

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Wedding," by Mahsa Ghavidel, age 12, Iran

THOSE LESS FORTUNATE

Shira knows the meaning of loss, but she can still help others

FREEDOM RUN

A cheetah longs to return to the wild

Also: Poet Bailey Nold shows us what's important

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

\$6.50 US \$6.50 CANADA

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 39, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2011

STORIES

Those Less Fortunate by Adair Brooks 5

Shira finds a new way to express herself

My Brother by Natalie Han 15

Elliot, now a teenager, doesn't play with his sister anymore

Jessica's Horse by Ismena Jameau 17

Jessica didn't like horses, until she found Mudcake

Flying Solo by Soledad Tejada 23

Papa's comforting words help Soledad face her fears

A Million Santas Invade New York City

by Olivia Calamia 27

Why are the streets and subways filled with Santas?

Freedom Run by Olivia Smit 31

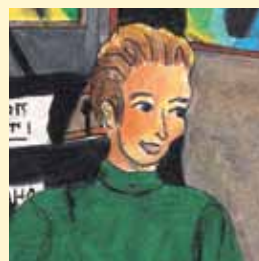
Kimabwwe inspires his brothers to dream of a better life

Free by Noor Adatia 40

Noor spends a perfect afternoon making noodles with her aunt

Wear Your Pajamas by Julia Condon 45

A true friend would never trick and embarrass you



page 5



page 15



page 31

POEMS

Song of the Trotter by Mary Woods 12

Nature by Bailey Victoria Nold 29

Sunset by Maia Kosek 39

BOOK REVIEWS

Tortilla Sun reviewed by Emily A. Davis 20

The London Eye Mystery

reviewed by Rebecca Bibn-Wallace 42



page 40



Available from the Library of Congress in braille for visually handicapped readers. Call 800-424-8567 to request the braille edition



Stone Soup is printed on recycled paper

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Stone Soup (ISSN 0094 579X) is published six times a year by the Children's Art Foundation, 765 Cedar Street, Suite 201, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Phone: 800-447-4569. It is published bimonthly in January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. Volume 39, Number 3. Copyright © 2011 by the Children's Art Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduction of the whole or any part of the contents without written permission is prohibited. *Stone Soup* is mailed to members of the Children's Art Foundation. Eighty percent of the membership fee is designated for subscription to *Stone Soup*. In the United States, a one-year membership costs \$37, two years \$60, three years \$82. Canada add \$6 per year for postage; other countries add \$12 per year for postage. Please remit in U.S. funds only. Send SUBMISSIONS, SUBSCRIPTIONS, and ADDRESS CHANGES to: *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Periodical postage paid at Santa Cruz, CA and additional offices. Printed in Canada.

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 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.

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: "Wedding" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by The Gallery of Young People's Art Works in Celje, Slovenia. The Gallery holds an international competition every year, displays a new exhibit by young artists every month, and publishes a magazine called *The World of Art*. Special thanks to Mihailo Lišanin.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

First of all, I'd like to thank you for what you've done and are continuing to do, giving opportunities to children across the globe. I have, over the few years spent working for you, advanced tremendously in my artistic skills and have grown to enjoy creating pieces for you immensely. I would be very glad if you would be able to convey my thanks to Natalie Han for her fantastic story. I liked it very much. I love your magazine.

BYRON OTIS, 13
Keller, Texas

Byron's latest illustration appears on page 14 of this issue.

I have read a few of the poems in your magazine and find them very deep and beautiful, exactly what I wish my poems could be like.

EMMA IRENE WILEY, 11
Annandale, Virginia

I was born in the city of Taipei, Taiwan. During my childhood my family left my home country for Singapore, and since then I have lived in multiple countries around the world. Despite initial difficulties, it is an exciting experience, and I am lucky to be able to call myself an international citizen. However, we have always felt that the United States is really our home, and last summer we were able to return to Texas. Three years ago I was fortunate enough to discover *Stone Soup* on a crowded shelf at a Detroit library. Since then I have always eagerly awaited its bi-monthly arrival, for a chance to dwell—if only for a little while—in a community of extremely talented writers, poets, and illustrators that I am humbled to hope that such a bookworm as myself can belong to.

JOYCE CHEN, 12
Missouri City, Texas

I enjoy reading *Stone Soup* because the stories are very interesting. It is surprising and amazing that they were written by children, isn't it?

THOMAS FREEDMAN, 9
Stamford, Connecticut

From the first time I saw your magazine I thought it was wonderful. I wonder how can something so charming be part of the twenty-first century. But it is. I opened a copy of your November/December issue as my Christmas gift 2006. I knew as soon as I had read it that the highest honor was to be in that magazine. And, although I am too old to submit, I still think this. Every time something arrives at my house from *Stone Soup*, whether it be the next month's issue or a renewal notice, my heart leaps, even though I know it can't be an acceptance letter. Your magazine is full of old-fashioned appeal, good quality work, and well, it also kind of smells nice, I don't know if you've noticed. When I grow up, after of course writing the Great American Novel (if I haven't done it already, you never know) I want to edit *Stone Soup* because the highest honor would be to have my name in that magazine.

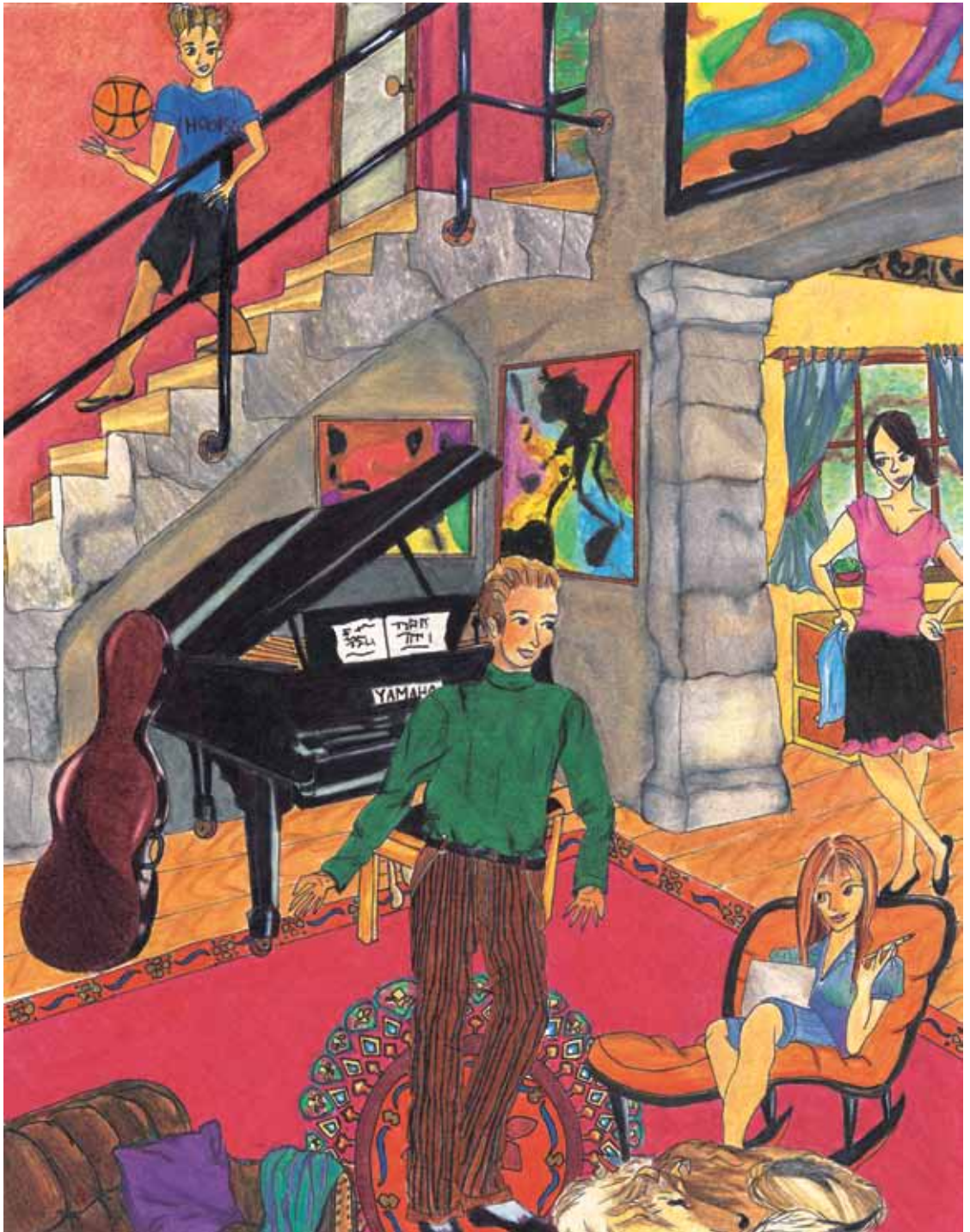
ISABEL SUTTER, 14
Houston, Texas

Two poems and one story by Isabel were published in Stone Soup in 2009 and 2010.

I chose your publication to submit my writing to because you let children express their ideas through writing and art. You let children show off their writings to other children. It gives the children a feeling that they are wonderful authors and artists.

VICTORIA ROUX, 12
Mandeville, Louisiana

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.



For now I'm just happy to be home

Those Less Fortunate

By **Adair Brooks**

Illustrated by **Tiger Tam**

SHIRA FELT A THUMPING on her bedroom floor. She got up from her desk and ran into the living room. Sure enough, Dad was home. Shira watched him lug his bulky cello case through the door and over to the corner by the piano where it was stored. Her father taught cello at a nearby university and had an hour's drive to work. He always got home later than the family wished. Now he went over to the kitchen doorway where her mother was wiping her soapy hands on a towel. Shira saw her mom say something to her dad, and then he hugged her. Seeing his daughter, Dad walked back into the living room and did the same to Shira.

"How's my little songbird?"

Shira read his smiling lips. *Shira*. The name meant song, which was ironic for a girl who had been deaf since she was seven years old. The last sound she remembered as she lay in the hospital bed was her mother saying, "It's getting worse." That night had been a sleepless one. When morning came, Shira was frightened when she watched her mother greet her but could not hear what she was saying. She'd watched her brother, Nolan, go off to school in the days that followed, disappointed that she had to stay home to be taught by her mother, who was struggling to learn signs herself. These days, however, Shira didn't regret staying home since Maxwell Junior High kept Nolan on an undesirably busy schedule. There were better things to be doing than sitting in a class at seven-thirty AM—like sleeping! A few hours of extra rest, though, could hardly make up for the dis-



Adair Brooks, 13
Black Mountain, North Carolina



Tiger Tam, 12
Honolulu, Hawaii

couragement she felt in being so different and difficult to talk with. She was grateful for the group of faithful friends who saw past the speech barrier, but at times it could be frustrating when others were afraid to talk to her. She also longed to hear again the warm tones of her father's cello. She cherished the memories of when he used to take it out and play for her after suppers long ago. In those days she'd had a cello of her own, and many a happy lesson she had spent scratching blissfully away as he patiently instructed her.

Now she turned to him and asked, "How was teaching today, Dad?"

"Not too bad," she read his lips in answer. "Only, the kids are so worn out from their lessons with Mrs. Etterson. Their technique is so stiff and they have a hard time playing relaxed. I've tried talking to her about it, but she seems to be set in her ways."

Mrs. Etterson was the other cello teacher at the school. Her lessons were always unpleasant and her practice requirements always unrealistic and unhealthy. Shira had gone to school with her dad several times and admired the way he not only demonstrated passages with skill but encouraged the students to experiment and figure things out for themselves. Mrs. Etterson did not. With her, everything was "my way or the highway."

"I'm sorry about that. You should really talk to the board. They need a different teacher."

"You're probably right, but for now I'm

just happy to be home. Howdy, Nolan!"

Nolan came down the stairs, having just emerged from the shower after a vigorous basketball practice. His short, towel-dried hair stood up in wet spikes on his head. "Hey, Dad," Shira read his reply. Dad went on with something like "How was practice," to which Nolan, looking very tired, gave a short answer and plopped down on the old, overstuffed couch.

After a while in which Dad read the paper, Nolan did homework, and Shira doodled a picture of their old collie dog, Whetford, who was curled up in front of her rocking chair, Mom called them in for dinner. There was a steaming pot of broccoli with a basket of warmly buttered rolls, and Nolan devoured a heaping portion of mashed potatoes. Staring at her forkful of broccoli, Shira remembered the family dinners of long before, which had been full of chatter. Nolan had been a talkative little six-year-old then, and Mom and Dad used to laugh at the disappointed faces their little ones made when there was broccoli on their plates. *Laugh.* How long ago that memory was. Sure, she still saw Dad's eyes squint and twinkle and his whole frame shake at times, and Mom throw her head back at one of Nolan's jokes, but even those soundless occasions were getting much rarer. Nolan frequently came to the table looking tired and sat in a silent stare through most of the meal. Dad appeared similar, though he sometimes tried to liven things up with a joke. Shira sighed and looked around

the table. Even with Dad's busy teaching schedule and Nolan's long school days, she was thankful that they could all be together at the end of the day. Her friend Amy, though she lived in a bigger house in a nicer neighborhood, was less fortunate in this respect because her father was frequently away for weeks at a time with his consulting job. Shira sighed once more and popped the bite of broccoli in her mouth.

After dinner they all sat down in the living room, and Nolan turned on a football game. Even though football had never really interested her, Shira was secretly glad that they were watching a game because her family never watched with the sound on or, if they did, hardly paid attention to the commentary. In this way Shira didn't feel left out. She was curled up on the couch, coloring in the drawing of Whetford, when her mom leaned over from her magazine in the rocking chair.

"That's a very good drawing," she signed. "It's just like his soft little doggie eyes are looking at me."

"Thanks. Really?" replied Shira. "I was just doodling."

THE NEXT MORNING dawned gray and rainy. Shira rolled over in her bed and looked at the clock. Eight-twenty. Nolan was long gone to school by now. She turned back over and stared out the window. Today was going to be a gloomy one. As she looked across her room to the window, her eyes fell on the little cello case lying dusty in the corner. How she

missed the evenings when Dad would take out his cello and start a tune, Mom would chime in on the chorus, and Nolan, who was just learning piano, would try his best to pick out the melody. No one minded when Shira added her own scratchy cello playing to the mix. She had always loved those times, not only because she could hear then, but because there was always a wonderful satisfaction in making music together. Evenings like that were less frequent now. Shira hoped it wasn't because of her; she would not have minded merely watching her family's faces glowing again in joyful music-making, even if she couldn't hear it. She supposed it was also because of Nolan's basketball, since the piano would sit dusty, unplayed for long stretches of time. Still, Shira sometimes felt out of place in a family that was musical by nature and longed to be able to join in once more, if not aspire to be a skilled cellist and tour like her father used to do in his younger days. She saved the programs of touring musicians and even had a signed poster from Yo-Yo Ma, which her dad had brought back from a concert in New York.

Shira sighed. It was in the middle of the morning and she had been struggling over an algebra problem for quite a while. She put her book down and went over to the window. *Still raining.* How long would this morning last? The other day she had called her friends Amy and Katya, and they planned to come over after school to spend the night.

At last she finished algebra and was munching on a turkey sandwich while she

sat staring at her laptop. She found herself reading articles such as “Young Cellist Debuts at Carnegie” and “Greenberg Writes Fifth Symphony at Age 15” and wondered what Dad was doing right now.

“AND DO YOU know what my dad said after that?” said Katya. Both friends had been eager to learn sign language with eight-year-old curiosity at befriending “the deaf girl.” They had proved genuine friends, and even through signing they were no less talkative than any other eighth-grade girls.

“What?” asked Shira and Amy simultaneously.

“He said, ‘You can’t go unless you’re together’—meaning Nick, but... yeah.”

Shira smiled and Amy burst out laughing. Katya had been invited to a church dinner, and Nick was her older brother.

“Hey, that’s good,” said Amy suddenly, pointing to the drawing of Whetford that lay on the attic desk.

“You think?” asked Shira. “I was working on it up here this afternoon, but I was really just doodling.”

“Well, your doodling is pretty good! What’s this?” Amy held up another drawing that had been lying underneath the first.

“Yeah, I did that one, too.”

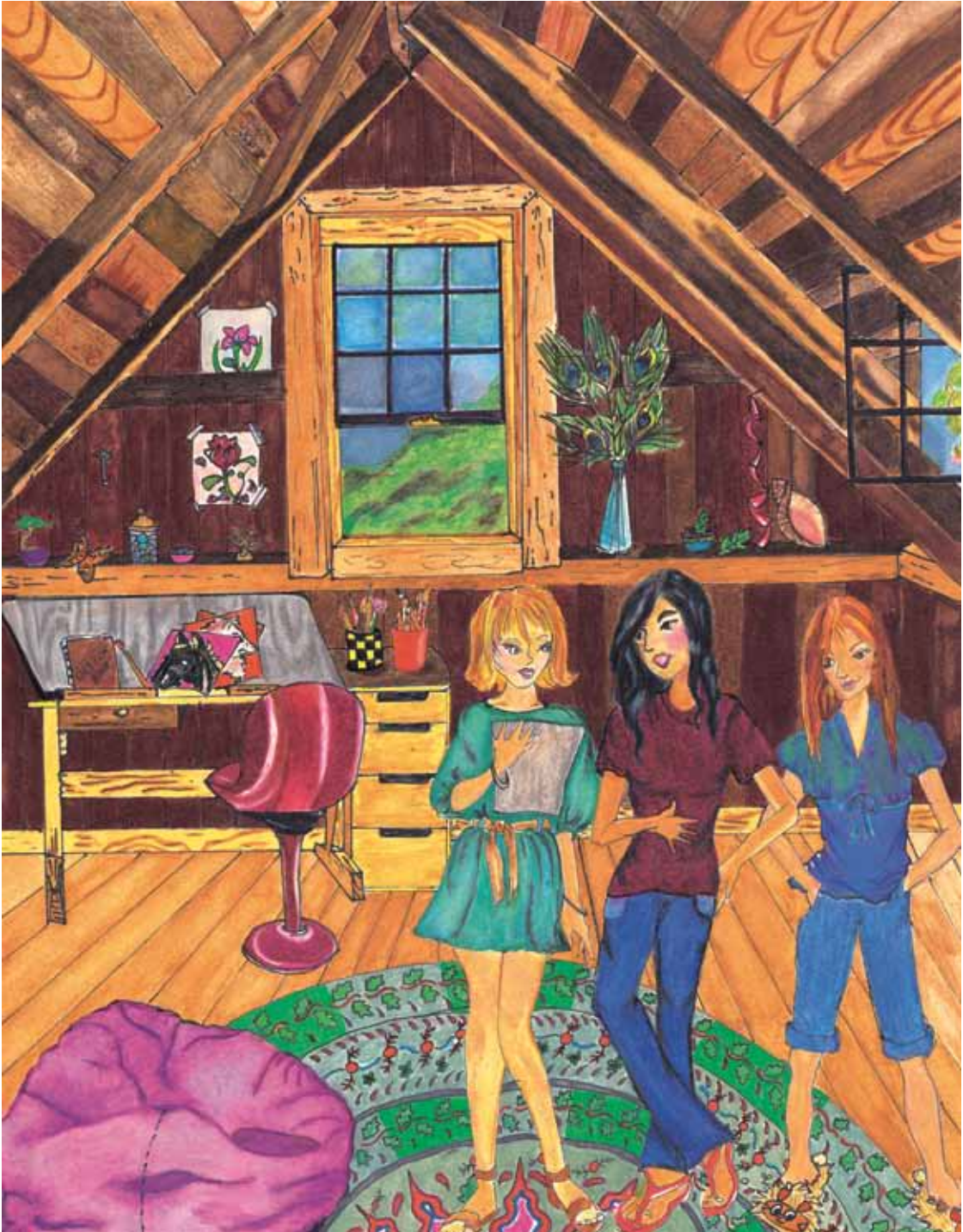
“Wow!” signed Katya. “Is that me? It looks just like me.”

“Maybe,” smiled Shira. “OK, I was thinking about putting that one on your birthday card, but I guess you just spoiled the surprise!”

“Sorry,” Katya smiled back. She turned thirteen in two weeks. “Anyway, you should find a way to enter it in a contest or something. I’ve seen drawings in art class that are honestly no better than this, if as good.”

Since Amy and Katya were spending the night, Shira’s mom fixed a special spaghetti dinner. Nolan ate quietly and then awkwardly excused himself upstairs, unused to having three chatty girls in the house. He returned soon enough when they turned on the TV after dinner.

It was *America’s Funniest Home Videos* tonight. The girls laughed over mouthfuls of popcorn as a hyperactive Chihuahua ran in circles after his tail. Midway through the show, however, the screen was suddenly replaced with scrolling red letters that read: “We interrupt this program to bring you news of the terrible catastrophe that has just occurred in Haiti. A 7.0-scale earthquake has devastated the capital of Port-au-Prince, as well as several minor towns, burying many inhabitants alive. Rescue workers have responded to the crisis from all over the world with amazing speed, coming from nations including the USA, Israel, UK, China, Switzerland, Brazil...” the list went on, and the family sat in silence as the screen displayed troubling images of Haitians being pulled out from under enormous piles of concrete rubble. It showed a man in a full-body cast, and many search-and-rescue teams scouring the ruins of giant buildings. Not a single structure was left intact. The masses of trapped and injured people, and



"Wow!" signed Katya. "Is that me? It looks just like me"

the power of the quake itself, left everyone in the living room in stunned silence. Mom led everyone in a prayer for the people in Haiti, and it was a while before they turned on the show again. Even then, *AFV* wasn't as funny anymore. The popcorn sat unfinished in the bowl.

Shira had a hard time getting to sleep that night. Disturbing images of Haitians buried alive kept flashing through her mind. It would almost have been better to be blind, not deaf, if it could prevent her eyes from seeing such nightmarish pictures. The devastating crisis affected everyone, even if they lived far from Haiti, and Shira knew she had to do something to help.

AMY AND KATYA had to leave early for school the next morning. Shira waved goodbye as she watched them pile in the old station wagon with Nolan and Mom. As the car pattered off, she went back inside the house and poured herself a bowl of cereal. She wasn't used to being up this early but decided to make the most of it by finishing her schoolwork before lunch. She went into the little glass-walled "schoolroom" off the kitchen and took her math book from a shelf.

Shira was just biting into an apple at lunch when her mom sat down beside her. She was holding a folded piece of slick paper, which appeared to be some type of brochure.

"I found something that might interest you," she began. Shira read her lips as she continued, "The Fine Arts Center is

having a youth talent show. It's on Saturday three weeks from now. Katya showed me a couple of your drawings yesterday, and I was surprised by your talent. When have you been working on all of these? I think you would definitely be eligible to be featured in this show." She opened the brochure on the table in front of Shira. "I picked up their information when I dropped the kids off at school."

Shira stared down at the colorful brochure. An art show. She barely considered her drawing more than an occasional pastime. If she was ever going to be featured for something, she had always dreamed that it would be the cello. As she thought about it now, though, the idea didn't seem half bad. Wasn't music an art? Then why should there be much difference between playing an instrument and drawing a picture? Most of all, she knew what she was going to do for Haiti.

Shira could be found at the desk in the attic for most of the rest of the week. She had taken to working on several more drawings and had even experimented with acrylic paints. Her father had given his consent and encouragement when they had approached him with the idea when he returned from work, so no one minded when Shira shut herself up in the attic for long stretches of time to work on her art. Her father had even bought her a sizeable canvas when she elusively told him that she had tested an idea which worked on a small scale and needed a larger medium. Now she was going busily to work on the secret painting.

A WEEK BEFORE the art show, Shira woke early and, carrying a large bag, headed downtown with her parents. In the prior weeks, she had completed her painting and found a print shop to make copies of it. She also bought sets of greeting cards on which she had it printed and even found a T-shirt company willing to screen it on their shirts. Everywhere she went, the companies were eager to help her, after hearing her story. The title of the work was “The Cry of Haiti,” and it depicted a desperate mother holding her injured child, in front of a collage showing scenes of the struggling people and the vast devastation. The title was born when Shira showed it to her mother, who said slowly, “Your ears are deaf, but your eyes have not been sheltered from the sights of reality. I know of no one with the keen-

est hearing who has captured the cries of these people any better.” Shira caught sight of a tear on her mother’s cheek as she gave Shira a hug.

The fundraiser was very busy long into the morning. Shira sold out of the T-shirts, which read, “I heard the cry of Haiti.” She had raised nearly \$870 and knew Red Cross would be grateful.

On the day of the art show, word had gotten out about the deaf girl who had created a painting that would speak to your heart, and a stream of people poured into the room. A woman from the newspaper made her way around the displays, interviewing the young artists. When she came to Shira, she wrote out on a notepad, “What inspired you to create all this meaningful art work?”

Shira replied, “It’s my music.”



Song of the Trotter

By Mary Woods

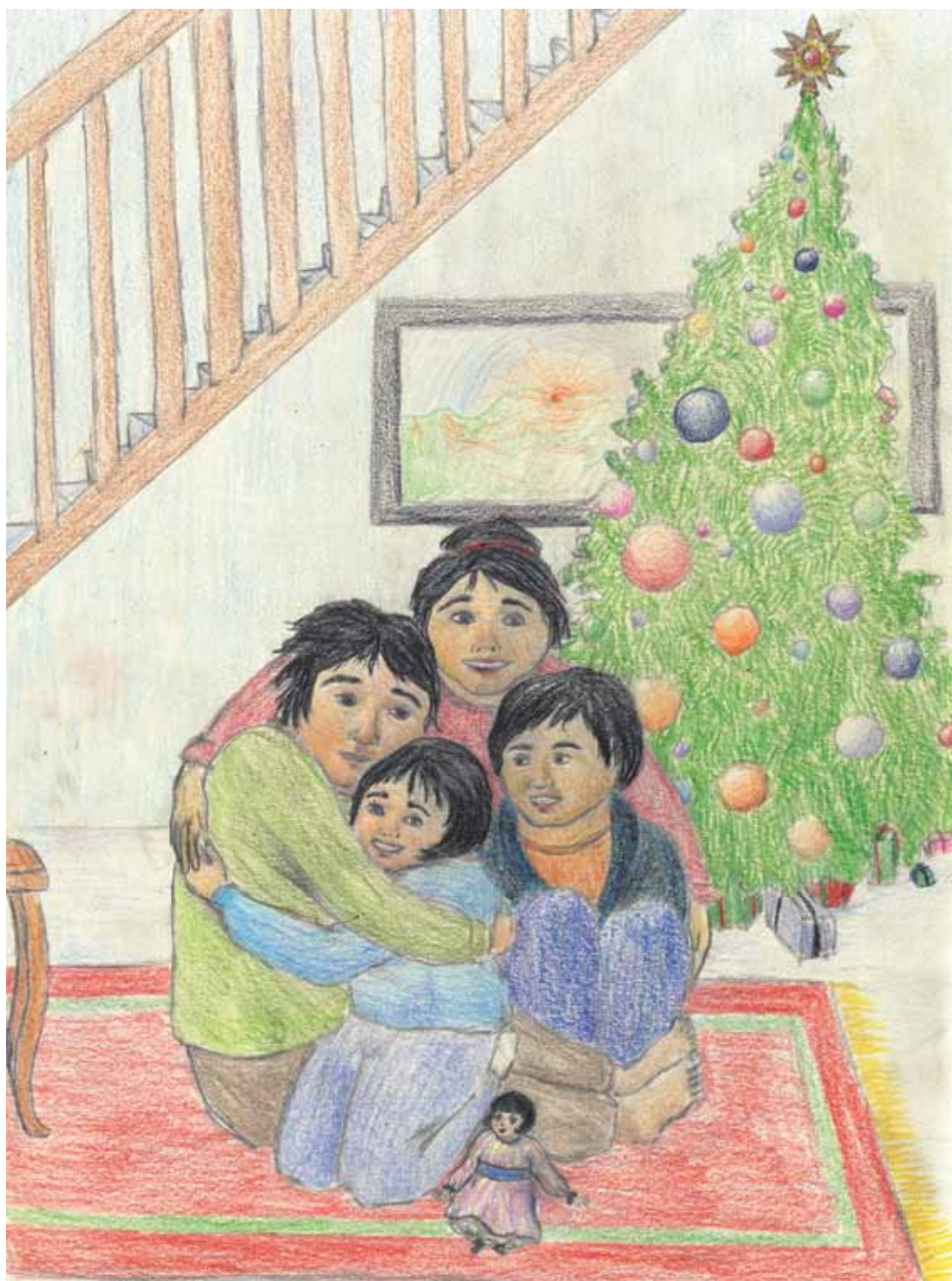


Mary Woods, 12
Frankfort, Illinois

Dark clouds gather, looming huge and gray,
Rain cold-needles my face,
The wind whips me into exhilaration.
A rumbling starts down the track.
Thunder? No, not thunder.
It's flint-and-steel hooves, striking out a lightning rhythm.
Tap tap,
Tap tap,
Tap tap.

Heads high, ears back—
The rain stings them, too.
Yet I see them charge undaunted,
For they know the storm is theirs.
The track is a dance floor,
With the wind for music.
They know the steps.
Tap tap,
Tap tap,
Tap tap.

Flecked with sweat and rain,
Hot and cold.
The voice of the whip drives them on.
They stretch out, bodies glistening.
My heartbeat joins with theirs,
As they speed straight under the wire,
Singing the song of the harness horse.
Tap tap,
Tap tap,
Tap tap.



We reminded them that they were a bit late. We laughed

My Brother

By **Natalie Han**

Illustrated by **Byron Otis**

I SIT AT THE COMPUTER, trying to think of memories to write about. I stare out the window. Then I hear “Crazy Baby,” a techno song by Nightcore II. It comes from our iMac computer upstairs. I start to think about Elliot, about the things he used to do with me when he finished his homework to entertain ourselves. We used to play together with my collection of stuffed animals. He made up the Animal Galaxy, an entire galaxy inhabited by only animals. They had tons of weird, science-fictiony gadgets like The Royal Chair, a chair that could play movies and serve food. He drew awesome spaceships and designed all the spaceships in the Animal Galaxy. I remember how he could turn anything I owned into a machine. He turned my toy golf club into a ray gun and my gel pen case into a keyboard. I remember we used to pretend that my bunk bed was a spaceship. Elliot played the captain, I played the first officer, and our toy bunnies played the pilot and the other officers. Once, Elliot and I pretended that our ship crashed into an abandoned spaceship and our ship became stuck to it.

“Board the abandoned ship and self-destruct it,” commanded Elliot.

“But, captain,” I objected, “if we blow up the other ship and the ships are connected, won’t we blow up in the process?”

Captain Elliot saw my reasoning and canceled the order.

We’d have sleepovers on my bunk bed and we’d stay up almost all night talking. One night there was a thunderstorm. A thunderclap shook the house and rattled the radiator. Both of



Natalie Han, 11
Lexington Massachusetts



Byron Otis, 13
Keller, Texas

us woke up, extremely scared. "When I count to three, we call for Mom," Elliot said quietly. "1, 2, 3... MOM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" That made us feel better, but we still ran to our parents' bedroom.

I remember one night, before Christmas, we tried to stay up till midnight. We tried sneaking downstairs to get playing cards, with our bathrobes draped over us like invisibility cloaks from Harry Potter. We said Merry Christmas to each other at midnight, then talked a bit. Five minutes after midnight, our parents came in and said Merry Christmas to us. We reminded them that they were a bit late. We laughed.

Nowadays, Elliot doesn't play with me as much, one reason being that we both have lots of homework, the other being that we've both grown up now. I'm eleven years old, in my first year of middle school. Elliot is fifteen years old, in his freshman year at high school. Usually, he's at the computer, chatting on Facebook, playing computer games, maybe doing his homework. He always uses the iMac, which means I usually have to type up reports on our old, slow, Microsoft computer. Most weekdays, after school, he stays at the high school to talk with friends until around six-thirty PM. Also, during dinner, he usually gets a plate, fills it up with a good amount of food, then takes it to the computer either to talk to friends on Facebook or watch *Bleach*, a Japanese anime. When I'm around him, I feel scared, scared that he'll lash out at me and yell. When I look at old pictures of

him when he was younger, I'm reminded of the carefree, happy, playful kid he once was.

Mom says he's going through a stage. She says that we have to live with it, to get through it. However, I know that deep inside of him, he is still happy and playful, like before. It may seem like he doesn't care about me anymore, but he's my brother and siblings love each other. Even if he accidentally told a friend's dad that I was ten and he said he doesn't keep track of how old I am, I know that, inside, he cares for me and loves me.

I feel like I'm a Pokémon trainer and Elliot is one of my Pokémon. Pokémon change their personality when they evolve. I feel that after Elliot "evolved," his personality changed, too. I know what I should do about Elliot: don't annoy him, let him rest a bit before I start talking to him, and wait for him to evolve again. When he evolves, hopefully we'll become a great team.

After thinking back, I found a notebook lying next to the computer. I opened it and found a map of the Animal Galaxy. I looked at the various planets: Bonar, Meoin, Cheezta, Squeakerain, Dragonia, Velveteen... I turned the page and found various drawings of spaceships, like a Bomber, Royal Transport, O-wings, E-wings... So many memories and only one memoir to write... Which one should I write about? I thought. I had an idea, why not write about every one I can remember? With that, I sat down and began to type.



Jessica's Horse

By Ismena Jameau

Illustrated by Annie Liu

JESSICA MARSTELL KICKED at a stone as she trudged down the dirt road. She was headed for her uncle's horse ranch in Country Ridge, Arizona. She didn't like going to Uncle Jame's ranch because she didn't like horses. Jessica had to work at Uncle Jame's ranch all summer, though, because she wanted a new laptop computer, and Mr. and Mrs. Marstell insisted that, if Jessica wanted a brand new computer at twelve years old, she'd have to pay for it herself. Jessica had asked her parents to buy her many things and she had gotten them, but now they decided it was time for her to learn more responsibility and appreciation by earning them herself.

"Hurry up, Jessie! Old Speckles is waiting to be ridden!" Uncle Jame called out as soon as Jessica was in sight.

"If Speckles is so old, why does he have to be ridden?" Jessica answered weakly. Uncle Jame frowned at his niece. Jessica turned around and gave the horse a sour look. She put her foot into the stirrup and swung into the saddle of the broad Appaloosa. Even though Speckles was wearing a western saddle, Jessica still posted to his trot. Jessica was a pretty good rider because her parents made her take lessons at an early age, but now she didn't always ride the way she was supposed to. Jessica had become a little bit of a spoiled and careless girl.

Jessica urged Speckles into a gallop as soon as they reached the trail that led up the mountain, through some trees. Jessica slowed Speckles when she thought she saw something in the trees. "Whoa, boy," she told Speckles as she dismounted. When



Ismena Jameau, 10
Sebastopol, California



Annie Liu, 13
Somerset, New Jersey



“Hey, Uncle Jame! Look what I found!”

Jessica got a closer look, she realized that the thing was a horse!

Jessica shook her head in disgust when she saw how dirty the horse was. “I think I’d call you Mudcake if you were mine—not that I’d want you.” Jessica was surprised when the horse came up to her and sniffed her face. The horse was a gelding, his coat nearly all covered with mud, but under that mud there seemed to be a shiny dark bay color. “Even though I’m not so fond of horses, I guess the right thing to do is bring you back with me.” Jessica smiled when Mudcake nodded his head up and down. She tied a rope around

his neck and got back on Speckles and rode back to Uncle Jame’s with Speckles’ reins in one hand and Mudcake’s rope in the other.

“Hey, Uncle Jame! Look what I found!” Jessica said as she motioned to Mudcake. Uncle Jame came over to them and ran his hands over the new horse’s body.

“Well, he looks like he’s been abandoned. These cuts and bruises are not that bad, though, and he’s a quarter horse.”

“So are you going to keep him?” Jessica stroked Mudcake’s neck while she groomed him carefully.

"I thought you didn't like horses," Uncle Jame said with raised eyebrows.

"Well, um—I kinda like them better now... especially Mudcake," Jessica blushed.

"I can't take another horse, but I think I know who should have him," Uncle Jame smiled.

"Oh." Jessica felt disappointed at the thought of someone else taking Mudcake.

"He's all yours." Uncle Jame handed her the lead rope.

"What? Me? Mudcake? Mine?" Jessica sputtered.

"Yep, your parents have been wanting you to get back into horse riding again, and your Mudcake can stay here for a while. I'll feed him for you at first, but eventually you're gonna have to buy him food and other supplies yourself," Uncle Jame said.

"Oh, of course! I can't believe I'm saying this—but I think I'm starting to like horses!" Jessica hugged her uncle. "And, I'll take great care of Mudcake—is he really all mine? I mean, why are you giving him to me? I haven't been all that nice to you or the horses lately..."


"I gave him to you because you are good for each other, and I know you'll take care of him. If he's not already trained, I'll help you with that," Uncle Jame answered.

Jessica had never thought that she

would ever love horses, but now she loved Mudcake, and the other horses no longer seemed so bad. "I always thought that horses were just big dirty animals that were unfriendly and unuseful, but I was wrong," Jessica smiled. Jessica began to realize that Mudcake taught her that horses could be a human's friend, even though he hadn't done much. Jessica hugged Mudcake, her new horse—her new friend.

The next day Jessica and her mom went to the tack shop. "What made you change your mind?" Mrs. Marstell asked.

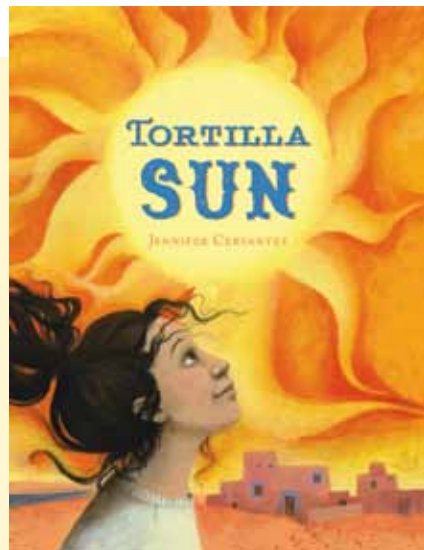
"Mudcake was just so friendly and funny, and he made me feel good. Then I started to realize how awful I've been to horses and I decided to change," Jessica said as she entered the tack shop. She bought grain, a grooming bucket and tools, a feeding bucket and saddle pad. She'd use Uncle Jame's saddle until she could afford her own—that new laptop didn't seem to be so important anymore.

After shopping, Jessica went to Uncle Jame's ranch, did her work chores quickly, and then tacked up Mudcake. She climbed carefully into his saddle. She wasn't sure if Mudcake was trained to ride, but he stood calmly with her on his back, so Jessica was relaxed. I love having my own horse, Jessica thought with a smile. Then she trotted Mudcake out into the field to start their very first ride together. 

Book Review

By Emily A. Davis

Tortilla Sun, by Jennifer Cervantes; Chronicle Books: San Francisco, 2010; \$16.99



Emily A. Davis, 13
Santa Fe, New Mexico

THE THING THAT FIRST hooked me onto *Tortilla Sun* was the word “magic.” In the first few sentences of Chapter One, Izzy Roybal is introduced as a discontented, lonely character, unhappy with her frequent moves all over San Diego and wanting to discover the secret of her long-dead father. Finding the old baseball in the bottom of a packing box enables her to take her first steps towards that. The words “because magic” are written on the baseball, with a small space between them as if something was missing. Izzy quickly figures out, from her mother’s confusion and annoyance at seeing the ball, that it was her father’s. Already, clouds of questions are beginning to roll through her mind... and mine. What is the secret of Izzy’s father that her mother has kept to herself for so long? *Could* the baseball be magic? And what are those missing words?


The second thing to grab my attention was the fact that Izzy writes stories... or tries to. Like me, she is always eager to start a story but almost never has the impetus to finish it. The only thing that keeps her writing are the story cards that her fifth-grade teacher gave her. “Small cards aren’t so intimidating for budding writers,” she had said.

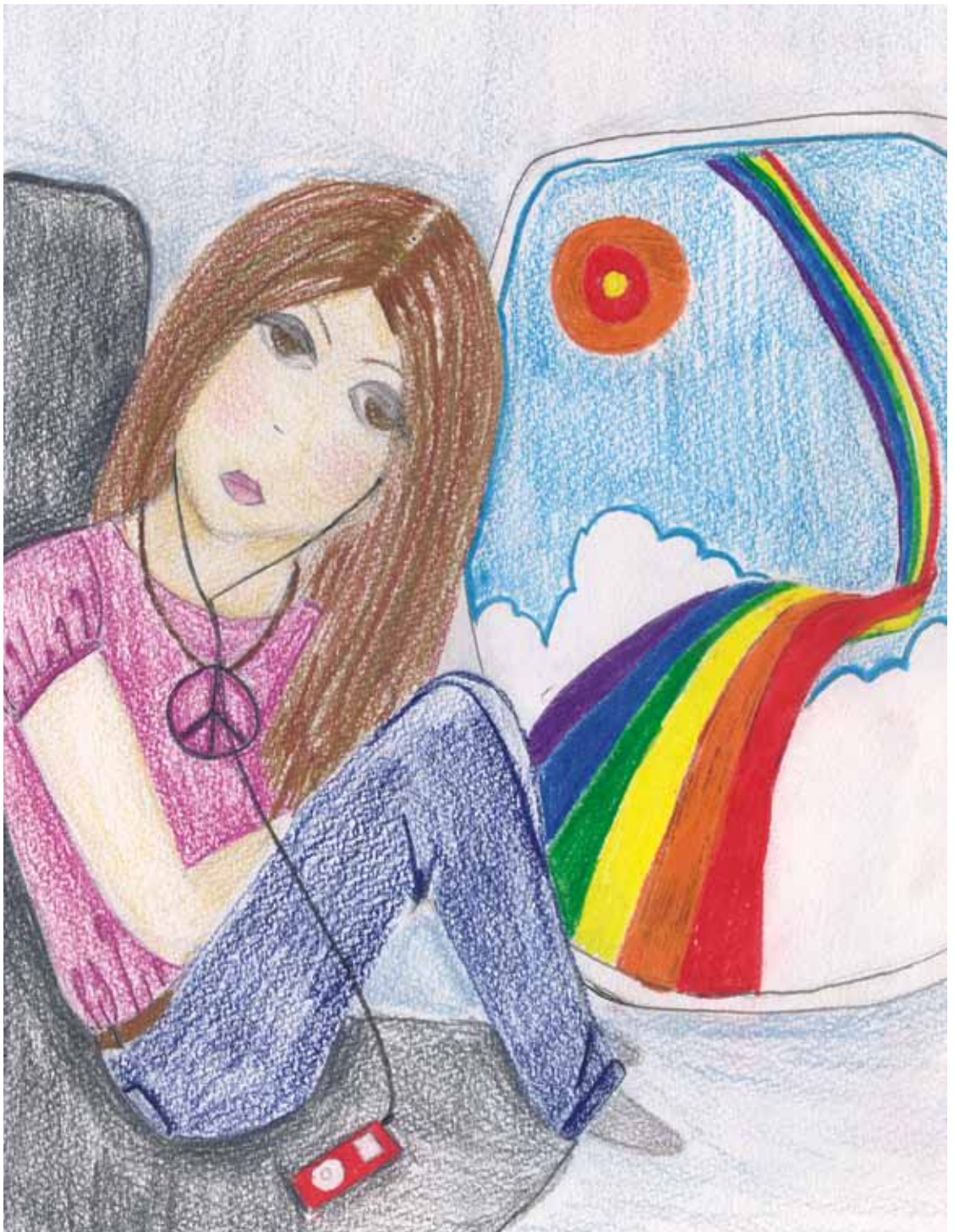
The final touch, that kept me reading for the rest of the

book, was Izzy's surprise and anger when her mother tells her she must go to New Mexico for the next two months of summer. I had mixed feelings about this. As I live in New Mexico myself, part of me wanted to defend my home state. The other part, however, sympathized with Izzy. Her shock that she is being sent off alone to her grandmother's—without being told why—reminded me of myself. Even in the beginning, Izzy's search for the truth is made clear.

Izzy's grandmother—or Nana, as she calls her—is bright and twinkly but very religious and obviously capable of bearing great burdens, as I realized when I first met her. When Izzy is taken aback by how colorful her room is, Nana responds with, “But of course it's colorful. Life is color, isn't it?” My admiration for Izzy's grandmother grew at her first tortilla-making lesson. When she tells Izzy that they must say the Hail Mary three times before starting, Izzy is embarrassed to say she doesn't know it. But Nana does not say a single derisive word or even show much surprise. This came as a pleasant shock to me, for making fun of someone's religion—or lack of it—is something almost no one will hesitate to do.

Exploring the village, Izzy begins to hear words on the wind. “Come,” they say, and later, the name Bella. Another mystery begins to take shape. Could the wind have the right person, if it is the wind talking at all? How could an Isadora hear the word “Bella” on the breeze, as if it were calling to her?

The rest of Izzy's story cannot be told without revealing the end; however, it can be hinted at. The end of Izzy Roybal's search for truth includes a talk with Socorro, the village storyteller, and a golden glass “truth catcher”; the shattering story of her father's death; a near-fatal accident; and a name that is almost new. Does it end happily? To find out, you'll have to read the enchanting story of *Tortilla Sun* for yourself. 



The thin colored stripes seemed as if they were painted across the sky

Flying Solo

By **Soledad Tejada**

Illustrated by **Isabella Taylor**

I SLIPPED THE HEADPHONES onto my head, glancing out of the window at the big airplanes in red and white. The huge hunks of metal reflected the dim sunshine of the afternoon, with a special surprise, a rainbow. The thin colored stripes seemed as if they were painted across the sky. They sparkled a little, twinkling in the evening light. I slipped out of my shoes, locking my knees to my chest, and rocked back and forth. What if... what if... my thoughts trailed off and I locked my eyes on the rainbow. The sun illuminated the pane of the window and I felt the warmth on my face as I shut my eyes.

"A good omen, we can all see it," I imagined my mother's voice.

"I can see it too," I would have replied excitedly.

I looked over to my right, expecting to see my mother or father, but it was a stranger. I bit my lip, looking away quickly, back to the window, back to the rainbow, and back to the terminal where I knew my family stood. They were waiting for me take off, probably staring through a glass pane like I was. Looking away, I remembered I was flying solo, like an adventurer, like a hero. Yeah, right. It was like something I read in a book. What was that book called? I frantically racked my memory for distractions. I knew I was doing anything to get away from my bad thoughts, but they won. Suddenly my brain was filled with images of myself at home with my family, curled up on my bed with a book. The image made the fact I was all alone too clear. All alone, for two whole weeks, I thought again. Nervous butter-



Soledad Tejada, 11
Brooklyn, New York



Isabella Taylor, 9
Austin, Texas

flies swarmed in my stomach.

Two whole weeks was a long time. Since it was summer, every day contained around twelve whole hours to spend with family. And twelve hours times fourteen days equals... When I realized it was more than a hundred and forty-four hours I stopped calculating. That was too long. Every day I would miss the joyful shouts of my curly-haired brother, the perfect advice from my mother's mouth, and the feeling of family my father created. My chest burned and I realized I was holding my breath. I exhaled and watched travelers zoom around in the faraway terminal. They moved with such urgency, their miniscule legs going a mile a minute. Two whole weeks, two whole weeks, two whole weeks, my brain chanted.

I broke my gaze on the terminal and focused my attention to my iPod that was resting on my lap. I pictured my mother looking through the glass, but it just wasn't, wasn't... enough. I tried to hear the comforting words she would use to soothe me. What would she say? My mind wandered, searching for the sounds that would form her words. I was tired, my eyelids started to droop. I shook my head and looked down. With a sudden surge of energy I scrolled through my files quickly until I found a playlist. The playlist was my reinforcement, my solution. The playlist was titled *Mama y Papa* and filled with messages my Papa had taken so long to record... just for me. Blinking a few times to clear the tears that invaded my eyes, I pressed play. I jammed the play button down hard.

Instantaneously, my Papa's voice, loud and gentle, but promising and strong, filled my ears. I let my breath out and listened.

"Hola, domicella."

I felt relief wash over me as I heard him say my name, in that special Spanish way. I listened harder as bits and pieces imprinted in my mind...

"Recuerdate de yo y mama siempre estamos con tigo y te amamos mucho." Remember that me and your mama are always with you and love you a lot.

Both eyes filled with tears. I hung onto every word of his message. Every sound filled me with warmth, but then the last line came. Too soon, too soon, I thought frantically.

"Nos veremos y abhh... cuidate y te amamo mucho, te amo, ciao, tu papa." See you soon and ahhh... take care of yourself and I love you a lot, I love you, bye, your papa.

The tears showed no mercy, streaming down my face. Wanting what was over, I reached to replay the message, to stay strong. The tears had already taken over though. Mixed emotions of sadness, nervousness, pride and anger all making rivers down my cheek. Why did they make me do this? I thought, Why? I was proud, my heart swelled, my mother and father are proud, they think I can do it, they believe in me... but what if I fail, what if I have an awful flight and I cry the night away and... I let it go. The butterflies in my stomach, my choked-up throat, I let it all go. I trusted in my papa's deep, soothing voice. And suddenly I wasn't afraid; the rivers of tears swelled but then reced-

ed because I felt brave. My whole family was urging me on, hoping, wishing, and thinking of me. They were urging me on, in the stands, telling me I could do it, and rooting for me. I knew they would always be there, so I took my adventure...

The stranger sitting next to me saw my tears and looked up, alarmed. But he was too late. I had already been comforted.

"Are you OK?" he asked, smiling sympathetically at me. I nodded as the tears reappeared with joy. I had overcome my fear.

"I'm just happy," I choked and sputtered, sounding like an old engine.

"Well, if you need me, I'll be over there. I'm changing seats," he explained and then indicated where his friend stood, beckoning him. Barely hearing him, I smiled and nodded so he walked off.

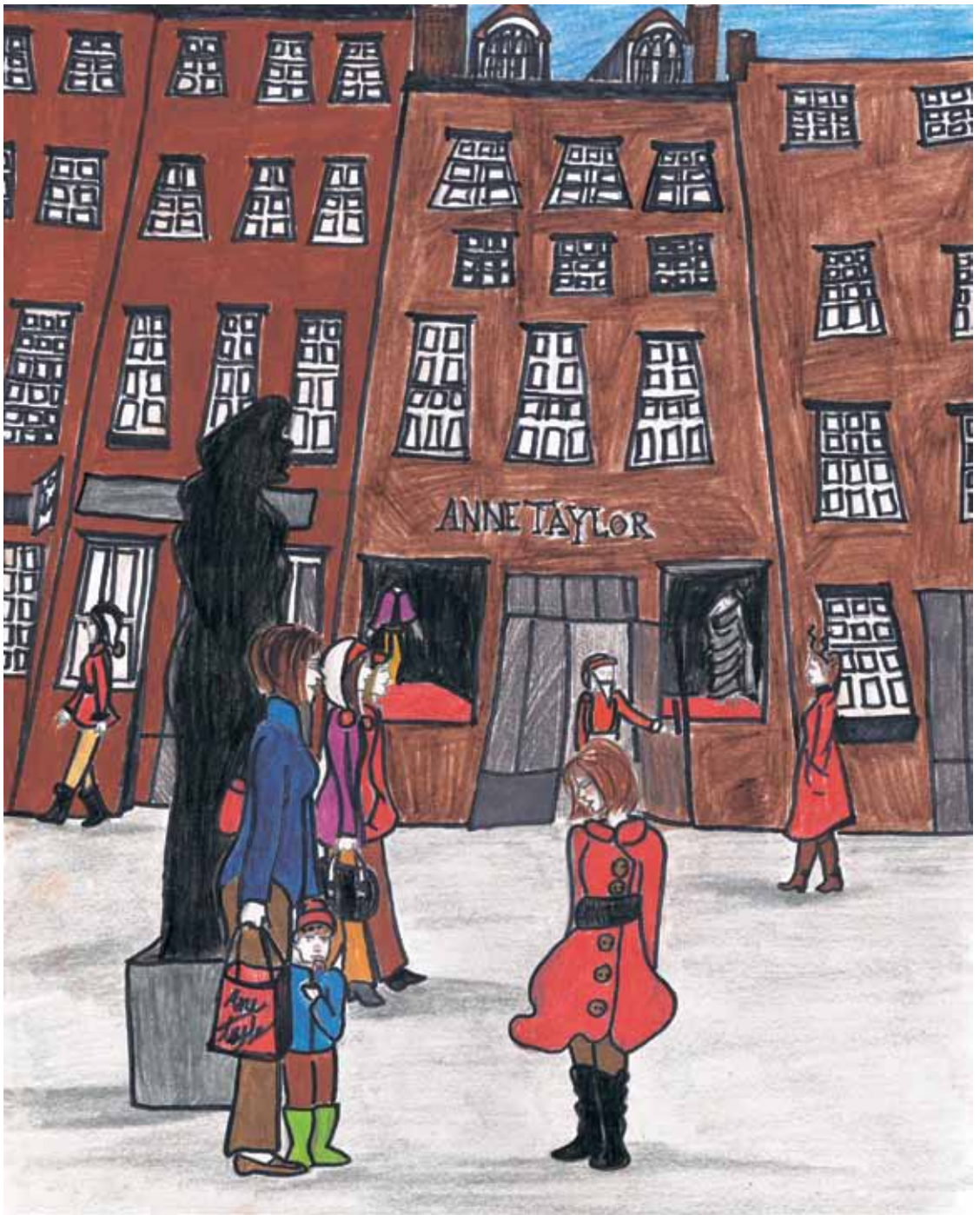
Why would a stranger even care about me? Why was I important to him? I

looked back at him again and smiled, but he was already making his way down the crowded aisle. I lay back in my seat, still exhausted and consumed by a whirlpool of emotions, so dazed I nearly missed the crackly voice of the pilot.

"This is flight 12792 to Geneva. We will be departing in five minutes," he announced. "Flight attendants, assume position..."

The sudden rush of movement within the cabin awakened the butterflies inside me and I froze. But like magic, the heat from the sun and dazzle of the sparkling rainbow defrosted me and the butterflies dispersed and disappeared. I knew why too, I was calm because the pilot's voice was now my papa's, urging me on, and proudly, I took my adventure, my tears streaming with pride, glinting with the colors of the rainbow, and I braced myself for the journey still to come. ❀





"All you need is a red fur-trimmed hat and you could be a Santa yourself!"

A Million Santas Invade New York City

By **Olivia Calamia**

Illustrated by **Ida McMillan-Zapf**

BLACK, WHITE AND RED all over. And no, we are not talking about newspapers here. We are talking about *Santas*. Hundreds of them. I couldn't believe my eyes when I boarded my subway train with my mom and my little brother one frosty December Saturday about two weeks before Christmas. They were packed into the uptown No. 4 Lexington Avenue line like a can of red, white and black sardines! I was surrounded by a sea of teenagers and college students dressed up like St. Nick. You could even hear the constant "Ho ho ho" above the deafening noise of the New York City subway.

There were all kinds of Santas. They wore red suits lined with white and cinched by black belts. They wore black boots and Santa hats. There were long white beards everywhere. Some of them were carrying sacks of "toys." Others were dressed up as elves. Some even wore reindeer headbands with felt antlers attached.

"What's going on?" I asked my mom in disbelief. Was I imagining all this? Was I dreaming? Was I going absolutely insane?

"Wow!" my mom answered. She was just loving this whole thing!

We got to our stop only to find more Santas. They were crowded into the elevator we rode from the subway up to the main street. Some were stomping in through the turnstiles and some were going out through the turnstiles. One of them gave my little brother, Stephen, a candy cane. He is six and his eyes were as big as saucers at this phenomenon.



Olivia Calamia, 12
Brooklyn, New York



Ida McMillan-Zapf, 13
Roanoke, Virginia

We were able to get away from the chaos for a while because we went to our health club and went swimming. But when we returned to the street the madness wasn't over by a long shot.

We rode another train packed with you-know-who and walked down to the South Street Seaport. My mom had to do some last-minute Christmas shopping and I was anxious to get away from the noisy confusion of the Santas.

Unfortunately, things didn't exactly turn out the way I wanted them to.

Take a wild guess at what we found when we got to the seaport. Yup, more Santas! There were Santas eating ice cream at the little outdoor ice cream stand. Others were standing around drinking beer from plastic cups. A couple of older Santas were hanging out down by the docked ships, chatting and smoking cigarettes. My brother was appalled. "I didn't know Santa smoked!" he said to me. Really, what could I say to him?

Mom was still excited about the whole thing and went off to ask one of the Santas what it was all about. When she returned she explained it was some sort of annual tradition that spread through the Internet and all college students dressed

as Santa and roamed the city.

Then my mom started looking at me strangely.

"What?" I asked.

"Well, Olivia," she said, "with your belted red parka jacket and your black boots, all you need is a red fur-trimmed hat and you could be a Santa yourself!"

I was horrified to think I could be mistaken for one of these crazy college kids!

"Mom!" I scolded, but at the same time I opened my coat to reveal a very un-Santa-like T-shirt.

IN THE LATE afternoon, we boarded the train still packed with Santas and headed home. The hectic and weird day finally ended when we walked through our front door. I still felt dizzy from all those Santa costumes. Mom was still giddy as a teenager herself about the whole event. (I might add that she referred to me as her "little Santa" all the way home!)

I'm kind of worried about Easter. Will my city be invaded by millions of bunnies? I've got to remember not to wear anything pink or any kind of floppy hat as Easter nears. You never know what is going to happen in the Big Apple! 🍷



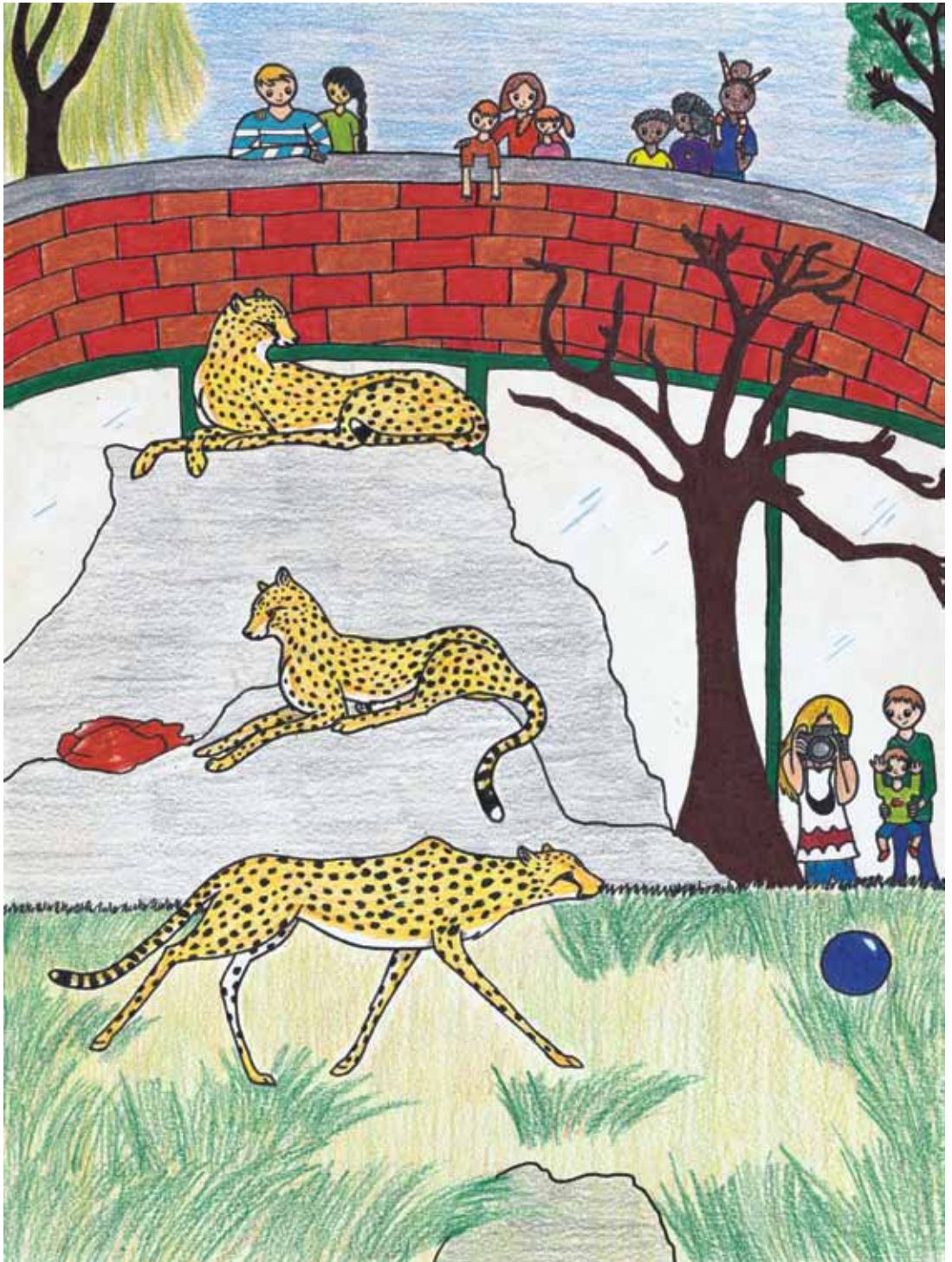
Nature

By **Bailey Victoria Nold**

Do you love to hear sweet songs?
Go outside and listen for
All kinds of birds chirping.
Go to your local park
Sit on a swing and look around
See that you're free
There are no wars or fights going on.
Look and see that you're safe from evil.
The snow is melting
Time is ticking
Why don't you go outside
Turn the hose on
Play with your neighbors
Say to yourself that you
Are very lucky. Don't worry
About people who brag.
Just think to yourself that
You are truly one of the luckiest
People in the whole world.



Bailey Victoria Nold, 10
Fort Wayne, Indiana



Sometimes he would jog around the enclosure as a special treat for the viewers

Freedom Run

By **Olivia Smit**

Illustrated by **Candace Tong-Li**

IT HAD BEEN YEARS since Kimbabwe had run. He lazily draped a paw over the edge of his rock, letting the warm sun shine in his eyes. His cage at the zoo was much too small to get up the kind of speed cheetahs were famous for. He had his food practically delivered to him, and he had long since forsaken the idea of pretending to hunt it as he had when he was young. It was, after all, just scraps of raw meat. No amount of pretending could turn it into the kind of challenge he needed. A good long chase after an antelope, maybe. Or perhaps just a jog for fun, he thought wistfully. He could barely remember the days when his territory had stretched across the entire African savannah. His father had been the leader of the most powerful band of cheetahs, and their territory had stretched farther than the eye could see. He had been a very young pup, still with his mother, watching the males he would someday join as they flew gracefully by.

Then the Men came. Creeping through the long grass, their fire sticks could shoot faster than the pack could run, and before long the pack was gone. Then they came for Kimbabwe and his mother. She ran from them for miles, but eventually the sticks caught up with her and she was gone too. Kimbabwe surely would have been next had not the people from the zoo found him and saved him. Ever since then he lived in a cage with two of his brothers.

Each day, many people would come and peer at them through the glass, commenting in awed voices at their incredible grace



Olivia Smit, 12
London, Ontario, Canada



Candace Tong-Li, 13
Scarsdale, New York

and beauty. Kimbabwe was always disgusted by their shallowness. *You think I'm beautiful when I'm sleeping. You should see me run! You think I'm mighty when I yawn and show you my teeth. Give me an antelope and watch me kill it myself!*

Sometimes he would jog around the enclosure as a special treat for the viewers, or sometimes he would play with his food and make a big deal out of "killing" it just to see the children laugh. His two brothers, Jawjue and Kamunji, couldn't understand him. They lay on the rocks all day, wondering at him. *Why are you wasting your time?* they would ask. *Come and lie with us. The people don't care. Why do you tire yourself by running when you could lie in the sun and be admired for your beauty?* They didn't understand how he longed for freedom, how he needed to run. He could feel his body tense and stretch sometimes, and the need to run was excruciating to ignore. He would growl and scratch at the ground, tear around the trees, leap and spin, trying to rid himself of the push to just let himself go.

Once, when he was still new at the zoo, he had run as fast as he could straight towards the glass. He had thought it would shatter and he would be free. Instead, he was unable to move for weeks.

On this particular morning, the people did not come. This meant that the week was over and tomorrow a new week would begin. Kimbabwe sighed and leaped down from his rock. His brothers, as usual, lay stretched out lazily. *Where are you going?* Jawjue, the curious one, lifted his head.

Come and lie down. My side is cold where you were lying, come and warm it up.

Kamunji cuffed Jawjue, making him fall off the rock. *You have the brains of an antelope,* he growled. *Get back here and be quiet.*

Kimbabwe ignored them pointedly and studied the crack in the glass wall where the keeper brought their food. *You two are stupid, lying there all day. Why don't you get up and do something for once? Make yourself useful.* They glared at him and lay back down.

No, really. Kimbabwe sat down on the rock and prodded Kamunji. *Don't you ever get the urge to run? To just be free, to go back to that place where we were pups? Go somewhere, do something? To eat something real instead of this fake raw meat junk that they bring us? Don't you want adventure?* His fur bristled just thinking about it.

Kamunji blinked at him. *In a word. No.* He sighed and rolled over.

Jawjue, however, was staring at Kimbabwe with a look of wonder on his face. *You mean there's more? This isn't the world right here in front of us? And the food tastes better than this?*

Kimbabwe was appalled. He motioned for Jawjue to follow him. They sat down together at the edge of the enclosure. *Of course there's more. Picture this place over and over with no walls or ceilings.*

Jawjue closed his eyes and thought.

Kimbabwe went on. *Imagine huge pools of water as far as the eye can see. Imagine thousands of cheetahs running at top speed through the grass. Imagine a mother with her pups. Imagine the thrill of the hunt, with cheetahs*

running and an antelope limping away. Now, look! The lead cheetah jumps up and the antelope is down! Now the pack's swarming over it... now it's gone and the birds move in. He shivered and opened his eyes.

Jawjue had a glazed look in his eyes and he was staring hungrily off into the distance. *I. Want. To. Go. There.*

Kimbabwe wrapped his tail around Jawjue's haunches. *Someday, I promise you. I'll take you there. We'll go and rule Father's territory, just like we were meant to.*

They sat together for a long time, each dreaming separately of wide open spaces and antelope. Kamunji growled in disgust. *How can you believe we'll ever get out? Why can't you just be happy with life here? Warm, never hungry. If you went back you'd have to...* He stopped when he saw that they weren't listening. With a snarl of contempt, he turned his back on them.

THE MANAGER of the zoo walked quickly to keep up with his boss. "Sir, please!"

"No, Damon, I've given you my final answer." He strode to his car and drove off. Damon Graham stared after him. He had just been fired. Dejectedly, he made his way back to his office to take care of some leftover paperwork. He paused at the monkey cage, saddened and a little scared to think of anyone else having such control over their lives. He was an animal lover and would never do anything to hurt any animal, but he knew some money-hungry people who were dying for this job. They would do anything to get their

hands on the job of manager. Worried, he turned his back on the zoo and continued on towards his office.

FOR THE CHEETAHS, life continued much as usual when the new manager came to work. The only differences were the amounts of people. Kimbabwe wasn't sure what had been done to the zoo, but he did know that a lot more people were coming by his cage every day. He and Jawjue would chase each other around and around, wrestling and tearing their meat apart together, for now that Jawjue knew that there was more to life, he had begun to feel the call as well. The two of them would tussle to keep themselves in shape, dreaming of that day when they would once again be free.

One day, their food did not appear in the corner where it always did. Kimbabwe and Jawjue searched the whole enclosure and found no sign of any food at all. By noon, even Kamunji was starting to get worried, and he helped them, but to no avail. That night the cheetahs went to bed hungry. The next morning there was a small bit of meat sitting in the corner. Kimbabwe neatly divided it between the three of them, although it was not much of a meal for anyone. Kamunji grumbled and growled, but no food came again for the whole day. The next morning there was the same amount of food as the day before. Starving, the cheetahs devoured the food and prowled restlessly around for the rest of the day. The next morning it was the same, and the next and the next.

After months of this, Kimbabwe woke up one morning and found himself so weak from hunger that he couldn't walk. Jawjue brought his food to him, although by the hunted look in his eyes Kimbabwe guessed that he was almost as weak. Kamunji didn't even bother to try, making Jawjue go and get his portion for him.

Jawjue curled up next to Kimbabwe and sighed deeply. *That place. The one with wide open spaces and antelope running free. When will we get there?*

Kimbabwe waited as his stomach growled before answering. *I don't know. But maybe if we imagine antelope we won't feel so hungry.* So they both closed their eyes and dreamed. When it came time for the zoo to close and them to go to sleep, they lay down together, never opening their eyes, both dreaming of a better place.

The next morning tragedy struck. Kamunji was unable to move even his tail and was having trouble breathing. Surprisingly, he wasn't his grumpy self. He seemed to know that he wouldn't be around for much longer, and when he opened his eyes for the last time, he spoke softly. *I can see it now... why you wanted to leave. I understand. I want to go now too... I'll be taking the quicker road than you.* He sounded vaguely happy. *I'm... so... rr... y.* He closed his eyes and was gone. Kimbabwe dragged his body into the fake rock den, and he and Jawjue kept watch over him for the rest of the day and well into the night. Then they pulled him out in plain view of the crowds as a plea for help. However, instead of gaining the sympathy

of the people, all they got were tranquilizer darts stinging their haunches, and then blackness slowly took over.

THE NEW MANAGER of the zoo was a money-hungry businessman. He had made all of the animals' food supplies smaller and was planning to rid himself of half of the animals by releasing them to research clinics. The Pretty Face Care Foundation, which tested its products on animals, and the Exotic Photo Clinic, which kept large African animals penned up for photographers to shoot safely, were only two of them.

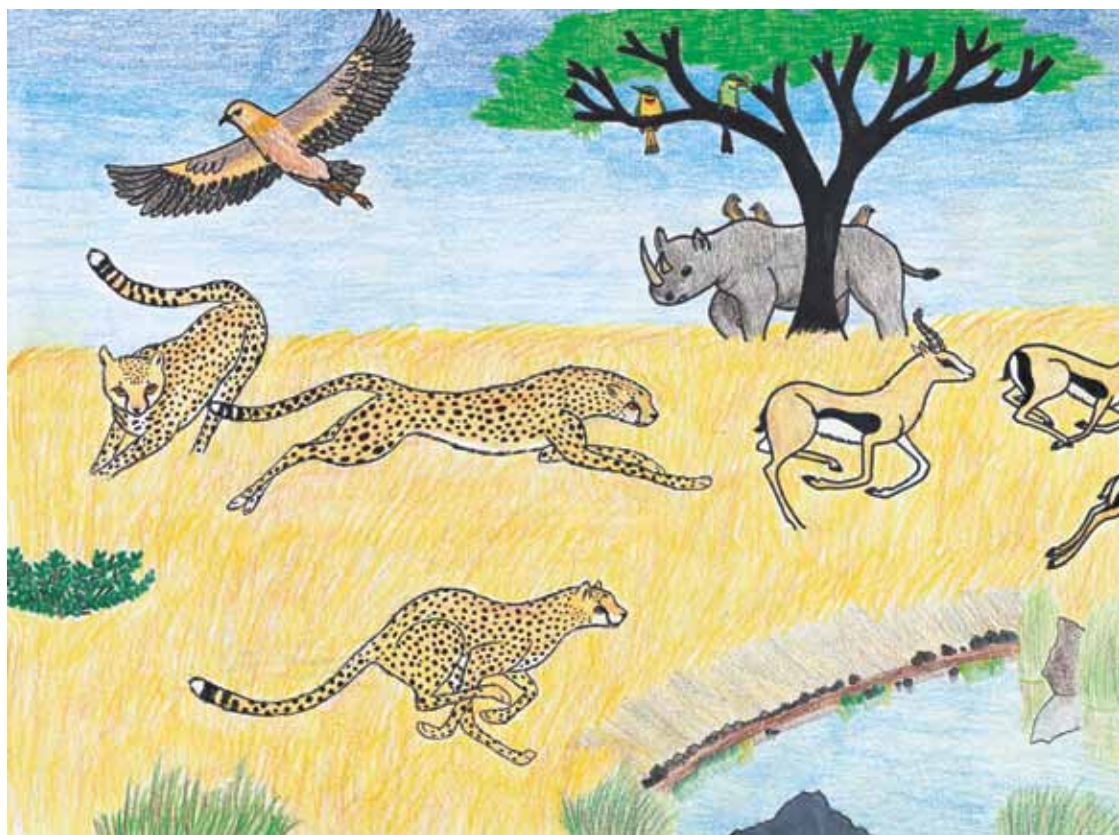
He had made up his mind that the monkeys were the first to go, but when he heard about the dead cheetah, he knew he was looking at possible lawsuits. So he changed the applications and arranged to have the cheetahs shipped out to the Exotic Photo Clinic in two weeks.

With a sigh, he shoved the papers to the back of his mind and pushed the admission price for the zoo up another fifteen percent.

KIMBABWE and Jawjue ate their food in saddened silence, the body of Kamunji having disappeared. Kimbabwe suspected that the disappearance had something to do with the sleeping sticks, but it didn't really matter to him. He wondered if anything would matter to him again.

Jawjue stretched. *What now?* He batted a ball aimlessly around Kimbabwe's paws.

I don't know. Kimbabwe watched the



We will step out of this cage and find ourselves at home with endless space

ball slowly come to a stop. Neither he nor Jawjue made an attempt to chase it down. Instead, they both sat down together and began to dream of the safari. Kimbabwe began. *We will step out of this cage and find ourselves at home with endless space. We will run together until we are tired and then the pack will find us, and we will join them. They will see an antelope, and we will help them chase it down. We will never be helpless again.*

Jawjue licked his lips and continued. *Then I will find a pretty female and she will have my pups. When they are older I will take them with me and teach them to hunt and*

they will call me Father. Their pups too will remember me, passed down like a story, growing bigger and fiercer with every telling. And the zoo part of my story will fade out and be forgotten. The two lapsed into sad, hungry silence.

They stayed together for days, leaving their daily servings of meat to pile up, forgotten. They continued to tell each other stories of what they would do when they were free, as they got weaker and weaker, and as the life started to ebb from their bodies, the breath from their lungs. But the stories went on, even when

Kimbabwe was short of breath, or Jawjue sank into unconsciousness. For the stories were the only thing keeping them alive. Then, a day later, Jawjue was unable to finish his part of the story. Kimbabwe opened his eyes and squinted at the brightness before looking down at Jawjue. He was lying peacefully quiet. Too quiet. His heart pounding, Kimbabwe brought slab after slab of meat that had collected over the days. Jawjue managed to eat one before sitting up. He refused to eat any more. *You'll need it for when you escape. I won't need it where I'm going.*

Kimbabwe didn't listen to such talking. *No!* he insisted. *It will be us escaping. I won't go without you! Now, try to eat some of this.*

Jawjue turned away. *Tell me one more time how it will look when we are free.* And so Jawjue leaned against Kimbabwe and listened as the older cheetah told him of the wonders they would see when they got to Africa.

After Kimbabwe had finished the telling, he looked down at Jawjue. Horrified, he tried to make himself believe that he was dreaming, but he knew in his heart that what he saw was no dream. Jawjue was taking his last breaths. His eyes were glazed over as he looked up at Kimbabwe. *I can see it now. The wide open spaces, the antelope, the cheetahs running free.*

Kimbabwe whimpered. *Don't leave me, Jawjue. I need you.*

Jawjue's eyes seemed to focus slightly for a few moments, and he replied, *You don't need me. I needed you, and you did what you told me you would. Thank you.*

Kimbabwe choked back a wail of agony. *Thank you for what? I did nothing. I gave you empty promises, that's all.*

Jawjue gasped. *But... you... did... so... much... more... than... that. You... gave... me... hope.* His eyes slowly closed, and he gave a short sigh of satisfaction.

Nooooo! Kimbabwe wailed, beating his paws on Jawjue's body, on the ground, on anything his paws touched, sending zookeepers running towards his cage, sticks in hand. For the second time in a week, Kimbabwe felt the sting of the sleeping sticks...

HE AWOKE in a quickly moving vehicle. Slung across the floor of a small cage, Kimbabwe groaned as the metal bars dug into his skin. Grief filled him as he remembered what had happened to Jawjue, and he was so full of it that he didn't care where he was going or why he was caged. Of course, even if he had, the name Exotic Photo Clinic wouldn't have meant anything to him. Which was probably a good thing because, even if he had wanted to escape, he couldn't have. But he didn't know any of these things, and so when the vehicle stopped, he barely pricked his ears up.

The bright light flooded the back of the truck, making Kimbabwe squint his eyes. A man and woman seemed to be arguing.

"I'll give you ten grand for him." The woman glanced at him and smiled. The man next to her twisted his hat in his hands, obviously swayed by the money.

"I had orders..." He pointed weakly towards the Exotic Photo Clinic just down the road. The woman smiled icily, her voice as cold and as hard as steel.

"I will double whatever they are offering you. You can take half back to your boss and keep half and no one will ever know. I need a cheetah like him for an experiment a group of vets are trying. We will release him back into the wild and track his movements, which is a lot better than what they'll do for him." She nearly spat the last words out, moving protectively closer to Kimbabwe.

"This is the perfect opportunity for both of us." She looked compassionately at the cheetah, and he began to feel a spark of hope.

"Done!" the man lunged towards the money in the woman's hand, literally ripping it from her grasp. He began to count it eagerly, and the woman waited patiently, with her hand on top of the crate. When he had finished, he helped the woman load the cheetah into the back of her man-eater, and then he almost jumped into his car and drove crazily away.

"There, that's better, isn't it." The woman slid behind the wheel and spoke softly to Kimbabwe.

"You know, I hate being dishonest like that," she confided in him, "but I really had no choice, did I?"

It wasn't long before they approached the doors of a veterinary clinic. The doors burst open and a young man rushed to help the woman with the cage. He frowned.

"We have the plane all lined up for tomorrow morning. Are you sure this boy's big enough? He's got hardly any meat on his bones."

"We'll give him some shots when we put the tracker in his ear. He'll be fine." The woman opened Kimbabwe's cage door, letting him into a spacious room, almost as big as his cage at the zoo. He headed straight for the shadiest spot and was asleep almost as soon as he lay down. This time it was a real sleep, not a drugged one.

Kimbabwe woke suddenly and found the woman standing over him with a needle in her hand. He purred, glad to see her as she gently slipped it into his leg. His head slumped to the side and his purr slowed to a low rumble as he was wheeled into the examination room.

He woke again in the vehicle with the woman at the wheel. This time he was in a bigger crate with a padded bottom, and he was surprised to find that he was quite comfortable.

Before long the vehicle pulled up to a huge bird-thing, and Kimbabwe watched with interest as the woman wheeled his cage towards some doors leading into the back of the bird-vehicle.

Once he was safely in place, the woman once again slipped the needle into his leg, and he lay his head down on her hand. He was asleep almost before she pulled it away.

Kimbabwe woke for the last time in the vehicle again. This time, though, the air held a familiar scent. Africa! Kimbabwe

sat up in excitement and pawed at the cage door, yipping and chirping in ecstasy. The woman laughed and stopped the truck. In the distance Kimbabwe could smell a pack of male cheetahs, and he whined in frustration as the woman pulled the crate down off the truck bed and slowly began to undo the latches.

Free! Kimbabwe rolled around on the ground, scratching and jumping. He was about to run off when he remembered the woman. Running back towards her, he rubbed his face up and down her leg and then jumped and put his paws on her shoulder. She tensed slightly, but when Kimbabwe began to lick her face, she put her arms around him.

Then he was off, running and running until he reached the pack. After sniffing him and circling around and around him, they accepted him as their own and the group set off at a slow jog. Then he re-

membered Jawjue. His head sank in sadness. *What is it?* One of the cheetahs his own age moved closer to him.

So Kimbabwe, remembering Jawjue's desire to be a legend, told story after story of Jawjue as a puppy, and as his friend and brother. When he had finished, the whole pack was gathered in silence.

Then the oldest one spoke. *We will always remember our brother Jawjue and our member Kimbabwe for all that they have struggled through to bring us these tales.*

Kimbabwe's throat constricted. He held back a whimper. *Thank you.* It was then that he remembered the thing he had told Jawjue about so many times. The desires that had come upon him in the zoo came upon him again, and Kimbabwe stood up. The pack, sensing what he wanted, stood up, and together they did the one thing Kimbabwe had been longing to do for his entire life. They ran. 🌀



Sunset

By **Maia Kosek**

Sun climbs down rocky mountains
To the west.
Rays start to venture,
Leaving paintings of colors across the skies,
Yellows and purples, oranges and pinks,
But then they fade, dissolving to darkness,
Like nothing was there before.
A glimmer emerges, a moon so fine,
That glistens like shining seas,
Turning the sky into a beauty.
A dark blue color, that twists with the winds,
Revealing a star:
The first one of nightfall.
Making a wish for the sunrise tomorrow.



Maia Kosek, 11
Eugene, Oregon

Free

By **Noor Adatia**

Illustrated by **Lydia Giangregorio**



Noor Adatia, 11
Farmers Branch, Texas



Lydia Giangregorio, 12
Gloucester, Massachusetts

LIFE WAS PERFECT as I ran into my aunt's small and cozy apartment. My three-year-old brother and I stepped into the warm kitchen. As usual, we would plead with our aunt to hand us the frozen noodle packet, but this time it felt different. An unexplained aroma circled the apartment. Our task was to break the noodles into smaller pieces, as they first came in a brick. I carefully pulled the plastic bag and revealed a cream-colored brick. I snatched a light green bowl from the dining table, ready to start my work. My brother, two years younger than I, mimicked all the things I did as we sat on the white, messy floor. He followed my every move, eyeing my hands as I ground the hard brick into the shiny bowl. The crunchy sound echoed. It was magical.

Steam fired in the kitchen as my aunt prepared a delicious meal for my mom. A ray of sun poured into the room, lighting up the white walls and warming my back. It almost seemed as if the couch was enjoying it, too. Elegant animal decorations embroidered the brown pillow on the mahogany couch. Horses galloped across the pillow—for a second—but were only an illusion. I looked down to my tiny fingers and realized I had almost finished breaking the noodles. I tried to reach the counter, but I was unsuccessful. My aunt took the bowl away from me and filled the boiling bowl with the noodles. It was a great feeling as the warm steam touched my chin. The aroma filled my entire body. Some may think it was plain. Ordinary. But to me, it was a pleasure to gobble down that bowl of noodles, in front



I tried to reach the counter, but I was unsuccessful

of the television, watching *Dragon Tales*. Its simplicity just filled me with delight. Indescribable.

I left the apartment, full of content, and skipped along the sidewalk. There

was nothing to worry about. I was loved. I was happy. I was free. The world was a castle, and I was the princess. I headed forward. Life was moving on. And it still is, in a different way... ❁

Book Review

By Rebecca Bihn-Wallace

The London Eye Mystery, by Siobhan Dowd;
David Fickling Books: New York, 2008; \$15.99




Rebecca Bihn-Wallace, 11
Baltimore, Maryland

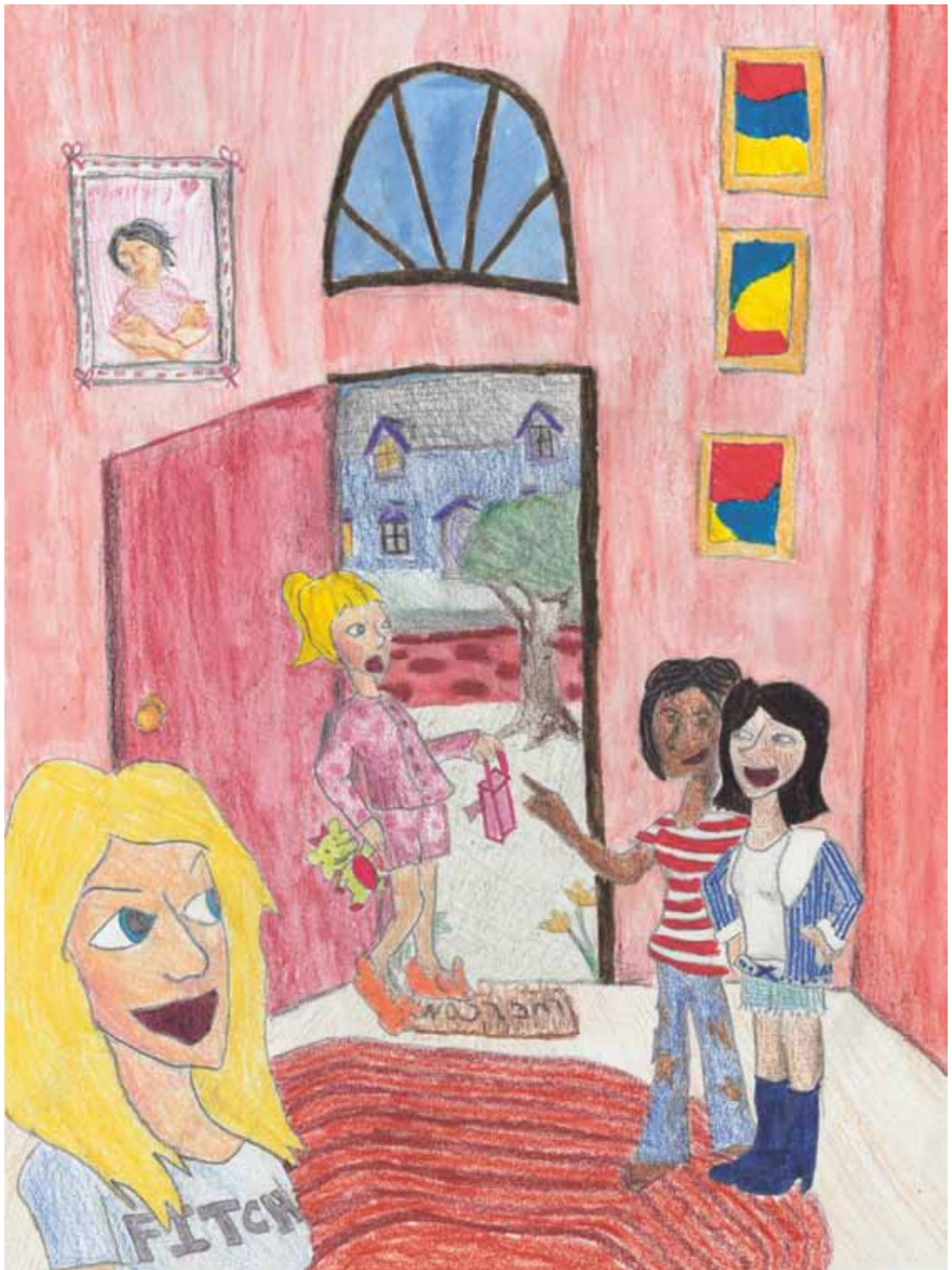
THE LONDON EYE MYSTERY is perfect for any reader who is looking for a spectacular book with an even balance of suspense, warmth, and mystery. Told from the perspective of Ted Sparks, a unique preteen with Asperger's Syndrome, a kind of autism, it is moderately fast-paced, and Siobhan Dowd brings settings and characters to life. Because Ted's brain runs on "a different operating system," as he puts it, his thoughts are quite unusual for someone his age, which tends to be challenging for people around him, since he struggles to connect with people and their interests. His intense fascination with weather and numbers makes his family members a little exasperated! But when a visit from his Aunt Gloria and her teenage son, Salim, suddenly becomes suspenseful when Salim disappears off the London Eye (a popular Ferris wheel in London), it will take all of Ted's unusual brainpower and his older sister Kat's determination to solve the who, what, where, when, why, and how of this breathtaking mystery.

One of the most compelling elements of this novel was the sense of familiarity with the characters. By the second or third chapter, the reader feels as though he or she could easily know the Sparks family in person. Every chapter had me wishing for more, and I wanted to make sure Kat and Ted don't get in too

much trouble trying to find Salim. Kat and Ted are probably the most humorous of the characters. Kat is reckless, impulsive, and frequently in motion. Ted is proper, straightforward, and unknowingly funny. He calls himself a “neek”—halfway between a nerd and a geek. But both his sharp memory and Kat’s wild instincts are needed to find Salim and restore peace to the family. Only they can really think straight about Salim’s disappearance because Aunt Gloria and her ex-husband are in hysterics and Kat and Ted’s mother and father are really too frightened and worked up to think strategically in terms of where Salim might be. Kat and Ted make a good, determined, mystery-solving team. As the story goes on, they learn to understand each other better and be more tolerant of one another.

I liked this book not only because of its strong plot but because I could relate to autism, since my older brother has it. Also, it helps spread awareness among young people about the disorder. In some ways my brother is different from Ted; he is less interested in mathematics, facts, and numbers; however, like Ted, my brother likes weather. Also like Ted, he sometimes takes things a little too literally. For example, when a sportscaster once stated that a certain athlete had “baseball in his blood,” my brother grew upset because he thought it meant that the man had a disease. When Mrs. Sparks says that Kat has Mr. Sparks wrapped around his finger, Ted imagines “...Kat wrapped round and round, over and over again, around Dad’s finger.” This problem of taking things literally can be both humorous and frustrating. My brother and I are similar to Kat and Ted in that, even though we get on each other’s nerves, we are close. This novel helped me realize that I wasn’t the only person who had a sibling with autism.

Overall, I recommend this compelling, funny, and fast-paced mystery for young people ages nine and up. It is a wonderful mixture of humor and reality, and the wonky but loving relationship between siblings. 



Ally looked down at herself and realized she was the only one wearing pajamas

Wear Your Pajamas

By **Julia Condon**

Illustrated by **Sophia Allen**

OF COURSE SHE was going to go.

Ally Paulson invited to Mallory Freshman's birthday bash? It was outrageous.

Ally brushed her dirty-blond bangs out of her eyes as she dialed the number Mallory had given her on her phone to RSVP to Mallory's party. It was just a dream come true. Ally had come from being an unknown nothing to being one of Mallory Freshman's friends! Mallory Freshman—the most popular girl in the whole school!

"I'll be there!" Ally squealed, finding that was all she could say to the answering machine. She was too nervous to leave a long, thoughtful message.

Ally plopped down on her bed, overwhelmed with excitement. She was actually going to be hanging out with the popular crowd!

Brrrring!! Brrrring!!!!

Ally's pink polka-dotted, old-fashioned-style telephone rang on her side table.

She picked up the phone and merrily squealed, "Hello?"

"Ally." It was Rachel, Ally's best friend since preschool. She was a really nice person but too dorky to be seen around. "Movie night at the church this Saturday, you in?"

Ally wanted to say yes; the church always chose good movies for them to watch, but Saturday would be Mallory's birthday bash. She had to reject the offer. "Sorry, Rachel, but I already have something planned."



Julia Condon, 13
Easton, Massachusetts



Sophia Allen, 12
Brockport, New York

"What?" Rachel asked curiously, always having to be a part of everyone's business.

"Mallory Freshman's birthday bash." Ally answered in the most arrogant way she could, as though she'd been invited to dine with the Queen of England.

"Mallory Freshman?!" Rachel exclaimed. "Holy smokes!"

"Yeah," Ally replied in an I'm-too-cool-for-you kind of way. She could just imagine Rachel's jaw dropping, her almond-colored eyes large in surprise.

"Well," Rachel chirped happily, "maybe I'll be invited next time and we can car-pool!"

Ally didn't know what possessed her to be so mean all of a sudden, but all she could think of to reply to that was, "Don't expect to be invited to a party like *this* anytime soon."

With that, Ally Paulson, newest popular girl, hung up on her nerdy friend.

FRIDAY NIGHT, the night before the party, Ally got an instant message from Ruby, one of Mallory's best friends. It said, "Ally, Mallory told me to inform you to wear pajamas on Saturday. There's going to be a pajama contest and she didn't want you to feel left out," followed by a smiley face.

Ally received the message after Ruby had logged out, so she just made a mental note to find some pajamas for Saturday.

FINALLY, Saturday night came. Ally wore her pink polka-dotted button-up silk PJs with matching shorts and a

pink robe. She even managed to dig out an old pair of bunny slippers.

She thought she might be going too far, but she knew that she'd win the contest now!

WHEN ALLY arrived at the door to Mallory's house, she could feel the base from the party music and hear screaming kids. Her heart pounded nervously to the beat of the music.

Whatever it takes to fit in with the right people, Ally told herself.

When Ally was just about to walk in, she could hear a few girls whisper, "She's here!"

When she opened the door, the room fell quiet except for the loud rap music coming from the basement. Everyone stayed silent for a few more seconds and then began bursting out in laughter, Mallory Freshman among all of them.

Ally looked down at herself and realized, right then and there, she was the only one wearing pajamas. She felt her face grow hot and red and then ran out the front door before everyone could see her cry. She remembered her father saying, "Don't let the bad guys see you sweat." In this case, she didn't want the bad guys to see her cry.

Ally ran up and down the curb and then finally sat down in a nice place about a quarter of a mile away from the party.

She could feel a sharp pain in her stomach, replacing her tingling excitement she felt earlier, and began wishing she could just sprout wings and take off somewhere

else—somewhere other than where she was.

“Ally!” She heard Mallory’s voice from about 200 feet up the block. “Ally!”

Mallory drew closer and closer, accelerating and then slowing down as she neared Ally.

Ally hid her tear-stained face in her pajama pants, not letting the bad guy see her cry.

“Ally.” Mallory sat down beside the sad, blond-haired girl in the pink PJs. “It was all Ruby’s idea. Seriously. And we all thought it was a joke and you’d laugh about it like us.”

“Stop making excuses for yourself,” Ally spat back, fighting back her tears, turning her head away to insure their eyes wouldn’t meet.

“Al-ly!” Mallory whined, emphasizing the “ly.” “You’re making me feel like the bad guy here!”

“Well then,” Ally looked up and wiped her face with her sleeve, daring herself to look into the eyes of Mallory, “you feel like what you are.”

With that, Ally took off down the curb, far enough away to call her mom and be driven home without Mallory trying to come back to make more excuses for herself. Mallory stood there watching. Ally dared not look back, but she could feel Mallory’s ice-blue eyes piercing into the back of her head.

“I’m so sorry, Al,” Ally’s mother told her as they rode out of Clear Meadow estates, leaving Mallory’s house far behind them. Mrs. Paulson looked back at Ally through the rearview mirror.

Ally didn’t know what to say, so she just kept looking out the window.

Then Ally’s mother struck an idea like a miner finding a jackpot of diamonds. “Why don’t you go to the church movie with Rachel?”

Ally thought that was a great idea, but Rachel wouldn’t want to see her. She just grunted, “Yeah, I guess so.”


Ally and her mom arrived before the previews, when everyone was just settling in. Rachel was sitting in the front row. As soon as she saw Ally, she beckoned for her to go sit with her.

Ally was surprised. She knew she didn’t deserve for Rachel to be nice to her.

“You’re not mad?” Ally asked when she took her seat next to Rachel.

“Of course not,” Rachel whispered. “Everyone makes mistakes, and I know you didn’t mean what you said.”

Ally smiled as the movie began. Looking around she knew she was right where she belonged. She didn’t need to be friends with Mallory Freshman.

As she scanned her eyes around the room, her grin grew wider as she noticed she fit in perfectly; the whole group was wearing their pajamas. 

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