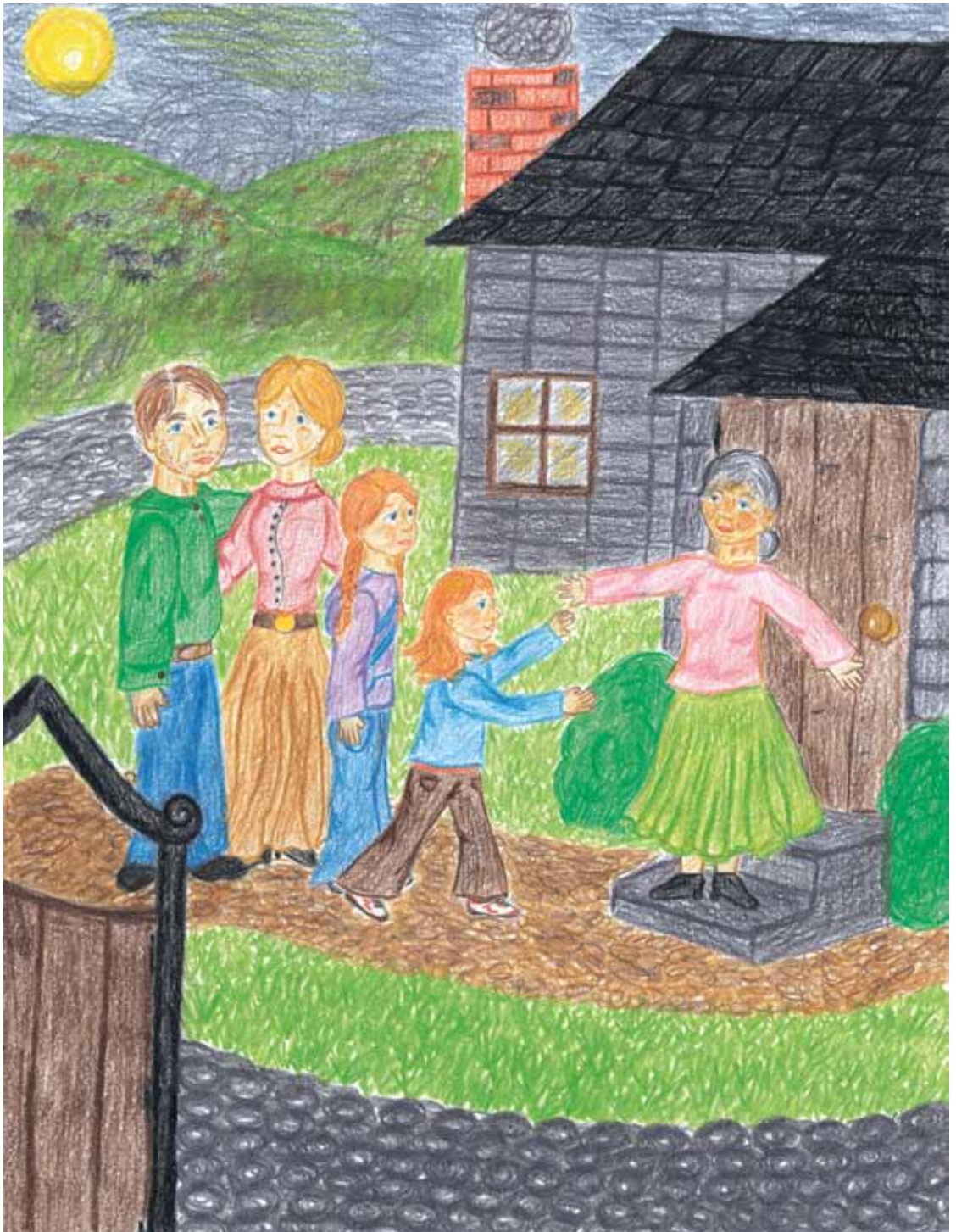
On a day that seemed ordinary enough, my family drove up to the house with its gray stone wall and swirling fog. I unbuckled and hopped out, smoothing my sweater as I did so. The air was wet and cool and I adored it. Smells of water and grass,



Cassie Armon, 11  
New York, New York



Jessa Fogel, 13  
Bow, New Hampshire



*I walked into the warm embrace of Marie*

and even cows, drifted along. A small sun shone weakly on my head, illuminating fiery red hairs. Glittering like tinsel on a tree, dewdrops trembled on their grass stems as I walked into the warm embrace of Marie. Everyone talked for a while and then the big-handed man asked, "Would anyone like to see a movie?"

Everyone nodded, of course. But, after I realized that the movie was about milking seasons, I decided that picking flowers amongst the real cows was more interesting. A few hours later, I came back in, shivering and sporting a wide grin. The flowers went into a vase and Marie and I started afternoon tea. Throughout Ireland, friends and family gather each day for a small meal. Marie and I put out cream, tea, milk, biscuits, and cold cakes and sandwiches.

We ate the crispy, hot, fresh biscuits and drank the thick, buttery milk and the hot, pronounced, sharp tea. Everyone talked and ate and laughed. Then Marie got a bit faint and we all quieted down.

She was a bit twitchy for a few minutes. Then she was kind of just deflated. I asked her, "Are you all right?"

She looked brave as she could manage and moaned, "I'm OK."

And for some reason, that was when my mom said, "You need to go up and get some rest."


But she found she was too weak to walk up the stairs. So we all helped her stand, and when my dad saw me holding her up, he told me to go away for a moment.

Marie was lifted upstairs and I never have seen her since.

My dad and mom finally came down. I wanted to stay and help Marie, but my parents told me to get in the car. So I did. But I fought and ran, back to the car and slammed the door, and begged my parents to turn around. But we left through those foggy gates, past that foggy brick wall into the foggy world.

We went home to New York after that. Never did we get news. I soon learned to forget. Or pretended to, at least—until two weeks later, on St. Patrick's Day. I loved St. Patrick's Day—the green, the joy, and the celebrations. It would have been a marvelous day if the overseas phone call had not come. Marie had died.

I appeared to be the same as always, outside—silly, talkative, understanding and listening. But inside, a part of my heart felt numb. My understanding about the permanence of life was now clearer.

No more Marie. No more tea in that house beyond the misty gray lane. I learned to treat relationships with friends and family more deeply. I realized that, at any moment, loved ones could be ripped away from you. Outside forces, like people, can write your life story and take you down unexpected paths. My outlook about friendship has been edited because of Marie and that foggy brick wall. 

*Marie Lee lived with her husband, Michael, on a cattle farm in County Cavan, Ireland.*





*Her harp looked like something the angels dropped into the room by mistake*



# Song of the Harp

By **Victoria Beccar Varela**

*Illustrated by* **Leela Keshav**

**B**RRRIING!! THE BELL announced that school was out. Kids poured out from different classes and the slams of lockers could be heard. While the rest of the kids ran out the door and into the winter air, Odette Barry walked patiently to the outside of the school. She was in no rush to arrive home to her demanding grandmother who insisted on being read her favorite childhood books. If Odette was lucky, she would arrive home at the time of her grandmother's nap and enter through the back door.

Barry House was like a manor. Clara Barry, Odette's mother, had suggested it had a rich look. There were gates, stone columns, heavy oak doors, and three chimneys. Through the back there was a great, majestic pine forest that had a stream flowing by. Odette discovered a path that led to the stream, across a tiny bridge, and then a stump. The stump allowed Odette to hoist herself over the wooden fence that dropped into Barry House's lawn.

On this particular day, Odette was in for a surprise when she crossed the back door into the kitchen. Her mother was standing over the stove, shelling peas into a bowl. Odette froze. Trying not to make a sound, she tiptoed across the kitchen floor. A wooden board creaked and Odette's mother turned her pretty head.

"Hi Mom," whispered Odette.

A look of understanding crossed her mother's face. "I don't blame you for not wanting to read to your grandmother,



Victoria Beccar Varela, 10  
Beaverton, Oregon



Leela Keshav, 10  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Odette,” said her mother. “She’s sleeping.” Her mom was everything: understanding, intelligent, beautiful, and kind. Odette’s mother was a nurse who traveled around the world helping poor villages. She only came home once a month and when she did there would be a delicious dinner and Odette would play her treasure, the harp. She tiptoed past the sitting room where her grandmother napped, past the parlor where she played her harp, and up the stairs to her room.

Odette’s room was exactly like a composer’s office. There were three sections, a bedroom, a bathroom, and a mini-office. In the bedroom there was a bed and a quilted pillow with violins on it. It was next to the window that welcomed sunlight. A rolltop desk filled with notebooks and test results stood on the wall opposite the bed. In the bathroom, a pretty purple towel hung on a rack, while the smell of shampoo and soap danced off the walls. In the mini-room were mini-bookcases filled with papers and framed pictures of Odette and her harp. Two music stands stood together in a corner and a small table was put in the center. Her harp looked like something the angels dropped into the room by mistake. Its gold furnishings glinted in the sunlight that would sometimes reach the office by the small skylight. The small jumps provided slides for Odette’s fingers.

After finishing her homework, Odette grabbed a notebook entitled *Music* and seated herself on the stool next to the harp. Odette reached for a music stand to

put her notebook on. On most days, she would turn to *Composer’s Chapter* and practice music for the harp, but today she decided to write her own song, “The Return.” At the beginning it was lonely and mysterious but then it turned gleeful and loud. She wanted to have cymbals go with it some day. These were the emotions that Odette felt during the return of her mother, but she wasn’t showing anyone her songs.

“Child,” said Odette’s grandmother. They were passing around bowls of egg salad at the dining table. “You didn’t read *Treasure Island* to me today.” Granny’s voice was stern and tired. Odette glanced a look at her mom, who exchanged a mischievous smile. After the salad was finished, brownies and ice cream reached the table for dessert.

“Odette,” said her mother, “I saw a pamphlet for a junior symphony called *Angel’s Music*. Do you want to join?” Her eyes looked expectantly at her. Odette gulped a brownie and knew exactly what she was thinking. Her mother wanted Odette to finally make some friends, not to play the harp.

“I’ll think about it,” replied Odette. She got up and went upstairs to get her harp. Odette needed some way to avoid the symphony, but she always wanted a chance to prove she was a great harp player. Odette decided to think about it later. She heaved her harp down the stairs, into the parlor, and started playing “Ode to Joy.”

“OK. I’ll do it,” said Odette that night in her mother’s bedroom. She had consid-

ered joining Angel's Music and decided to do it.

"That's wonderful, Odette," replied her mother, smiling. "I'll take you to rehearsals on Tuesday."

As Odette lay in bed, arms on the back of her head, staring at the sky, she wondered if she really wanted to do this. Would she make a good impression and get a solo? For the first time in a while, Odette Barry looked forward to trying something new, even if it meant making friends.

**T**IME FLEW BY and soon it was Tuesday. Odette was seated in the car while her harp lay in a case on the back seat. "Odette, you are simply going to love this," said her mother for the entire trip. "I did some research and Angel's Music was the start for some really famous musicians." Odette was silent during all this; she began to doubt that she would have fun with this symphony.

They finally found a place to park next to a giant building that had a sign that said Devin Hall. Odette stepped out of the car, opened the back-seat door, and got her harp. In its case the harp looked like

a giant red mitten on wheels and Odette thought it was embarrassing. Odette and her mother were soon inside a maze of empty hallways that had doors every few feet. "Here it is, Odette," called her mother, who was ahead of her, "room 312."

Odette eyed the room with suspicion. One foot inside and she would not get out until the period was over. Odette saw her mother open the door and beckon for her to enter. The room was a lot like a movie theater, dark in some places and bright in others. A bunch of heads craned to look at Odette as she entered, which made her want to turn tail and flee.

A tall man smiled and said, "Welcome to Angel's Music." He shook Odette's hand and showed her where to sit while he talked with her mother. Odette took her harp out of the case and reached for a music stand while holding the harp. Odette tried to reach it but she couldn't. Suddenly, a hand came out from her right side and pulled the music stand towards Odette.

A girl about her age was smiling as she said some words that would change Odette's social life completely, "Hi, my name is Jill. Do you want to be friends?" 🍷



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