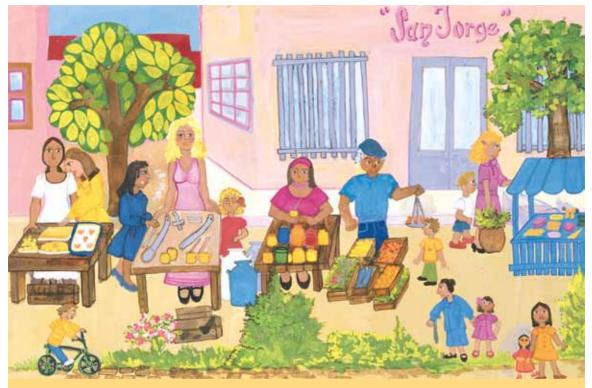
Stone Soup The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Working Day," by Maria Jose Ortega, age 11, Argentina

My Dad's Birthday I'll Never Forget

Danny meets his football hero, Tiki Barber

TEAR DROP'S LEGACY

After the rescue at sea, David can't get Tear Drop out of his mind

Also: A poem about the last day of school

Stone Soup The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 38, NUMBER 6

JULY / AUGUST 2010

STORIES The Sparrow by Lulu Russell 5 The laws of nature can be harsh River God by Virginia Mason 7 Was it really just a dream? My Dad's Birthday I'll Never Forget by Danny Singer. . . 13 Danny's role model inspires him to be a better person Tear Drop's Legacy by Olivia Smit23 David is determined to find Tear Drop and bring him home What's a little laryngitis between sisters? A turtle comforts Julia when she gets lost at the aquarium It was Gemma's weakness—a thirst for knowledge **POEMS Down at the Dock** by Rebecca Mitkus Wishnie 30 BOOK REVIEWS Love, Aubrey reviewed by Eliza Edwards-Levin.................19 **Promises to the Dead** reviewed by Bhavana Penmetsa 38



page 5



page 7



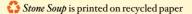
page 33



page 41



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The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

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.





Fessie 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: "Working Day" was loaned to Stone Soup by the International Museum of Children's Art in Oslo, Norway. Established in 1986 by Rafael and Alla Goldin, the museum is a wonderland of floor-to-ceiling art by children from over 150 countries. Special thanks to Angela and Alla Goldin.

The Mailbox



I think one of your best issues yet was the recent March/April 2010 issue. It was filled with plenty of wonderful illustrations (Tiger Tam rules!) and fabulous pieces of writing. However, I would like to draw attention to the story "Time," by Kaija Warner. I thought this story had exceptional wording and a touching, deeply thought over plot. Katya Lopatko's illustrations completed the story and made it seem as if the boy in Kaija's story was really there. They captured the bittersweetness of the story. Thank you for putting such great things in your issues. Keep it up!

Brooke Weber, 11 Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania

I love your magazine so much! I have been getting *Stone Soup* for six months now, and I've enjoyed every single issue. I especially adored "Writing Is Like Knitting," by Brittany Jullie [January/February 2010]. I liked how Brittany made Ruby's excitement increase as she read the letter from the publisher. Another thing I liked about "Writing Is Like Knitting" was the illustrations. Maya Keshav did a very nice job with the color. I actually write stories myself, usually fiction. I like writing about people and scary stuff like zombies or vampires. Thank you for publishing this amazing magazine and I am very grateful for the work that goes in it!

GRACE STONE, 8
Falmouth, Maine

I like to write stories. Writing is so fun! When I read a story out of a *Stone Soup* magazine, I felt excited because I knew I could send my own writing to *Stone Soup!*

PATRICK LIAO, 11 Santa Clara, California For as long as I can remember, your magazine has motivated and stimulated me with its selections. Seeing these pieces by my peers gave me access to tangible possibilities. It is my goal to one day create writing that will likewise inspire others. Thank you for having provided me a forum in which to apply my aspiration.

Isabella Kundu, 14 Marlborough, Massachusetts

We just wanted to say thank you for all the work you put into developing the talents of children. It makes a difference to us. Your projects and programs not only show children how to live with deadlines using discipline, but also how to apply their skills and see how sharing these skills can actually make a positive difference in a young reader's life. This is basically an introduction to the world of work! Thank you again for your decision to help children grow!

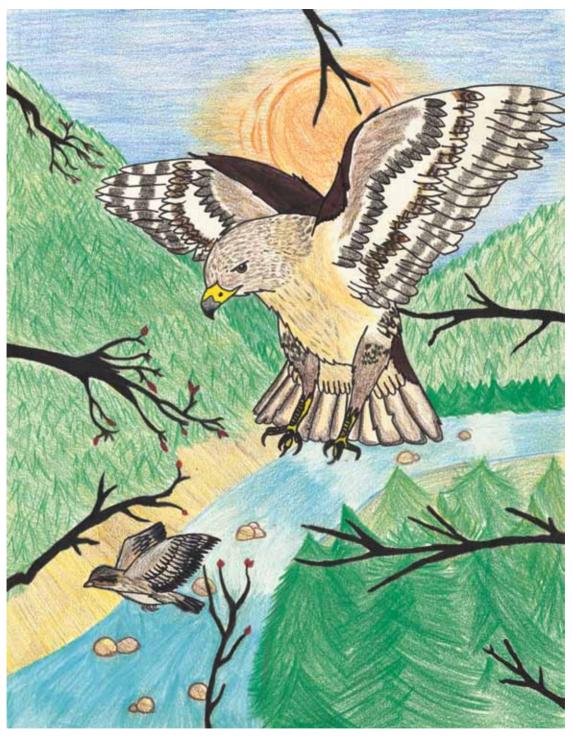
JEFF AND KRISTA VALDOVINOS, PARENTS

Damascus, Oregon

What has always inspired me about your magazine is that anyone can write, draw, or review a novel, but only those who have true passion and who truly want to share their talents with somebody and make a statement, those are the ones who make true masterpieces. Those are the ones who open our world's eyes to what is truly important in this world. Those are the people who lift veils and show everyone that the beauty of imagination is the most priceless talent. That is the talent that makes technology, that entertains, that sculpts the human way of life. I may sound childishly passionate, like I'm just faking it, but a philosophy is a philosophy.

Emma Patton, 11
Tualatin, Oregon

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.



We dodge branch after branch, but I can't seem to get him off my tail

The Sparrow

By Lulu Russell
Illustrated by Candace Tong-Li

GLIDE GRACEFULLY, looking down at the world below me. I swoop over the trees, adjusting my wing to catch the breeze. I feel the strong winds blow over me, calming my thoughts. I am a sparrow, I think to myself. I am me. As I think this, I get a bad feeling. I look up. Up, high in the sky, regarding me with beady eyes: a hawk. I don't take time to recognize what kind. Knowing I've noticed it, it dives at me, screaming. Knowing it will be easier to escape, I dive, too. Down, down towards the trees. Though I am already lower, the hawk is faster. It is a race for safety. We both fly to live. I fly to escape the hawk, a predator. It flies to catch prey, to eat. One of us must lose. The hawk is too close. It stretches its talons, ready to catch me and fly away before it crashes into the tall trees. I realize quickly that speed is not the answer to survival. I am a sparrow. I am agile. The question lies in the unknown, though. It may be intimidating, but is it any match for me? There is no time to think. It rakes its talons forward, hoping to win the contest of survival, but I am not ready to give myself up.

I flap my wings and flit to the right. It is not ready for that move. It puts on the brakes, which gives me time to escape and plan my next move because I know that it will not give up until it has caught me.

I may not be able to escape completely, but I can put death off until I have reached the bottom of the hill of life. I have already climbed to the peak, and I am climbing down, wishing there was not a bottom waiting for me.



Lulu Russell, 11 Marion, Massachusetts



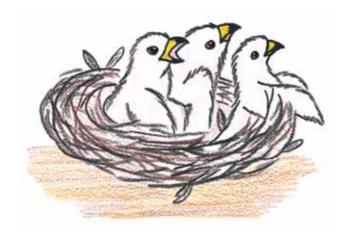
Candace Tong-Li, 11 Scarsdale, New York

JULY/AUGUST 2010 5

The hawk flies a sharp turn around, and as it streaks at me, I feint to the right and dive down again. Swooping and diving, he chases me where I hoped he would: down into the trees, where there is an obstacle course of branches as an arena. As I pass under the treetops, I am surprised by the sudden dimness. I can't see him for a second, but then he is there right behind me. We dodge branch after branch, but I can't seem to get him off my tail. My wings are sore, and I am getting tired, and yet, I still fight for my life. Suddenly, I see him putting on an extra burst of speed, and I feel his sharp talons finally closing around me. I tuck my wings into my body, knowing he will carry me away. The claws cut into me, causing pain throughout my entire body. The talons pierce further into my body. The hawk flaps his wings, lifting us higher, up past the treetops into the bright light of the sun. I twist my head to look up at him. In the glare of the sun, I make out his eyes staring straight ahead of him. They seem to tell me, "That's just the way it is." And I know that it is true. The race has ended. And I have lost. I close my eyes.

THE HAWK

The forest. I could sense him looking up at me, and I looked straight ahead. I would not give any mercy. I did not look down as, slowly, his breathing stopped. I carried him towards my nest to feed him to my little eyases, my babies. I tried not to respect the brave little bird who was now lifelessly clutched in my talons. I did not like thinking those thoughts because hawks should be fearless. I had to kill him to keep my precious youngsters alive. I flew towards the sun with my strong wings pumping at a steady beat.



River God

By Virginia Mason
Illustrated by Zoe Yeoh

E SAT THERE, under the tree, our tree. The tree with the leaves that spread to the sun like helping hands. The tree with the tall trunk and cool shade. "It's hot," I complained, fanning myself with the back of my hand, the mid-August sun beating down from the unforgiving sun.

Mimi stood up. Her long dark hair draped down her back and her rosy face was pink.

Jared and I stared at her in confusion.

"We have been sitting here all day, complaining about the heat. I want to go hiking into the woods. My mom was talking of a small stream she found while she was exploring the new hunting trails." And with that Mimi marched off.

Jared looked at me and I looked at Jared and we both stood up to follow.

Our tree stood on a hill looking over the dark, forbidding woods. Those trees were black and tall in a way that our tree was not. Those trees rose like mountains until they seemed to scrape the glaring cloudless sky. They whispered about some untold secret when the wind passed, rattling together with a sound like bones.

It was for this reason that I stopped at the forest's edge. Long, thick, parched stems of grasses pressed up against my legs. A small red-and-black ladybug was crawling, ever so slowly, up one of the stems. It reached the top, lost its footing and fell.

"Emma, hurry up!" Mimi's voice was impatient and I could

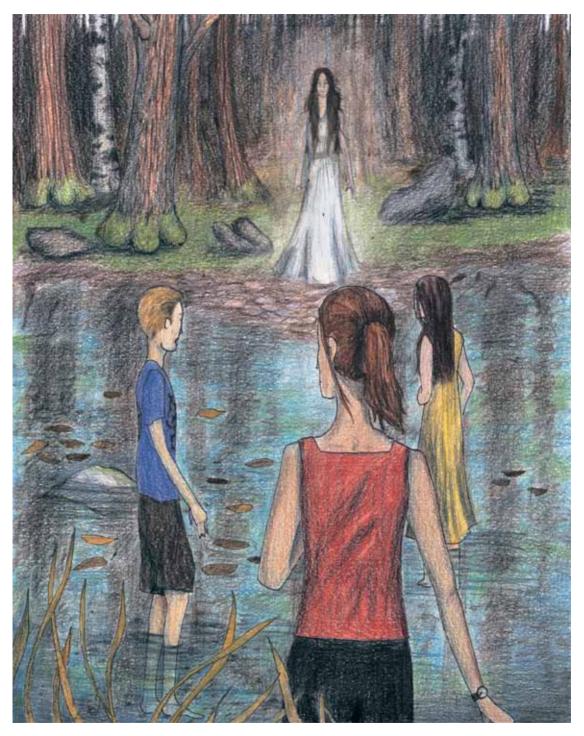


Virginia Mason, 12 Hoboken, New Jersey



Zoe Yeoh, 12 Salem, Connecticut

JULY/AUGUST 2010



But the most amazing part of her beauty was she seemed to emanate a faint, silvery glow

see her far ahead, through the trees. Her yellow summer dress stood out like a ghost against the dark trunks and I hurried to catch up.

We followed no path in particular. The forest floor was carpeted with leaves, which had fallen in the late summer drought, making the ground crunchy and hard to see. There were no birds and no small animals. No, they had all fled, searching for water somewhere else.

We reached the place. A place where the trees were green and lush and the grass sang. When a gust of wind blew, it sang of joy and happiness and life. There were rocks beyond the grass that led to a river. Not a stream, as described by Mimi's mother, but a rushing, swishing, pouring river. The water was a clear, beautiful, turquoise blue.

Mimi flung off her shoes and ran to dip her toes into the water and Jared followed not too far after. We hadn't seen this much water in a long time. My feet dipped under the cold surface and felt the hard, round pebbles of the riverbed between their toes.

Jared gasped and I looked up.

On the opposite shore was a woman.

She was tall and slender. Her hair was thick and hung in ringlets around her face. She wore a white dress though her feet were bare. But the most amazing part of her beauty was she seemed to emanate a faint, silvery glow.

I glanced sideways at Jared and his mouth was hanging open. I longed to shut it and ask this wonderful lady to forgive his rudeness, but I didn't.

She opened her mouth and the word came out like a tumbling waterfall, fluent and enchanting. "Come."

Jared stepped forward as if under a spell. Somehow, he crossed the river and stood beside her. She grabbed him by the arm and ran with a wonderful grace.

Mimi screamed and ran after her, sloshing through the racing river. The woman paused just inside the trees and looked back. Her eyes grew dark and hard, they seemed to grow bigger and bigger until they swallowed everything else. The world tipped under me and all was quiet.

My eyes fluttered open and I was back under the tree, our tree, with Mimi and Jared beside me. Something was different and I looked up to see the sky open in a torrential downpour.



The Last Last Day

By Courtney Cooperman



Courtney Cooperman, 12 Short Hills, New Jersey

It was the last day. Names and Have a great summers Had been scribbled into yearbooks. Presents had been lovingly handed to teachers.

For six years, we'd had last days. We'd sung cute little songs, And signed the yearbooks, The amount of friends growing each year.

We'd always seen them—the oldest kids— Going to the ceremony. We'd always heard the music from the hallway.

But we never thought that we'd actually be those fifth-graders.

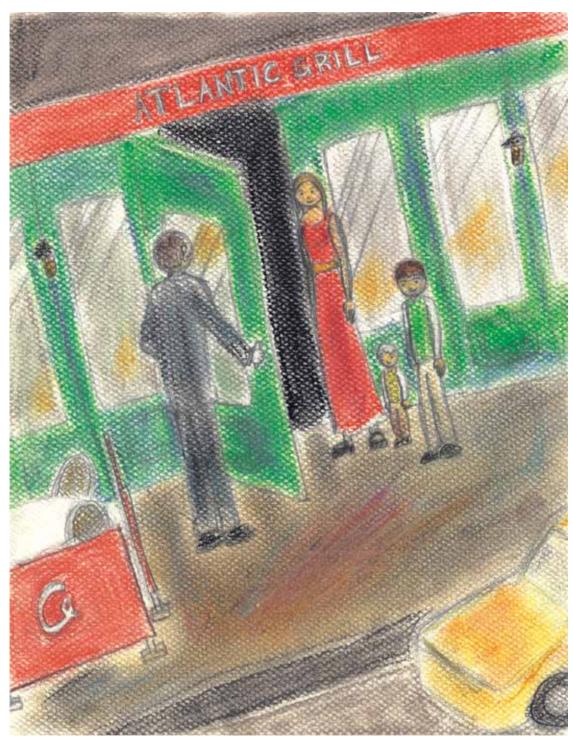
And we never imagined how strange it was when you're sitting on a rug in a classroom for the last time.

And you've had your last recess.

Ever.

And there you are, staring into your friends' eyes,
Not knowing whether to scream out with joy
Or wail and explode with tears.
Because the bell, that we have heard ring thousands of times,
Is screaming its shrill, heartbreaking call,
The sorrowful
"Brrring!" that had told us time to go so many times,
Was sounding for the last time,
Like it was hollering,
"I miss you," forlornly,
But it was too late—
We had already gone away.

And we'd never hear its call as students of that school again.



The entire day during school all I could think about was going to Atlantic Grill

My Dad's Birthday I'll Never Forget

By Danny Singer
Illustrated by Henry Weresh

Y DAD'S ZEBRA HAIR was black with a few specks of white. It was his forty-first birthday. It seems that as each year passes, his hair gets more and more white. We were planning to celebrate his birthday with a special family dinner. We were going to a restaurant called Atlantic Grill. It was May 28, 2004, and the entire day during school all I could think about was going to Atlantic Grill with my parents and my brother. It is one of my favorite restaurants and I love their food. They make a homemade chocolate-chip cookie that is the best in the world! Dad came home from work a little early that day at 5:30. Then we were off on the dirty, gray sidewalks of New York City. It was a nice spring evening. The sun was peeking out from behind a building as it was lowering for sunset. It was warm outside, getting ready for summer. For once the streets were a little quieter than usual, but there sure were a ton of cars. Everybody was in cars because I noticed that there was major traffic on York Avenue.

On the walk there I asked my mom, "What are you going to get for dinner?"

"A salad," she replied.

"Dad, what are you going to get?" I asked.

"The sushi, of course," my dad responded.

"What are you going to have, Danny?" my dad questioned.

"I am going to get the grilled cheese. You know how I love Atlantic Grill's grilled cheese. It is even better than yours, Mom," I replied.



Danny Singer, 12 New York, New York



Henry Weresh, 11 Kirkland, Washington

JULY/AUGUST 2010

When we got to the restaurant, I glanced around. The restaurant was packed with people at the tables and at the bar. We were hoping to sit outside because it was so noisy inside and it was a beautiful evening. Inside, there were TVs, paintings, phones ringing, people talking and music playing. There was the smell of smoke because the fresh food had just been put on the grill. Luckily, there was one open table outside for the four of us. The hostess sat us at the table and brought us menus. When the waitress raced over I anxiously asked, "Can I have a grilled cheese with french fries on the side?"

"Sure, munchkin," she replied because I was only six at the time.

"What are you going to have tonight, ma'am?" she asked my mom with a little bit of a Southern accent.

"I will have a Greek salad please," my mom replied.

"What about you?" she questioned as she turned to my dad.

"I will have the sushi platter with a California roll," my dad said.

"What will the little one be having tonight?" she asked, motioning to my brother Dylan.

"A New York strip steak," my dad responded before my mom could answer. My brother was three years old and has had autism ever since he was born. His brain has trouble making sense of the world. Autism causes Dylan to experience life differently than other kids who can play around with their friends and

talk about sports. He can't talk because he has autism. He is trying to learn to talk and his teachers are working with him at school. He usually communicates using pictures and by shaking his head. Whenever we go to restaurants my parents will usually talk for him and tell the waitress or waiter what my brother Dylan wants to eat. Sometimes I get frustrated that Dylan can't talk and because he is different. But I love him so much and keep hoping that he will get better and talk soon.

I searched in my mom's purse for her BlackBerry. I liked to play a game on it called Brick Breaker where there is a ball and a platform that you have to move around to get the ball to hit the bricks. Her purse was so unorganized with lots of papers shoved in and some of her belongings were creeping out. I smelled the fresh leather because the purse was brand new. When I rubbed my hand to the left it was smooth to the touch but to the right it was rough and bumpy. I liked the feel of rough and then smooth. It felt as if I was petting a cat or dog when it was smooth, but when it was rough it kind of felt like a papier-mâché project I once made. I would always look through my mom's purse for her BlackBerry when I was bored or waiting at a restaurant for our food to arrive.

After what felt like an hour our food came. I saw the orange melted cheese and the steam coming from the french fries. There was a smoky smell filling the air and whetting my appetite. The smoke had

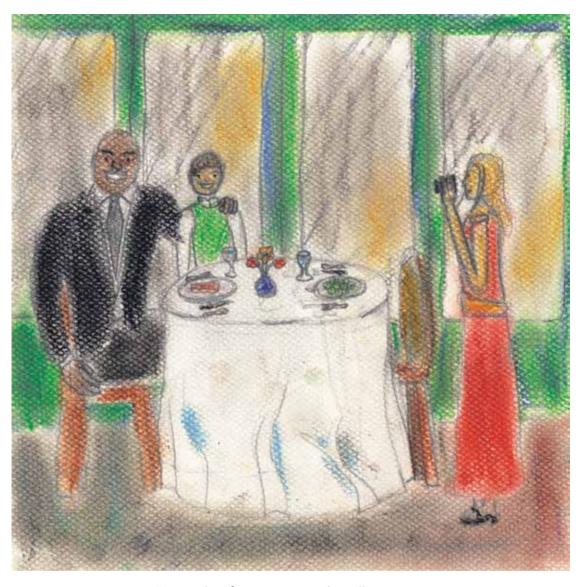
a blast of heat. When I took my first bite it was hot, delicious and soaked in spicy ketchup. Then I turned my attention to Dylan. I saw his tan face, gray shirt, silver fork, and white napkin with red ketchup stains. I could smell his fruity shampoo that he used in the shower. I was staring at my brother's steak. It looked like heaven. It was so juicy that it was dripping into his mouth like a leaky faucet. I could smell how good it tasted. I leaned over and put my fork right into his steak because I craved a taste of it. When I put a gigantic piece of steak in my mouth it was so juicy and delicious that I felt I was in a whole new world. I got so addicted to this great taste that I kept stuffing more of the steak in my mouth. Then all of a sudden my brother started crying hysterically. I realized he had every right to be upset. I had just eaten almost a third of his dinner right in front of him without even caring. Sometimes I forget that just because he can't talk, he has feelings and I need to consider them.

Then I looked at my dad's sushi. It was dark green seaweed and white rice until he dumped the red soy sauce on it. Then it looked like a volcano erupted on his food or the rice was bleeding to death. I could smell the sauce and the vegetables that were in the sushi. Even though I didn't like any of the vegetables, the red sauce made it look so good that I might gobble it up anyway. When I finally agreed to taste the sushi, I didn't enjoy it at all. I could feel its mushy body and the smooth, crunchy seaweed outside the roll.

After our dinner we had cake for my dad's birthday. The candles were lit so brightly like the sun shining in the sky. The whipped cream was soft and fluffy like clouds floating by. The cake tasted warm and delicious. It was buttery, vanilla cake with creamy chocolate frosting and filling inside. We all sang, "Happy birthday, Dad!" and my mom took lots of pictures. As my dad was blowing out the candles, I wondered what he wished for.

When we were done munching on the cake, we started to leave the restaurant. But then we halted when we saw two huddles of girls surrounding one of the outdoor tables. They kept asking, "Is that Tiki Barber? Is it him?" Tiki Barber is a bald, African-American man who played professional football for the New York Giants. The position he played was running back, which is the person who runs the ball to try to score a touchdown. My dad and I are huge Giants' fans. We have season tickets and love spending Sundays at Giants Stadium watching our amazing team play. Of all the players, Tiki was always my favorite. He was an amazing player and it seemed he was a great guy. He wrote books about football for children and I enjoyed reading them.

As we walked by Tiki's table, I looked over at him. His head was glimmering in the sunset. When we got closer to him, I noticed that he smelled clean as if he had just taken a shower. Luckily, it wasn't the way he would have smelled after a game or a practice. When he smiled his teeth were so white and bright like a shining



It seemed as if my mom snapped a million pictures

flashlight. I looked down and he was eating the same steak that my brother had eaten. His wife was having the sushi that my dad ate. I wanted to approach his table and ask for an autograph or a picture. My mom was uncomfortable. She felt that we shouldn't interrupt him even

though all those other girls had. She said it wasn't right, since it was his night out with his wife. She and my dad discussed it and my dad knew it was so important to me. Before my mom could object again, my dad nudged me towards Tiki's table.

"Are you Tiki Barber?" I asked.

"Yes, I am," he replied as he gave me a high five. When our hands touched, his skin felt so smooth, like the softest blanket in the world.

"You are my football hero. Can I please take a picture with you?" I asked.

"Sure, I'd be happy to," he said.

Tiki immediately reached out his arm and put it around me while smiling brightly for the camera. It seemed as if my mom snapped a million pictures. I was grinning from ear to ear. I couldn't believe it. He was so nice and didn't seem to mind that we were interrupting him. He was smiling the whole time. We told him that we had season tickets and were such great fans. I think my dad was just as thrilled as I was. It was so exciting to meet him because we had spent so many Sundays watching him play. Football is something my dad and I love, and it is our special activity to do together. What a perfect day, celebrating my dad's birthday with our family and meeting Tiki Barber, my football hero. It was a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

My mom quickly rushed us away as she wanted to let Tiki finish his dinner.

"I can't believe you guys interrupted his meal. I was so embarrassed," she said in an annoyed voice.

"Oh hon, don't be silly. He is used to it. It must happen all the time," my dad responded.

"But still, it doesn't have to be us who ruin his meal," she continued.

"If he doesn't want to be bothered, he shouldn't sit outside on the sidewalk. He should sit inside in a corner," my dad replied. My mom looked at him and shook her head.

I couldn't believe it. I was ecstatic about what just happened, yet they were arguing. Sometimes I just don't understand my parents. What's the big deal?

"Mom, this was the best day ever! Meeting my hero, Tiki, on Daddy's birth-day was amazing. He was so nice. He didn't even care that he was eating," I shouted with excitement.

"OK, Danny, I'm really happy for you that you had a great night," my mom said.

The rest of the walk home I kept talking about Tiki and telling my mom I couldn't wait for her to print the picture off the computer. I only wished I had asked for an autograph too, but my mom felt that would have been too pushy and rude. It is obvious my mom isn't a football fan. She just didn't get it.

THE NEXT DAY my dad and I kept talking about his perfect birthday. We knew that Tiki Barber lived across the street from us but we had never seen him in the neighborhood before. My mom told us that his wife went to the same nail salon that she did. So my Dad and I made up a plan for my mom to give the picture to the manicurist. My mom would ask her to give the photo to Tiki's wife who in turn would have Tiki autograph the picture. We begged my mom to go along with the plan and eventually she agreed.

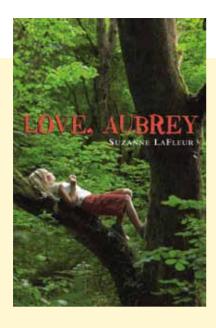
Three months later I finally got the picture back after Tiki had signed it. The three long months I waited for it were

torture. I had been waiting and hoping he would autograph it for me because he was my hero. I had written him a letter telling him how much I would like it if he signed the picture of him and me. I explained that I was a huge Giants' fan and that he was my favorite player. He was amazing on the field and off. I used to see him on TV doing events for charity and spending time with sick kids. He has a brother Ronde who also played football for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. They are so close as brothers and best friends. They spend their free time with each other and write children's books together. Also they talk about how important family is and how much they love each other. They remind me of my brother Dylan and me. I look at them and hope we will always be close. Even though he can't tell me, I know Dylan loves me as much as I love him. For all these reasons, Tiki is my hero and meeting him was so exciting.

NE NIGHT my mom came home from work and shouted with excitement, "Danny, look what I have for you!" It was the Tiki Barber picture signed by him. It was one of the biggest sighs of relief in my life. I was so excited to get this special autographed picture of me with my football hero. I was thrilled that our plan had worked and that his wife returned it to the nail salon. It made me feel so special that Tiki had gotten my letter and taken the time to autograph the photo. He is so busy and travels all the

time. But he took time to do something for me, one of his biggest fans. It also made me realize what a great role model he is for kids. He is such a strong football player but also an extremely good-hearted person. My parents always tell me that it doesn't matter how smart, athletic or good looking you are. They say what matters most is what kind of person you are on the inside. Since Tiki took time out from his dinner to take a picture with a kid like me, and then autograph the picture, it shows what is special about him on the inside. He doesn't play football anymore but he works for NBC on the Today show. He often reports on sports and other topics. It shows that he is also a smart man and has a career outside of football. He has so many great heroic qualities, he is an amazing athlete, he is intelligent and he is a really genuine person.

Now the picture is hanging on the wall in my bedroom and is one of my favorite things in the whole world. It is a reminder of the kind of person I hope to be when I grow up. I want to be athletic but also extremely kind, thoughtful and a great brother. The picture hanging on my wall reminds me of the special night with my family on my dad's birthday. Also that my family is so important to me. Even if we don't always agree, we can listen to and be excited for each other. I will never forget my dad's forty-first birthday. Every year since we keep going back to Atlantic Grill, but we haven't run into Tiki there again. There's always next year!



Book Review

By Eliza Edwards-Levin

Love, Aubrey, by Suzanne LaFleur; Wendy Lamb Books: New York, 2009; \$15.99

AVE YOU EVER read a book that is, in every way, perfect? Have you ever read a book conveying a character so well that you feel as if you know them? That's how I felt after that first delicious read of *Love*, *Aubrey*. Yes, my first time. But not my last.

I live with my mom, dad, and brother. I can't count how many times I have rolled my eyes at my dad, stuck out my tongue at my brother, or given my mom the silent treatment. But after I read *Love, Aubrey,* I remembered how wonderful it feels when I see a movie, just me and my mom, or go out to a wacky café with my dad, or play baseball with my brother. Then I thought of people like Aubrey, whose seven-year-old sister and father died in a car accident, whose mother abandoned her, and who had to move to Vermont with her grandmother. I don't mean to sound preachy, but I realized how lucky I am.

Imagine: you live a happy and normal life, your mom is always (or almost always) ready to play and have fun, your sister is as cute and nice as a seven-year-old sister could be and your dad has a good job that pays him well. This was Aubrey's life. But while she is driving back from a vacation in a blinding down-pour life throws a cruel curveball that kills both her sister and father. This brings me to the most complex point of all: kids are



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in many ways more adaptable than grown-ups. After this tragic accident, Aubrey's mother—out of sheer grief—abandons her. So Aubrey moves to Vermont to live with her grandma.

In Vermont, Aubrey has to start more than a new school—she has to start a new life. During the summer and the beginning of the school year Aubrey's thoughts are constantly clouded by sadness and confusion, especially for her sister, Savannah, who was very similar to the sister of the girl next door. It seems that the only people Aubrey can talk to are her pet fish and Savannah's imaginary friend, Jilly. It's like she's isolated herself on an island that she doesn't feel ready to leave. But gradually she makes friends with Bridget, the girl next door, gets closer to her grandmother and starts to open up to the school counselor.

In my life, I have attended three different schools. In first grade, when I spent a wonderful year in Germany with my family, I attended the Comenius School. I felt scared. I wondered what people would think of me. Would I make friends? Would anyone hate me? Would anyone like me? School is the majority of my social life, and it's the same way for Aubrey. In school, there are other things to deal with besides sorrow—there's homework, friends, crushes. While at school, Aubrey allows herself to flee from her island a little and begins to let the terrible things that have happened in her life fade into the past.

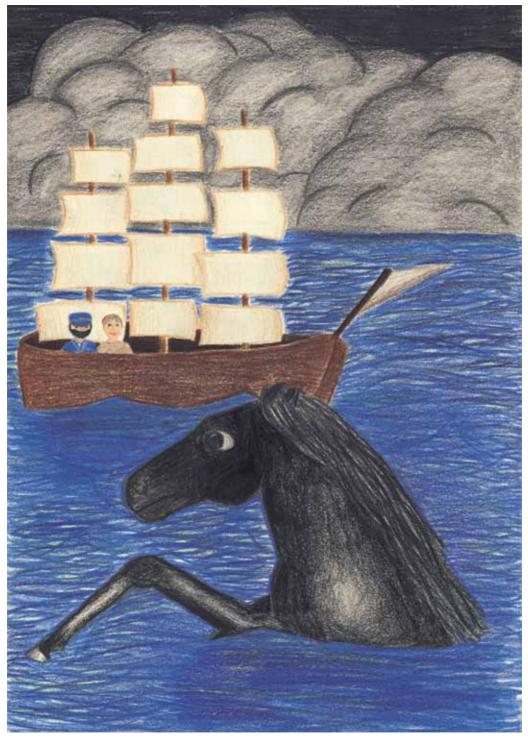
Meanwhile, people are frantically searching for Aubrey's mom. After about three months of school, she is found.

Aubrey's mother has always loved her. That's not the problem. Death is a huge force that can do many things to people. I think the impact of the car crash and all the loved ones lost made Aubrey's mother do this terrible thing despite her love and care for Aubrey. After her mother is found and spends months seeing a psychologist, she is finally ready to visit. This

is a big deal for Aubrey. Think: your mother has abandoned you, apologized over and over through tears by phone, and now she's coming to visit. I remember last year in my choir when we had auditioned for the first solo of the season. For weeks I had worried and wished and gotten sweaty hands from crossing my fingers, but when it finally came time for our conductor to announce who had gotten the solo, I was suddenly wishing that I had never come to choir. If you morph this into more serious terms, that's how Aubrey felt. For months she has cried and prayed and desperately wanted her mom to come back, but when she finally does, Aubrey feels scared and confused.

Slowly, Aubrey and her mother adjust to each other and begin to spend more time together, making dinner, playing Monopoly, hugging, talking, and relaxing outside. Aubrey, her grandmother, and her mom have a fantastic time together. But it's just a visit and, after Aubrey's mom goes back to their old house to see her psychologist some more and to get a job, Aubrey settles back into her now normal life in Vermont. Then a decision is put in front of Aubrey. She has the choice of living with her mother or staying with her Gram. She finds herself very confused. Should she go back and live with her mom? Should she stay here with Gram, Bridget and her counselor? Decisions cloud up a lot of life, and I sometimes wish that somebody could just decide them for me. But then again, I tell myself every time I am faced with one, I need to make my own decisions without somebody else planning out my life for me. That's what Gram tells Aubrey when she asks what she should do.

I'm not going to say that *Love, Aubrey* isn't sad, because it is. Really sad! But I am going to say that you should never let the sadness stop you from reading this amazing book. Because once you begin reading about the life of Aubrey Priestly, you can never stop.



"May I go to him, sir?"

Tear Drop's Legacy

By Olivia Smit
Illustrated by Melissa Ferris

HE CAPTAIN of the ship *Sea Horse* sat back in his chair and drank a long drain of his coffee. They were almost to Spain, their destination, and the only mishap had been the thunderstorm a day ago. He contemplated this fact, and had just decided that this had been the most uneventful voyage yet, when he heard the distress call. One of his sailors burst into the cabin.

"Captain! A strange disturbance around the ship the *Horn of Plenty*, sir! Permission to reply to the signal."

The captain scratched his beard.

"Permission granted. Make a large circle around the disturbance, and come abreast of them on the *Horn of Plenty's* starboard side."

The night watchman aboard the *Horn of Plenty* had been watching the disturbance, a black stallion, ever since he had escaped during the storm a day before. He had named the beautiful horse Tear Drop and had prayed for him every time the waves hurled him up and pulled him under. The stallion was promised to a wealthy businessman in England, as were all the other horses aboard. The man was starting a business and wanted expensive purebred horses. The watchman said Tear Drop's name over and over, talking to him, calming him. The big horse seemed to sense the desperation in the watchman's voice, for he slowed his frantic paddling and stared into the man's eyes. The large ship rocked suddenly, and the watchman slowly abandoned his post to direct the *Sea Horse* to Tear Drop. As the large ship



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JULY/AUGUST 2010 23

crawled slowly forward, Tear Drop started to panic. The watchman rushed to the railing and began to talk to him. Almost immediately, he became still. The crew aboard the *Sea Horse* readied their equipment and were trying to find a man to go out, when the night watchman timidly spoke up.

"Captain, sir?"

"Yes, David?" the captain asked absently, his eyes fixed on Tear Drop.

"May I go to him, sir?"

The captain turned.

"You're volunteering? The horse could kill you, you know."

The watchman nodded.

"Yes sir."

The captain turned to the *Sea Horse's* crew.

"Well, put him in, then!"

David was quivering with excitement as the crew from the *Sea Horse* readied the equipment for him to take to Tear Drop. When it was time, he launched himself into the waves. Treading water, he moved gradually closer to the big horse. Uneasy, Tear Drop swam away. The sailor tried again to get closer, calling his name over and over. Tear Drop again swam away. David slowly pursued him, but he was quickly tiring. When he felt he could swim no longer with the equipment strapped to his back, he turned around to signal to the *Sea Horse*. Directly in front of him, he saw nothing but open water.

He looked up, startled. Both ships were quite a distance away, too far for him to swim to. Suddenly, the ocean felt very

big and violent, the waves enormous, the pack on his back like lead. A large wave tossed David high, then pulled him under. As he came back up, he found himself yelling Tear Drop's name. Tear Drop was treading water, watching the wave-battered man. Another wave sucked David under and, when he resurfaced, Tear Drop was nowhere to be seen. A pang of fear twisted David's heart. Then he felt a bump on his back. He spun around. Tear Drop faced him, nickering. David tentatively reached out to touch Tear Drop, then grabbed his mane and hauled himself up when another wave tugged at him. Tear Drop never flinched, seeming to know the importance of being still. When he was sure of himself, David waved his arm in a big sweeping motion, calling the ships to come closer. When he saw that they were underway, he wrapped his arms around Tear Drop's neck and laid his head on his mane. Within a quarter hour, the ship was near enough to hoist Tear Drop aboard. David clambered after, so exhausted that the sailors had to carry him to his bunk. Almost before his head hit the pillow, he fell into a deep sleep.

The days passed quickly after that, one and then another, blending together in a flurry of activity. The one thing that stood out was the time spent between Tear Drop and David. David had saved Tear Drop's life by sending the distress call, and Tear Drop had saved David from drowning. There was a special bond between the two of them, and if David wasn't the one to feed him, Tear Drop

wouldn't eat. Some of the sailors grumbled, saying the stallion was picky. Others openly admired the bond between the two. Still others pretended not to notice, simply because they didn't know what to think. Every morning, David was up earlier than needed, feeding, exercising, and caressing Tear Drop. One morning as he and Tear Drop were strolling around the top deck, the captain approached.

"David."

"Yes, Captain, sir?"

"We're almost to England. I can feel it in my bones! Oh, to taste my Maria's tea right now."

He inhaled deeply.

"I expect you'll be glad to see your family too, son. You married?"

The mention of England distracted David, and it was a moment before he was able to speak.

"Yes, sir. Got a wife, and a young boy." He half smiled.

"Mary and Nicholas. Sure will be nice to see them again. I wish they could meet this guy, though."

He patted Tear Drop's withers, and Tear Drop nibbled his sleeve. The captain looked at the exchange, opened his mouth, and then shut it. Then he turned, and walked away.

A WEEK LATER, they arrived in England. David convinced the captain to let him take Tear Drop to his new home. As he and ten other sailors walked down the paved walk, David could only wonder if he would ever see Tear Drop

again. On the voyage, they had become almost like brothers. Or as close to brothers as a man and a horse can get. David gritted his teeth, fuming that such a grand horse should be used for a business, where he would not be loved, or scratched in the special spot just above his hoof. Seeming to sense what he was thinking, Tear Drop stopped and raised his hoof. David looked sadly at it before pulling it to him and scratching it briskly. The sailor in front of him turned around.

"Come on! The gate's just up ahead!"

Dropping Tear Drop's hoof, David led him through the gate where his new owner stood waiting. The man was enormously fat, dressed in a gray suit, and sweating like a pig. He sniffed.

"They look overweight. Can they pull carriages?"

David was tempted to tell the man that Tear Drop was lame, and pulling was out of the question. Instead, he sighed and led Tear Drop to his stall. He kissed the stallion on his nose, then turned to go and found the fat man glaring at him.

"Come out here, boy," he demanded.

Then he slapped David twice across the face.

"That's for messing with my horse!"

Anger and indignation rose in David's throat, choking him. Tear Drop, sensing this, became increasingly agitated. Finally, he let out a piercing scream and reared up, his forelegs almost touching the roof. The men were silent, one out of fear, one out of awe.

David walked slowly up to Tear Drop,

and when he was still, kissed his nose. Then he turned and walked out the stable door, and then the gate, blinking hard. His nose smarted, but his heart hurt more. He walked back to the ship, crawled into his bunk, and let the tears stream down his face and into his ears.

The next day, he collected his wages, packed a lunch, and set out for home. In the town close to his cottage, he stopped at a toy store and bought a little pocket-knife for Nicholas. He had enough wood at home to teach him how to whittle. There was a slight spring in his step as his feet found their way up the path. When his house was in sight, he started to run. His face split into a grin when he saw Nicholas run to meet him.

"Father! Father!"

"Nicky!"

Father and son collided.

"Father! Look!"

David lifted the small block of wood and turned it over in his hands.

"Father, will you make me a ship like the one you sailed on?"

David grinned.

"No, Nicky."

"Why?"

The little boy's face fell.

"Because this time you're going to make it!"

David dug in his pocket for the knife as Nicky watched, entranced.

When his fingers closed on the little knife, David slowly pulled it out, then placed it in Nicky's hands.

"Oh, thank you, Father!"

David smiled. By this time they had reached the door of the little house. Mary stood waiting by the door. David grabbed her by the waist and swung her around.

"Oh! David!" she gasped, a smile playing about her lips.

When she was safely on the ground, David slipped her the small sack of coins. She weighed the bag approvingly in her hand and then slipped them into her apron pocket.

"Father, come see the garden Mother and I made! We have carrots, and 'taters, and tommy-toes, and a punkin!"

Mary smiled. "We're having stew for supper. Vegetable stew, just the way you like it."

David threw Nicholas up in the air, then caught him again.

"I'm as hungry as a bear! A couple months at sea sure make a man want to taste home cooking again."

Nicky giggled, and Mary brought them into the cottage and ladled out the stew. It would all have been perfect, except for Tear Drop.

THE NEXT DAY, David surveyed the inside of his barn. There were four stalls, side by side, and a large door opening into one of them. The whole barn was fenced in, and the property was about an acre.

David rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "So if I knock out the walls between the stalls, and take out the door, then Tear Drop wouldn't feel closed in..." David spent the rest of the day building the ideal liv-

ing space for Tear Drop. Close to supper, Mary came outside.

"David, what are you doing to that poor barn?"

David looked up, startled. He decided to tell Mary everything about Tear Drop. When he finished, he looked down at his hands, sure he had absolutely ruined any chance of ever salvaging Tear Drop from the mess he had gotten himself into. When he looked up, Mary was biting her lip, trying not to smile.

"I've always wanted a horse, David, you know that."

David jumped to his feet.

"Really, Mary? You mean it?"

Mary laughed.

"Of course I mean it, David!"

"Well, then. I'll go over to get him tomorrow! If that's OK with you, of course."

Mary grinned at his excitement.

"That's fine with me, David."

THE DAY DAWNED bright and cheery as David walked down the road. He was expecting the journey to take all day, so Mary had packed him a lunch. After he had eaten it, he came to a brook, where he washed his hands and face and had a drink. Then he continued on. He came to the gate of the large stables shortly after noon.

He peeked through the doors of the stable, then spun around as he felt a tap on his shoulder. A groom grinned at him.

"Can I help you?"

"Um, yeah." David scratched his chin. "Do you have a black stallion, shipped

from overseas?"

"Yup!" The groom looked relieved. "Just left for the auction on South Street yesterday. Bit Mr. Hodges one too many times, I guess."

"What?" David looked up, horrified. "But, those horses, they're, they're little more than bags of bloody skin and bones!"

"Yeah, that's what he looked like, I suppose." The groom tipped his hat. "Gotta go!"

David stood looking after his retreating back. Then he recovered his tongue.

"Hey!"

The groom turned around.

"Where did you say the auction was?"

"South Street!"

David broke into a run as he neared the gates. South Street was only a few blocks away, but the auction was almost over. When he reached the auction, he dug out his money and settled himself under a large oak tree. A few horses were snapped up right away, before Tear Drop appeared. When he did, looking like a bag of skin and bones, the crowd collectively snickered. David's mouth hung open. Only two weeks ago, Tear Drop had been a healthy black stallion, and now he was shaggy, skinny, and bruised. When he recovered his tongue, he had barely enough breath to shout, "Five dollars!"

Everybody turned to stare. The auctioneer, obviously gleeful at selling the stallion at all, crowed, "Sold, to the man in the back for five dollars!" David, his enthusiasm slightly dampened by the fact that Tear Drop was not responding

to his caressing, barely noticed. He was preoccupied the whole way home, only stopping to bathe Tear Drop in the little stream where he had eaten his lunch. By the time he got home, he felt so mentally drained that all he could do was put Tear Drop in the barn with fresh straw and water. He walked inside, ate his supper without really tasting it, and went to bed as if in a dream. Mary noticed but didn't say anything, simply pressed her lips together as she peered out the window at the lone horse.

THE NEXT MORNING, David put on a cheery face and swung Nicky up in the air as Mary fried flapjacks. It was a Sunday morning, which meant a quick breakfast and a quiet walk to church. Nicky bounced up and down all the time they were eating and during the long walk to church, happy that his father was home and excited to show off his new pocketknife. David enjoyed seeing all his old friends, and by the time it was all over, he was feeling much better than he had that morning. On the way home, he and Mary had a chance to get caught up on all that had happened. Nicky was staying behind to talk with some friends, and he would catch up later. As they rounded the bend near their house, they heard a piercing scream. Startled, they started to run, just as Nicky tore around the bend, knife in hand. David turned.

"Nicky! Stay there!"
Nicky looked frightened.
"What is it, Father?"

"Just stay there. No matter what, don't follow us."

As he and Mary rushed towards the house, flames and smoke became visible.

"Oh, no!" Mary gasped. "The pot I left on the stove for lunch! I forgot to cover it!"

David looked grimly at her, about to say something, when the scream came again.

It was Tear Drop, rearing and bucking. The stallion had obviously smelled the smoke and was half mad with fear. David and Mary frantically started to throw buckets of water at their house, as more churchgoers stopped to help. After a few minutes, the fire was under control and rapidly disappearing. Most of the people had flopped down on the grass to rest.

Seeing that the immediate danger was past, David cautiously let himself into the paddock that enclosed Tear Drop. The stallion whickered softly, looking at David out from under his eyelashes. David moved slowly closer. When Tear Drop didn't move, David slowly stroked a small circle on his forehead, then moved down to his muzzle, and then to his withers, and then, with some hesitation, moved down to the special spot near his left front hoof. For a moment, Tear Drop did nothing, and David's heart sank. After a few seconds, Tear Drop slowly raised his hoof and let David grab it before he stomped it back down. Finding that he wasn't being punished, he hesitatingly nibbled David's sleeve, then joyfully shook his head and whinnied loudly. David jumped out of



He saw the spirit that had been locked away coming to life again

the way, as Tear Drop reared and bucked, joyfully racing around the paddock. The tears streamed down David's face as he saw the spirit that had been locked away coming to life again.

EPILOGUE

AFTER THE FIRST step to healing Tear Drop's spirit, all the rest came naturally. Before long, the bond that man and horse had developed over the ship journey had been fully restored. During the next few years, David and Mary bought a little

mare, for Mary to ride, and a Shetland pony for Nicky. Tear Drop sired quite a few foals with the mare, and they brought in enough money that David and Mary were able to live quite comfortably for the rest of their life in England. And Tear Drop's legacy preceded him wherever he went.

This story was inspired by "Marvelous Exertion," from Story Starters: Helping Children Write Like They've Never Written Before, by Karen Andreola.

Down at the Dock

By Rebecca Mitkus Wishnie



Rebecca Mitkus Wishnie, 10 Newton, Massachusetts

Down at the dock when all is dark, my footsteps clang and echo on the metal corridor above the ocean. Filling the near silence, accompanying the shhhh of the waves and the thud thump of the silver boats knocking on the dock. And the sssss... callop sssss... callop

of the
white-crested
waves
disintegrating
on the peaceful shoreline.
Look at the
black sky!
White sparks
in the darkness of night,
the kindling of light.



She ponders what to guess, finger tapping her chin. "Bear with glasses? Harry Potter?"

Wordless

By Grace Euphrat Weston Illustrated by Emma T. Capps

CANNOT SPEAK TODAY. Instead, I must act out every word in charades or write it down on a pad of paper. I carry the pad of paper around with me, scraps of my life written down in faint pencil. "I already had breakfast," says one. Another: "Daddy's at the grocery store." And, written heavily in big letters at the top of the page, "I have a sore throat."

I meander upstairs and turn towards the chair in the corner of the family room, thinking of the old *National Geographic* magazines stashed on top of the guidebooks piled behind the plump flower-patterned chair. Cassandra, my older sister, is camped out on the red couch, computer open on her lap, homework spread around her in a private whirlwind. Homework. On a Saturday. I nod to her as I pass, silently hoping to never have this much homework in high school.

"Hi, Grace," she responds. Then, seeing my mopey expression, "What's wrong?"

I hold up my pad of paper so that she can clearly see the bold letters at the top of the page.

"Oh. Sorry," Cassandra says. "Hurt a lot?"

I nod vigorously and make my way over to the chair. I sink into it and grab a *National Geographic* magazine at random from behind me, fingers gently brushing against the spines of the guidebooks. I sink into the chair and begin to read, skimming lazily.

I finish one magazine, then another. I'm aware of the time passing, aware that perhaps Daddy should be home by now. I



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JULY/AUGUST 2010

reach over and tap Cassandra's foot. She looks up, her fingers pausing in their incessant typing.

"Yes, Grace?" she says irritably.

I stand on tiptoes, fingers pointing toward the sky as I look down at Cassandra, my brow furrowed. She hands me my pad of paper, and I wave it away. I want to communicate by charades; I need to see if I can do it.

"Bear?" Cassandra guesses.

I shake my head no, then run to Daddy's desk and grab his glasses. Shoving them on my head, I run back to Cassandra. She ponders what to guess, finger tapping her chin.

"Bear with glasses? Harry Potter?"

I roll my eyes, then resume my pose. I'm getting a headache from the glasses now, but Cassandra has to guess my pose first. I point violently to the glasses, nearly jabbing myself in the eye.

"Glasses..." Cassandra guesses halfheartedly.

I nod vigorously.

"Daddy's glasses!" Cassandra yells.

I hold up one finger to indicate that I only want the first word.

"Daddy!" Cassandra guesses.

I nod and tear off the glasses, relieved, then tap my wrist. I'm giggling now, helpless laughter at the ridiculousness of it all.

"Watch," Cassandra says.

I shake my head, still giggling, and tap my wrist more urgently.

"Time?" she guesses.

I nod, giggling, and point to Daddy's glasses, now lying sideways on the coffee table, then to my wrist.

"Daddy... time..." Cassandra says slowly, more unsure.

I nod encouragingly, smiling now.

Cassandra pauses, and then her eyes light up. "What time will Daddy come home?"

I nod and start to giggle again, and soon Cassandra joins in.

"I don't know," she hiccups.

We roar with laughter and fall to the floor, still laughing. I smile at Cassandra as I realize the only language we need is a wordless language of love.



Dreaming

By Julia Gaitley
Illustrated by Shanthi Chackalackal

WISH I WAS like them, the seals," I say to Russ, still a little dazed.

"Why the seals? Why not any of the other animals we have seen?" Russ asks with a puzzled look on his face.

"Because they are so free in their own little world with no problems at all," I think aloud, gazing through the fogged-up glass of the exhibit.

"Sometimes it's nice to be in a big world, more people to meet and talk to," Russ says to me with a giant smirk on his face.

Russ is always getting after me for being too shy and not knowing more people. I just don't talk that much. "Only idiots talk when they have nothing to say." I always say that to people who ask why I'm so quiet. But at least he cares.

Russ and I have been together for almost as long as I can remember. Being older by many years, and being my brother, he has always looked after me like another parent.

I wonder if the seals know that they are in captivity. Or that, even though they are having the time of their lives, they are prisoners, I think to myself, awed. They have nothing to worry about. It must be absolute bliss to live like that. I keep thinking to myself, already in a trance.

Drifting back down from the cloud I was dreaming on, I ask Russ, "Wouldn't it be nice to be as free as they are?" I turn around for an answer and probably a look from Russ that is sure to call me a dumbstruck dreamer, but no one is there. He wouldn't just take off like that. Did he tell me he

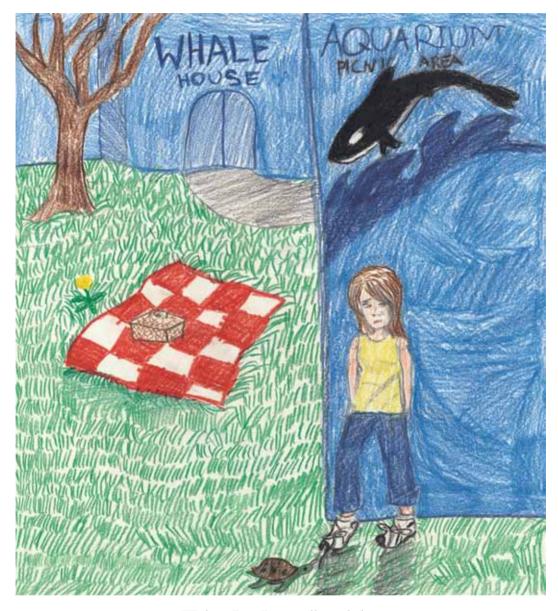


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JULY/AUGUST 2010



Without Russ I am really, truly lost

was going somewhere? "Oh man, oh man," I say while wringing my hands together so tightly they started to turn white. "I shouldn't be daydreaming. I do it too much, and now because of it I don't know where Russ went." I start to

ramble on, punishing myself. I feel like cursing. Half running, half tripping, I move quickly around the circular area. Scanning the crowd, I see no sign of Russ. Shouting his name would do no good. No one could hear anything over

this grunting mass of tourists.

Swiftly, I squeeze past mobs while looking for a front desk or anyone who could help me. I run backwards up the ramp and look over the building layout and no Russ to be seen. Stopping dead in my tracks, I start to finger the braided ring Russ gave to me. I always do this when I am nervous. I have fingered it and rubbed it so much it is starting to slowly disappear. People tell you that worrying gets you nowhere. That is not true, it gets you more scared.

I walk outside onto the picnic place right outside of the aquarium. I stand across from a table and lean on a wall. I scan the harbor and around the area for the red flame of Russ's head he calls hair. Thoughts run through my mind that should never enter anyone's. Did he leave me here on purpose? Will I ever get home? Is Russ all right? What will happen to me? My body's shaking because of how scared I am—more than the cold fall wind. I still look around, hopeful to see any sign of Russ.

I feel a little pinch on my foot. Scared of what I might find, I take a deep breath and slowly look down with my eyes closed. I'm shaking. Not wanting it to be a giant bug or a snake, I reluctantly open my eyes. I almost laugh. There is a turtle lying at my feet, having a small snack of my sneaker lace. I bend down cautiously to the turtle and soon I'm eye-to-eye with him. I look into the little guy's eyes and "Russ!" I exclaim, ashamed that I forgot.

Lost. I didn't think of it that way. I'm

lost. Without Russ I am really, truly lost. My legs slide slowly from under me. I sink down against the wall, feeling more invisible than ever. A tear wells up in my eye and slowly it slips down, not seen or heard, only sensed. More and more keep flowing down silently until my face is soaked and my eyes blurred. I flinch; a familiar pinching feeling is now on my elbow. Turning my head, I feel a flow of warm air that stinks of rotten garbage and greens. The turtle is on my legs and crawling into my lap to nibble at my jeans.

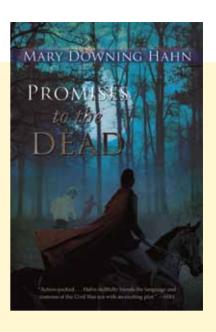
"I bet someone is looking for you just like I hope that Russ is looking for me," I say to the turtle while looking at it and seeing some things I didn't see before—the turtle's neck craned over my leg and his eyes darting back and forth, looking for something particular. The turtle looks very determined to get closer to my pant leg to get a little nibble. He is moving very slowly but in such a cute way it seems like time stands still just so I can see this creature journey through an obstacle course.

"Maybe I should have just stayed put with the seals in my own world," I tell the turtle with a glum look on my face and my arms crossed across my chest. Now more frustrated than scared, I look once more over the crowd in the grassy area. No one and nothing worth seeing. I look down toward the turtle and am almost ready to collapse when a hand lifts my head up. It's Russ and an expression of pure alarm on his face melts into relief and tears are streaming down both of our faces toward where the turtle had been.

Book Review

By Bhavana Penmetsa

Promises to the Dead, by Mary Downing Hahn; Sandpiper (reprint edition): New York, 2009; \$6.99





Bhavana Penmetsa, 11 Plano, Texas

Folly Baxter," a dying slave named Lydia makes twelve-year-old Jesse Sherman promise. She wants him to take her seven-year-old son, Perry, to a safe place in Baltimore and hide him from Colonel Abednego Botfield, who is a greedy and persistent slave catcher who "caused nothing but misery from the day he was born."

Jesse figures it'll only take him a day to do what Lydia bid him to do, and his uncle, with whom he lives, wouldn't even notice that he's gone. However, since the Civil War is just starting it takes much longer: in fact, it takes months. When Jesse arrives at the house of Miss Baxter, Perry's aunt, he's wounded from the colonel's gun and the colonel has snatched Perry from him and returned him to his owner. Once Jesse rescues Perry again and is sure that he can leave him safely where he is and go home, something else comes up, and they have to start all over again. And that is how the rest of their journey goes.

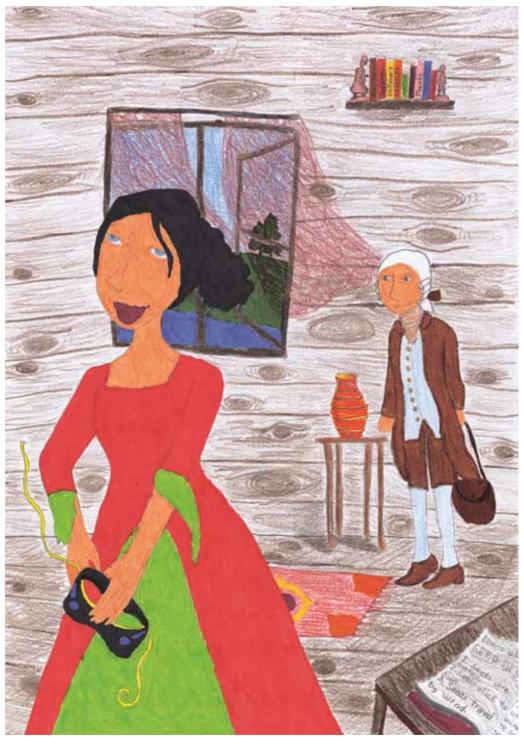
While helping Perry, Jesse learns many truths about himself that shock him to his core. For example, he realizes that he hates the practice of slavery, Mr. Lincoln isn't really as bad as he'd thought he was, and, most important of all, he'd much rather fight for the Union than for the Confederacy.

Jesse's character is a great role model for the readers. Jesse could have just abandoned Perry any time and gone straight back home, but he doesn't. He stays committed to his promise, which proves that Jesse is responsible and trustworthy. At first, he just wants to keep his promise so the ghost of the slave woman won't haunt him, but as time goes on, he starts caring about Perry and wants to keep him safe.

One part of the story that I really liked was, when Jesse later finds Perry with the rest of his family in a Yankee camp, both the boys are elated and are not embarrassed to express their delight. There were a couple of things in the book that I wish were different, though. After Jesse helps Perry find his family, I wish the two could continue their friendship; after everything they'd been through, I'm sure they would've been happy to have a normal visit every now and then. There was a twist to who fathered Lydia, but we never know whether the same person fathered Lydia's sister. I don't like it when books leave you hanging, even in the case of those tiny details that don't affect the story line.

What would you have done if you were in Jesse's place? If it were me, based on how I am now, I probably would have helped Perry to safety, though I doubt I would be as brave as Jesse. Also, I most likely would have taken longer to say yes to Lydia's request. Being a girl, it most likely would have been a little easier for me though, because back then no one would have suspected a girl of doing anything as dangerous as helping a runaway slave.

This is a really well written book. The author makes each of the scenes come alive for the reader. The book makes me realize how thankful I am for the freedom and the rights we enjoy today. Although it takes the reader through some pretty dark times, *Promises to the Dead* has a positive and heartening message underneath: you can become best friends with anyone, no matter what color, gender, age, or race.



"I- I- I'm going to the Masked Ball?" she stuttered

Masked

By Sophie Tottman
Illustrated by Sophia Aleksandra Allen

EMMA WAS SHIELDING herself from a sandstorm of dandelion seeds. Her tutor, Dominick Vickson, and herself were right at the core of a lush field. "As you can see," Dominick called above the strong summer wind, as they made their way through the long, fine, green stalks, "wind is another form of seed dispersal. So that makes..." He choked on a mouthful of seeds, and coughed them out. Gemma giggled behind her hand and finished the sentence for him.

"...that makes three different ways of seed dispersal we've learnt today!"

Dominick nodded approvingly. They had almost reached the village smothered by the thick forest pines on the other side of the field. "And can you remember what they are?" he tested her. Gemma thought for a moment, recalling their trek through the woods, then snapped her fingers.

"The first one we learnt was how the seeds sometimes get stuck in a passing animal's fur, then fall off later," she replied carefully. "The second one was how they eat the seeds and—well—excrete them," she blushed but shook it off. "And we just learnt the third," she said with a grin, as Dominick managed to get another mouthful of dandelion seeds, "...seed dispersal by wind!"

Soon they were back in the village. The ripe, orange sun was low in the sky, staining the horizon a horrifying yet fascinating red. Gemma was bathing in the river that trickled be-



Sophie Tottman, 12 Singapore



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JULY/AUGUST 2010 41

hind the small log cabin that she and her parents lived in. The water was cool and refreshing, gurgling and bubbling happily as it streamed along like an endless cord of blue ribbon. As she washed, a twittering bird caught her attention. Its wings were a deep, eye-catching turquoise; its chest was a soft, plush orange and it had a white underbelly. The bird's beady black eyes darted back and forth, as it hopped along the bank. It must be a bluebird, Gemma thought, look at that magnificent sheen!

Suddenly, her mother walked out of the back door of the cabin, startling the bluebird. "Gemma, your tutor is here to see you." Her mother smiled. "And he's brought the loveliest clothes with him! You'd better dry yourself off, then greet him." She handed Gemma a clean linen towel that had been left outside to be baked by the sun.

"I'll be right there!" Gemma exclaimed, hopping out of the river and gladly taking the warm sheet to towel herself off with, from her mother.

GEMMA WALKED IN, her curling raven-black hair pulled back into a ponytail. Her red cotton dress creased as she sat down on the chair opposite Dominick. "Hello!" she said cheerfully. "Haven't today's lessons ended?"

He beamed. "Well, this isn't really a lesson," he said. Unable to contain himself, he blurted it out, "Have you heard of the Masked Ball?"

"No." Instantly, a flashing yellow ques-

tion mark appeared in Gemma's head. It was her weakness—a thirst for knowledge.

"Well," Dominick explained excitedly, "it's a marvellous ball that happens every year, and the theme is masquerade. All the famous scientists, writers, mathematicians and artists meet there every year and exchange information. The fun part isn't the elaborate dresses, delicious food or bittersweet drinks; it's the fact that you have absolutely no clue as to the identity of the person you're getting information from, because all of these great, talented people are masked. And so you will be too, Gemma." He stopped for breath, panting. Dominick pulled out a beautiful black mask from his satchel, along with a dark blue gown of silk and pair of pearly white shoes. Gemma's eyes widened as she realized what he meant.

"I- I'm going to the Masked Ball?" she stuttered. Her heart was pounding wildly, she felt the blood pulsing ecstatically inside her. She would get to meet all of those wonderful people! She, Gemma Burberry, would become a masked guest at this extravagant event! "I'm not even on the guest list though!" she cried, more with excitement than doubt. "How can I get in?"

Dominick grinned. "That's the sneaky bit," he said. "My Aunt Jennifer is the cousin of the man who runs the catering at the ball. She was invited to come along and mingle with the guests, but sadly she caught pneumonia and can't go. Instead, we've agreed that you, a young scholar

with plenty of potential, should go instead. Your name from then on will be Jennifer Vickson."

"But what if the catering man mistakes me for your aunt?" Gemma gasped. "He'll certainly be there!"

"No he won't," Dominick replied calmly. "He's gone down with pneumonia too—who do you think my aunt caught it from?"

Gemma sat down, not even realizing she had stood up in the first place. There was nothing stopping her. Nothing blocking her way from becoming a guest at the Masked Ball... what should she do?

A smile slowly began to spread on her face, as sweetly and willingly as hot butter on toast. "Of course I'll go," she said. "I'd be crazy not to!"

TEANWHILE, the ball was taking place. Lords and ladies, scientists and amateurs, all gathered under the brilliant, golden light that leaked through the crystals of the grand chandelier, which hung suspended over their heads. The floor was a cool marble, the tables all of the smoothest oak, even the curtain cords were tied in fancy silver bows! But the highlight of the evening was the masks. Oh, what a variety! There were red masks of velvet lined with gold tissue; menacing black masks adorned with long, dark feathers; pleasant, solid blue masks with shining silver pearls. Suddenly, the chatter subsided as the doorman led another person into the room. It was a young woman, wearing a soft, navy-blue dress and an intriguing, mysterious dark mask almost as black as her hair. Eventually, the noise grew back to its usual level. The girl was Gemma.

Gemma walked around, blushing prettily for no apparent reason. She felt waves of adulation coming from everyone in the crowd, everyone seemed to be admiring the professor they were talking to, and everyone was learning and enjoying themselves. Unfortunately, Gemma wasn't really looking where she was going and bumped right into someone. "Oh!" Gemma exclaimed, smiling apologetically. "Sorry!" She smoothed her hair out. The man she had bumped into was wearing a plain white mask, but it gave him a rather chilling, haunting effect. However, she soon discovered that his nature was a complete contrast to what he was wearing.

"That's all right," he grinned. "My name is Professor John Clair, specialty: marine biology! What's your name?"

Gemma grinned up at him. "Gem... er... Jennifer Vickson..."

Professor Clair nodded.

"Nice name, nice name," he said politely, then immediately plunged into a conversation. "Now, Jennifer, what do you know about the nudibranch?"

"Excuse me?" Gemma exclaimed, puzzled. "I'm not really sure what a *nudibranch* is!" Professor Clair smiled his jolly smile again.

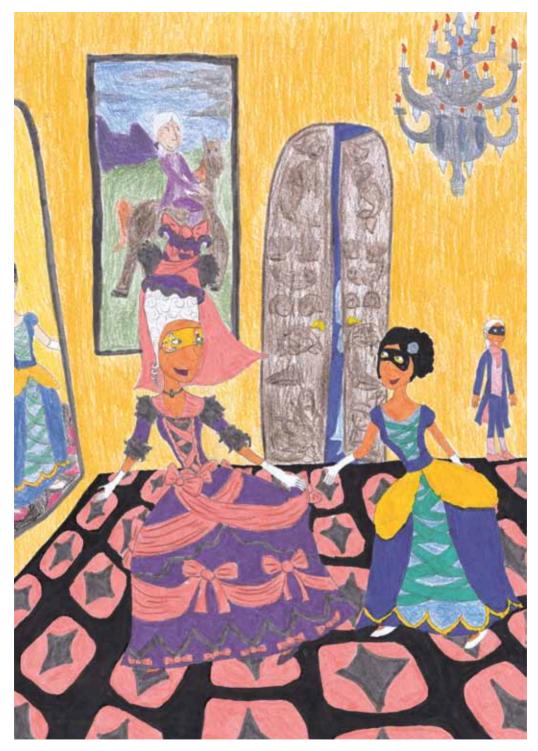
"Now that," he said proudly, "is the beauty of science! Tell me, Jennifer Vickson, would you like to know what a nudibranch is?" Gemma nodded eagerly.

This is exactly what she had come for knowledge! "Well," began Professor Clair, "it's basically a sea slug. Ah, yes, I see the disappointment on your face! You're asking yourself what the point is, knowing about sea slugs, where's it going to get you in life? A nudibranch is actually quite a fascinating creature; it comes in a variety of different colors and shapes, and is a real deep sea creature too, like the blobfish. Blobfish are really quite lazy animals; they sit on the bottom of the ocean floor all day, waiting for their food to come to them instead of vice versa! Because of this, they have a fat, slimy appearance, thick lips and tiny eyes set into their large, pink head. I bet you wouldn't like to come face-to-face with that ocean potato!" He beamed, whilst Gemma laughed. Suddenly, a young woman shoved in front of him.

"All this ocean stuff is nothing!" she exclaimed, tossing her head dramatically. "Hello, young lady, I'm Sylvia Heartwood-the best actress in this room!" She flung her arms out and twirled around like a ballerina. Gemma couldn't stop grinning. If it was possible to label someone's voice as "sparkly," she would definitely use it to describe Sylvia Heartwood's voice! It seemed to tinkle on, like a row of perfect, never-ending silver bells. "Even my mask is committed to the dramatic arts," Sylvia was saying, pointing to her mask. Gemma gasped. It was a beautiful gold, embroidered with dramatic slashes of purple and silver. Into the gold, little pictures of characters from Shakespeare's plays were visible; their facial expressions were as intricate as their patterned brown belts.

"It's dazzling," Gemma admitted, meaning it, as Sylvia plunged into a conversation about how pantomime dancers shaved their foreheads to make their masks fit easier. The rest of the evening passed like a marvelous dream. Gemma flitted from place to place, talking to professors, eyes wide as she listened about the alignment of the planets, why cows gave more milk when they listened to music, and how Christopher Columbus originally thought that turkeys were peacocks! It didn't seem real, being in a beautiful ballroom, with beautiful people, beautiful food and drink, beautiful dresses, and most importantly—the beauty of knowledge. Gemma could almost feel the neurons connecting in her brain like entwined tendrils, sending off information at lightning speed. Eventually, the evening came to a halt, and soon Gemma found herself outside again with the fresh air, and the glitz and glamour of the night gone. As she walked home to the village on the gravel path, using the flickering orange lamps to guide her, she reflected on all she had learnt. She remembered that someone at the ball had been telling her, "Learn to Live, Live to Learn," and Gemma felt her lips curve into a smile as she realized just how right it was.

THE NEXT MORNING, Dominick knocked on the door. He was worried: Gemma hadn't come back to see him last night, to tell him what a wonder-



"Hello, young lady, I'm Sylvia Heartwood—the best actress in this room!"

JULY/AUGUST 2010 45

ful evening she had, to chatter on endlessly about the professors and everything she had learnt. Gemma's mother, Mrs. Burberry, opened the door with a quick twist on the wooden knob. "Hello, Vickson," she smiled warmly. "Here to see Gemma?"

"Yes, actually," he replied steadily. "Is she all right? She didn't tell me she was home safely last night."

Mrs. Burberry led him in. "Of course she's fine," she said coolly. "In fact, she was so excited she couldn't get to sleep for—oh, I don't know—three hours? Anyhow, I could just tell from the look on her face that it was the best experience she'd ever had! Thank you for giving my little sugarplum this opportunity, she's really very happy."

Dominick gave a relieved smile. "Oh, really...?" he said contentedly. "That's good. Is she here?"

Mrs. Burberry nodded and then turned her head. "Gemma...!" she called. A distant, muffled reply could be heard. "Your tutor is here to see you! If you're having your morning wash in the stream, come out—the linen sheet is on the grass beside the riverbed!" Mrs. Burberry turned back again, to face Dominick. Soon enough, Gemma burst through the door, in her usual red cotton dress. Her hair was damp and tangled, but her eyes shone, recalling the events of the previous night.

"It was great!" Gemma burst out, before her mother or tutor could say anything. "Did you know that dolphins sleep with only one eye open? I learnt that from Mr. Garnelle, a biologist. And did you know that golf is the only sport so far that has been played on the moon? I got that fact from Miss Aneliese Tornex of the Space Exploration Society. Also, another guest told me that the results of a recent test have proved that right-handed people live longer than left-handed people. Dominick, are you right-handed or left-handed?" Before Gemma could get another word out, her laughing mother had clapped one hand over her mouth.

"She's a little brain box now!" she exclaimed. "Gemma Burberry, my little brain box!"

Dominick laughed. "I'm glad you had a good time," he said. "Aunt Jennifer will be pleased!"

Gemma nodded enthusiastically. "Oh, she will," she mused. "It was..."

Yet again, Gemma's mother clapped a hand over her mouth. "If you say 'it was great' one more time," her mother joked, "I swear I'll feed you to the fishes!" They all burst out laughing, even talkative Gemma. Dominick stopped suddenly and pulled a little parcel out of his bag.

"This is for you," he said, "to write down all that knowledge that's swimming in your mind. Our brains are greatly evolved, but we're only human, Gemma. We all need to pour our thoughts onto paper someday!" He handed it to Gemma proudly. She tore at the paper eagerly.

"Oh, this is wonderful!" she cried, gazing at the present. It was a sky-blue notebook made from smooth, light leather, with tiny green gems connected on its

surface to form a beautiful, swirling design. "Thank you, Dominick; I'll use this all the time!"

"I'm glad to hear it." He stood up abruptly. "See you tomorrow!"

"Wait a minute!" Gemma stood up. "No classes toady?"

Dominick shook his head. "I think you're still reeling from the Masked Ball yesterday. Why don't you go out back and write something in your new notebook? I'll see you tomorrow, then!" He waved as he stepped outside, shutting the door with a slight clang. Gemma stood up.

"I think I will go out back," Gemma told her mother. "Maybe write a few things I learnt from the Masked Ball in my new notebook?"

Her mother smiled. "OK," she said. "I'll just be doing the laundry further up the riverbank with the other mothers."

of satisfaction. The sky was a stunning azure blue, decorated with clouds that looked like white watery waves. The same little bluebird was hopping by the reeds and pecking curiously at the gurgling water of the stream, fascinated by the world of rainbow mirages inside the bubbles. "What should I write about?" Gemma asked the bird as she lay down on the light brown riverbank, the soil crumbling beneath her weight. The bluebird cocked its head at her and squawked. Gemma giggled. "All right," she said, and she began:

Some people ask what the face of knowledge is: if knowledge was a cheerleading team, who would be its mascot? What connects all the great minds in this world? It sounds silly, but it's quite a task—the face of knowledge... is a mask.



JULY/AUGUST 2010 47

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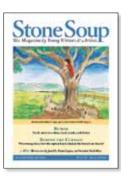
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