

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Emma T. Capps, age 12, from "Plant a Thimble," page 32

RUMOR

Nicole intervenes when a hawk attacks a wild ferret

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

What strange force drew the orphan boy, Gabriel, to the burned-out theatre?

Also: Illustrations by Joan He, Daria Lugina, and Stanislav Nedzelskyi

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 38, NUMBER 3

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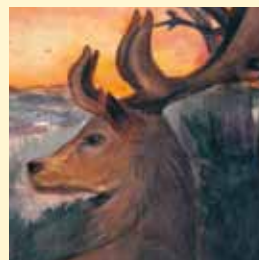
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Stone Soup

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, phone number and e-mail.

Cover: Author/illustrator Emma T. Capps has been drawing and writing ever since she can remember. Emma speaks both English and Spanish, and she recently won a Spanish-language poetry contest in a magazine called *Iguana*. Besides drawing and writing, Emma's favorite thing to do is swim.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

Your magazine is amazing! Every time I find you in my mailbox, I'm first awestruck by your cover, inspired by the letters, then I simply gasp at the quality of the stories and artwork. Thank you for making the dreams of so many young authors and illustrators come to life. I've been getting *Stone Soup* for six or seven years now, and my sister and I have a considerable collection of magazines in our bedroom. Whenever we're gloomy or bored, we know where to go and what to read—we head straight for the magazines! I want to be a writer when I grow up—so do most of my friends at school and in the neighborhood. But until we turn fourteen, the best thing we can do to achieve our dreams is read and write for *Stone Soup*. Thank you again for your mellifluous magazine— isn't "mellifluous" such a perfect word?

MAYA KESHAV, 13

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Maya illustrated the story on page 11 of this issue.

I am Aliosha, I live on the island of Cyprus and I speak Greek and English. I go to year five at a primary school in Spitali-Paramytha village. I enjoy reading *Stone Soup*, which I receive here in Cyprus. I also used to receive it in another country we lived in, the Emirates. Thank you for publishing a magazine like *Stone Soup*.

ALIOSHA BIELENBERG PITTAKA, 10

Limassol, Cyprus

For the past four years I have been an avid reader of your magazine. Your fiction and poetry sections have always particularly intrigued and inspired me. This is how I started to write poetry myself.

MARIA MAIER, 12

Walpole, Massachusetts

My name is Rachel Simon and I am now twenty years old. I first subscribed to *Stone Soup* in the '90s and early 2000s. I was ten or so back then and I remember being really excited to run to the mailbox and see if I had gotten a new issue of *Stone Soup*! I still have every copy of *Stone Soup* I have ever received in the mail. I pored over every story, poem and book review in the issues. I even submitted a few times, but was rejected. During those years of confusion, of the transition from elementary school to middle school, I was thankful for each issue of *Stone Soup*. I was so influenced by some of the stories (I remember a particular one about a young girl in the future having a conversation with her mother) that I went out and attempted to write my own story in a similar vein. I am now a college student who is studying English and Creative Writing and I hope you and everyone else at *Stone Soup* know that it is in part thanks to you that I am in this field. Your magazine has really touched me and for that I am forever grateful. And since I can no longer subscribe (well, I suppose I could but I would feel a little silly), I do go on your Web site to see the latest issue. Your magazine has really helped me grow as a writer and avid bibliophile (a lot of the books I read in those days were because of the book reviews!). Thank you for your magazine. I am forever in debt.

RACHEL SIMON

Wayne, New Jersey

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Stone Soup is pleased to announce that we are now partners with SecretBuilders, an online world for children offering a variety of creative activities, including an online interactive magazine where young writers can get published. We encourage you to visit secretbuilders.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.



"Well, that's Maine's beaches for you," she sighs. I nod in agreement

Rumor

By **Hugh Cole**

Illustrated by **Joan He**

FRIGID WIND WHIPS through my long brown hair and bites me with cold teeth. It carries the strong smell of the sea in it, which stings my nose. Gray, salty water is churned into waves by the gale and sprinkles my chilly bare feet that are sinking into the wet sand. A seagull struggles to fly to its nest. I watch the large bird as it finally defeats the wind and lands in a small hollow high on a weathered rock.

I sniff, disappointed by the wind, then turn around and walk up the beach, avoiding flurries of gritty sand. Huge rocks like the one the seagull is perching in stud the beach and reach into the sky like the rough fingers of an old man.

I come to the gravel road leading away from the beach and the sea and awkwardly hobble across it, not wanting to press my feet too hard against the sharp little rocks. I walk across a lawn of grass that is long and plush like a carpet.

As I enter my small house, I welcome the warmth and savor the familiar smell.

"Is that you, Nicole?" my mom calls from the kitchen.

"Yes." I enter the steamy room and sit at the table. My mom is at the stove, grilling the sea bass my brother, Brent, caught that morning for dinner.

"Why back so soon?" She starts humming a pretty tune as she adds spices from glass shakers.

"The wind is too cold," I groan miserably.

"I thought it might be," Mom says knowingly, looking at me. I see that she is wearing her peach-colored apron. It has the



Hugh Cole, 12
Moscow, Idaho



Joan He, 13
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

handprints of Brent, Zoë, and me on it in red paint. Mine are smaller than my two older siblings'.

"It seems it always is," I say, fiddling with the zipper of my jacket.

"Well, that's Maine's beaches for you," she sighs. I nod in agreement. Maine's beaches are always cold and windy.

I get up from the table and walk down the narrow hallway that leads to my room. School pictures of us three kids hang on the walls alongside my dad's fishing boat, a large, proud vessel. Mom and Dad are standing next to each other in the bow of the boat, squinting in sunlight yet smiling.

I enter my room, which is small like the rest of the house. Sand dollars of various sizes and hues are tacked to the walls, and the bedside table, desk, and dresser are all covered in dark, glossy seashells which I have collected along the beach and in tide pools. Several of my watercolor paintings add to the decoration, resting on the sea-green walls. They are mostly of the sea, but there are a few lighthouses as well.

My bed is messy and unmade, as it usually is. I let myself fall onto it. I punch my pillow a couple times and lay my head down sideways. In this position I can see my painting of the large sky-blue lighthouse. It is taller and wider than most lighthouses, and unlike the rest of my paintings, it actually exists. I discovered it one day while exploring along the beach. It is old and rickety, abandoned, with wide sheets of wiry ivy growing on it. I think the ivy looks like it's strangling the lighthouse, so I left that part out when I paint-

ed it a few weeks ago.

That night, after dinner, and after I have brushed my teeth with thick toothpaste, my sister, Zoë, and I sit in the living room and look out the big window. We stare at the choppy waters, illuminated by the pale moon that sits in a throne of twinkling stars. The light of the moon dances on the water, glittering brightly.

"The sea is so beautiful," Zoë murmurs, tucking a loose strand of her hair behind her ear. I pull a blanket draped over the back of an armchair and wrap it snugly around myself.

"I know," I agree, "especially in the night."

THE NEXT DAY the wind has stopped. I am relieved and return to the beach, after Mom tells me to stay away from the water and be safe. Despite the wind's absence, it is still cold. The sun shyly peeks through thin, stretched clouds, providing no warmth.

Instead of heading back home, I start the short journey to the blue lighthouse. It is hidden in a small bay that has huge boulders blocking the entrance from the sea. Large trees grow around it, hiding it like a leafy wall.

There is no door to the lighthouse, just rusty hinges connected to an empty frame. The sky-blue paint is faded and peeling, revealing cracked wood and rusty nails. The inside of the lighthouse is hollow and dim. I am sure there used to be doors and floors, but now it is just one large room that leads up to a glass roof,



If ferrets smile, I'm sure that is what Rumor is doing

for the large light is gone too. A few bird nests are built on the wall, but I don't hear anything from them.

A squeak brings my attention to the floor of the lighthouse, which is dirt and weeds now. A small ferret is looking at me cautiously. I can see its small legs are tensed, ready to run. I freeze, not wanting

to scare it or make it angry. I am afraid it might be rabid.

The ferret takes one step nearer to me. It seems to relax.

It is brown and skinny with a long tail tipped with black. It has dark eyes ringed with white fur, as are its ears. I'm not sure if it is a boy or a girl, but I'll pretend it's a boy.


“What’s your name?” I ask thoughtfully. My voice echoes in the lighthouse. “Is it... Rumor?” I realize using the word as a name is odd, but I like the sound of it. I kneel down to him, all thoughts of him being dangerous gone. My movement seems to frighten Rumor, and he hisses and scampers off, running through my legs and out into the cold day. I turn and watch him.

Suddenly, a bird with dark, russet-colored feathers and a sharp beak thuds into the ground with outstretched talons next to Rumor, sending a plume of sand into the air. I yelp in surprise, as well as fear for the ferret. The bird appears to be some kind of hawk. I see the bird struggle to grab Rumor with its wicked talons. I run out onto the beach, waving my arms and yelling. The hawk’s attention is momentarily on me. Rumor must sense this, for he scurries out of the hawk’s grip and runs into the woods that fringe the beach. The bird pursues, and I grab a few small pebbles and dash into the woods. I immediately lose sight of the hawk, and I search desperately for Rumor. I hear a commotion a few feet away and see the hawk crying angrily into a hollow log. I throw one pebble at it but miss. Luckily, the stone startles the bird, and it backs off. I throw the other pebbles. They all miss, but they drive the hawk off. It flaps off into the sky, cawing in frustration.

I find I am exhausted and fall to my knees into a patch of ferns. Rumor comes out from the hollow log and looks cautiously for the hawk. He cocks his head

then sees me. I think he’ll run from me, being the timid thing he is. But instead he slowly comes towards me. I reach out my finger and pet his neck, delighted at how soft his fur is. The ferret makes a sound that is much like the purring of a cat, and if ferrets smile, I’m sure that is what Rumor is doing. I pet him with my entire hand now, smoothing down the unsettled fur. He eventually runs away, leaving me with a smile on my face. I stand up and walk back out to the beach, then begin the journey home.

I tell no one in my family about Rumor or the hawk, just for the sake of having a secret. But I tell paper and paint about Rumor, using a thin brush as my tongue. The painting shows a small ferret with a black-tipped tail, running from a fierce hawk. I hang it on the wall once it has dried.

I return to the spot in the woods, the place with the disturbed patch of ferns and the hollow log, in a few days, just to see if Rumor is still there. But he is not. I am slightly upset but not terribly. It is what I expected. I sit outside the lighthouse, staring at the bay. It is not windy, so the gray water is relatively calm. I then jump to my feet, excited, for I notice it is warm. The sun is out, and it is warm! I run out onto the beach, leaving the sky-blue lighthouse behind. I laugh with joy and spread my arms out and spin in circles, leaving a spiral in the sand. And as I turn to go home, to tell Mom it is warm, I am not sure, but I think I see a black-tipped tail dart through bushes out of the corner of my eye. 

Silent Story

By Mina Alexandra Oates

On a cold winter morning
The lake breathes out steam
Like a giant tea kettle.

Two ducks in the middle
As still as a painting.
Why haven't they gone south?

A bird hangs up in the air.
Let's sit on the shore
And soak in the quiet.

Instead, we zoom by
And join in the traffic.



Mina Alexandra Oates, 7
Pinson, Alabama



Ruby stared at the letter, not daring to believe it

Writing Is Like Knitting

By **Brittany Jullie**

Illustrated by **Maya Keshav**

WRITING IS LIKE KNITTING. When you write or knit properly and take time to learn the craft, you can enjoy hours of pleasure from doing it. However, if you don't take the time to learn the skill carefully, the needles or pen can be your downfall, stabbing away at your heart and making you angry or upset. It just depends on whether you're patient.

These words ran through Ruby McClure's mind as she typed away at her old-fashioned typewriter that her grandmother had given her. *Click! Click! Click!* She pulled the page out of the typewriter and quickly re-read what she had written. Of course, she wasn't *nearly* satisfied. Scowling in frustration, Ruby ripped the page into pieces and tossed it in the direction of the garbage can, where the pieces floated through the air and landed on the floor.

Ruby's deceased grandmother's words came back to her as if her grandmother whispered them in her ear. Ruby knew that writing took time to learn, and you have to practice to master it. But, Ruby thought in exasperation, I have practiced, and if my writing doesn't get accepted, how will I pay the bills? This was true. Ruby always knew that she wanted to be a writer, and she had always thought about that as she went through middle school, got her high school diploma, and graduated from college, but none of her novels had been accepted for publication. When she gave up her full-time job as a receptionist to become a freelance writer, acceptance became critical. Ruby's only source



Brittany Jullie, 11
Grand Haven, Michigan



Maya Keshav, 13
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

of income came from writing short stories and submitting them to contests and magazines, but that wasn't enough. After watching bill after unpaid bill stack up on her kitchen counter, Ruby started to doubt herself. She began to write more and more, which was good, but, reading it over, she recognized a forced quality in her writing, something that she had pointed out in a piece by a critiquing partner in a writing club that she had abandoned a few months ago. And nothing had been accepted.

Ruby was sure she had taken time to learn the craft, but she knew that she couldn't spend her life trying to convince herself that her novels were being rejected by numerous publishing houses because she hadn't taken enough time to practice. *Be patient*, her grandmother would say.

Ruby rubbed her temple wearily and decided to take a break to go check the mail. She stood up from the old swivel chair that she spent many hours of her day in. Since the extra bedroom that she called her office was so tiny, Ruby didn't even have to turn to open the door that stood to the left of her desk. She cast one last glance behind her shoulder at the office as she stepped out the door, taking in the shelves, packed with books and papers and threatening to collapse any day, the card table that she called her desk, and the typewriter sitting upon it, an old, manual Underwood with a few broken keys, the only possession of her grandmother's that Ruby had left. Ruby blinked in the bright

light that came through a small window on the opposite wall and shut the door behind her. She walked down the hallway, enjoying the familiar sounds of creaking floorboards under her feet. Ruby opened a door and stepped onto a small porch. The paint was chipping off at the edges, and one side's rails had already begun to rot. Ruby ambled down the driveway, blinking in the bright sunlight and enjoying the feel of fresh air on her skin, and remembered that she had to mow the lawn as soon as she got a chance, which, with her busy writing schedule, could take as long as two weeks to get to.

She pulled open the mailbox and sorted through the envelopes, mostly magazines and junk mail, including one bill that Ruby opened with dread. She gasped as she read her electric and water bills. How can I ever pay this off? she thought. A knot grew in her stomach. Ruby pursed her lips and closed her eyes, wishing for the thousandth time that her novels would get accepted and she would be able to pay off the bills.

One more letter still sat in the back of the crooked mailbox, a letter in a fancy envelope with curly cursive writing on the front that said:

*Ruby McClure
13330 Beach View Lane
Brasewater, MS*

The return address was the one of a publishing house in North Dakota that Ruby remembered she had submitted to about a month ago.

Ruby opened the letter casually, as she was sure that this was just another rejection letter. She didn't even want to see what suggestions the editor would have for her novel.

Only one sentence caught her eye: "Your novel, *The Mage of Malilea*, has been accepted for publication."

Ruby skimmed through the rest of the letter as it went on to explain what the editor liked about the manuscript, things that the editor would like to improve, the publishing contract, and so on. She barely processed the words, as she was absorbed in her success.

Ruby stared at the letter, not daring to believe it. She lowered her hand and pulled out the enclosed contract that was also in the envelope. There it was, real, solid proof.

Ruby raced back into her house, threw

the letter onto the kitchen table, and, grabbing her cell phone, proceeded to call all of her friends.

"Guess what, Becca?" Ruby nearly shouted into the telephone.

"What?"

"They accepted my manuscript!"

"They did?"

"They *did*!"

Becca let out a shriek on the other end of the phone. "This is amazing, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, they're going to publish you!"

A few minutes later, after Ruby called everyone she knew to celebrate, she dropped into a comfortable leather armchair and closed her eyes. A single tear fell down her cheek.

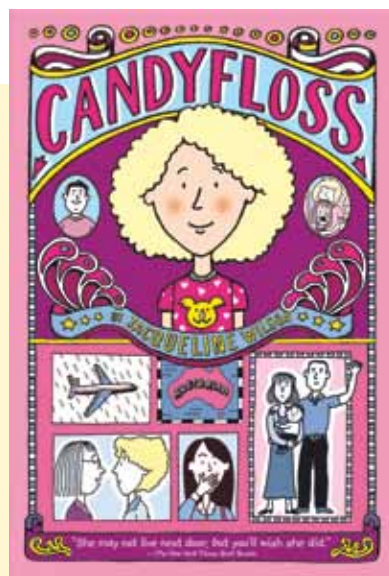
Her grandmother's words came drifting back to her. *Be patient*. Ruby smiled. Her grandmother was right. ❁



Book Review

By Sarah Gavis-Hughson

Candyfloss, by Jacqueline Wilson; Square Fish: New York, 2008; \$6.99



Sarah Gavis-Hughson, 12
Princeton, New Jersey

WHAT WOULD YOU DO if your mom moved to Australia? This is just one question Flora Barnes, also known as Floss, has to answer in Jacqueline Wilson's excellent novel, *Candyfloss*.

Floss is a girl in her preteens living in England. She lives with her mother, her mother's husband, Steve, and their toddler, Tiger, and spends the weekends staying with her dad in the house behind his rundown café. Floss is in the middle of a family split. She loves her mom and cherishes the girl-time that they spend together, yet at the same time she has more in common with her honest, easygoing father, who will do anything for her.

When Steve gets a new job in Sydney, Australia, Floss makes a tough decision. She defies her mother's insistence that she must accompany them to Australia and declares that she will stay with her father. This is hard for Floss because she is choosing one parent over the other, but she decides that her father needs her the most. Her mother has Steve and Tiger to look after her, but Floss's dad has no one. He lives for the short weekends that he and Floss spend together, and Floss realizes that he needs her more than her mother does.


I have a friend in a similar situation to Floss. Her family spent a year in California, and while they were there her mother

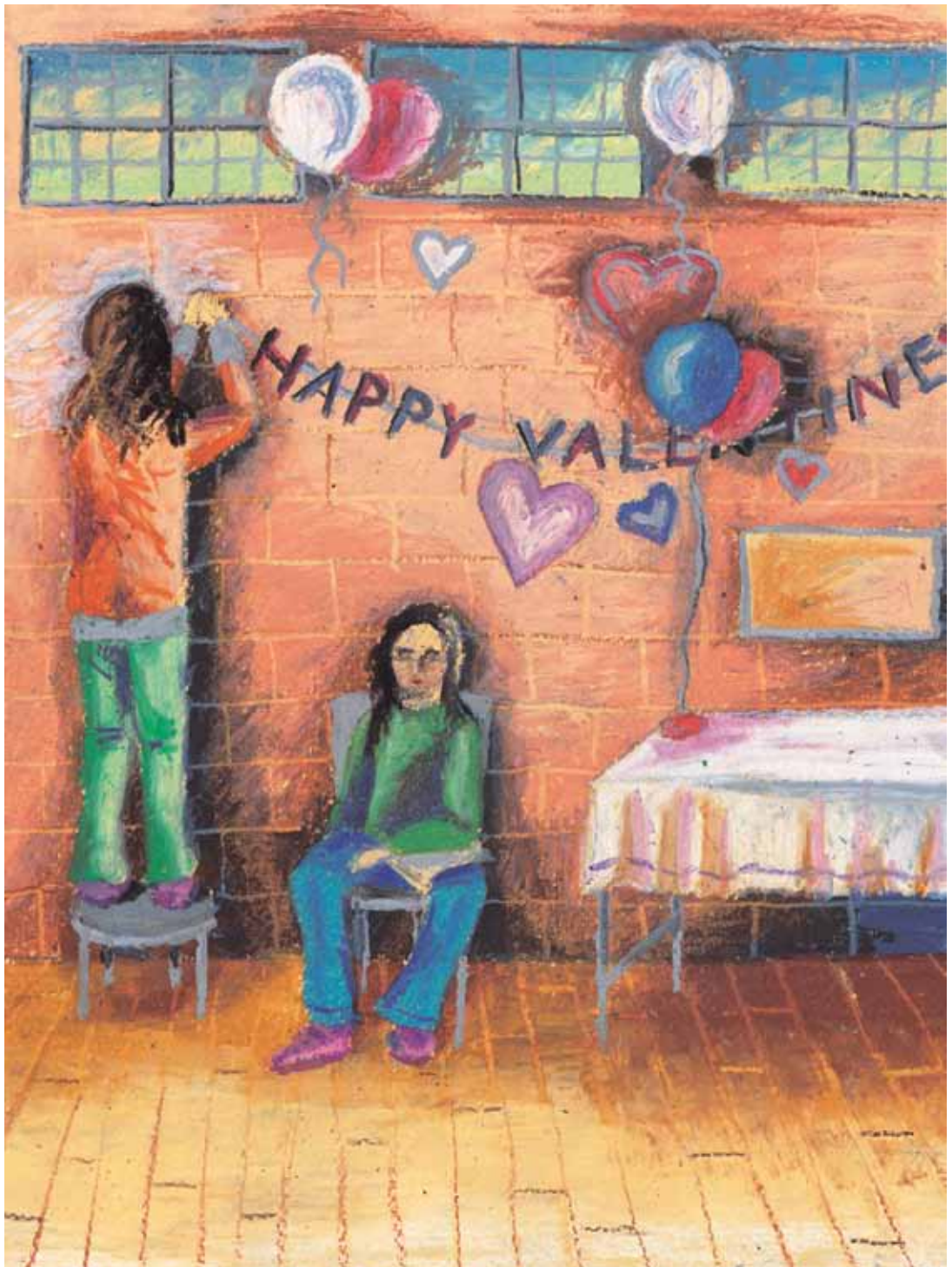
fell in love with another man. When they got back, her parents divorced. This was only in third grade, but she is still scarred. She now switches between her parents' houses every week. Both Floss and my friend have dealt with the sadness of divorce.

Not only does Floss have problems at home, but school is becoming a concern as well. Floss is best friends with the pretty and popular Rhiannon. Unfortunately, just because Rhiannon is popular doesn't mean she is nice. When Susan Potts, a nice, nerdy girl, comes to Floss's school, Rhiannon and her friends start to tease her. Floss wants to stand up for Susan, but it seems impossible with Rhiannon always teasing her. How can Floss possibly remain friends with both of them? Floss is torn between wanting to be popular and fit in, and wishing that Susan was her friend.

I am a nerd, no doubt about it. I expect other people who write for and read *Stone Soup* are. But most kids don't like nerds. For some reason, we always find ourselves on the fringes, occasionally being included, but for the most part off in our own little world.

Another reason that I can really relate to Susan is the feeling of being the new kid. I spent half a year living in Cambridge, England, when I was in fourth grade. Overall, the kids welcomed me with open arms. Unfortunately, there are always some characters, like Rhiannon, who feel insecure enough that they need to pick on a new kid to fit in with their group. Sometimes I was called names, sometimes I was picked on, and lots of kids enjoyed making fun of my American accent. Eventually, like Susan, I learned that if people tease you the best thing to do is to hold your head high and rise above unkind bullies.

Over the course of the book Floss finds herself motherless, homeless, and friendless, but she also has her good times. She makes a friend, discovers a circus, finds a pet cat, and befriends her teacher. *Candyfloss* is an excellent book—as Floss would say, “Simply brilliant!” 



How am I going to tell James that I want him for my Valentine?

Secret Crushes

By **Emmy J. X. Wong**

Illustrated by **Daria Lugina**

JAMIE LOOKED OUT her bedroom window and laughed, trying to look past the irregularly shaped snowman, the masterpiece her younger sister and brother had created to adorn their front yard. With only one button eye remaining, and a scarf which had been mistakenly tied around its head instead of its neck, it looked more like a scary pirate in its Halloween costume than any Frosty the Snowman she had ever seen. But she loved it anyway. Oh, how she lived for the holidays. She loved every single one of them. She loved the adventure of ringing doorbells, pretending to be someone else and being rewarded with a bagful of candy on Halloween. She loved the reflection of holiday tree lights making jumbled-up rainbows in the snow, and her favorite holiday of all time was just around the corner.

In preparation for that sweetest of all holidays, dressed in its red finery, Jamie was scanning the horizon for something, or someone. Sure enough, the door opened across the street, and the auburn-headed James O'Reilly appeared right on schedule. She felt a twinge in her heart, or was it a stab of pain from an arrow hitting its bull's-eye from Cupid's bow? Every morning, Jamie looked for the shaggy red-headed youngster at ten past seven and would race down the stairs, her heart flip-flopping wildly, in order to "just by chance" bump into him and walk with him to the corner bus stop.

She had crushed on James ever since they had been in kindergarten together and he had taken as much an interest in her



Emmy J. X. Wong, 12
Weston, Massachusetts



Daria Lugina, 13
Northborough, Massachusetts

skinned knee as she had herself. She remembered sobbing on the playground and how he unselfishly offered his stuffed rabbit to help console her. But as they grew up, they grew apart. The only class they still had together was band, and she was both happy and relieved they had each taken up the clarinet. Wednesdays were the only time each week in middle school she could count on seeing him. She would pretend to forget her music, and he was always eager to share and plop down in the seat next to her. Was it just her imagination, or did he look forward to band just as much as she did?

"Hi Jamie... I saw a lot of cars at your house last weekend. Did someone in your family have a birthday or something?" he asked excitedly.

"Ah, or something," Jamie replied quickly. "It was Chinese New Year... yeah, probably not a holiday you celebrate. We had a lot of our family over for dinner. Just a regular dinner—well maybe a few special things."

"Chinese New Year sounds like fun to me," asserted James. "I like anything with food." Boy what a dumb thing to say! he thought. That's not going to impress her, he thought, but he didn't realize she didn't need impressing.

The rest of the way was silent, and Jamie was happy when the bright orange bus pulled up, against the backdrop of a crisp February azure sky. She had already run out of topics and wanted to end any conversation about the differences between their families dead in its tracks. She

was from a traditional Chinese-American family, and she knew, with their Celtic customs, the O'Reillys were proud Irish-Americans. She was relieved to take her seat in the front row with Corinne, her best friend, which had been their routine all six grades previously.

BOTH JAMIE and Corinne were on the Valentine's Day Dance Committee. After school, the two gathered with the enthusiastic crowd of other party-planners in the gym. Construction-paper hearts of all sizes lined the cinder-block walls, and, intertwined among clouds of crimson and snowy helium balloons, hung excitement and anticipation.

"I like the school's seventh- and eighth-grade tradition," giggled Corinne in hushed tones.

"Kinda risky if you ask me," replied Jamie quietly.

"I like the fact that the last dance is 'Girls' Choice.' If the girl is ready to reveal a secret crush, she can offer a small token of a gift she has picked out just for her crush that she unveils during the last dance. If the boy doesn't feel the same, he just accepts the gift politely as a gift of friendship. If he likes the girl, he offers a small gift back, that he especially brought for her. No harm done. No feelings hurt."

"Except if you're not the right girl," replied Jamie. "I think it's dumb," she heard herself voice aloud. Secretly, she was shouting. She wanted Corinne to know that she genuinely loved the tradition. She had crushed on James her whole life

and couldn't wait till the St. Valentine's dance to take a chance and let it be known. But she was scared. She couldn't believe she was acting this way. I can't even tell my best friend, she thought. How am I going to tell James that I want him for my Valentine?

She thought back to the day she bought the simple Claddagh boy's ring. She had learned that the Claddagh was an Irish symbol of friendship. She was with her mom in Winkelman's Jewelry Shop in town right before Christmas. Mom was getting the battery changed in her watch, the one Dad had bought at Winkelman's last year as a Christmas present. Mom loved that two-tone silver-and-gold watch that "goes with everything," she had told all her friends.

Jamie loved her mom. Although she had no fashion sense, she was a ready listener. She could tell her mom anything. Mom was always ready to hear her out and didn't judge. She told her mom she wanted to buy the ring and her mom had let her. She wanted something that would be important to James and let him know she wanted to learn more about his family's culture.

Jamie's favorite day, filled with cinnamon hearts, foil chocolate boxes, cutout cupids and frilly doilies, had finally arrived. "Ha-choo," Jamie awoke. "Ha-choo, ha-choo," a reveille of sneezes announced the morning to the rest of the household, in place of her usual tinny electric alarm. Jamie didn't have her comforter on, yet she was burning up. "Oh no, not

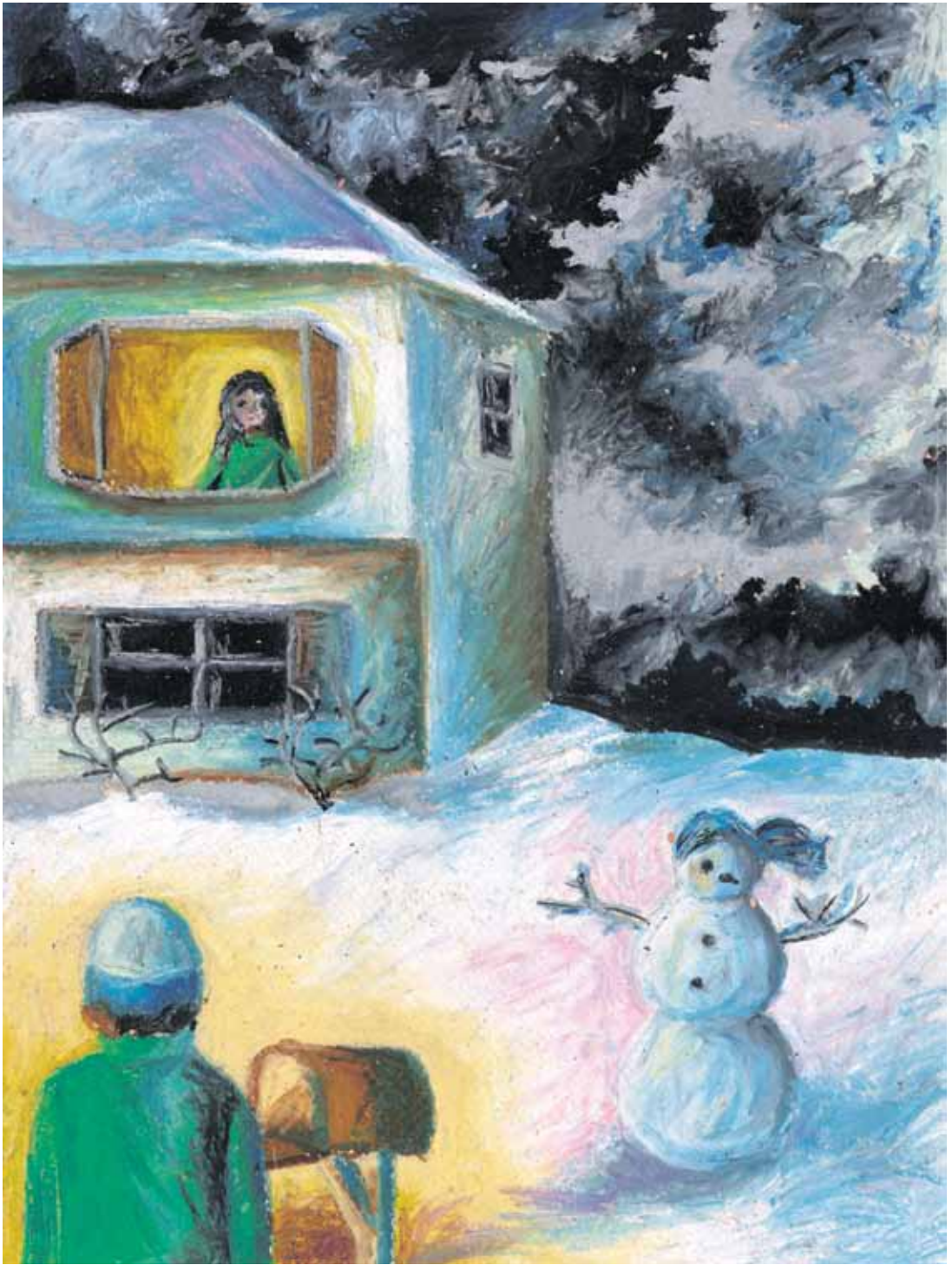
today," she implored the vacant room. As she slipped her feet over the side of the bed and tried to stand, she felt her stomach reach for her knees, and everything grayed out.

"This can't be happening," she uttered aloud to her platoon of stuffed animals keeping guard. She plopped back on the bed, yearning for ice chips to soothe her dry, burning throat. Sure enough, after her mom found the thermometer hidden among the store of orphaned items in the bathroom drawer, it was confirmed. She had the flu.

"No school for you today," her mom pronounced. Any other day, Jamie would have been happy to have a day off from school. But not today. Jamie knew if she wasn't well enough to go to school, she wasn't well enough to go to the dance tonight. That was a house rule. And house rules were never broken. The twists of red and white party streamers that she would never see again swirled into a pink vortex as Jamie fell into a deep slumber.

Somewhere around nine p.m. Jamie awoke. She had to look twice at the fluorescent dial illuminating the face of her bedside alarm clock. Was it possible? She had slept over fourteen hours. She felt beads of perspiration on her forehead but felt much cooler, as if Persephone, the goddess of spring, had exhaled a fresh supply of mountaintop air into her boiler room of a bedroom. Her fever had broken.

Looking out at the silver moon through her box bay window, she spied a figure



It looked like he was slipping a small wrapped package into her mailbox

in the shadows, hovering over her mailbox. Could it be James? she thought. He was wearing the familiar kelly-green parka and it looked like he was slipping a small wrapped package into her mailbox; then he quickly scampered away across the thinning snowdrifts to make his way home.

Jamie put on her robe and pulled on her fleecy Uggs quickly. If she were quiet, she could tiptoe down the back stairs to the kitchen and her parents might not hear her as they sat in front of the TV. She could hear her parents' favorite show blaring up the stairs.

Jamie begged the snow not to crunch too loudly. She didn't want Bailey the pug next door to start barking its worst. As Jamie opened the mailbox gingerly, her heart skipped jump rope. Sure enough, in its dwelling was a small package wrapped in ruby-red tissue. With it was a hand-scrawled note with a heart and an arrow running through it, which read, "To Jamie from James." Unwrapping the satiny tissue, Jamie let out a small gush of surprise. In her palm lay a dainty silver dragon, cut out in front of the Chinese character for luck. It was the cutest Chinese dragon she had ever seen. It sparkled in the moonlight. Her heart wanted to shout out its happiness to the low-hanging stars eavesdropping above.

Jamie surveyed her watch under the nearby street lamp. There was still time before Valentine's Day was over. She had

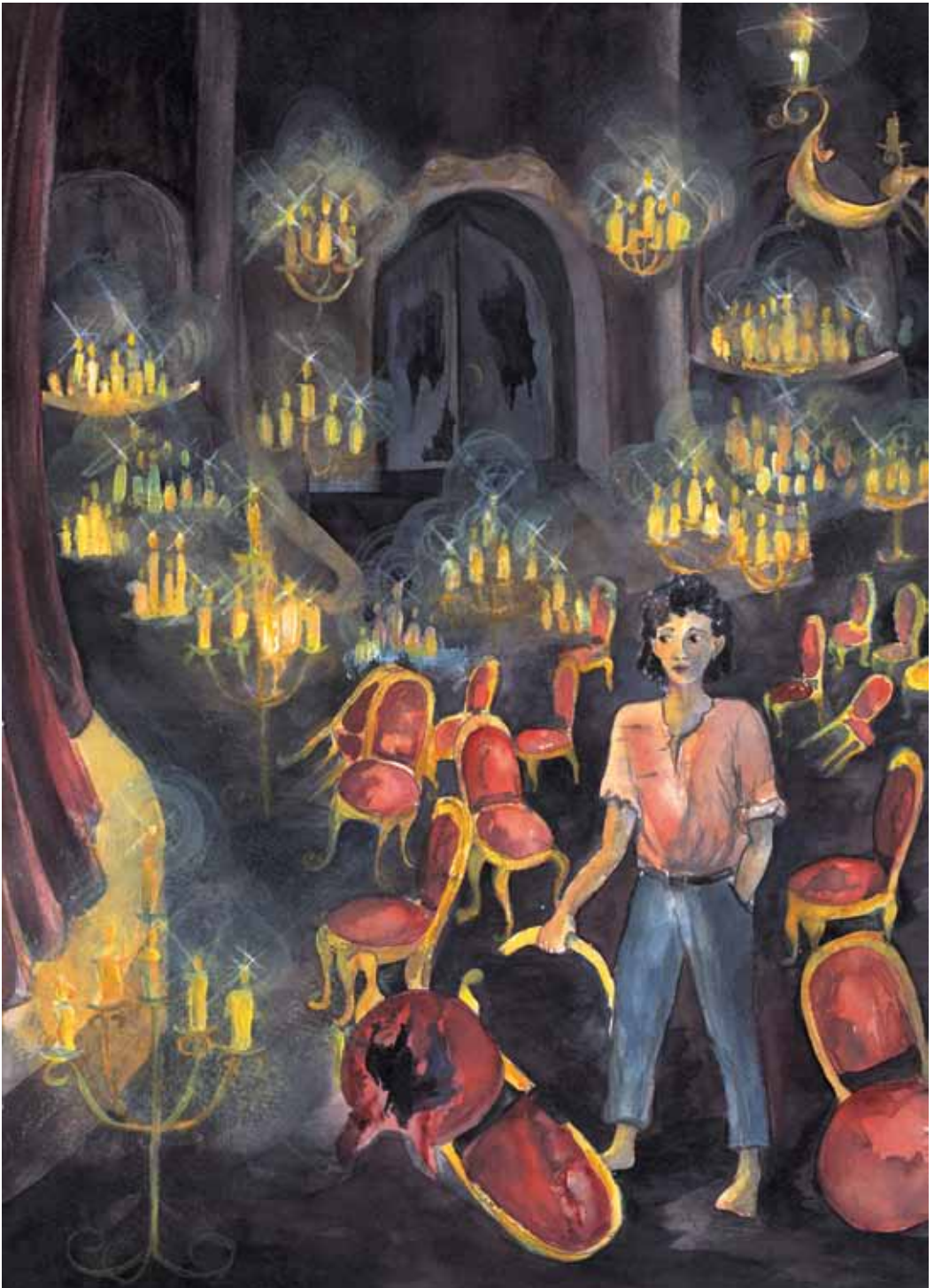
missed the dance, but not the holiday completely. Cupid was still flying around somewhere for two more hours. She hoped he had a warm coat on because the February air was saturated, foretelling lacy precipitation. She snuck back upstairs and found the Claddagh friendship ring she had carefully wrapped in white paper with magenta hearts. She summoned her bravery and snuck back down the stairs, out the side door and across the street. She placed the Claddagh in James's mailbox and sped home. Before long, she was in the deepest and most restful sleep she could imagine.

The next morning Jamie awoke, wondering if it had all been just a sweet dream, a remnant left over from the holiday of hearts just past. But wait, fingering the pendant around her neck, she could make out its dragon outline quickly. She smiled. She wouldn't have to wait another year to share her heart's biggest secret.

"H EY VALENTINE, can I walk you to the bus stop?" It was James, his cheery self. He must have been watching for her. As he clasped her hand, she could feel the weight of something heavy on his ring finger.

"I love Valentine's Day," Jamie ventured.

"Me too," is all he said, grinning back. The new crusty layer of snow glistened and sparkled in the brilliant sunshine. Ahead, the bus was just pulling up. ❀



Who were the mysterious performers whose music was so captivating?

Behind the Curtain

By **Dylan J. Sauder**

Illustrated by **Stanislav Nedzelskyi**

THE OLD, WORN CURTAIN loomed over the stage. Chairs covered in faded, red velvet cushions were scattered throughout the theatre. A piano that had once been played in the most famous of performances now housed a family of mice. The theatre was falling apart, yet it still contained a certain beauty and elegance. If you listened closely, you could faintly hear the soft, sweet sound of a violin coming from behind the dark curtain. A single candle on the glamorous chandelier that hung from the ceiling of the concert hall flickered to life. The violin was joined by a flute, clarinet, cello, and then a viola. As the instruments grew louder, the chandelier became brighter. Soon, the music of an entire orchestra floated throughout the theatre, and the hall was filled with the soft glow of candles.

Famous pieces by Tchaikovsky, Bach, Vivaldi, Beethoven, and many others were performed, yet the curtain never rose to reveal the mysterious musicians who played for an invisible audience. Just as soon as the music began, the harmonic sounds began drifting into the darkness, until only the lone violin could be heard; that, too, soon grew quiet.

Who were the mysterious performers whose music was so captivating? Who were they that hid behind the curtain of the abandoned concert hall? They were not of the human race, for they left no trace of their presence. Was it possible that they were beings who had once been of this world, but no longer were? If so, what reason did they have for returning to the the-



Dylan J. Sauder, 13
Raymond, Wisconsin



Stanislav Nedzelskyi, 13
Keller, Texas

atre? The only answer I can give you, my friend, is to come with me, for they are what this story is all about.

LATE ONE NIGHT, as a light snow fell over all of Paris, a boy slowly crept towards the theatre. Finally, he had made it; he was away from that orphanage he had so long called a home—an orphanage that should never have been his home. True, his parents had died when he was just three years old, but he wasn't the only surviving member of his family. Somewhere in Paris, he knew, his grandfather was still alive. He didn't know where in Paris his grandfather was, or even what his grandfather's name was, but he knew that his grandfather could give him the loving home he had never had. He just had to find him first. And while he was searching, he would need to make sure the orphanage people couldn't find him.

The old, abandoned theatre would make the perfect hideout.

With a quick glance over his shoulder, the boy slipped inside through a broken window. There, he found himself standing in front of two large, charred, heavy wooden doors. As he pushed them open, they creaked loudly. The boy looked around the huge room that he had just entered. It appeared that it had once been the concert hall of the theatre, and it looked strangely familiar to him, but he didn't know why.

Well, he thought to himself, I guess this is home.

Suddenly, the hall was aglow with hundreds of candles, and music was coming from behind the curtain on the stage.

The boy was out the doors and through the window in a flash! He tripped as he flew out the window, landing face-first in the snow. Breathing heavily, he stood up and brushed himself off.

What— or *who*—had been making that music? he wondered. Was it just his imagination? Could it have been... ghosts? The boy shivered at the thought.

No! his mind screamed at him. He would not be afraid. He, Gabriel Campeau, wouldn't let a bunch of musical ghosts scare him away. He escaped the cruelty of the orphanage, traveled all the way here to Paris; he was brave, smart...

And he had nowhere else to go.

The curtains in an apartment across the alley fluttered, and Gabriel quickly sneaked back into the theatre.

A middle-aged woman appeared on the apartment's balcony, her shadow stretching across the moonlit alley. Once again, music that sounded as if it were just outside her bedroom window had awakened her. It was so familiar, and it brought back many memories of her days spent in the theatre. She stared longingly at the theatre's faded walls. It had always held a special place in her heart, but even though it contained so many happy memories, the haunting memories of a night many years before kept her from ever reentering the theatre. If she had, she would have realized that the music she heard was much more than a dream.

ON THE OTHER side of the city, an elderly man tossed and turned from the nightmare that he had relived every night for the past ten years. It was so vivid; there he was, bowing as he was introduced to the biggest audience for whom he had ever performed. He turned around, and his wonderful orchestra began playing. Just as the song was ending, a blood-curdling scream came from somewhere backstage, and smoke poured into the concert hall. Panic and terror ensued as everyone attempted to escape the burning theatre. The most horrifying part of his nightmare was when he looked back into the theatre and saw people struggling to get out. People who were his friends, his co-workers, his family; people who, when the smoke had cleared, were gone.

The man wiped away a tear that slid down his face. Most of his orchestra had died in the fire, and the few who survived had left Paris soon after. He had gone from being the man in his dream, Alexandre Mierceles, the greatest conductor and composer in all of France, to nothing more than a frail old man with no friends, no family, and hardly anything left that was worth living for. His only daughter and her husband had perished on that tragic night, and their young son disappeared in all of the chaos. All he had left was his music, but he feared that that, too, would soon be nothing more than a memory.

FOR THE NEXT few days, Gabriel adjusted to his new, independent life.

During the day, he would wander the streets, looking for someone kind enough to feed him. He also searched for a job, but this was challenging; not many people were interested in hiring a thirteen-year-old boy.

At night, Gabriel explored his hide-out, everywhere from the box seats to the burned-out dressing rooms. In an office-type room, which had somehow survived the fire, he found a desk whose drawers were filled with scores of music! Each one was composed by a man named Alexandre Mierceles. At the very bottom of one of the drawers, Gabriel found an old, tattered photograph of a man and what appeared to be his daughter. The girl, who Gabriel guessed was about his age, looked, oddly enough, much like himself! Same dark, curly hair, same small, rounded nose, even similar elf-like ears. The only difference he could find was the eyes. While the girl's were big, round, and gentle, Gabriel had a mischievous gleam in his sharp, narrow eyes. Looking at the composer in the photograph, Gabriel saw that he, too, had that look. On the back of it, written in small, fancy letters, were the words "*Alexandre and Jeanette Mierceles, Paris, France, 1908.*"

Gabriel's heart skipped a beat. His mother's name had been Jeanette, and he knew that she been a violinist in the most famous orchestra in all of Paris. There was no doubt about it. His grandfather was the infamous Alexandre Mierceles!

"But where is he?" Gabriel asked himself. "Well, a famous composer can't be

too hard to find. I'll start searching first thing in the morning!"

Gabriel was extremely excited to have discovered his grandfather's identity. A composer! And not just any composer, but the most renowned composer in all of Paris! All of France! All of Europe!

However, he would have to contain his excitement until tomorrow. Now, he had a concert to attend.

Gabriel curled up in the chair he used for a makeshift bed, notebook and pen in hand. All he had to do now was wait.

Every night, Gabriel spent some time writing music. He wrote for every instrument from the cello and bass to the piccolo and trumpet. He composed piece after piece, and after he finished for the night, he would blow out his candle, say his prayers, and listen as the mysterious orchestra began its performance. Some songs he recognized, and some he couldn't quite place, but they seemed very familiar, as if he had heard them long, long ago.

Tonight, though, he was tired, and he fell asleep as the ghosts played lullabies all around him.

WHILE READING the newspaper in his favorite café one morning, Alexandre Mierceles spied a headline that intrigued him:

Ghostly Happenings in Local Theatre

Neighbors of the once popular Leroux Theatre have rumored that ghosts are current inhabitants of the theatre. They have

reported seeing lights flashing on and off inside the building, shadows of human figures moving around late at night, and the most mysterious of all: music of an entire symphony orchestra being played for half the night. One neighbor, Madame Loretta LaGue, said in an interview that she recognized a large amount of the music as that of composer and former conductor of the Leroux Theatre Orchestra, Alexandre Mierceles. No one has yet entered the theatre to verify or disprove the rumors, but Mme. LaGue says that she "will not tolerate this disturbance much longer, and if it continues, I will take action in discovering its cause by all means."

Mme. Loretta LaGue was a performer with the theatre before it closed.

"My word!" Alexandre cried. "Ghosts in the theatre, and little Loretta calling my music a disturbance? What is this world coming to?" A smile slowly crept over his face.

"Why, I haven't seen Loretta in over ten years!" he said to himself. "I think I'll arrange to meet with her. Then we can figure out what all this ghost business is about."

A mischievous gleam that had been absent for quite some time came into his eyes. He smiled again, then went back to his newspaper.

ALEXANDRE MIERCELES wasn't the only one who saw the article. Gabriel Campeau read the article, too, and he became worried. He figured that he would have to be on the lookout at all



"My word!" Alexandre cried. "Ghosts in the theatre... what is this world coming to?"

times in case someone did decide to investigate. Whatever happened, he could not let anyone find him, for fear they would send him back to the orphanage.

That wasn't the only part of the article that caught his eye. It also said that Mme. LaGue once performed in the theatre, and that she lived nearby.

"I'll bet she'll know where my grandfather is!" Gabriel said to himself. He made his decision: the next day, he would find Mme. LaGue and come one step closer to finding his grandfather!

As Gabriel waited for the orchestra to begin playing that night, he realized something: he hadn't yet looked behind the curtain; he had just assumed that the music was being played by ghosts. Gabriel's mom had been the lead violinist in the orchestra, and if the musicians really were visible ghosts... Gabriel took a deep breath... he would be able to see his mother again!

So when the orchestra began, Gabriel walked onto the stage and poked his head behind the curtain. Disappointment met him. The instruments were all being played, but the beings that played them were invisible. Despite this fact, he still felt a special warmth and comfort, a tranquility he had never felt before, in knowing that the violin that was hovering over the first chair was being played by his mother.

Gabriel finished listening to the performance, then sank into a peaceful sleep.

LORETTA LAGUE anxiously waited at the window of her apartment, ex-

cited and nervous about the infamous conductor's visit. It had been so long since they had last seen one another, and he had been like a father to her during her days in the theatre.

She predicted that his time in her home would be bittersweet; it would be great for them to see each other and reminisce about "the good old days," but discussion of the fire was imminent. After all, the main purpose of the visit was for him to find out more about the "ghosts." Loretta felt sorry for him because, while she had lost only her job after the fire, his most prized possession, his daughter, Jeanette, had been taken from him. He probably hoped that Jeanette was one of the "ghosts," and that he would be able to see and talk to her again.

Loretta sighed. There were no ghosts, she strongly believed. She hated to think of Alexandre's disappointment on discovering that, but it was the truth, and he would have to face it. All of her neighbors had spread those rumors, but she knew that there was some logical explanation for it.

There was a knock at the door.

"That will be Monsieur Mierceles himself," she said, and after a quick glance in the mirror, she went to greet her caller.

Much to her surprise, however, the person at her door was not the composer but a young, shabby boy. You and I know him as Gabriel, but Mme. Loretta LaGue had not yet met him, so she looked on him in disgust.

"Can you not see, boy, that this is the home of a proper lady and not a place that

welcomes beggars?" she snapped when she saw Gabriel at her door.

"Madame LaGue," he calmly replied. "I have not come to beg; I only want to know if you have any information on how I might contact Monsieur Alexandre Mierceles."

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

Gabriel hesitated, but then answered, "He is my grandfather."

A look of shock spread over Mme. LaGue's face.

"He is to arrive at any minute," she stammered. "Won't you come in?" she added nervously.

Alexandre Mierceles came very soon.

"Oh, Loretta, it's so good to see you again!" he exclaimed upon his arrival. After greeting each other with a hug and a kiss to both cheeks, they walked into the parlor, where Gabriel was waiting.

The old composer froze the moment he entered the room. His eyes met with Gabriel's.

Impossible! was Alexandre's first thought.

I knew it! was Gabriel's.

He has everything like her: same nose, same hair, same mouth, everything! Alexandre's mind was racing.

In a stunned silence, they walked slowly towards each other. Overjoyed, Alexandre embraced Gabriel, and their eyes—their sharp, mischievous eyes—began filling with tears, and soon everyone in the room was crying.

"Gabriel," Alexandre whispered, "Gabriel!"

And Gabriel's lips formed the word of a long-forgotten memory. "Grandfather."

EIGHT MONTHS LATER

Conductors and Composers

M. Alexandre Mierceles and

M. Gabriel Campeau

present

The Leroux Theatre Orchestra

After eleven years, they have finally returned to give us what was meant to be the most spectacular performance of their time

Please join us on

Saturday, September 22, 1935

for this masterpiece concert

IT HAD TAKEN eight months of long, hard work, but the theatre had finally been restored to its former glory. Now, conductor and grandson stood onstage, batons in hand, with *both* of their music ready to be performed.

The theatre was just as it had been eleven years before; the bright chandelier, red velvet seats, a new curtain, and an extremely large audience. Only this time, it was even better. Now, there were two composers, two conductors, and two people who agreed that they were the happiest people in the world.

With the help of Loretta, they had managed to find most of the surviving orchestra members, and many children of former musicians had returned to play as well.

The Mierceleses had formed a whole

new orchestra, and they were determined to give the best performance of the century.

The lights dimmed, and as it had at the beginning of this story and on that dreadful night so many years before, the audience heard the soft, sweet sound of a violin, not played by Gabriel's mother, but by Gabriel himself! The violin was soon joined by the entire orchestra, and it was the most spectacular performance Paris had ever heard!

SO THERE YOU have it, my friend. You have discovered who the mysterious performers were and seen many lives changed along the way. It was the ghosts of the orchestra that had called Gabriel towards the theatre when he had nowhere to go. They played not only because they wanted to give the perfor-

mance they never gave, but because they wanted Gabriel to feel at peace while he hid from the world and searched for his grandfather. They wanted him to be comforted by their music. If the orchestra hadn't begun to play, Alexandre Mierceles would never have read the newspaper article, Mme. LaGue would never have given the interview, and who knows how long Gabriel would have spent searching for his grandfather.

So you see, the ghosts were not only behind the curtain of the theatre, but behind everything wonderful that happened in this story: Gabriel feeling safe in the theatre and having the chance to compose music that was almost, if not just as good as his grandfather's. And Gabriel was given a home, a home with family, a home with love, and a home filled with music. ❁



Monolith

By **Eden Amital**

Carved, crooked peaks outline themselves against a
Yellowing sky,
Deep crags littered with fertile eggs

Cawing to the firming moon,
We flap between their statuesque
Shoulders, draped in heavy fog
They don't dance

Their shadows do,
Trembling freely outside of the rocks' impenetrable cases,
Sharing secrets with the sand,
A peppered canvas,
Which formed when
The smeary stars
Cracked and crumbled

We gulls fly,
The stones too stiff
To crane back their necks
And see us,
Swooping, whooping,
Following an invisible course
Sliced into the sky



Eden Amital, 13
San Francisco, California

Plant a Thimble

By Emma T. Capps

Illustrated by the author



Emma T. Capps, 12
San Carlos, California

TODAY'S THE DAY we're going to the doctor, and I'm hiding in my tree.

I beat my way through the little abandoned plot, the tall dry grass and thickets of clover flowers tickling my bare, dusty legs. Late summer, and the air's thick with palpable, golden heat, the deep blue sky curving away above my head.

I push through the long grass to the small spot I've cleared away around my oak tree, decorated with chips of colored china, chains of metal bottle caps, and little sculptures of smooth gray rocks the size of my palm, balanced precariously one on top of the other.

I hike one bare foot up in the crook between the two main branches of the tree and pull myself up to my favorite branch, the tallest one that's thick enough to bear my weight.

I pat the tree. I'm high, too high, but I know I can't fall. A light breeze lifts my dark braid from my neck for a moment, and I smile. The tree won't let me fall.

"Hi, tree," I tell it, stroking its mossy bark. "We're going to the doctor today."

The tree rustles its leaves softly in response.

"Personally, I'm dreading it," I say, a great sighing poof of a sentence. The street is heavy with silent heat. I feel like my tree and I, we're the only ones alive.

I spot a small daisy, blown into the tree's ensnaring branches by an afternoon wind. I pluck it out of the tree's grasp and tuck



I feel like my tree and I, we're the only ones alive

it behind my ear.

I sigh and hug the tree. I don't want to let go, don't want to go to the doctor. I stroke the tree a moment, and calm myself, and feel, for a moment, serene.

I turn my gaze towards the harsh and knowing sky and whisper a few lines out into the world.

Plant a thimble
a lock of hair
moldy gloves of lace;

Grow a dimple
with great care
right there on your face.

The tree nods in approval. I grin and say, "You liked that? No one else did. Not even my writing teacher."

And then I hug the branch and whisper to my tree, in thoughts.

I tell it, half reassuring myself, that somewhere far across the world, someone heard my poem. ❁

Book Review

By **Danica Lee**

Every Soul a Star, by Wendy Mass; Little, Brown Books for Young Readers: New York, 2008; \$15.99



Danica Lee, 13
Sanford, North Carolina

“...the sun will get erased from the sky, the planets will come out to greet us, the birds will stop singing, and a glowing halo of light will flutter like angels’ wings above our heads. Except, of course, if it rains.”

I RECOMMEND THIS BOOK to anyone who likes a book with a good plot, feeling and humor; this book has it all, and great characters. Three very different people tell this story of an eclipse, friendship, and the difficulty of change.

Ally has lived her whole life at Moonshadow campground. Her family has been living for one day for almost a decade. When the day comes, the moon’s shadow will cross in front of the sun, creating a solar eclipse that will last a few mere minutes. Hundreds of people, eclipse chasers and tourists alike, will come together to witness the natural phenomenon. But when A-clique and fashionable Bree is dragged along with her family to take over the campground, both girls resist. Ally wants nothing to do with the city, where smog and light pollution make only the brightest constellations visible, and Bree only wants to go back home to her pool, best friend, and life with the “popular girls” at her school. So together Ally and Bree try to get their parents to reconsider and stay where they were before the

eclipse comes, and Ally has to leave and Bree has to stay.

Through it all, Jack is invited by his seventh-grade science teacher to see the eclipse with a tour bus full of people. He also has to help Mr. Silver with a project involving finding an exoplanet on a faraway star. Jack only came with to get out of going to summer school and would much rather spend time flying in his dreams than looking at stars. But Jack, Ally and Bree are going to like looking at our very own star, the sun, when the moon's shadow crosses over it.

My aunt gave me this book when I was visiting her by myself for the first time. I was a little uneasy at the thought of being alone for five days, not to mention miles and miles away from home. This book was very nice to read late at night and early in the morning when everyone was sleeping or doing something else. I connected with the feeling of not knowing what I was supposed to do or what I wanted to do.

And being homeschooled I knew exactly how Ally felt when fashionable Bree came and ridiculed her for her unbrushed hair and baggy clothes. I live out in the country and I always had time to go outside and play in the woods or look at the stars instead of doing homework or talking on the phone. I didn't know much about civilization till later in life, like Ally, and I still really don't care if my shirt matches my shorts.

But now I also know how Bree feels, trying to fit in all the time with my friends or finding a new identity or what I am supposed to do in this world. And Jack is totally out of his element when he goes to Moonshadow, and I often feel out of it too. Also, I am kinda shy, and I know the feeling of not being able to find the right words to say something. I think anyone can relate to at least one character in this book, and it's definitely worth reading. As Mr. Silver says, soon you'll be ending every conversation wishing good star viewing. Wishing everyone clear skies! ☾

Lucky Penny

By Mac Vogelsang

Illustrated by Jeremy Anderson



Mac Vogelsang, 12
Bloomington, Indiana



Jeremy Anderson, 13
Fort Worth, Texas

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT! It couldn't be true. How could someone you love just be gone? Grandpa seemed invincible to me, and I was shocked when he died suddenly of a heart attack. Just a few short days ago I was sitting next to him in the park. I feel empty now, like a part of me is missing. No more amazing stories, no more silly jokes, no more bird-watching. After all, he was the only grandpa I had. Now all I can do is sit here in my bed and mourn his death.

"Benjamin Michael Anderson! Open this door and get your homework done!" my mom yelled. I don't think she realized it, but she sounded angry. When she's depressed or frustrated, like me, she yells. I didn't go.

I vividly remember one time with Grandpa when we were bird-watching in the park. We were sitting on the bench when I spotted a penny. Grandpa watched as I picked up the penny and showed it to him.

"When you found the penny, it was heads up. That means it's a lucky penny!" Grandpa had said. "Did I ever tell you about the lucky penny that my mom gave to me?" I had said no to his question, but he ignored me and went on. "It was heads up when she found it, so she put it in a case and gave it to me when I was five years old." He reached into his pocket and took out his wallet and said, "Here I'll show it to you." He took out a small, thin, stainless-steel case no bigger than the palm of my hand. He pushed it into my hand and I looked at the penny closer. The penny was dirty and partly black from old age. Right



"Did I ever tell you about the lucky penny that my mom gave to me?"

next to the profile of Abraham Lincoln was the date, 1951.

"Back then this coin was new and shiny, but now it's worn down. That's why it's special to me. I've had it for fifty-eight years," Grandpa stated after he saw me studying the date. I gave it back to him, realizing that I never looked at the back of the case. But that was just a memory now and it didn't bring him back.

It was getting late, so I went downstairs to find my mom looking through some of Grandpa's things.

"Look, Bennie," Mom said when she noticed me. "I found Grandpa's old wal-

let. The hospital gave it to me with his other possessions after he died."

She appeared to be in a better mood now. Mom handed me the wallet and I took it curiously. Remembering that one bird-watching day in the park, I wondered if the special penny was still there. I looked in the wallet and I was surprised to see the steel case holding the lucky penny. I took the case out of the wallet, and as much as I wanted to take the penny out of the case and touch it, I didn't. I thought that since this is the only thing I have to remember Grandpa by, I'd better take good care of it. Then I thought about how

I had never gotten to look at the back of the case. I carefully turned the case over and read the inscription on the back:

Dear Bennie,

I hope you'll always remember me with this token and that it may bring you good luck at any task that you might encounter. I love you, Bennie!

Love,
Mom

Obviously, that Bennie wasn't referring to me and that mom was my great-grandmother. I was named after my grandpa. Other people might think that note was addressed to me. No wonder this penny was so special to him, and now to me. I went upstairs and put the penny in the drawer on my nightstand. Then I went down to the table for dinner.

THE NEXT MORNING was a Saturday. I got out of bed and looked out the window. It was sunny outside, so I decided to take a walk and think about Grandpa some more.

Thirty minutes later I was ready and I walked outside, not forgetting to take the penny with me; I wanted to look at it some more and to be alone with my thoughts.

As I turned the corner of our block, I encountered Mike, Billy and Joe, three kids from my school who act tough and like to bully me when they get together but otherwise ignore me when they are alone. Today, they were on their bikes, making jokes and laughing.

"Awe, look, what does little Bennie have in his hand?" Mike teased.

"Oh, it's an old and dirty penny. Why would you want that?" Joe said. And they all laughed hysterically.

"Be quiet and leave me alone!" I shouted.

"Woo, little Bennie is in a bad mood today, we don't want to interrupt your precious time with that dirty old penny. Why don't you put it in the bank and you'll be rich. Ha, ha, ha! Let's get out of here! Have fun with your penny," Billy said sarcastically.

They rode away still laughing and joking. At least they were gone. I kept on walking until I saw a new donut shop across the street. On the window in big orange letters there was a sign that read, GRAND OPENING!!! FREE DONUTS FOR EVERYONE!!! I rushed in and soon found my place in line.

With a full and satisfied belly, I walked out of the shop. I reached into my pocket to take another look at the penny, when I realized that there was a hole in my pocket! The penny was gone, and it must have fallen out somewhere! As I was searching frantically, Mike, Billy and Joe showed up.

"Is this what you're looking for?" Mike held up the penny.

"What do you want with it?" I said.

"We have what you want but you're not getting it!" They laughed and took off on their bikes, heading towards the lake at the edge of town.

It seemed like I chased them for hours, and I was getting tired. I only

had legs and they had bikes, really fast bikes, which was unfair, especially since they were stealing my grandfather's possession. I was running towards the lake after them and was nearing the dock. The gang of three stopped at the end of the dock. I begged and pleaded for them to give the penny back to me, but they took the penny and the case and used it like a rock and skipped it across the water. I stood there in disbelief as I caught a final glimpse of the steel case before it plunged into the depths of the lake. I was so angry, angrier than a lion! I couldn't believe what had just happened. That penny was one of the only possessions that I had of my grandfather's. Losing it was like losing him all over again!

I ran home as fast as I could and felt ashamed of myself for not taking better care of the lucky penny. I slammed the front door in anger as soon as I got into the house. I was tense and breathing heavily. I began sobbing and it took a while be-

fore I could tell Mom what had happened. I just knew Mom would be angry too, and she might not trust me anymore.

But her calm reply surprised me. "It's OK, Bennie. I'm very sorry that happened to you, but..."

"I still can't believe that those kids would be so mean! I hardly even know them! Why do they choose to pick on me?!" I said fiercely.

"I know what they did was mean, but you don't need an object to remind you of your grandpa. You will always have special memories of times spent with your grandpa, and no one can ever take those away from you," Mom explained.

Deep down I knew my mom was right. I really didn't need Grandpa's special penny to remember him, but I wanted it. The memory of Grandpa is always in my heart, and each time I hear my name, Benjamin, I will think of him, knowing that our shared name is the one thing that cannot be lost or taken away. 🌀



The Beginning

By Devorah Malka Reisner



Devorah Malka Reisner, 12
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I watch them
Each face unknown
Their eyes move back and forth
I walk to my desk
In the corner, alone
The teacher begins
I sit there
Watching
Each face wondering
Whispering
Who is she?
As if I'm not there
I glance up
At the girl in front
I see a smile appear
And she laughs
Quietly
Pointing at me
My face burns crimson
I stare down
At my desk

Out of the corner of my eye
I see
Someone toss
A paper
On my desk
I grab it, and read
“Don’t mind her,” it says,
“She’s just being unkind,
Welcome to school”
I look at her
A quiet, red-haired girl
She smiles at me
And I know
I’ve found a friend.

King of the Forest

By **Josepha Natzke**

Illustrated by **Dominic Nedzelskyi**



Josepha Natzke, 13
Newberg, Oregon



Dominic Nedzelskyi, 11
Keller, Texas

THE FOREST WAS STILL. The birds had ceased their songs, the squirrels their chattering. Even the wind seemed to hold its breath as the woods prepared for the night. Rabbits had long since crept to their warrens, and mice were scampering to their burrows as owls shook out their wings to go hunt in the night air.

Only one figure was still awake under the trees, standing in a small clearing near the edge of the woods. It was the king of the forest, a magnificent buck, his huge antlers rising like a menacing crown around him as he stood silhouetted against the dying sun, his eyes piercing the gloom of the forest.

What exactly the buck was waiting for, he was not yet sure. Perhaps it was the quietness of the forest this night, or perhaps the instinct that told him that danger was lurking nearby.

A sudden change of the wind confirmed his suspicions, and from the bushes at the edge of the glade he could smell life—living, breathing, hungry life. Cougar.

The buck's mind flew to other parts of the forest, where does and fawns lay asleep in the wood, so vulnerable and innocent. Without the buck to protect them they would be helpless, easy prey. Yes, the king was old, but if he did go down it would not be without a fight.

Slowly and cleverly he turned away from the bushes and pretended to graze along the ground, looking for all the world like unsuspecting prey. The trick appeared to work, for with a ter-



Only one figure was still awake under the trees

rible snarl a huge mountain lion erupted from the bushes, his face distorted as he leaped for his prey. But the king was ready. Easily he sprang aside and the cougar crashed to the ground, where the buck's sharp hooves rained down blows on him. But the cat was hungry. It had not eaten for a while. It would not let go so easily.

Almost too quick to be seen its paw flashed out, knocking the deer's feet out from under him. The buck toppled and the cat leaped up, going for the neck. For a moment it was flailing hooves and claws, a blur of tawny and soft brown fur.

But somehow the buck was back on his hooves before the cougar could pin him, and he rammed his great antlers into the cougar's side.

That was enough. Yowling and screaming, the cat scrambled to his feet and fled from the woods, both hungry and beaten, never to be seen again.

The buck stood again at the center of the clearing. Once again, he was victorious. Silently, looking around the glade once more, the king passed into the darkening forest at last.

The sun set.





It was Anne's last spring in the mountains

The Thinking Place

By **Katie Mercer-Taylor**

Illustrated by **Abigail Schott-Rosenfield**

IT WAS SPRING in the mountains of Washington—a time of beauty and change. The heaviness of the snow was melting away, flooding the brooks and allowing the pines to stretch their branches once again after a long winter. Leaves were budding on the trees, no longer icy and dead. The whole world, it seemed, was slowly turning colors.

Anne was sitting in the majesty of it all, lying back upon a rock and watching the geese disappearing into the clouds over the distant horizon. There was warmth from the sun and splendor all around.

A woodpecker's tapping, a firm rhythm, was the only sound in the silent mountains. The creek below slid easily by beneath her over the shining rocks lining its bed. The wetness of spring hung in the air, soft to breathe and alive with the scents of nature; there was wood and soil and moss. Tall grass waved in sprigs, jutting out of cracks in the rocks that tumbled over a steep slope. It was the place Anne called her Thinking Place, where all was peaceful.

There was much thinking to be done that spring. It was Anne's last spring in the mountains. That very day she would be leaving the years behind, shedding them, and departing her aunt's house to rejoin her family in California. She had been staying to finish the sixth grade while her parents readied their new home, but the signs of approaching summer—the fresh greens and budding flowers—signaled that it was time for her to go. Anne drew a wrinkled and fading photograph from her



Katie Mercer-Taylor, 13
St. Paul, Minnesota



Abigail Schott-Rosenfield, 13
San Francisco, California

pocket, where it had been since she arrived at her aunt's house. It showed her and her parents, with their home and the mountains in the background. She was eager to return to them, but they were like the flowers of summer—seeing them meant new beginnings, and new beginnings can only follow an end. Anne willed through the stillness of the forest that her aunt would not call her back too soon.

There was a presence beside her. Anne glanced to her left. It was another girl, with black hair and soft blue eyes that were quietly staring at her. The girl met her gaze gently and turned back to the sketchbook on her lap to continue a drawing she was working on.

The stillness continued, and neither said a word. They sat on the rock together and let the magic of the place engulf them.

It was a long while before the time was right to speak. The first words came from Anne. Her question seemed not to cut through the silence but to blend with it.

“Is this your Thinking Place too?”

The other girl nodded and smiled, just a little. There was a piece of sadness, Anne realized, in the blue eyes. There was more silence. Then the girl's question came, almost a whisper.

“What are you thinking about?” The eyes drifted to the tear still clinging to Anne's jaw.

“I love this place,” Anne said simply. This was the truth, and it was all that the other needed to hear. A comforting arm reached around Anne's shoulders.

“Me too.”

“What are you thinking about?” asked Anne, remembering the sadness in the blue eyes.

“My parents split up... we're finding a new place somewhere.” Anne understood. It was her turn to extend a comforting arm.

So the two girls sat, each with a shoulder to lean on and one to hold. All was peaceful in their Thinking Place. The rocks stood firm on the slope, the grass waved about them, and the stream kept sliding by while the woodpecker tapped at its tree.

And slowly, the world was spinning... time was slipping by. The sun began to disappear beyond the curve of the horizon. It glowed pure and red, leaking its color into the sky. There was soft golden light enveloping the mountains of Washington, bathing the Thinking Place and the girls in its pleasant warmth. The very dome above them shone with the glory of the setting sun. The whole world, it seemed, was turning colors.

The girls leaned against each other and the orb sank lower, its color dappled by faint clouds. Then that sliver of scarlet disappeared, and there was a flash of brilliance. The girls couldn't see it, but they felt it in their hearts... the assurance that the sun would return to glow over the Thinking Place—that the end of that day would make way for a new sunrise.

THE VOICE OF Anne's Aunt finally cut through the silence. It was



A bright sun dappled the entire page in a hopeful gold

time for Anne to leave the mountains of Washington. The girls stood together and gazed out over the rocks and the brook and the forest.

"Here." The girl removed her drawing from the notebook and handed it to Anne. "Remember this moment."

"I will," said Anne. She placed the photograph of her family in her friend's hand.

"Me too," said the girl, and closed her fingers around it.

Then Anne turned away from their

Thinking Place, towards a future in California. She glanced back at her friend, standing on the rocks in the mountains, then examined the drawing. It showed the magic of their friendship and the Thinking Place in swirls of brilliant color. A bright sun dappled the entire page in a hopeful gold.

Walking through the forest toward her aunt's house, Anne turned the sheet over.

There was a telephone number written on the back. ❁

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