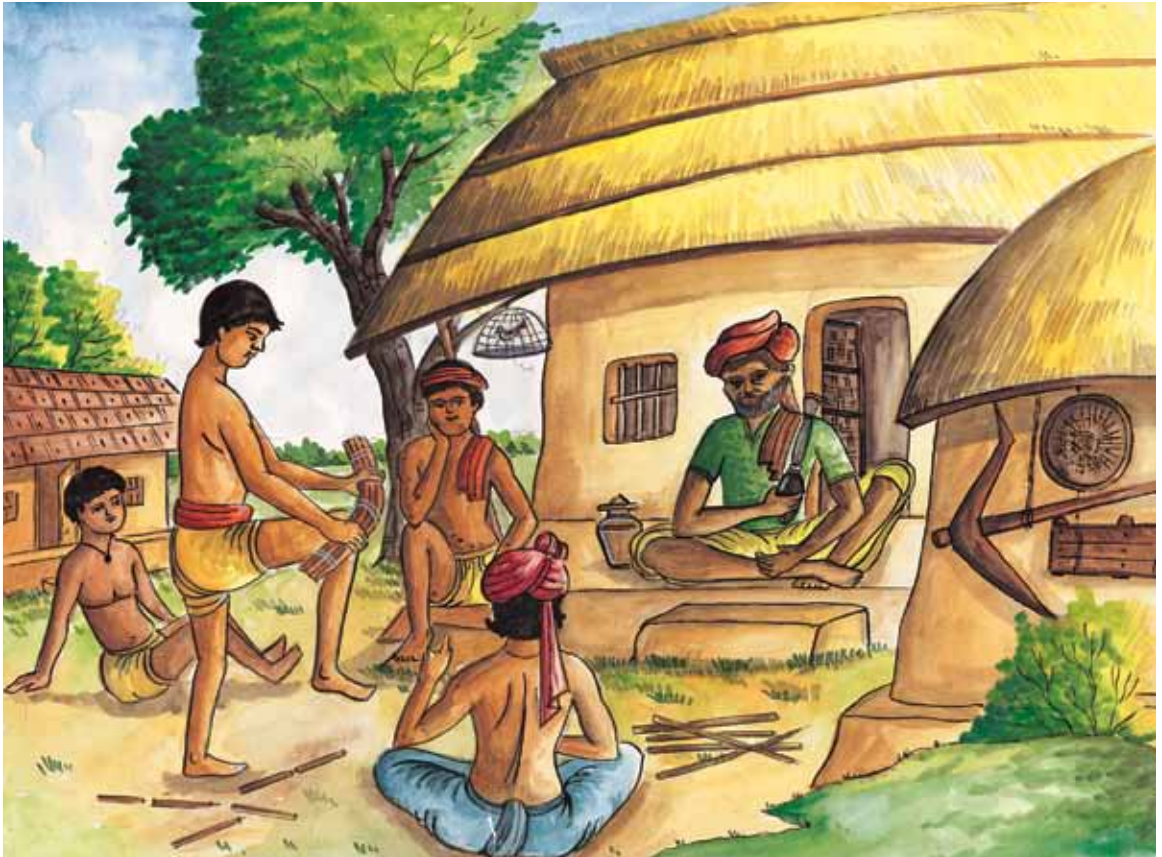


# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*"The Farmer and His Sons," by Santana Das, age 12, Calcutta, India*

## ARCADIA, THE ADVENTUROUS WOLF GIRL

The wolves are the only family Arcadia has ever known

## FROM DUST TO DREAMS

This was not Alicia's idea of any way to spend a summer vacation

*Also:* Jacob and his family visit Tanzania

MAY/JUNE 2010

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 38, NUMBER 5

MAY / JUNE 2010

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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 37 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](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:** "The Farmer and His Sons" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy of Menlo Park, California. For over 30 years, Paintbrush Diplomacy has worked to promote children's artistic expression around the world and to raise awareness of children's causes. Special thanks to Louise Valeur and Char Pribuss.

# The Mailbox



LBP, 9

Today I got my January/February 2010 issue of *Stone Soup*. I read the story “Secret Crushes,” by Emmy J. X. Wong. Even before I began, and had just read the title, I was dubious and intrigued. I was doubtful the story would be any good. But I was interested because so few *Stone Soup* stories are romantic. Usually kids from ages 8 to 13 aren’t good at writing about crushes. Either it embarrasses them, or they make it way too perfect. Emmy’s story was neither guarded by awkwardness nor overly, unrealistically romantic. A perfect mix of reality, charm and beautiful writing! I commend you, Emmy, for doing something I couldn’t do when I was your age and probably can’t do now (although I will try, freshly inspired by your story). You made something realistic enough to not annoy the reader, but storybookish enough to warm said reader’s heart. I will strive to write like you.

**ISABEL SUTTER, 13**  
Houston, Texas

*Isabel is a regular contributor to Stone Soup. Her latest poem is on page 16.*

I love your magazine! It’s nice that kids all around the world can be connected with your magazine. It’s like the link to all the countries in the world. If kids have troubles, they can turn to your magazine to cheer up.

**PATRICIA TANG, 11**  
Palo Alto, California

I have read some of the *Stone Soup* magazines and I adored them. I love writing magazines for their sense of ingenuity and the magical sense about turning a page to a new unexplored world, to which all who enter are welcomed as pioneers.

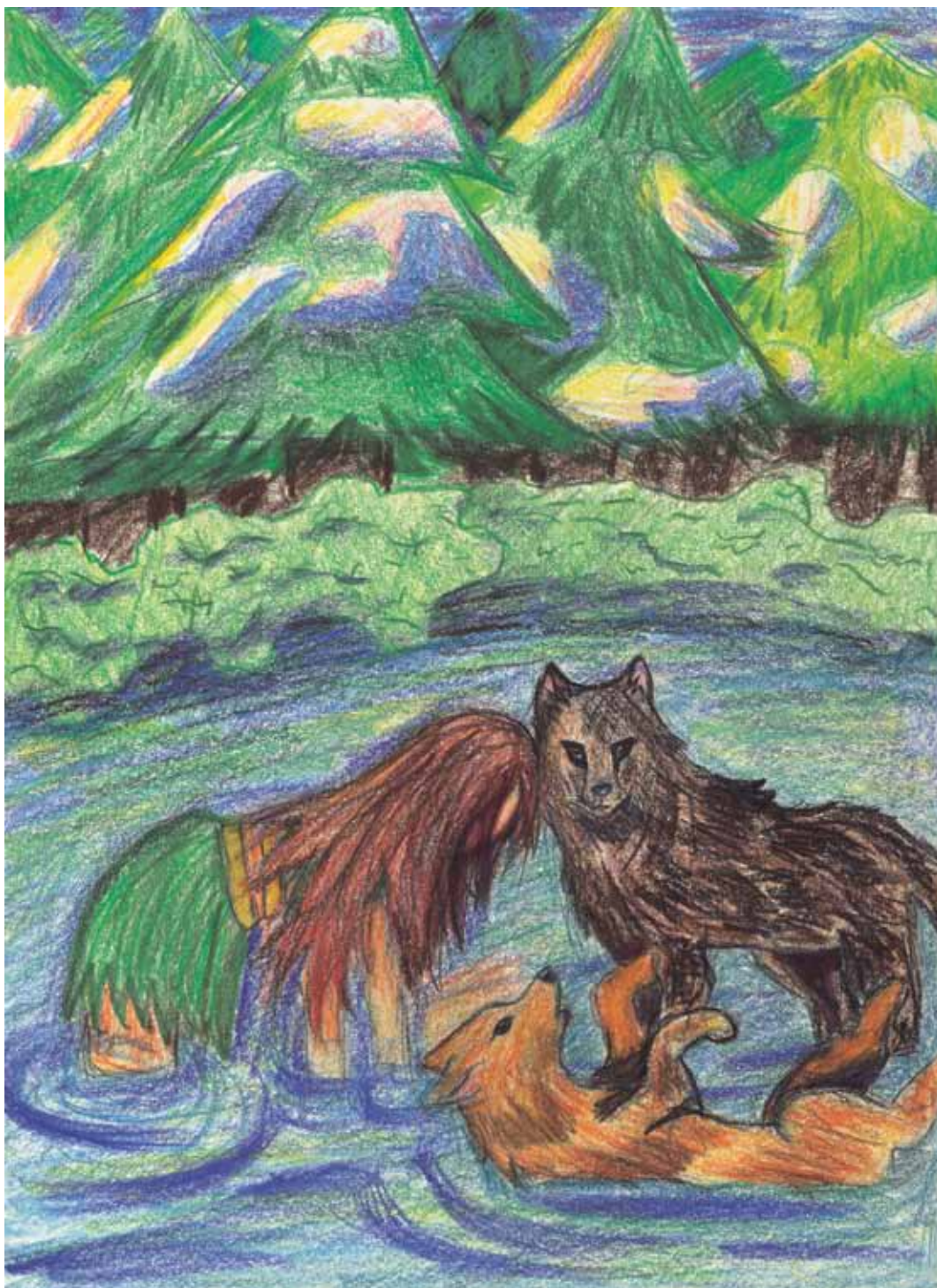
**COLIN LIPHART, 10**  
Ashland, Wisconsin

I’m a short-story writer myself; I love to express myself through art and writing. There is one reason I find myself drawn to this magazine like a magnet. I give it what I like to call the snowflake review. This magazine is special, one of a kind, and all around fantastic. No magazine is like it. No other magazine is made entirely by kids like me. Through *Stone Soup* kids can find their talent, whether it is art or writing. Even reviewing. Now, after reading *Stone Soup* for a while, I have taken up reviewing teen books. It is one of my hobbies now so I want to thank *Stone Soup* for that. One story in particular I loved was “To Be a Swan” [March/April 2009]. A young girl auditions for the lead, Odette, in the ballet *Swan Lake*, but she doesn’t get the part. An injury during opening night gives the girl, Sydney, a chance to shine as the starring role. I could relate to this story. There have been many times when I didn’t get the part I wanted in a production. “To Be a Swan” is a story I will always remember. *Stone Soup* is a wonderful magazine, but it’s not so much a magazine as it is an escape for young writers and artists to get out in the world and tell their story. Whenever I read *Stone Soup* I wonder what the authors’ and illustrators’ lives are like. Where they are from may affect the stories they write. I think about this, after school when I’m done with homework, as I’m sitting in the park watching the people pass by, I think, any one of these people, any one of these minds, could hold a great story. Will they tell it? Or will they keep it to themselves? I must thank each and every author, illustrator, and poet, anyone who has ever submitted anything to *Stone Soup*, for not keeping that great story inside your head.

**ALEX MESSERSMITH, 12**  
Gilbert, Arizona

**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.





*At the creek, Arcadia was almost able to forget that she wasn't like the rest of her family*

# Arcadia, the Adventurous Wolf Girl

By **Julia Clow** and **Olivia Smit**

*Illustrated by* **Annie Liu**

SOMEWHERE ON HIS TRAVELS, Conroy had found it. The human pup. He had brought it home for lack of a better thing to do with it. He had thought that maybe they could use it to teach their pups to hunt, but when he got home, another thing entirely occurred...

“CONROY, CONROY! Did you bring anything good? The pups are starving and we... why what’s that?” Mother Wolf asked. “What on earth did you bring a human cub for?”

She pawed it, turning it over.

“Bring it over and it can nurse with Blaze and Cassie.”

“But Atalaya, I had brought it home for the pups to hunt!”

“Well, it will help us someday if we help it!”

Atalaya was a firm believer that if someone helped you, you should repay it, and vice versa. Because of this, many a time had she brought home a motherless cub and nursed it back to health.

“We’ll call the human pup Arcadia, and I *will* raise it.”

Conroy grumbled and growled at this, but not too loudly because mother wolves are very protective of their cubs, and although Arcadia was not a wolf, Atalaya felt very strongly about her already.

Arcadia crawled over to Atalaya, where she was nursing Blaze and Cassie, burrowed herself between them, and began to suckle. Atalaya chuckled softly and glanced over to where Conroy had stopped growling and was sleeping peacefully.



Julia Clow, 12  
London, Ontario, Canada



Olivia Smit, 12  
London, Ontario, Canada



Annie Liu, 12  
Somerset, New Jersey

"You just wait," she said softly, so as not to wake him. "This one *will* help us, you'll see!"

She had no idea how right she was, on that warm summer evening.

#### FOUR YEARS LATER

SIX-YEAR-OLD Arcadia sat up quickly. What had woken her up? She looked over to Blaze and Cassie. One little tan bundle of fur told her that Blaze was still asleep, but where was Cassie? Arcadia looked all around the cave, then closer at Blaze, to be sure Cassie wasn't hiding somewhere. She wasn't. Cassie was always hiding, or playing, so Arcadia wasn't worried. She was lonely, though, so she howled the "I'm here, where are you?" howl so Cassie would come back. In almost no time she heard a rustling in the forest, but it was not Cassie who stepped out of the bushes, it was Atalaya and Conroy.

"I see you've woken up." Atalaya nuzzled her human cub.

"It's a good thing, too," Conroy added, "It's time to go to the creek."

By this time Blaze had begun to stir.

"Mamasha, Babashar," he yawned, "where's Cassie?"

If wolves could roll their eyes, Conroy would have been rolling his. He had very little patience for cubs when they weren't hunting, or sleeping. It was his turn to howl the "I'm here, where are you?" with a little more demand in it than Arcadia had used. It didn't take very long before they heard the familiar rustling in the

bushes. What was unfamiliar was the low growl that accompanied the rustles. Conroy growled back, unsure of what to expect. A dark ball of fur hurtled out of the bushes and landed on Arcadia's back. Arcadia flailed her arms and legs, but to no avail. It was at times like this that she wished she weren't so different from the rest of her family. She didn't like having teeth that no one could feel when she sank them into a neck or an ear. She didn't like not being able to keep up with even Blaze, the baby of the family. And she especially didn't like how different she looked and smelled. Going to the creek was the worst, because she could see from her reflection in the water that she wasn't like any of them. She only had fur on the top of her body, and it was red, not brown, like Blaze's and Cassie's. Not even black, like Conroy's and Atalaya's. Instead, hers was red, and in her eyes, red was the ugliest color in the world.

Atalaya gently grabbed the neck ruff of Cassie, (for that's who was on Arcadia's back) and pried her off Arcadia.

"Let's go to the creek now," was all she said, unruffled from Cassie's entrance.

At the creek, Arcadia was almost able to forget that she wasn't like the rest of her family. She was having too much fun splashing around with them.

A RCADIA SAT UP and stretched. After being at the creek, everyone had gotten tired and had drifted off to sleep. She had been sleeping under a large tree, in the shade, but now the sun had moved



and was in her eyes. She looked around and found Blaze and Cassie just waking up and squinting because of the bright light. Blaze rolled over.

"Where are Mamasha and Babashar? They were here when we drifted off!"

"Don't worry, Blaze," said Cassie, always protective of her younger brother. "If they aren't here, then we'll just have to go look for them," and she darted towards the nearest set of trees. Before she could step into the forest, though, Atalaya and Conroy came into the clearing.

"Mamasha! Babashar!" Blaze whimpered with delight. "I was worried! I thought..." Here he broke off and looked hard at his parents. "What's wrong?" He whimpered again, this time with fear.

"Cassie, Arcadia, you come with me. Blaze, you go with Babashar." Atalaya paused.

A shot rang out, sounding much louder than it should, in the normally quiet wilderness. She and Conroy ran in opposite directions, Arcadia and Cassie following close behind Atalaya, Conroy carrying Blaze. Atalaya, Arcadia, and Cassie made it home safely, but Conroy ran for miles, with the hunter silently following. He could have gone for miles more, but he was carrying Blaze in his mouth, and that slowed him down.

When he reached a little clearing he thought would be good for defending himself and Blaze against the hunter, he turned to fight. When the man cautiously entered the clearing, Conroy threw himself on him, with all the strength he could

muster. It wasn't enough. The hunter fired a shot—just one shot—and it hit home. Conroy dropped to the ground, lifeless. Blaze rushed forward, calling, "Babashar, Babashar! Get up, get up, oh please get up, there's a hunter right beside you! Please Babashar, get up, I'll be a good cub and never cause you any trouble, just please, please *PLEASE* won't you get up!" The hunter picked up the whimpering cub, wrapped it in his coat, and settled down to wait for whatever came to investigate the dead wolf's body.

**M**EANWHILE, Atalaya, Cassie and Arcadia huddled in the corner of the cave. They were shaking with fear for their father and brother.

The night passed quickly but Blaze and Conroy did not come home. Atalaya finally made a decision. She told the girls to stay there while she went to look for them. Cassie begged to go, but Atalaya refused. "I can cover more ground this way." This wasn't the real reason she wouldn't let them go, though; she was afraid for their safety in the face of danger.

So she set out. She traveled many miles before she found her first clue. Smoke. The hunter had decided to make a blazing fire. As she got closer, she could hear the sound of a whimper. It was Blaze! He was trapped in a small crate lying at the feet of the hunter. But she could not see Conroy. As Atalaya looked closer, she wondered if the hunter had captured only Blaze, or if he had Conroy chained somewhere else. Only a few meters away, though, lay the

outline of a wolf body. As she drew closer, Atalaya at first thought that the wolf might be sleeping, but as she came within a few inches, she smelt that he was dead. When she started nosing him, the full realization hit her.

This dead wolf was Conroy.

With a mournful howl, Atalaya threw herself at the hunter, covering the distance between the dead body of Conroy and the hunter in mere seconds. The hunter whipped around and started to reach for his gun, but he wasn't fast enough. Atalaya sank her teeth into his neck and wouldn't let go. The man sat there fighting the beast, then pulled a knife from his boot and stabbed the snarling animal in the ribs again and again. Atalaya slouched to the ground, then retreated towards home, but not making it far. A little while later she collapsed in a furry heap on the ground, never making it home.

EARLY THE NEXT morning, Cassie and Arcadia were playing at the mouth of the cave when they heard a sound in the bushes. They turned and saw nothing, so continued playing. At noon they were restless.

"I'm going to find Mamasha!" declared Cassie.

"Oh, don't go, I'm sure she'll be home soon," replied Arcadia calmly.

"And what if she's not here?"

"Then we'll go out and look for her."

But Atalaya did not come home, so Arcadia and Cassie set out. They had not

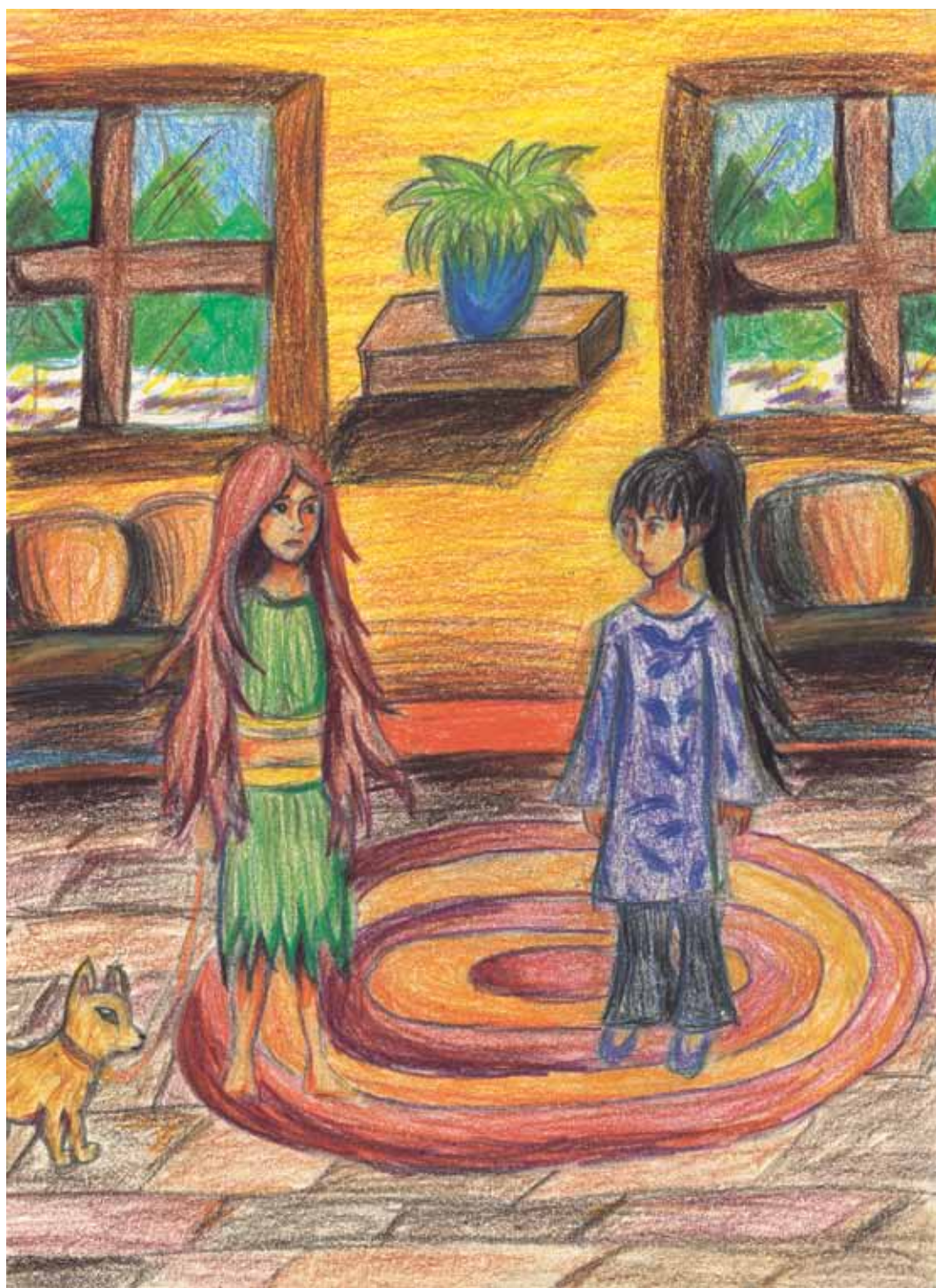
gone far when they heard something they had never heard before. It was a roaring sound, increasing in volume as it got closer, like thunder to their ears.

Then something very large came speeding towards them, stopped, and before they could run, a man stepped out of the big, dark, noisy thing. He pointed a gun at Cassie, and then... BAM! Cassie slumped to the ground. Unknown to Arcadia, who thought her sister was dead, the man had used a tranquilizer on Cassie. The man walked forward, and Arcadia yelped, then retreated back to the cave.

"Wow, there really is a wolf girl," thought the man out loud, as he claimed his prize. As he picked up Cassie, he heard a low, mournful howl, like the one he had heard the morning before. Arcadia had lost everyone... her sister, her brother, her Mamasha, and her Babashar. What could she do? She was so distressed that she just lay in a heap in the corner, waiting for the light of the morning to awaken her.

The bright beams of sunlight poured down onto Arcadia's aching body. The little rock cave seemed unknown to her because there was nothing to cuddle with, no one to play with, and nothing to eat. She was completely alone and she was afraid.

She decided to follow the tracks of the large noisy thing. She traveled many miles and then she found something to eat. It was a little rat that the unknown thing had run over. She did not stop long because the little girl was anxious to find her



*Arcadia started to race out the door, when she noticed one of the girls. She looked just like her!*

family. A while later she finally came to the outskirts of a small village. It was getting dark so Arcadia found some comfortable bushes and lay there for the night. She awoke slightly before dawn, remembering her quest from the day before.

She promptly began circling the tiny town until she caught the scent of the “thing.” Once inside the town, she began searching for the location of the “thing,” and upon finding it she climbed up and began looking for her sister. She did not find Cassie, but a strange noise made her look up. It was voices of people that looked just like her! A kindergarten class was walking by in single file, and Arcadia crept up to the bushes to watch. Suddenly, she heard a shrill bark from one of the tall buildings without faces peering out of the windows. She darted towards the most likely entrance—an open window—and quickly clambered inside, forgetting all about the class.

Now she looked to the most likely place Cassie would be hiding, a wooden box. She crept softly up to it and whispered, “Cassie, is that you?” But it was not Cassie’s voice that greeted her, it was Blaze!

“Arcadia! You’re here! He killed Babashar... and took me!”

“I know, Blaze, that’s why I’m here, to rescue you and Cassie and to have my revenge.”

These last words were spoken in an undertone so Blaze could not hear them.

“Blaze, is Cassie here?” she asked.

“I think so,” replied Blaze. “I thought I

heard them bring her in last night.”

“OK,” said Arcadia, “the first step is to free you.”

Here she tugged, pulled, and bit at the rope tying Blaze’s cage shut. Finally, it gave way. Having freed Blaze, she wandered cautiously. She could hear strange voices, but there was no barking from Cassie, and Arcadia would soon find out why. There was a sock tied around her muzzle and a long thin rope around her neck. Arcadia could see the fear and anger in Cassie’s eyes. She stared in horror as two little girls were poking and hugging the frightened wolf. Arcadia could stand the suspense no longer, so she leaped into the room and yanked the cord from the surprised man. As the middle-aged woman clutched the screaming girls, Arcadia started to race out the door, when she noticed one of the girls. She looked just like her! Suddenly, Arcadia dropped the rope, and Cassie started to run away, but stopped at the expression on Arcadia’s face.

Arcadia realized something that had been nagging her since seeing the kindergarten class, and the hunter’s children. She knew what it was now. She was not a wolf girl. She was a human being, just like the two girls in the corner. It was then that she realized that, being a human, she would have to move away from her beloved family. The thought shocked her so thoroughly it took her breath away.

“Are you all right?” Cassie asked, concerned.

Arcadia was too stunned to answer at



first, but when she got her breath back she was able to gasp out a reply.

"I just need to go back to the cave."

"Are you sure?" Cassie asked again, looking more worried than Arcadia had ever seen her.

"I just need to go back to the cave!" Arcadia repeated, louder.

"So long as you'll be OK."

"I'll be fine," Arcadia answered.

THAT NIGHT, in a dream, Arcadia was visited by the Great Mother Wolf. "You are not a wolf anymore," she told Arcadia, "you are a human. You do not belong here anymore. You must think about your future, and your family's future. What is best for you? What is best for them?" Then Arcadia woke up.

With Blaze and Cassie still sleeping, Arcadia turned the thought of living with the hunter's family over and over in her mind. She knew now that she couldn't continue living with her wolf family, no matter how much she loved them, because no matter which way she looked at it, she knew that, sooner or later, she would have to go live with humans anyway. The time had just come sooner as opposed to later. It was nearing dawn when she made her final decision. She would ask the hunter if she could live with him and his family. Having the matter settled in her mind, she cried herself to sleep.

THE NEXT MORNING, when she woke up, Arcadia couldn't stand the thought of being alone, so she woke up

Cassie. Blaze she let sleep. She told Cassie that she wanted to go back to the town, and although Cassie didn't understand why, she reluctantly agreed to come.

When they reached the town, Arcadia started towards the hunter's house, Cassie uneasily following behind. As soon as the house was in sight, Cassie visibly started slowing.

"Why did you come back here?" she asked.

Arcadia didn't answer, so Cassie didn't persist. When they got to the house, Arcadia stopped in front of the window she had entered through before, hoisted Cassie through, then climbed through herself. She started exploring, looking for the hunter. She finally narrowed all the smells down to his, inside a room with the door half open. She squeezed through, then motioned for Cassie to follow. As she did so, her tail accidentally jarred the door, making a squeaking sound. The man seated at the desk spun around. When he saw who it was, his jaw dropped.

"Why did you come back?" the confused man asked.

But Arcadia had only been taught wolf language, so the man only heard barks and growls. Arcadia felt that, as a human, she was responsible for her Babashar's death. Tears streamed down her dirty cheeks as the whole family (who was gathered in the room by this time) stared in amazement. Even though there were tears, she could still see the soft brown eyes of her sister.

"Come on!" whispered Cassie, "Aren't you coming?"

"No, I can't," sobbed Arcadia, "not after I have killed our Babashar."

"You didn't kill him," Cassie said, surprised, "that nasty man over there did."

"Well, I'm human too, so it was partly my fault."

"Oh," sighed Cassie, knowing it was no use trying to convince her stubborn sister. "I guess it's goodbye then."

"Yes, it is goodbye," answered Arcadia softly.

Then Cassie turned away with her tail dropped and walked out of the small house. Arcadia turned to the man, who looked at her compassionately, and then she slowly walked towards him.

"She needs a home," said the hunter. The wife nodded, and then the girls charged to the dirty and ragged girl. Arcadia shied at first, and then realized that the two girls were merely hugging her.

Arcadia felt loved already, so many warm faces and loving arms, she almost felt at home... the word reminded her of

her Mamasha. What had become of her beloved mother? The question was answered within a few days, when Blaze, Cassie, and their Mamasha came to town. Atalaya was very much healed, and very happy but at the same time sad that her child she loved dearly was moving away. After many hugs and kisses the wolf family returned to their small cave in the forest.

Arcadia lived a long and happy life with the hunter's family. She went to school and learned to talk. Then she went to university and became a wildlife vet. This helped her family a lot and made them very happy. Her new name was Helen, but she was known to all of the wolves as Arcadia, the Adventurous Woman!

#### EPILOGUE

SOMETIMES, on warm nights, if she felt like it, Atalaya would bring Blaze and Cassie down to see Arcadia. They would never forget the human cub that brought them together again. ❁



# Simon, Dik-Diks, and No Worries

By **Jacob E. Gerszten**

*Illustrated by* **Keysun Mokhtarzadeh**

**W**Henever my parents plan a vacation for my younger sister and me, they never include Disney World or a Caribbean cruise on our itinerary. Instead, they define a vacation as a learning experience that expands the classroom to include the real world. That is how I ended up spending last summer sleeping in a tent in the grasslands of Tanzania. From Simon, our guide, I not only learned about the local culture, but I also met the dik-dik of Tanzania.

When I first met Simon, a broad-shouldered modern Maasai who stands over six feet tall, I thought he looked mean. Then he smiled, and his white teeth, even the two front ones that stuck out like sticks, sparkled like the snow on top of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Simon's brown skin reminded me of the dirt covering the back roads upon which we traveled in a 1986 Land Rover; his hair, the black of a zebra's dark stripes, created tight curls around his head. Simon loved wearing his Lewis & Clark T-shirt, a gift from some college students. He insisted the school was in New York City, while I argued it was in Oregon. Simon, who only knew about New York and California, refused to admit that I was right.

Simon also boasted that his tire shoes bound with leather were better than my American-made hiking boots. I wished I had his shoes after my mother made me trade my boots for my sister's tennis shoes with their mesh tops. My sister complained that the neck-high grass slipped through the mesh and created a pinching feeling in her feet. Her complaints led to my suffering.



Jacob E. Gerszten, 11  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Keysun Mokhtarzadeh, 13  
Tehran, Iran



*Everything about Africa was different from what I knew*

But, according to Simon, my suffering was nothing compared to what twelve-year-old Maasai boys endure. If I were a Maasai, I would have to undergo a circumcision next year to celebrate my coming-of-age ceremony. I would then spend the next three to four months recover-

ing in a black hut. Unlike the BaMbuti of the Congo, a Maasai boy cannot scream to show his pain. The BaMbuti boys also get to go away with their fathers to learn the ways of their tribe. The thought of becoming a Maasai boy sounded as unappetizing as the funny stew that another



African made for us. The stew contained red, green, and brown vegetables buried under a thick brown sauce. I spent the entire meal separating the vegetables from the meat.

As someone who spends a lot of time reading about and studying wars and weapons, I could not understand why the Maasai would fight over cows. Simon explained that the Maasai, a semi-nomadic tribe, believe that they own all cows; therefore, they steal cows from other tribes. This led to a war in 1987 between the Maasai and Barbacks. Fifty Barback warriors tried to rob the Maasai farmers of their cows. After hearing cries from the farmers, fifteen Maasai warriors rushed to their rescue and killed two Barbacks. The Maasai army numbered 1,500, while the Barback forces totaled 1,700. Neither side won because the spears of the Maasai and Barbacks could not defeat the guns of the 300 government policemen.


While in Africa, I expected to see ostriches, giraffes, lions, and elephants. I did not expect to see the dik-diks; in fact, I had never ever heard of a dik-dik before I walked past some tiny pellets lying in a pile on the ground. When I stepped on a few pellets, I heard a crunching sound as if I had crushed the bones of a small animal.

"What's this?" I asked Simon as I pointed to the pellets.

"Dik-dik poop," he answered.

A dik-dik, I learned, is one of the smallest members of the antelope family. When I later met one, it reminded me of Winston, my Yorkie, in size but not in features. Under its eyes, the dik-dik has a blue gland that secretes a jelly-like substance. The dik-dik rubs the gland against a tall piece of grass to mark its territory; it also uses dung to mark its spot. When I walked near a dik-dik, it ran away as if I were a scary monster about to kill it.

Everything about Africa was different from what I knew. The sounds, unlike the city noises of talking people and roaring engines, were more a symphony of animals, each playing its own instrument. Without the fumes emanating from cars and the stench coming from garbage, Africa had a clean aroma as if the air had just been created. The plants and animals boasted colors as radiant as fall leaves. Even the stars that shine over Africa like nature's night-lights differ from the ones that illuminate the sky above my house.

During our two-week stay in Tanzania, my sister missed her mirror, my mother missed her washer and dryer, and my father missed his cell phone connection. I missed pizza, my computer, and my collection of toy guns. To all my complaints and concerns, fears and frustrations, Simon responded as he did to everything: "No worries." 

# Up in a Tree

*By* Isabel Sutter



Isabel Sutter, 13  
Houston, Texas

I climb the water oak in my yard  
Its gray bark  
Tearing my once smooth skin  
As I pull myself to a  
New branch  
A cool breeze  
Like the cloud  
That rolls out of the freezer  
When you crack open the door  
But gentler, softer  
Breathes on my face

The sea of  
Gray, white, blue  
Swirling as one sky  
Lifts my heart  
And makes it joyful  
That special joy  
Where  
Your heart pounds  
Your chest aches  
Your eyes water  
Your lips smile

The dull  
Almost twilight  
Sun  
Giggles from behind  
A cloud  
Showing up  
In gay splotches  
Here and there  
Every thing  
Every worry or care  
Every war, lie, death  
Shut out  
All is beauty  
When I'm  
Up in a tree

# Unstoppable

By Nicky Cannon

*Illustrated by* Isaiah Garrod



Nicky Cannon, 12  
Dallas, Texas



Isaiah Garrod, 12  
Frederick, Colorado

I AM PERCHED in the car anxiously, inhaling the sweet, salty air of the sea. I stare out my window, feeling my mind swirl violently with thoughts of what was soon to come. The sun thrashes on the ocean's gentle papery surface, and the water glistens as three birds merrily fly over. The waves lap coolly on the surrounding sand.

The car comes to a sudden halt and I leap out, not looking back. The sun sits in a cloudless blue sky and blazes with a glowing smile. I am in such a rush I don't put sunscreen on.

My feet sprint over the scorching sand. I maneuver over the mounds so I won't stumble and fall, and soon I am plunging head first into the Atlantic Ocean. The water is freezing, but when I am swimming, I am unstoppable. Nothing can remove me from the ocean, and nothing can take the thrill away from me.

A wall of water approaches me, and I puff out my chest. I brace for the impact and soon I am tumbling in multiple back flips underwater. My buzzed blond head is exposed to the tangy salt water and I feel completely refreshed.

I go back to the water's surface and see my younger brother, John, slowly sinking into the water. I wave at him and he shivers and gives me a frown as I hear his teeth clatter. He hates being immersed in cold water as most five-year-olds do, but nonetheless he loves to swim here. He slithers up beside me.

I can't recall how long we swam; all I know is that the stars were breaking through the thick texture of the night sky by the time we were done.





*My feet sprint over the scorching sand*

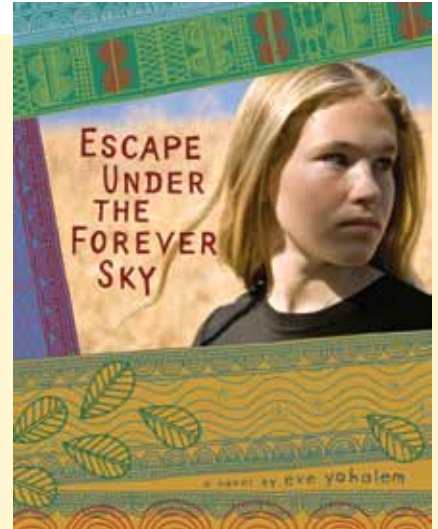
My mom hollers for John and me and tells us that it's time to go and I unwillingly depart from the place that felt like a second home. I gather myself in the

car, nestled in a towel. As we drive away from the beach, my feeling of invincibility weakens, and soon I am just a regular person again. ❀

# Book Review

By Libby Davis

*Escape Under the Forever Sky*, by Eve Yohalem;  
Chronicle Books: San Francisco, 2009; \$16.99



Libby Davis, 10  
Anniston, Alabama

**M**OVING. AWE-INSPIRING. These are words I would use to describe Eve Yohalem's first novel, *Escape Under the Forever Sky*. Lucy Hoffman, the daughter of an American ambassador in Ethiopia (a country in east Africa), is kidnapped. She's taken to a place far from where she and her mother are staying. At first I thought Ethiopia was pronounced "Utopia." It is anything but that. Ethiopia is a dry desert land where the sky appears huge. Many animals live in Ethiopia, like hyenas, monkeys and lions.

Lucy manages to escape the kidnappers, but now she must get back home and she has no idea where she is. Lucy must use her knowledge of African animals to survive in the Ethiopian wilderness. I love animals like Lucy does. I like birds, cats, dogs, fish and many more animals (except for worms and slugs), so I especially enjoyed the parts of the book where animals helped in Lucy's survival. For example, Lucy follows a monkey, who leads her to water. She follows the water, which turns out to be crucial to her survival. Lucy finds food many different ways. One is finding a banana tree. When night fell and Lucy had to sleep, she would sleep in a tree. I can't imagine sleeping in a

tree. I would be worried about falling out of the tree and about other animals in tree.

You have to realize that when Lucy escaped from the kidnapers she had nothing at all. No food or water. No technology. And most importantly, no one to help her find food or water, no one to tell her if a certain thing is poisonous or good to eat. It is as if she is totally cut off from the world.

This book is based on a true story. In 2005, a twelve-year-old girl was kidnapped from her Ethiopian village and was held captive for a week before she escaped. A few hours after her escape, the police found her.

I would describe Lucy as a fun and loving girl. However, Lucy's mother doesn't always have time for her, and Lucy's father is in Indonesia working for the World Bank.

Lucy and I are a lot alike. We both want adventure, not just to be cooped up in the house.

I have been lost once, but it was only for a very short time—definitely not as long as Lucy. But from that experience, I know that when you're lost you have a sense of urgency and a strong will to get back to a familiar person or place.

This is an adventure book, but it is funny. Lucy never loses her sense of humor. For example, even when Lucy is being held captive by the kidnappers, she still has the heart to nickname a mosquito Mr. Malaria.

This book is probably one of the best books I will ever read! It is beautifully written and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. I encourage you to read it, too!



# Mung Bean Noodles and French Bread

By **Madelyne Xiao**

*Illustrated by* **Alicia Liu**



Madelyne Xiao, 12  
Frederick, Maryland



Alicia Liu, 12  
Fremont, California

“**H**ERE,” MY MOM shouted in Mandarin over the bubbling of the cooking pot. She lifted her hand and motioned me over.

“Hold on to the handle,” she grunted, nodding to the handle of the slowly revolving pot as she stirred with a pair of chopsticks.

I chuckled. “I’m guessing that the bottom of the pot isn’t flat?”

Mom lifted the pot up ever so slightly and glanced at the convex surface. A stray drop of boiling water dripped from the spatula onto the glass cooktop and sizzled dry.

“Affirmative.”

I gingerly held the handle while Mom scurried over to the counter and brought back a bowl of fine white powder. I sniffed, and smiled. The evanescent fragrance of mung bean wafted out soothingly.

Mom now held the bowl, poised at the cooking pot edge. The boiling water purred below the bowl’s lip.

“Ready?” Mom inquired, half teasing, half serious.

“Yawp,” I rolled my eyes, but still instinctively blinked as I heard the first dusty sounds of powder sliding on powder, then the wet “plop” of collision between powder and hot water. The burning spray of water that I always half expected never came.

Humming one of my piano pieces, Mom went about stirring the cloudy mixture, pushing her hair out of her eyes as she worked. There was a certain comfort in watching the apron-clad





*I thought of the distances love for our family could go*

figure prepare one of our family's favorite dishes, accompanied by a Chopin waltz.

"Ouch," she suddenly gasped. The chopsticks stopped their revolution around the pot's inside and clattered to a halt on the pot's rim. Her stirring hand flew up to her mouth, and she quickly sucked on the tiny burn that had been caused by the pop of a bubble of hot mung bean water.

"Lemme see," I clamored, tugging childishly at Mom's tightly clutched hand. She reluctantly pulled away her hand to reveal a small, teardrop-shaped burn that blushed a rosy pink. Mom carefully extricated her hand.

"It's OK," she reassured. "It's not the first time." I knew that she was in a rush—Dad was coming home from a business meeting in Paris in half an hour,



and everything had to be perfect. Still, I thought I could see her wince as she grasped the chopsticks again.

Hoping to be helpful, I wandered over to the dish rack and plucked out a large, long-handled bamboo spoon.

"Mom, use..." I started.

She shook her head automatically.

"Stay away from the stove—it's really hot now, so if the bubble pops, you're going to get a burn twice as bad as this little blemish," she nodded at her hand.

By now, the cloudy white water had thickened to a paste in the pot. There was the thick *thlop!* of boiling air bubbles as the sweet-smelling concoction simmered and burped like some sort of Yellowstone mud pot.

Mom had, by now, turned off the stove and was rinsing her hands in cold water at the sink. She exhaled slowly and grimaced. It was then that I noticed the odd speckling of pinkish burns along the back of her hands.

"Your hands really got burned," I exclaimed stupidly. She gave me a sideways glare.

"Thanks for stating the fact," she chuckled, shaking her head. "My hands feel much better already."

Mom checked the clock. Twenty minutes, and Dad would be back home. She pressed the surface of the cooling mung bean paste with her hand. I half expected her fingers to sink into the agonizingly hot starch, but her knuckles merely brushed the translucent surface. The paste quivered slightly, like Jell-O, but

held firm. Lifting the pot up slowly, Mom pried the block of paste out with a pair of chopsticks and let the pot-shaped block relax into a plastic bowl. As usual, I was amazed. The bottom of the pot looked as if nobody had used it in the first place, and the curved surface of the paste block was flawlessly smooth. Mom smiled at her handiwork.

"Beautiful," she finally decided.

I contented myself with sitting at one of the bar stools by the counter, listening to the muffled tapping of Mom's knife slicing easily through the soft gel and meeting the solidity of the cutting board. I half dozed, listening to the soft tap-tap of the knife, the rustle of the tree leaves outside, and the sound of a car motor.

My eyes shot open.

A car motor?

I raced through the living room to a front window, where the already raised blinds revealed the sight of a large, black Lincoln Town Car that squatted in the driveway.

"Mo-om!" I screamed. "Dad's home!"

"Greet him for me. I've got to season this stuff," she scowled at the bowl of mung bean starch noodles that she'd cut the block into.

Slipping on a pair of sandals, I pelted outside, to where the cab driver was helping Dad unload. Dad stopped and smiled.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle?*" he laughed and gave me a hug. Once the bags had been put in the shoe room and the taxi driver paid, I turned to Dad.

"So, how's Paris?"

"Beautiful place. It's old, but the atmosphere's fantastic," he responded. "You and your mom would love it there."

"How was the food?" I spat out the question that I'd been dying to ask for a week.

Dad brightened. "Wonderfully light. Of course, it doesn't compare to your mother's cooking. Speaking of which..." He grinned impishly and raised his eyebrows.

I stood by, watching, as Mom and Dad hugged and smiled, with Dad rushing back to his suitcase for the gifts he'd brought us. Besides a snow globe and key chain, he set another oblong package down by two bags of French chocolate.

"Here, hon. I got something for you that I hope you'll like. Open it!" It was a command. I opened the package's carefully folded waxed-paper wrapping and smiled. Dad had brought me a real French baguette. My mind automatically snapped to what my French teacher had told me at school. French bread was special—no preservatives, with a thick crust that hid a soft, fluffy inside. A gourmand in the making, I'd obviously blabbed about baguette to my dad the day I'd learned about it. It was something that was nearly impossible to come by in America. Instinctively, I stuck my nose into the wrapping and sniffed deeply, then smiled. The sweet aroma of wheat was as good as that of mung bean.

"Aw, Dad, you shouldn't have," I exclaimed, thinking about the absurdity of

flying a loaf of bread cross-Atlantic.


"Well then, you don't even have to eat it," Dad laughed. "Just look at it, if that's what you want."

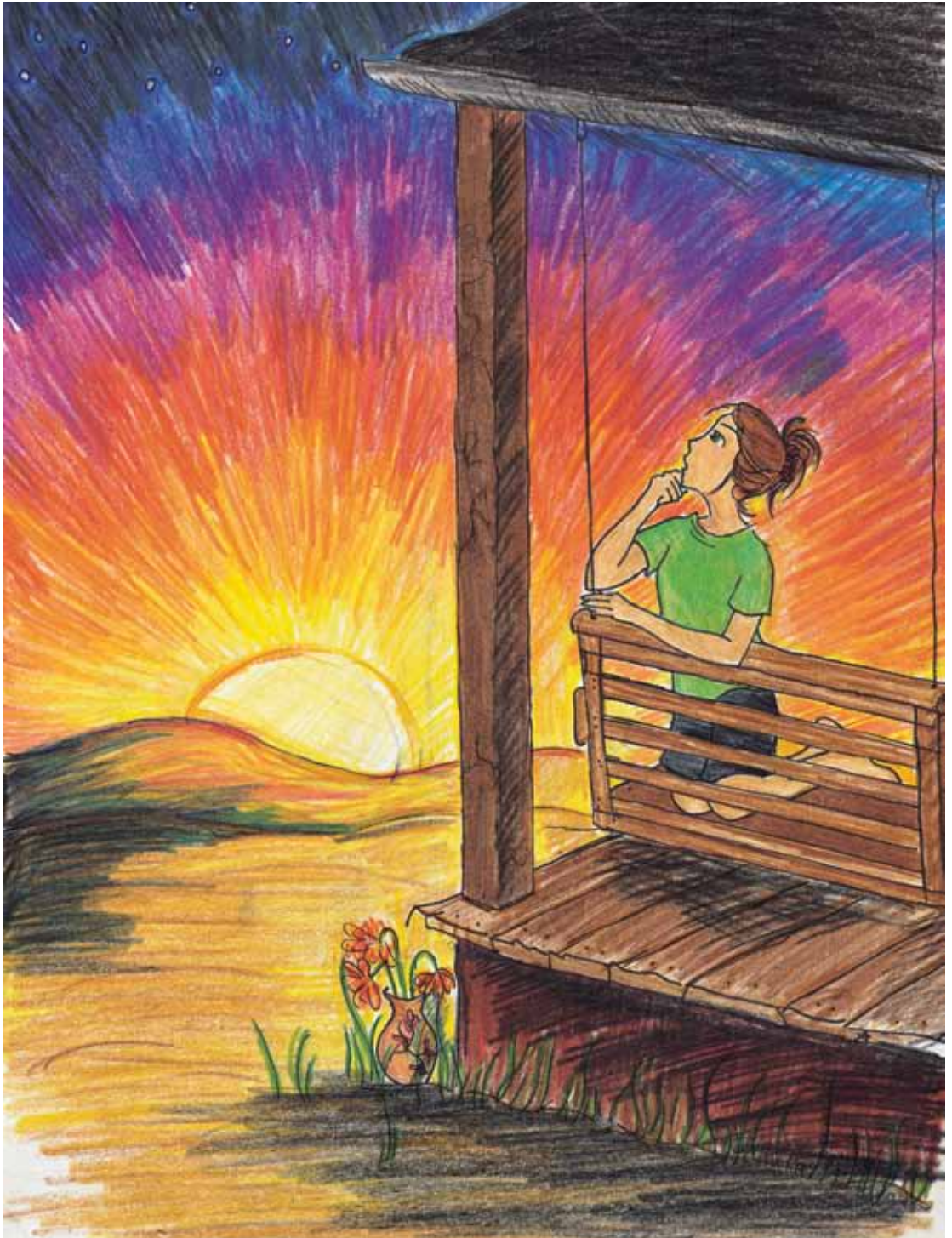
"Not eat it? What a waste. Of course we'll eat it," came the hasty reply.

Dad shrugged. "I hope it's worth it. I had to go through such a fiasco getting that loaf through customs." He rolled his eyes. "Mysteriously wrapped oblong package, eh? In fact, they wanted me to eat a piece to see if it was tainted or not!"

As I watched Mom and Dad prepare the rest of dinner, an irrepressible feeling of happiness swept over me. I smiled at the sight of Mom and Dad preparing dinner together for the first time after a week. I smiled at Mom's gentle chiding as she reprimanded Dad for cutting the cucumber too thin. I smiled as I heard the familiar sounds of appreciation as my mom finally approved of Dad's cucumber cuts and went on to pester him with questions on how many euros he'd spent buying our gifts. Not a lot, Dad would reassure her.

I thought of the distances love for our family could go. Halfway across the world for a loaf of bread. A handful of burns and half an hour for the tired traveler's favorite dish.

As we sat down to eat dinner that night, I laughed inwardly at the inquisitive surprise on my mom's face as she took in my ear-to-ear grin. After all, she laughingly told me later, Dad had only been away for a week. 



*It was like the desert was breathing and singing a silent but glorious song!*

# From Dust to Dreams

By Katharine Keller

*Illustrated by* Laney Haskell

THE CRUNCH OF the pickup truck's wheels and the sound of the girl's breathing were all that could be heard as the rusty vehicle huffed to a dusty stop in front of the low sprawling wood-and-stucco house with a very rusty farm windmill attached on the side. The door to the driver's seat slammed, but Alicia was staring out at the miles of foreboding sand dunes, broken only by some very distant grayish-brown hills, harsh against the bright sunlight, and did not move to join him.

She was rooted to the frayed vinyl seat, the words of her last conversation with her mom running through her head again and again, as if trying to impart some hidden meaning which she had not yet grasped, an answer to why she had been sent here, banished to this isolated place for the whole summer vacation.

She knew the answer, it was simple: her mother had just gotten a job offer, which required her to teach a summer session art history course for exchange students at the university in Siena, in Italy. She could not take Alicia with her (although she'd begged to go along), so she had sent her daughter to her grandparents'.

It really was quite straightforward, Alicia reflected, but she couldn't help feeling a touch of resentment towards her mother; why did she have to send her to a place so far away from everywhere that there was not even any Internet connection, let alone any other people, let alone anyone her own age? This was not Alicia's idea of any way to spend a summer vacation.



Katharine Keller, 13  
Adelboden, Switzerland



Laney Haskell, 13  
Powell, Tennessee

Alicia had been looking forward to hanging out with her friends, and taking that watercolor class she'd longed for, not sweltering with two old people on what now was staring her in the face: a decrepit homestead in the middle of a desert.

"It'll be even better than what we were planning before," her mother had said, "I promise."

"Hey, Alicia, you coming?" The gnarly voice shocked her out of her daydream and she got out of the cab of the truck into the glaring light. Her grandpa was waiting for her with her luggage—two suitcases and a backpack. He handed her the backpack and took the suitcases, carrying them over the hot gravel as if they weighed nothing.

She studied him as they walked; he was thin and tall, with a tanned weather-lined face, and still some wisps of gray hair on his scalp. Everything about him was tough and leathery as old hide. A bit like a cactus, Alicia thought, and had to stifle a giggle.

As she took a few steps, the screen door of the house banged open. A short, wrinkled white-haired figure in a beige apron and faded denim dress came quickly limping out, like one of those desert hens who roosted in the cactuses and strutted about on the sand clucking. Her grandmother rushed to her, wrapping her in a tight hug, smelling very very faintly of old-lady perfume, exclaiming with happiness at seeing her... the usual greetings after a long time spent without seeing someone, Alicia thought, but it had all happened too fast, her mind was still pro-

cessing the previous day, unable to cope with the present.

"So, Alicia, how do you like your new home?" her grandmother indicated the house with a proud gesture, which would have been used more to indicate a grand palace, even a fancy car, but never this...

Stung with bitterness at the words "new home," Alicia stared at it critically. It was a typical decaying ranch house for the area, maybe a bit bigger than normal, with a sagging porch supported by cracked wooden beams. Looking around, Alicia decided that everything here was dry and cracked; the earth, the house, her grandparents... She winced as she tried to smile... even her lips.

Now was the time to stop musing and put on her actor's face. Alicia had always thought of herself as a good actress, now was the time to use this talent. She noticed, just in time, three brand new pots of marigolds in the shade under a window which clearly someone had very recently organized. They were already a little wilted.

She rallied around to hug her grandmother. "Oh my gosh, it's awesome! It's so big, I can't wait to see the inside!" Lying, she excused herself for doing that, it was better than making other people feel bad. But her words, even to herself, sounded like she was overdoing it.

Her grandmother smiled, she looked a little bit relieved, but quizzical, and Alicia realized that she must have been worried about what her granddaughter would think of her house. See, it's a good thing I





*"So, Alicia, how do you like your new home?"*

lied, she told herself.

"Well now, you come along right this way, and I'll show you your room. I'm sure your grandpa will manage with the suitcases," and she led Alicia over the wooden porch and through the screen door.

It was dim inside and Alicia's eyes had trouble adjusting after the glare of the desert outdoors. The inside of the house enveloped her with the musty smell of

really old furniture. They were walking rapidly down a narrow hallway, her grandmother giving her a tour of the house. They passed the living room, the dining room and an incredibly archaic kitchen to the back of the house, stopping in front of the last door in the hallway. Her grandmother flung it open with a grand sweep of her arm. "And this is your room! It used to be your mother's."

The door creaked as it swung open to reveal a tiny uncarpeted room, with faded yellow walls and nothing except a bed with a thin white bedspread, a wardrobe, a small wooden desk and an old wooden chair. No evidence of her mother having grown up in it. No pictures on the walls either, she noticed. Alicia gulped; she had to live here for three *months*?

"Wow... it's cozy..." OK, maybe I'm not such a good actress, she thought, as she set her backpack on the bed. Her grandpa had come in with the suitcases, and her grandmother was overseeing him placing them on the floor in the corner, and she fortunately did not seem to be paying much attention to what Alicia had said.

She stood at the door, waiting patiently until her grandmother stood up, dusting her hands off in a businesslike way. "Well, we'll be leaving you to unpack and Grandpa needs to get back to work after he's been away all day."

Alicia, who at the moment could not yet face unpacking because it would be resigning herself to being stuck there, asked awkwardly, "Um, actually, I was wondering if I could maybe take a shower, get freshened up a little bit."

Her grandmother glanced back with a look that Alicia could not read, but then smiled and replied, "Why of course, the shower house is right behind the house, we have a pump which brings up groundwater to our house, but it's not heated. I hope you don't mind showering with cold water?"

Alicia shook her head, though she had

never taken a cold shower in her life, and her grandparents left. She sat on the bed, motionless, for a few minutes, just letting her thoughts hum around inside her in that meandering way they always did when she did not try to control them. This room was so empty, and dead, and did not seem like any kind of bedroom to live in. Where was all her mother's stuff? She supposed they had cleared out the room long ago, but she wished there could have been at least some hint that there had been life in the room sometime before. It seemed like an abandoned shell.

It was going to be hard to find the desire to make the effort to figure out what would be the wrong thing to say or what would be impolite or what would maybe offend her grandparents in terms of what she took for granted and what was actually different out here in the desert and might be difficult for them to provide. Like the water supply and showers...

Another thought idled into her head: what was her grandpa going to work on? And where? And then she wondered why her grandparents had chosen to even live here in the first place and how and where her grandpa had worked when he was younger because there was nothing around, that was for sure. And how her mother could have stood growing up in this desolate place, and how had her mother become who she was now, if this was where she came from?

Finally, she roused herself and, getting out some clean shorts and a T-shirt from her suitcase, uncovered a muslin bundle



*Her mother had packed her brushes and paints!*



hidden under the clothes: her mother had packed her brushes and paints! What in the world for? she thought angrily, there is absolutely nothing here to paint, it's totally ugly and hot and there is nothing to see. The house was as old as her grandparents themselves, and they seemed never to have changed anything in the style or the furniture or the decoration in the last half a century. It's just dead, dead, dead, with no colors or life at all!

And she clacked out the back door in her flip-flops into the dry furnace blast of the sun.

The shower house was actually a lean-to with metal sheeting across both ends, like an oven at this time of day. Alicia winced as she entered into its stifling heat, thinking that somehow the lack of hot water was not going to be a big problem, carefully stepping over the weeds growing at the edge in the only bit of damp there was.

Alicia turned the water on full blast, heard the hum of what must have been a pump, and was shocked into the first pleasant experience that had happened in several days. The water ran over her back in streams of pure, cool delight. She could practically feel it washing away all of the dirt from traveling, smoothing out the kinks in her back from a long night on the airplane and a long unair-conditioned drive to the house.

She forgot about everything and in any case felt too tired to wash. She simply stood there, letting the water pour onto her, wondering if she could somehow

paint a picture of how cool water felt, until some strange clunking of machinery nearby jolted her back and she remembered again, too late, about the water supply. She quickly turned it off at about the same moment that it had begun to splutter and turn brownish. Getting dressed in a guilty hurry, she left the lean-to.

She heard some hammering on metal from the windmill tower and figured out where her grandpa was and wondered how much extra work she was causing him by showering. A brush of hot wind against her cheek startled her into looking up across the wide plain of the desert; miles of unbroken earth and sand ravaged and scarred by the sun, over to those hills apparently scorched barren of all vegetation.

Alicia shivered, this truly was the end of the world, the doom of man, she was thinking dramatically: how could anyone survive in such a forbidding place? Where the heat ate at the bodies of the people, and the wind tore apart their souls and buried their memories. It was depressing beyond belief.

She didn't even want to think about it, she just wanted to go back home to what she had started thinking of as "civilization." Despite the heat, she shivered, breaking into a trot towards the house.

AFTER DINNER, when she was lying on her bed in the small shell of a room, listening to the last clicking of the cicadas outside, she thought of how the bedroom was like the dry empty exoskeletons

of those insects and then kept on thinking of bones, bleached white by the sun, being enveloped by the sand and, when they were gone, no one to cry because everything and everyone had been swallowed up by the awful heat.

The sound of a radio softly playing really old-fashioned music outside filtered into her head and she got up to get away from her bleak thoughts and that desolate room and went to see who was listening. Outside on the porch, the old swing creaking, sat her grandmother, humming along to the radio, as she looked out over the wide expanse of the sandy plain.

The radio was so full of static out here on the porch that Alicia was about to turn away when her grandmother's voice stopped her. "Come here, hon, I want to show you something." Alicia stepped through the screen door, outside into the cooler night air, settling herself beside her grandmother. The old woman set the swing into gentle motion, rocking it back and forth. "Now," she said, "look up."

Alicia looked up, and her eyes were caught on the wide expanse of deepening blue, which was bigger, far bigger, than she could ever imagine a sky could be. As she watched, the very tip of the sun finally sank down under the horizon, turning for a moment at least the whole desert into a rosy fire and infusing the air with sparkly gold. Both the far-off hills and the rolling

sands before her were coming alive with colors all merging into each other and changing by the second.

"You see, honey," her grandmother was speaking again, "the desert is just like any other bit of land; it rewards those who are brave enough to live in it." She sat a moment longer but did not say anything after that, just stood up and faded back into the house, leaving her granddaughter on the swing.

Alicia stayed there, motionless, watching the pinpricks of stars, incredibly brilliant, pop out dozens at a time, and the blending of rose and gold evaporating into shades of blue. She'd never seen anything like this back in "civilization" and it was unbelievably beautiful. It was like the desert was breathing and singing a silent but glorious song! She wanted never to stop looking at it.

And as she observed, she finally began to understand. You did not live in the desert because you had to; you lived in it because you loved it and it was a hard love, that much was clear. The desert did not give you water or food if you did not work for it, but it gave you something better, it gave you a place where the dreams inside you could be born.

Fingers itching to get started, and grinning now for the first time about her mother's words, she rushed back inside for her paintbrushes...





# For No One

*By* Mara Schiffhauer

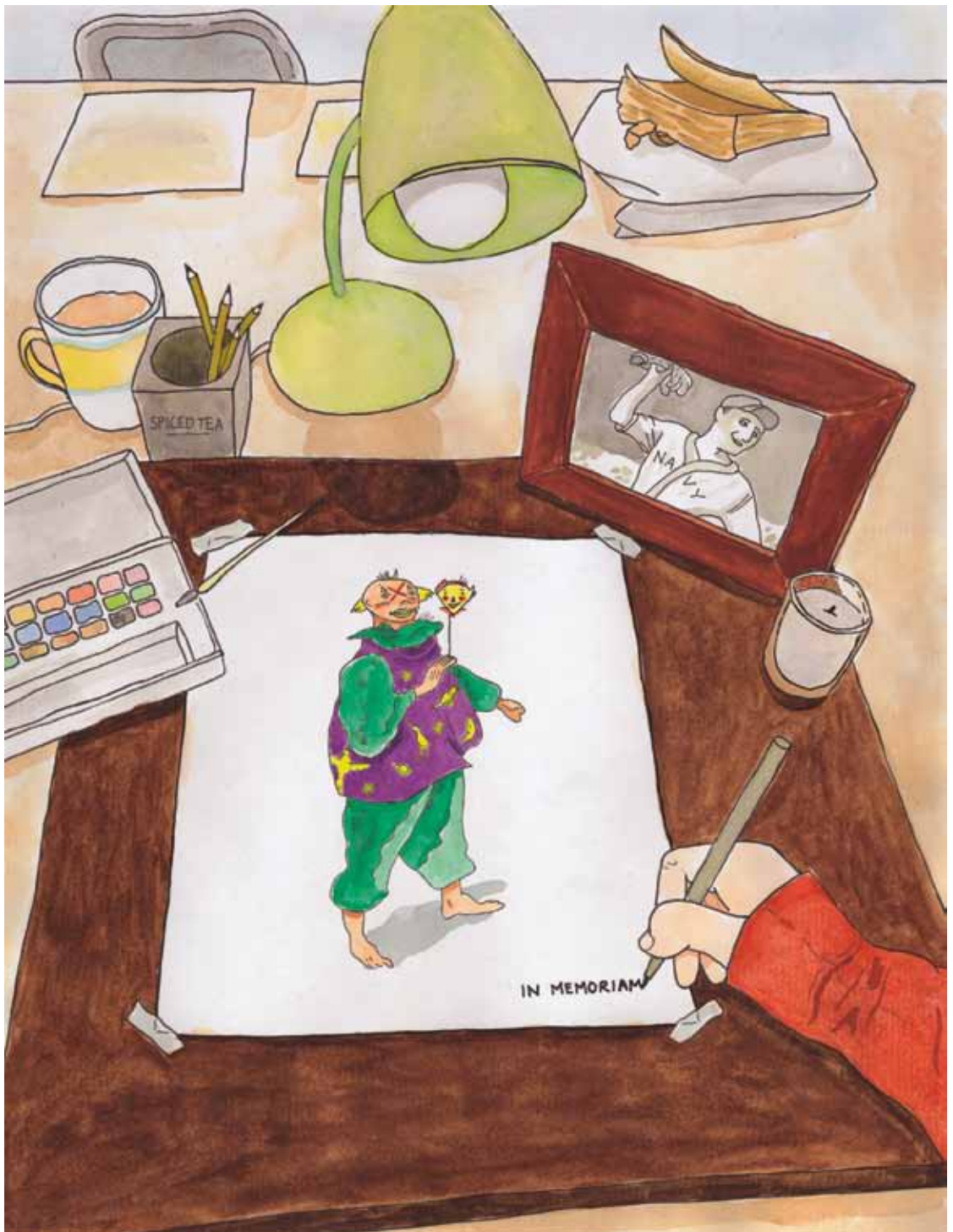


Mara Schiffhauer, 12  
Tabernacle, New Jersey

I watch her  
From the garden  
A baby girl  
Wobbling around, like a buoy  
On a choppy ocean,  
Batting playfully  
At her rainbow of toys,  
Her blue eyes,  
Darting around the room.  
Her mother softly coos,  
“So big,”  
With a pearly smile  
Drifting gently up her face.  
The baby shoots  
Her tiny fingers  
Towards the heavens.  
The mother,  
Clapping and cheering,  
Tells everyone.

But when I  
Was a sprout,

Nestled warm  
In my cocoon of soil,  
Like the jelly encased  
In a fluffy doughnut,  
Soaking up the nutrients,  
Readying for my awakening,  
The thunder boomed to me,  
“So big!”  
With its blinding smile  
Shooting straight to the ground.  
I sprawled out  
My verdant fingers  
And rocketed to the sky,  
My tiny heart full  
Of pure pride;  
All the creatures in the forest  
Saw me,  
But they told  
No one.



*The jester came alive, and my grandfather did too*

# The Unfinished Jester

By Emma T. Capps

*Illustrated by the author*

**I**N MEMORIAM. Angelo Salvatore D'Amico, 1919–1989. That was what I wrote, at the bottom of the painting, in felt-tip pen. That isn't the beginning of this story. It's the end.

This story starts a month earlier. It starts in the library.

That's a room in our house—the library. Right next to my bedroom, across the hall. It's filled head to toe with books upon books, stories upon stories. In one corner is a tall fireplace, near the couch and the faded leather armchair. On the mantle are Halloween pictures of me: kindergarten, third grade, fourth grade, sixth grade. On a different shelf are old black-and-white photographs, grainy and lovely, of my mother's parents.

My mother and I were sitting on the rug, flipping through black portfolios she had put together of my paintings and sketches. She was proud of her work. I was proud of her work.

"See, Emma?" she said. "I've put all your drawings in these plastic covers, so they don't get faded. Look—there's that watercolor you did of the girl and the calla lilies."

"Thanks," I said. "You did a really nice job with these portfolios. Why is this one backed with newspaper?"

"I don't know," she said, shrugging. She flipped the portfolio page.

"That's amazing! Who drew that?"

She had flipped to a breathtaking charcoal sketch on yellowed old paper. It showed a dark, meticulously drawn little house teetering on a cliff above a lake. The drawing was gorgeous.



Emma T. Capps, 12  
San Carlos, California



"My dad made it," she said wistfully. "You remember I told you he loved drawing?"

"He was very skilled," I said.

"Yes, well," she said sadly, "he never got to use his skills."

"Why not?" I asked, although I half knew the answer.

"He had to work all the time to support our family. He never had time to be an artist."

I flipped the page. It was a portrait of a man, his sculptured face dark and brooding. His long hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and he wore a fancy coat with tails and a ruffled cravat.

I didn't like this drawing as much as I liked the first drawing. On the next page was a third drawing, and this was the most captivating of them all.

It was a black-and-white charcoal portrait of a court jester. His face was spread in mischievous delight, his snub nose upturned. In his right hand, he held a staff with a toy face on top, almost a mirror of his own. He wore a voluptuous coat and pants, decorated with thin outlines of birds and stars, moons and tiny trees. The detail on the coat seemed unfinished, as did his left hand. The hand was a mere outline, pale and ghostly.

My mother and I stared at the picture.

"I never realized he didn't finish this picture. Look at the left hand and the coat. I think he was drawing this right before he died."

"It's beautiful," I said. "*My* paintings pale in comparison."

"No, they don't," she said seriously. "You're already a better artist than he was."

"Do you think he would be proud of me?" I said, smiling slightly.

"Yes," she said. "He would be extraordinarily proud of you."

"Would he help me with my art?"

"Yes. I don't think you need it, though."

We sat there for a long time.

"He was a good man," she said, tears brimming in her eyes.

**M**Y GRANDFATHER died a long time ago, when my mother was eighteen. On our mantle, right there in the library, is my mother's favorite photograph of him. He's smiling from ear to ear, wearing his Navy-issue baseball jersey and throwing his glove into the air after his team's victory. Even though the photograph had been taken during his service in World War II, his face is nothing but pure joy.

So he played baseball. He drew. And I wish I had known him.

**T**WO DAYS LATER, I took the court jester out of the portfolio. I brought him over to my drawing table, cleared a place of honor for the drawing among my desk clutter, sketches, and art supplies.

I tore a sheet of paper from my watercolor pad, got out my best mechanical pencil, and began to draw. I stared at my grandfather's court jester and copied him carefully. I refined the lines, finished his left hand and drew in the details on his

coat, carefully penciled in tiny stars and birds and trees.

I inked it in. I did this all in secret, when my parents weren't watching. I didn't want them to know. This was between me and my grandfather.

Then I painted it. In watercolors, because they were my favorite medium, rich and versatile. The jester came alive, and my grandfather did too. My grandfather came alive through my pencil, my pen, my paintbrush. He smiled out through the court jester's lips.

I stood back and stared at my grandfather's jester, my jester. It had been a month since I first saw the sketch. Homework and school and life had

crowded out the jester, but whenever I had a moment I inked a little here, painted a little there. Now it was finished, and it was beautiful.

No—not *quite* finished. Not yet.

"Mama, what was your dad's name?" I called out.

"Angelo. Why?" she yelled back, sounding puzzled.

"Just wondering!" I said.

I pulled out a felt-tip pen and wrote my In Memoriam at the bottom of the painting.

"There," I said. "*Now* it's finished."

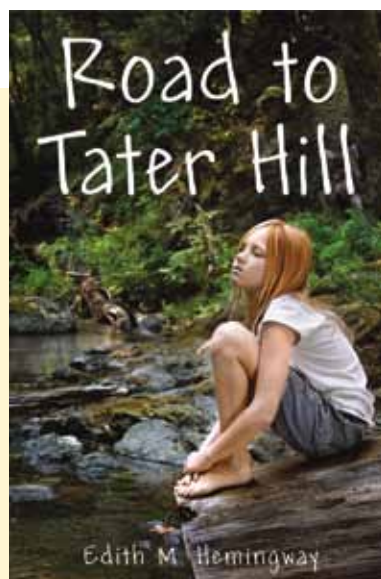
Then I went out and played baseball. I threw much better than usual. I think my grandfather was throwing through me. 🍀



# Book Review

By Adair Brooks

*Road to Tater Hill*, by Edith M. Hemingway;  
Delacorte Books for Young Readers: New  
York, 2009; \$16.99




Adair Brooks, 13  
Black Mountain,  
North Carolina

IT WAS A DELIGHTFUL coincidence to find a book in the library that was set where I live! *Road to Tater Hill* is a heartwarming and fulfilling story of friendship, family, hope, home, and the bumpy road through grief. As eleven-year-old Annie Winters spends another summer at her grandparents' house in the mountains of North Carolina, I could imagine every sight and smell of the creek, rhododendrons, washed-out clay roads, and windy hilltops easily because my house is nestled in similar North Carolina woods. I've enjoyed trips to waterfalls and mountaintops just like the ones in the book. This summer, however, is like no other for Annie. Her Air Force dad is overseas in Germany, leaving Annie and her mother alone when their day-old baby, Mary Kate, dies. Annie grieves the death of her only sister, who she never even got to see, and she struggles as the whole house falls into gloom. While her mother sinks into a stony depression, Annie escapes to visit the creek to hold her "rock baby," a river stone whose weight is a comfort while cradled in her arms. She later befriends a reclusive mountain woman, Miss Eliza, who is mysterious at first, but Annie realizes that she is just lonely, too. The two share similarly sad stories and troubles, but also wisdom that helps Annie cope with

her mother's behavior and reconciles Miss Eliza back into the community.

While I'm grateful to have been spared from anything as heartbreaking as losing a close family member, the way the book described the behavior of the characters in their sorrow was very real to me. I would be as frustrated as Annie is when the household tiptoes around the subject of the baby. It was also interesting to compare the emotional outlet that she and Miss Eliza found in the rock baby, books, and weaving, to Annie's grandma's constant, busy kitchen work. My grandmother also sometimes seems to live in the kitchen, so it seemed fitting that busying about in the kitchen would be her outlet. Another similarity between Annie and me is that she's close to her grandpa. In the story, he's the one who listens to and asks about *her*; and he doesn't complain about her running off all the time. My grandfather might not be as quiet as Annie's, but I like the way he is frank and up front and understands that when I do something embarrassing or the wrong way, it really *is* wrong and laughs about it good-naturedly rather than trying to cover it up. He also listens to me and continues an interesting discussion on things I bring up. He is full of practical wisdom for creating and fixing things, just like Annie's grandpa is a good woodworker.

Miss Eliza says that books are "medicine for my soul" and that "once I could read, that made all the difference" during her loneliest years. I share her love for the world of books. Not only can they be a diversion in times of sorrow, but I am fascinated by how each of the myriad books out there leads you into a new world, a new way of looking at things.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Road to Tater Hill* and highly recommend it. It is a great read for anyone who shares my love of stories, character development, and the mountains! 



# Wave Song

By Anna J. Mickle

*Illustrated by* Ida Otisse McMillan-Zapf



Anna J. Mickle, 12  
Madison, Wisconsin



Ida Otisse McMillan-Zapf, 12  
Roanoke, Virginia

A vast land  
Small enough to comfort me

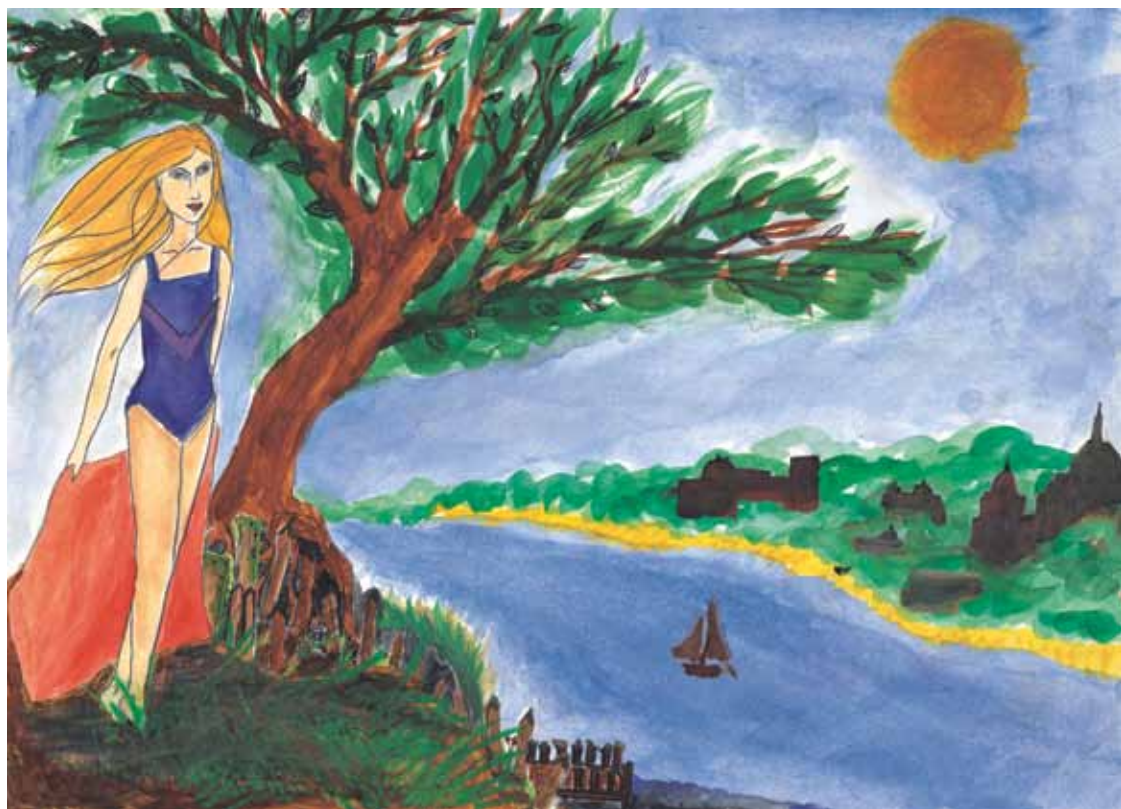
Not an ocean,  
too big  
Not a pond,  
too small

A meadow of green  
A field of waves

So loud, so soft  
So big, so small  
Green Lake is a blanket

I AM STANDING on a cliff made of sandstone that crumbles into the lake. I watch branches that sway on the trees; their visible roots are a baby's arms, clinging to its mother. I gaze at a skyline where a bright ball of fire is suspended, as if by a string, from the heavens.

I walk down rickety steps, plants reaching out to brush against me, not grab me, not scratch me, embrace me. I laugh as a breeze plays with my hair, as a puppy would. I run down a creaking dock and jump into an ice-cold, refreshing lake. Bubbles fly around me as I sink to the sandy bottom. This is a heaven, under the dock, over rocks of many sizes, each I know as if they were my friends. The water is clear, showing me sand,




*I am standing on a cliff made of sandstone that crumbles into the lake*

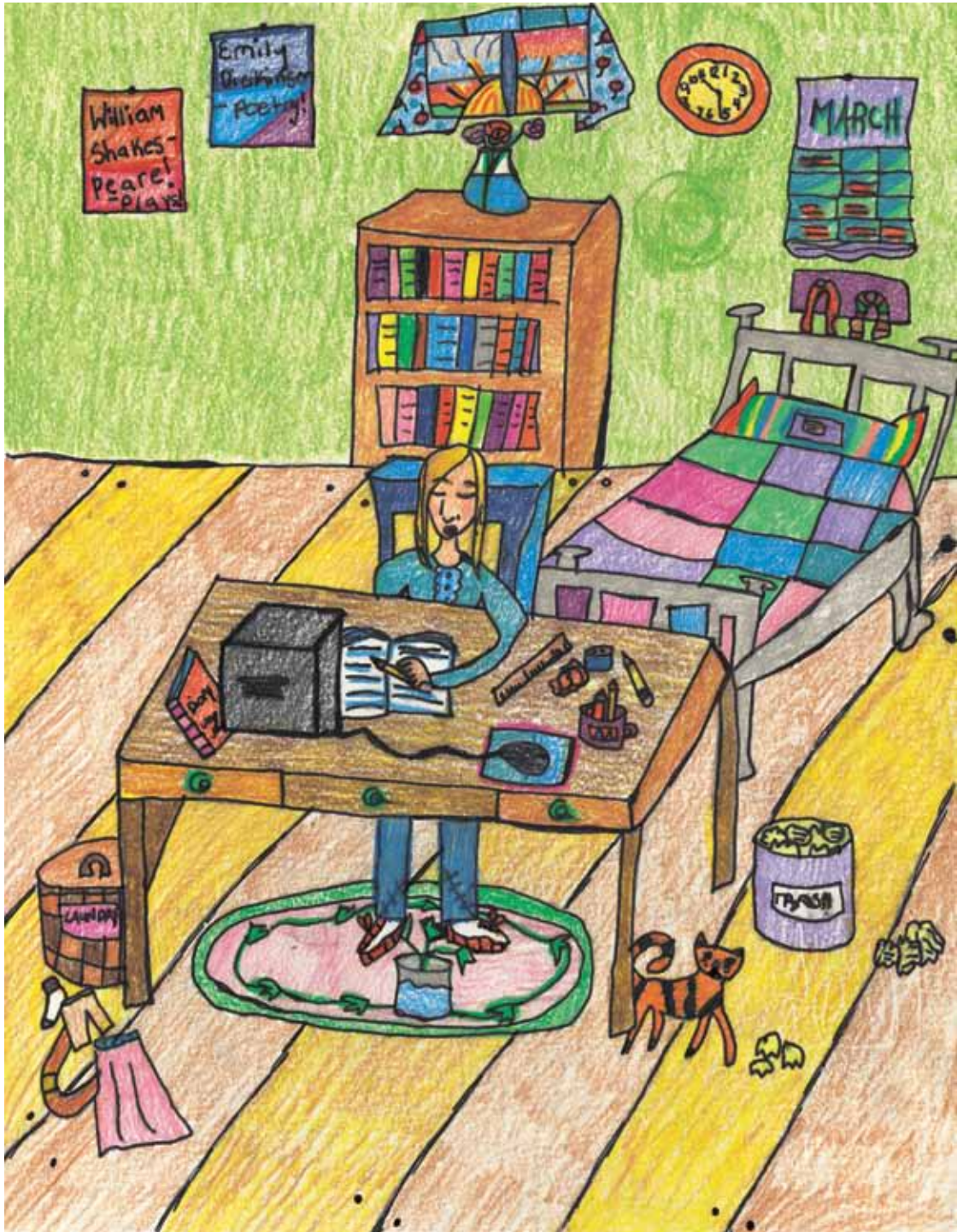
seaweed and so many stones. Bobbing up, I see again that skyline, trees, so green, like a line scribbled by a two-year-old. But I remember when I was zipping around on a small little boat, a motor with a seat.

I remember gripping onto my strong brother, a security in front of me. And that line was not so fuzzy anymore. Large hotels, fancy restaurants, mansions, so rich but beautiful, all placed like a collage on a background of thick, lush, green trees. Our little cabin is small and humble

compared to these huge houses, but it is more of a home.

Leaving the lake, wrapping a towel around my cold body, I watch the sun leave the horizon; I watch the sky grow dark. I see the last purple clouds disappearing like smoke; I see a few brave stars beginning to peep out. I walk up those steps and on past the cliff, feeling grass on my ankles. Darkness is here; voices and light protrude from our small, humble cabin. 





*Ophelia was born to write*

# Inspiration

By **Emi Cohen**

*Illustrated by* **Rebecca Bihn-Wallace**

**O**PHELIA CRUMPLED UP yet another piece of notebook paper and threw it in the general direction of the garbage can. It missed by roughly five feet. Ophelia shrugged. Her cat, Butterbell, would find it eventually and hopefully also find a use for it. She focused her attention back on her notebook. It had started out with a hundred pages. It now had maybe thirty-six. She'd tried out almost every genre she knew of: sci-fi, historical fiction, tragedies, comedies, biographies, fantasy, comic strips and even realistic fiction, which she already knew she couldn't write. Ophelia glanced up at the clock: 5:54. She would have to leave for school soon. Oh well. She'd write more during math. The teacher wouldn't notice. She never did.

Ophelia was born to write. She had been named after a character in one of William Shakespeare's great creations, though there were so many she didn't know which one. She had always loved to write, though she hadn't known that until who-knows-when. She loved to create characters and put them in strange, wonderful yet difficult positions, then save them at the very last minute. Lately, though, it had gotten harder. Maybe it always got harder to imagine when you got older. Either way, Ophelia spent every moment she could with a pencil and paper, or on the computer with Microsoft Word. Her ideas flew off the pages and came to life in front of her eyes. Even during math, when she wrote on scraps of paper with pencil stubs, or at least on her math paper. And fantasy was her favorite genre. And al-



Emi Cohen, 10  
Chicago, Illinois



Rebecca Bihn-Wallace, 11  
Baltimore, Maryland



ways would be. Maybe.

"Ahem," said Mrs. Pickle, the math teacher. "Now class, we will start with Parrrrrtial prrrrrroducts." She always spoke like that. Don't pay any attention to it. Ophelia smiled. A long lecture that made no sense. Perfect writing conditions. She rummaged around in her desk for any scrap of paper and anything that would make any sort of mark on that paper. She emerged with an old candy wrapper and a crayon. Marvelous, as the characters in old cartoons would say. Simply marvelous.

By the end of math, Ophelia had filled the entire candy wrapper with miniscule writing and tucked it in the plastic container with the Little Mermaid on it, along with all the other old candy wrappers in it. She had started another story and given up on it. On each wrapper was a different story, and none of them were finished. Not one. There were stories about squirrels battling evil crows and owls, stories of a kingdom with an evil sorcerer intent on destroying all traces of good in the world. The latest one was about a girl with a very long name. Misericordia Caterina... no, Esperanza Caterina Cassandra Monica... no, Alexia... well, never mind, you get the point. Half the wrapper was covered in that girl's name. Ophelia almost wished she had a name like that. But she figured it was close enough, because everyone called the girl Juliet, who was a character in another one of Shakespeare's plays. Right?

At recess, Ophelia explained her writing predicament to her best friend, Harry.

He just laughed. "Just don't think about it," he advised her. "If you don't think about it, you'll come up with something."

Ophelia puffed out her cheeks. "I thought about that. The problem is, I can't not think about something if I'm trying not to think about it, can I?"

Harry half smiled. "You'd be surprised," he said, and the bell rang.

P.E. was after recess. "No hope for writing through that," Harry commented.

"Obviously," replied Ophelia, then, "but why don't you try it?"

Harry half laughed. "Only someone stupid would not pay attention in front of Meatloaf." Meatloaf, the P.E. teacher, was actually Mr. Metloff, but he was so large that even he called himself Meatloaf.

"EY!" said Meatloaf. "You. Yes, you! Geddup here."

T.D. Roosevelt stumbled slightly as his cousin Maria pushed him out of line. "Y-yeah?" he murmured hesitantly.

"Don't y-yeah me!" bellowed Meatloaf. "One-fifty, now! NOW!" T.D. dropped to the ground for his 150 push-ups. "Now," said Meatloaf menacingly, "who's up next?" Everyone backed away.

Next was writing. The woman who taught it had previously been a counselor but had been fired because all the students had been afraid of her. And for a good reason, too. "Now children," she said in a dreamy voice, "every great artist starts at the seed, as does every tree." Everyone had become extremely interested in either the ceiling or their desks, hoping they wouldn't be called on to


read aloud their homework, as none of them had done it. "Every one of you," the teacher continued, "will become someone great." Ophelia looked up. Maybe the teacher was crazy. Well, there was no doubt about that, but crazier than usual. "Each and every one of you. Whether you become an accountant or the president of the United States, each of you will be great in your own, individual ways." After that, the speech droned on. Something about how important exclamation points were.

"Pretty crazy lesson, huh?" said Harry after class.

"Yeah," said Ophelia. But really she was wondering about what the writing teacher had said. *Every one of you will be great in your own, individual way. Every great artist starts at the seed.* Immediately she was filled with that kind of feeling you get when you

want to do something you would never do if you were thinking straight. She decided on the spot that she was going to give realistic fiction one more try. The little voice in her head decided not to comment on the fact that she'd only given it one try in the first place.

She turned to the next blank and third-to-last page in her notebook. She set her pencil on the paper and tried to think of something to write. Her mind, as one's mind usually is when you pick up a pencil, was blank. Don't you hate it when that happens? Finally, she knew what she would do. She would write a story about deciding to write that story.

She wrote about everything that happened that day and beyond. She wrote about 5:54 and math and recess and P.E. and writing and everything in between. And here we are at the end. 



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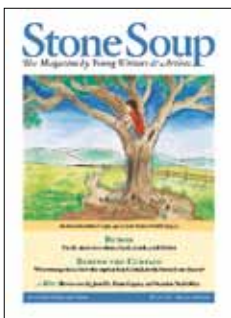
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