

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Leigh McNeil-Taboika, age 13, from "Infinite Field," page 17

WORKING FOR SPARKLE

Suzy wants to adopt a kitten, but her parents say no

THE ISLAND OF MYSTERIES

Will Dave be the first explorer to survive a night on the island?

Also: Illustrations by Emma T. Capps and Dominic Nedzelskyi

MAY/JUNE 2011

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

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MAY / JUNE 2011

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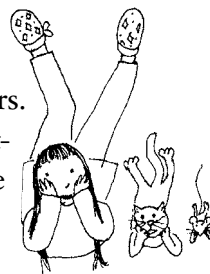
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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for more than 38 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 website: 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: Canadian artist Leigh McNeil-Taboika was inspired to draw by her two older sisters, Viktoria (Vik) and Allison (Ali), who are both great artists. When she's not drawing, Leigh enjoys animation, reading, playing netball, photography, baking and cooking, math and science, and her wonderful Weimaraner dog, Molly.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

It's always a delight to open the crisp white pages of your magazine and indulge in a few well-written words. Today was a snow day and everything felt perfect as I sipped tea, ate biscotti, and reveled in the amazing stories between your gorgeously illustrated covers. Ever since I got a subscription to your magazine I've wanted to submit my work, and I can't say how many times I've started a story but never came up with a satisfying ending! My fourteenth birthday rolled around, and amidst the fun I realized I couldn't submit to *Stone Soup* anymore. All I can do now is regret that I never mailed anything to you, but, like you haven't heard it already, this is a truly special magazine. I loved the January/February 2011 issue, especially the moving story "Freedom Run," by Olivia Smit (she's fantastic). To all the aspiring authors, illustrators, poets, and book reviewers out there, never stop!

SARAH DAHL, 14
Newton, Massachusetts

Stone Soup is my favorite magazine. I liked it so much that it inspired me to create my own magazine that I send out for The Happy Birthday Club. I send it out to nine of my friends and family members.

RILEY MAYES, 9
Harpswell, Maine

I am an eleven-year-old girl who loves to write. I saw your magazine and thought, That's a great way for children to express their ideas through writing, maybe I should try it out! I hand-wrote a draft, edited and revised it, and then typed it on the computer. I edited it again and again, printed it out, and kept revising it.

PARKER JAY-PACHIRAT, 11
Brooklyn, New York

I love your magazine! One day me, my mom, and my sister were shopping for things to take on a long road trip. I found two old, used *Stone Soups* (September/October 2003 and November/December 2004) and I got them. My favorite story in those whole two magazines was "A Window by the Sea" in the September/October 2003 issue, by Alison Citron. I loved the story!!! Dara Green did a fantastic job on the drawings too!!! Thank you for publishing this great work and so many others!!!

MAIA JANSSEN, 8
Iowa City, Iowa

I live in Bologna, in Italy, but that does not prevent me from reading *Stone Soup*. I am Italian but I have been studying English since I was three years old and I have been subscribed to your magazine since 2007. I really enjoy your magazine.

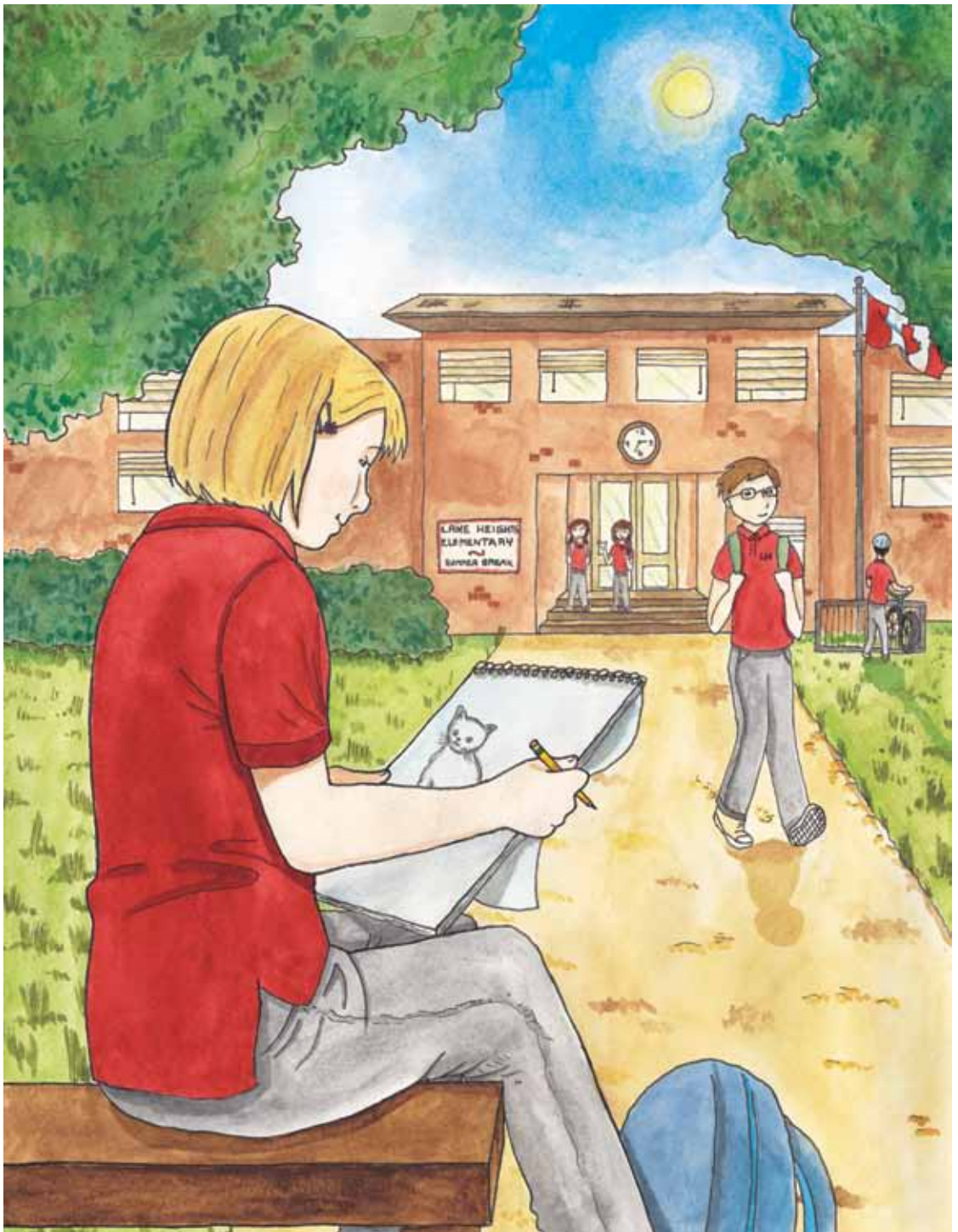
VIRGINIA BERNARDI, 11
Bologna, Italy

Recently, a cousin of mine on my mother's side contacted me. I had never met her before, but she is my age and we have since begun an email friendship. She never knew before that my mother had the drawings my grandfather made. She was really touched by "The Unfinished Jester," since it is our mutual grandfather, and now we have a new connection. I bought her a subscription to *Stone Soup* so we could share all the wonderful stories and art you publish.

EMMA T. CAPPS, 13
San Carlos, California

Emma's story, "The Unfinished Jester" appeared in the May/June 2010 issue of Stone Soup. Her latest illustrations are on pages 4 and 7 of this issue.

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.



Suzy added the finishing touch and smiled

Working for Sparkle

By **Allison Armstrong**

Illustrated by **Emma T. Capps**

THERE WAS NO NOISE. Everything was silent except for birds chirping and leaves rustling. Off in the distance a bell rang. Suddenly, noise erupted as students came running out of Lake Heights Elementary eager to begin their summer. Only one child didn't run out screaming and yelling. This child was an eight-year-old girl named Suzy. Suzy was an average-looking girl with cropped blond hair to her shoulders. She was doodling in her notebook, ignoring all the screams of delight around her. Suzy added the finishing touch and smiled, admiring the kitten looking up at her from her notebook. Pocketing it, Suzy skipped down the sidewalk towards home, daydreaming all the while. She thought of what she and her best friend, Emily, would do for the summer.

Suzy was so busy thinking about swimming and playing soccer that she didn't realize where she was going. Suzy snapped out of her trance as she heard a large truck go by. Looking around at her surroundings, she gulped. This definitely wasn't her friendly neighborhood, but uptown. How on earth did I get here? she thought to herself nervously. The truck that had rumbled so noisily past her stopped at a building. On the side of the building she read: Humane S-so-ciety." Suzy frowned. Humane Society? What's that? she wondered curiously. Well, I need a telephone to call Mom and Dad, and it looks pretty friendly, so I guess there's only one way to find out. Suzy walked over to the doors and, opening them, went inside.

It was like her dream come true. Every inch of the room was



Allison Armstrong, 13
Timmins, Ontario, Canada



Emma T. Capps, 13
San Carlos, California

filled with cats and dogs meowing and barking. "Wow," she whispered in awe. Looking down the rows of the cages, one particular animal caught her eye. It was a tiny, adorable calico kitten that was looking at her pleadingly. Suzy walked over to its cage and reached out her hand.

"Hello! Can I help you?" She spun around, an elderly lady was walking toward her with a big smile on her face.

"No! I mean... yes!" said Suzy. "Er, do you have a telephone I could use?"

"Certainly," said the woman, indicating a pay phone on the wall.

Suzy thanked her and placed a quarter in the phone. A few minutes later she hung up, relieved her parents were home and coming to get her. While she waited, the lady told Suzy all about the Humane Society. Suzy then went back to the kitten to look at it admiringly. It softly emitted a tiny meow. An idea suddenly occurred to her... Suzy saw her parents' car outside and whispered to the kitten, "See you soon."

"Please!" cried Suzy for the fifth time in a row.

"For the last time, no!" her mother exclaimed.

"You're not old enough, Suze," her father said gently. They were back at Suzy's house and she had just asked them about the calico kitten.

"Would you please turn it down a notch!" snapped Suzy's older brother, Mark, as he came into the kitchen wearing his headphones. "Rock music is much more interesting than an argument about

a stupid kitten, and I can't even hear it with my headphones on!"

"Yes," said Suzy's mother, "this argument is over." Suzy burst into tears.

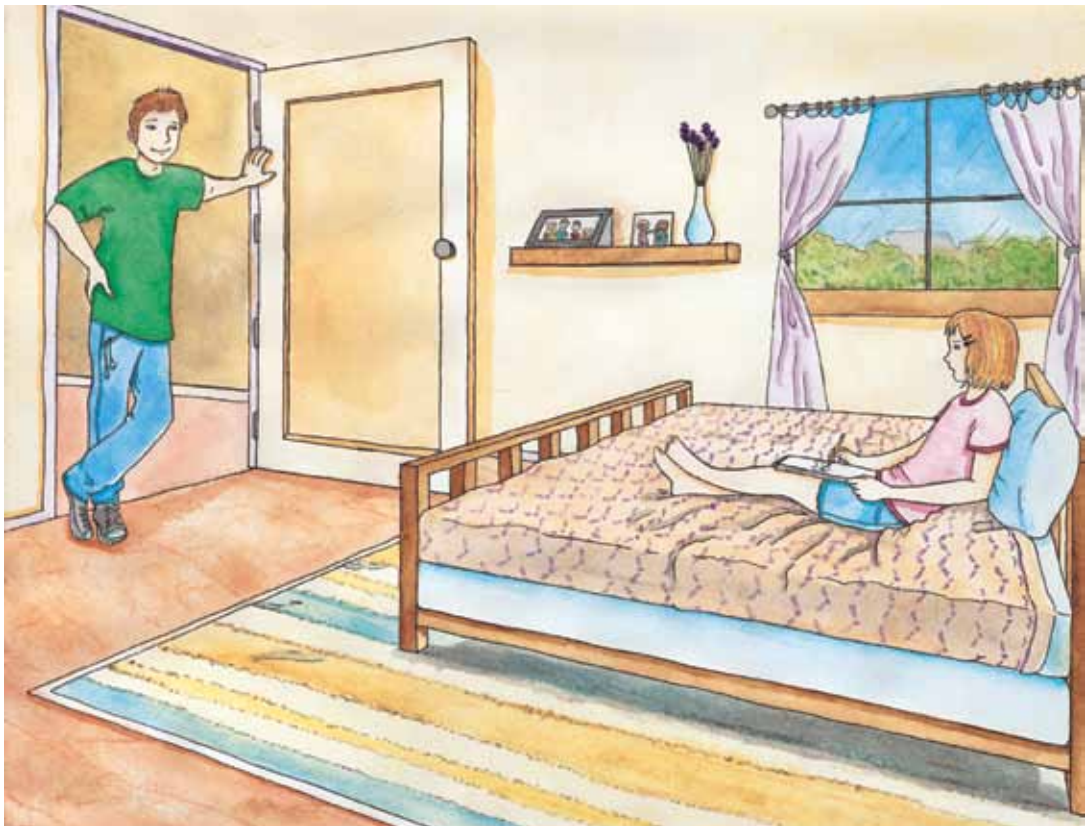
"That lady told me what they do with unwanted animals and you don't even care!" she sobbed. Running up to her room, she slammed the door and threw herself on her bed. She stayed in her room the rest of the evening.

The next day, Suzy told Emily about what happened the night before. Instead of acting angry at Suzy's parents, however, Emily smiled.

"Don't worry, Suzy, I know how you can get that kitten."

That night, Suzy set to work on Emily's idea. By doing chores around the house, she would show she was responsible enough for a kitten. Unfortunately, her parents had no idea what she was up to and just thought she was being helpful. After Suzy finished cleaning bathrooms, doing dishes, and washing windows, she was exhausted. Surprised, she happily accepted the money her father gave her with a proud smile. She did this every day until she had enough money to buy: a litter box, one bag of cat food, and some sand.

Suzy knew her parents wouldn't keep paying her to do housework, so she and Emily hung up posters around town reading: Keen to Be Clean? Call Suzy at 268-5021. No one (to Suzy's disappointment) hired her after they found out her age. Then one day her luck changed. After listening on the phone for a while, Suzy jumped up and yelled, "I'm hired!" With



"Go away, Mark!" she shouted

that she ran out of the house and went to Baker Street to meet her customer.

Trying to ignore the butterflies in her stomach, Suzy rang the bell. The door opened and Suzy gasped. It was the elderly woman from the Humane Society!

"I know you," she said in surprise, "you're the woman who..."

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Wood," said the woman. "Are you Suzy? The one who's supposed to clean my house?"

Suzy nodded. She noticed how Mrs. Wood's eyes seemed to sparkle and felt she could trust this lady with the kind smile. She blurted out the whole story.

Mrs. Wood listened carefully, then nodded as Suzy finished.

"It sounds like you've been working up a storm dear, so please accept this and save that little kitten," she said, taking Suzy's hand and pressing a twenty-dollar bill into her palm. Suzy looked at it. There was even enough money to acquire a squeaky toy, plus everything else she needed.

"B-but I haven't cleaned anything for you!"

"Oh, don't worry about that, something tells me you'd be a lovely owner for that calico kitten."

When Suzy got home Mark was in the

kitchen listening to his iPod and eating a bag of Oreos. Taking one earphone out, he said, "Hey, kitten-obsessed."

Glaring at her brother, Suzy sat down and grabbed an Oreo.

After watching his sister eat for a few seconds, Mark asked, "What's with the new cleaning frenzy?"

"For your information, I am doing this to try and get a kitten!" Suzy snapped.

"Figures," he muttered.

It was later, Suzy had just finished supper and was lying on her bed doodling in her notebook. Suddenly, the door flew open and the cat's perfect whisker in the drawing turned into a long jagged line. "Go away, Mark!" she shouted.

"But I have a surprise for you."

"I said go away, I don't need to hear any more rude comments."

"Fine. Don't come shopping with me then."

"Shopping?" Suzy loved shopping with her brother because he treated her more like a friend than an irritating little sister.

"Well, I guess I *could* go."

"Great, then I'll meet you in the car." He started to walk out of her room, then stuck his head back in. "Oh, and don't be a slowpoke... slowpoke!"

Suzy sighed, then grabbed a sweater and headed out the door. Mark was already in the car and he honked the horn impatiently.

After a short drive, they pulled into a familiar-looking building.

"Huh?" said Suzy, confused. "Why are we at the Humane Society?"

Mark turned around in his seat to look at her. "After you told me why you were doing your 'cleaning frenzy,' I managed to persuade Mom and Dad to reconsider the kitten."

"But why would you care if I got my 'stupid kitten,' when all you did was make fun of me about it?" Suzy asked sourly.

"Just because I bug you doesn't mean I don't care about you." When he saw Suzy's raised eyebrow he added, "Look, all I'm trying to say is, you deserve a reward for all that hard work, and what could be better than your lifelong dream?"

Suzy grinned. "Wow, Mark, I never saw you think this deeply before!"

"Hey! Now I..."


"I'm kidding!" she laughed. "Now come on, I want to show you the one I want!"

While Mark was driving the kitten and its savior home, he remarked, "I can think of a good name for your pet: Obsession!"

Suzy rolled her eyes while cradling her calico. What would be a good name? She remembered Mrs. Wood's eyes and how the windows looked after they were polished. Suzy smiled.

"Sparkle, my kitten is going to be named Sparkle."

Mark craned his neck, trying to see the calico. "Doesn't look very sparkly to me."

Suzy ignored her brother and focused on what was important. For one thing, she realized that things weren't always as they seemed. Take Mark, for example. And for another thing, the saying "hard work pays off" really did turn out to be true. She smiled the rest of the way home. 

The World Apart

By **Ash Berger**

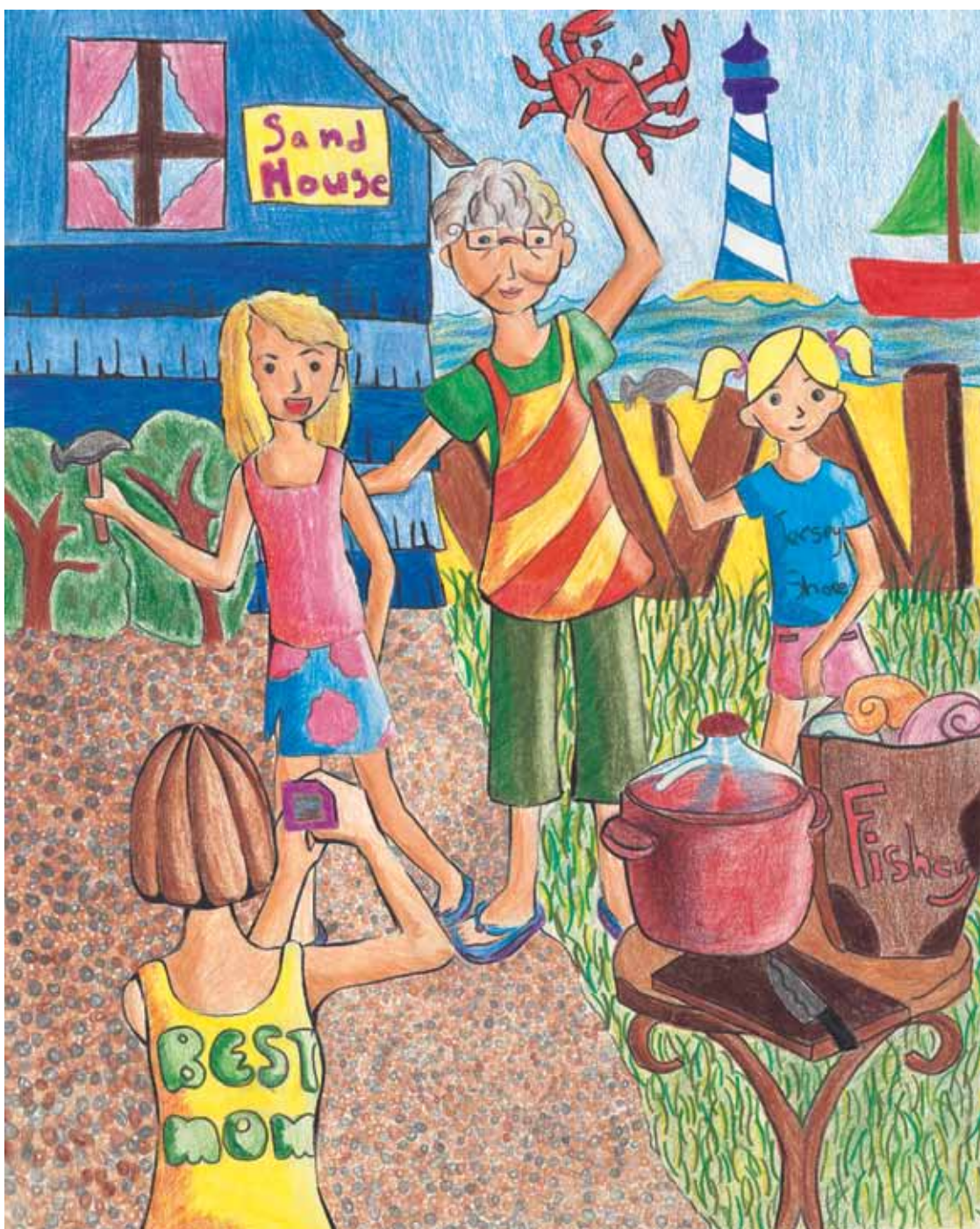
The trail is rough,
But I absorb it all,
Every bump, dip and curve,
And let it become me.
My hands rattle on the bars of my bike,
As I take on this course.
With speed and energy I never knew.

The scenery astounds.
A stream tries to keep up,
The trees watch from above,
The grass plays at my ankles,
The birds cheer me on.
As I try to blend,
Into the scenery.

The burn in my thighs,
The wind in my face,
The rustle of my hair,
The fast steady motion,
Is the rhythmic beat,
Of the world apart.



Ash Berger, 12
Concord, North Carolina



My mom gets the camera out, ready to get the perfect shot for our summer photo book

No Time to Twirl

By **Genevieve Anderle**

Illustrated by **Athena Gerasoulis**

“Ewww! ITS GUTS and internal juices are dripping down the driveway!” my sister would screech in a squeaky six-year-old voice.

“Yeah, and now they’re dripping on you!” I said, while shoving half of the dead corpse in her face.

“Girls, stop playing with our dinner. We have to eat those,” my grandmom would say. My sister would be temporarily quiet and listen, while I would get the knife, hammer, and cutting board out. Ready to kill crabs.

Every summer we go down to the Jersey Shore. We do a gazillion things there. Go to the boardwalk, the beach, the pool, buy hermit crabs, go out to dinner almost every night, go for bike rides and so much more. Although the restaurants are very good and I wind up eating too much and regretting it, those meals are never the perfect meal. The perfect meal is one that is homemade. It takes all day to make it and it never lets you down. It always tastes the same, smells the same, and looks the same. I know this sounds cheesy, but it is because it really is made with love. My grandmother stands there creating the gravy all day long, adding spices, continually stirring, bringing that wooden spoon to her mouth, tasting it, and adding some more spices, and after about five hours it is perfect.

Early in the morning, on a day we’ve been waiting for, my sister, my pop-pop, and I get in his blue Escalade and drive to the fish market. The ride is long, but my sister and I sit in those large leather seats and talk about how good the macaroni is



Genevieve Anderle, 13
Louisville, Kentucky



Athena Gerasoulis, 12
Edison, New Jersey

going to be and thinking of good names to give to the crabs before we kill them. After hours of driving, or at least that is what it seems to us, we eagerly hop out of the car. As soon as we walk into the store a strong whiff of sea enters our nostrils; the smell of so much salt stings our noses. My pop-pop walks to the front counter to secure our dinner while my sister and I usually play-fight with the figurines of shrimp and lobsters. After we get bored with that, we can be found pressing our noses against the glass of the lobster tanks. If one squirms just a little, we both scream. Just as quickly we are shushed by the creepy old guy in the back corner cutting off fish heads. Usually by that time my pop-pop has finished up with our “live” purchase. The hard-shell crabs are in a gigantic brown paper bag that wiggles every ten seconds and has wet splotches of what we think is pee.

The ride home is longer. Olivia and I sneakily turn up the AC and point the fans at each other and turn the seat warmers on and off. These games cause lots of laughter, which often gets us yelled at because Pop-Pop isn’t fond of giddiness. The need to be silent causes even more laughter. But we would be startled to silence when the bag in the back rustled.

This past year, when we got home, my grandmom and my mom were waiting on the driveway with a large knife, tongs, hammer, cutting board, and a huge pot. We immediately got into our positions; Olivia and I would grab a hammer, and my grandmom would get a crab out of the

moving bag, sometimes bringing out several as they hold onto each other for dear life or like monkeys in a barrel. My mom gets the camera out, ready to get the perfect shot for our summer photo book. My sister and I decided to name the first crab Alvin; we always name the crabs in alphabetic order. We felt bad for the Y and Z, since we only ordered 24 crabs, leaving two crabs to share four letters. My grandmom would carefully line up the knife on the crab, right between the eyes; he knew his destiny and attempted freedom to no avail. I usually had the honor of going first, since my sister was too chicken. I smacked that hammer down like a fly swatter on an annoying mosquito, splitting the crab in half in one swoop. My grandmom would pick up the crab halves and toss them into the pot. Although they were dead they still managed to move a tiny bit, which fascinated me. We continued on killing them: Betty, Carlos, Daniel, Emma. Ryan would go run behind our mom and hug her legs while my grandmom would grab the crabs and the execution continued. Swoosh. Right down the middle. It’s quick and painless. After some time, I was brave enough to pick up a crab half. I remember being so proud. Showing it off like a badge of honor. Dancing with it and shoving it in my sister’s face, saying, “Hey, Olivia... here comes the crab!” and “Ahhh, there’s a crab on your head!” By that time, I was almost on the ground laughing, and she was crying, which only made me want to tease her more. But, as usual, I would get scolded and drop the crab back in pot. After kill-

ing our last crab, Yolanda-Zack, my grandmother would walk straight to the laundry room sink to begin the cleaning.

The cleaning takes a long time; we disappear, leaving my grandmother to do the dirty work. She has to peel the shells off and get the yuck out. Then, in a big pot she puts crushed tomatoes, oil, salt, pepper, garlic, onions, basil, oregano, a little sugar, and of course, the crabs. Being a good Italian cook, she doesn't use exact measurements. She lets that cook, stirring when necessary. After a while, the smell in that kitchen is indescribable. She says that's all she does but I don't believe her, there is some culinary magic going on. The "gravy" goes on to be poured over linguini and the crabs get served up in a tempting pile of deliciousness.

While all the cleaning and cooking is going on in the kitchen, my sister, brother, and I are most likely in the pool, swimming and diving and jumping. We have contests to see who could stay under water longest, touch the bottom with your hand, and sometimes we even do shows with flips and handstands. We make up crazy jumps, like The Walking Person, where you just walk into the pool. We swim until we have purple lips, chattering teeth, bloodshot eyes, and pruney fingers and toes. Our fun has to stop when it is time to bathe and get ready for dinner.


Oddly enough, we all dress in white. It is inevitable we will all be wearing crab gravy down our shirts by the time our bellies are full. The reason for the white? That night, it's a washing machine full of

bleach. If the clothes have color, you can't bleach the stains out.

We all pile into our chairs, the macaroni steaming from a blue-and-white bowl with a sunflower pattern on the bottom. We eat like kings. We scoop a ton of spaghetti on our plates, cover it with grated Locatelli cheese and eat and eat and eat. I just use my fork as a forklift and try to get more in my mouth than there is room for. My mom insists I twirl my spaghetti with a fork and spoon but I am too hungry for that. No time to twirl.

By the time we see that sunflower pattern on the bottom of the bowl we are all full and ready for a nap, but we have to clean up. There are piles of pots and pans as tall as the Chicago skyline. My grandmother, being the best grandmother, usually excuses my sister and me from cleaning duties to go to our room to watch TV.

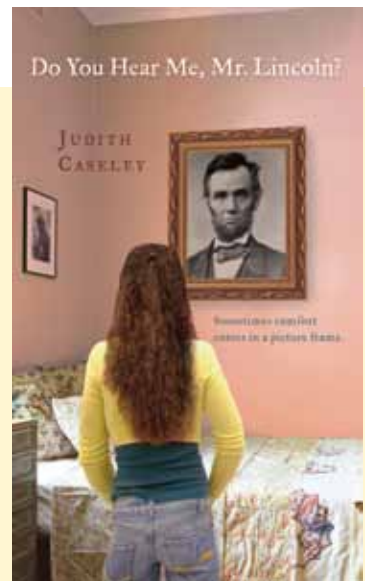
My grandmother is efficient. She has that kitchen spotless by 9:30. Every evening, after we eat, she spends the rest of the night cleaning. Clearing the table, loading the dishwasher, mopping, and sweeping with her Swiffer WetJet. She will be in there alone, just cleaning, sort of like she has a bizarre cleaning disorder. She can't go to bed unless the kitchen is spotless. Sometimes I try to help her but when I think it is clean, she gets out the Windex again.

This meal may not be for everyone, but my Italian family, at least four generations back, can close their eyes, smell, taste, and see the smiles around our dinner table as we enjoy our crabs and macaroni. 

Book Review

By Nayamah Kolliiegbo

Do You Hear Me, Mr. Lincoln? by Judith Caseley;
Graphia Books: New York, 2009; \$6.99



Nayamah Kolliiegbo, 13
Willingboro, New Jersey

LIFE HAS CHANGED for Sierra Goodman after the death of her father. Her grieving mother has gone into a house-cleaning rage, her brother is too young to interpret how she feels and suffers nightmares, and her friends are clueless about how she feels. With no one to turn to, Sierra gets comfort from a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. It was a meaningful gift her father wanted her to have. Lincoln seems to be the only one to hear Sierra's pain and help her move on. That's why Sierra talked to the portrait about what she felt, even though it couldn't talk back.


After her father died, Sierra impatiently longed to return to her normal routine, but her mother resisted. She wanted to have family time again instead of just watching her mother clean all day. Sierra was very close to her father. Sierra's entire family was grieved. Her Aunt Rose said that God took a diamond away from them. Moreover, the relationship between Sierra and her best friend, Eli, was growing apart. Sierra didn't know why. It got worse when she found out that she'd have to act in a play as Mary Todd Lincoln while Eli acted as Abraham Lincoln. The play was like a reminder to Sierra when they acted the death of Lincoln. It reminded her of her father's death. Both he and

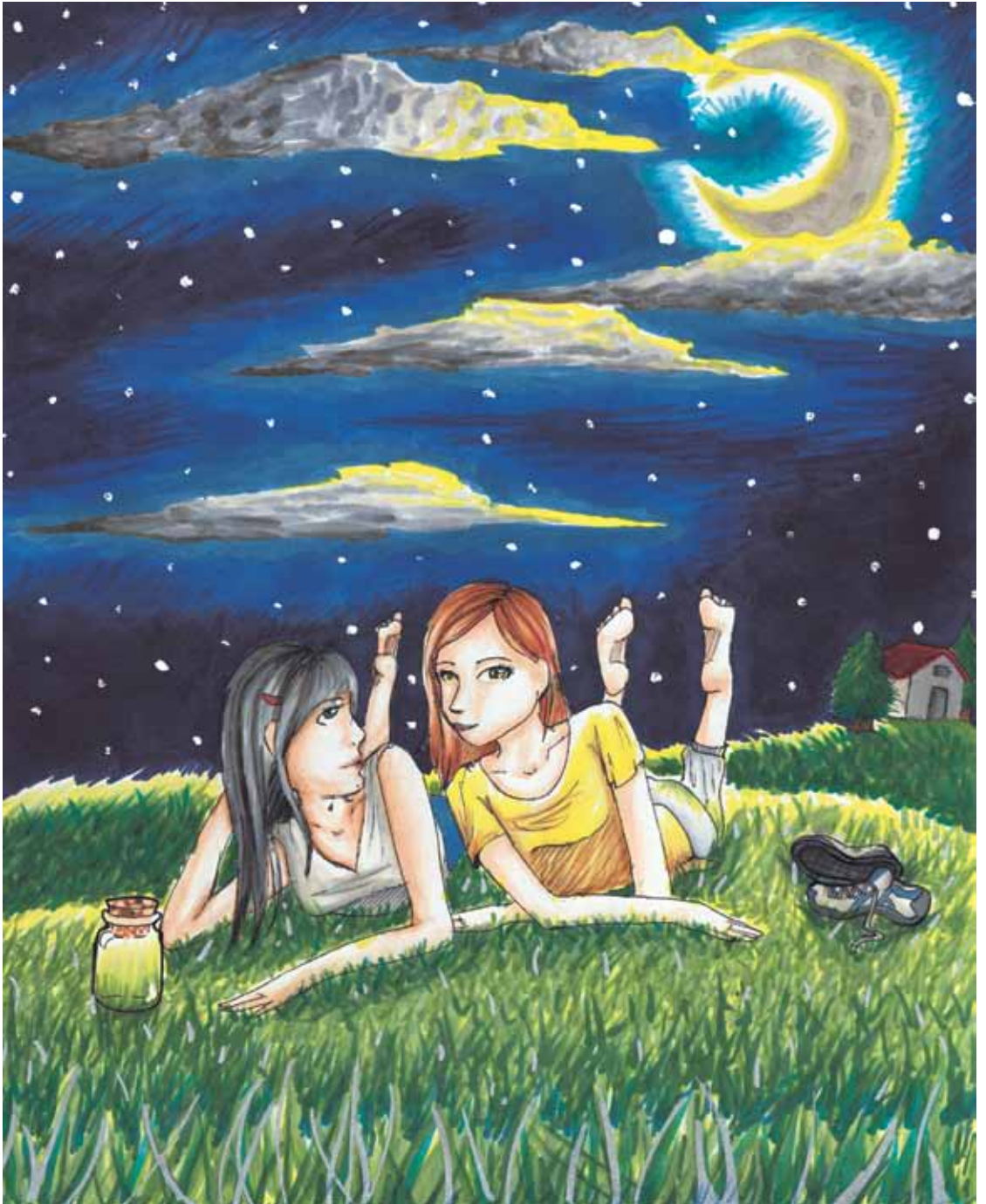
Lincoln died unexpectedly, even though her father was not shot.

As I read about Sierra's problems, I felt sad and would hate it if I were in that situation. However, I've felt tragedy too. I was quite young when my grandfather died, and I'd been very close to him. It hurt me a lot to lose him because I was always able to express myself to him. One day, like a missile flying by, my grandfather was gone. It had happened suddenly and it was shocking. Similar to Sierra, I had no one to get comfort from. So I wrote in my diary for comfort because I felt relieved being able to express myself. Sierra, however, got comfort from a portrait. We can relate because we both know how to find comfort at times when we're down.

My personal favorite part of the story was the play about Lincoln's death. I liked it because it was for me the high point of the story. In that scene Sierra really expressed herself a lot. The play related to Sierra because Lincoln's death reminded her of her father's death. Both of their legs hung off the gurney because they were so tall. Sierra lost her father, and Mary Todd Lincoln lost her husband. They both lost people who were important to them.

Another aspect of the story I liked is the way the story shows how diverse the world is today. In the story, Sierra's mother is Cuban and her father is Jewish. They are bringing two cultures together with no discrimination. I like this. It makes me feel that the world is changing. People can join from different parts of the world and get along.

Sierra Goodman's grief is one I will always remember because I have never seen somebody overcome their grief so strongly. When I read this incredible story all I could think is "WOW." It is a great piece of literature. I enjoyed this book of a long journey of sadness. I learned that there are challenges you face in life but you have to overcome. I think it's the best book I've ever read. 



We are like a grain of sand on an endless beach

Infinite Field

By Amanda Kneppel

Illustrated by Leigh McNeil-Taboika

A SOFT WHISPER echoed off the walls.
“Jess!”

I jerked into consciousness, tense and trembling. The door was closed. The clock ticked as usual. The lopsided calendar above my mahogany dresser showed the same picture of a sun sinking behind the mountains that had been there when I went to bed.

Must be a dream. I leaned back into my pillow to close my eyes again.

“Jessica Stark, wake up.”

Silvia?

A light tap sounded on the window pane. I shifted my position. In the darkness I could make out a small, round face with long black hair pressing its nose against the half-open window.

It was Silvia!

I stood, tore off my blanket, and pulled the window up all the way. What on earth was Silvia doing here at—I glanced at the lit clock—12:37 in the morning?

“Hi,” Silvia whispered.

“H-hi,” I whispered back. “What are you doing here so late?”

Silvia glanced behind her shoulder and said, “I couldn’t sleep and thought you and I could go exploring.”

Exploring? I suddenly felt afraid and remembered how quiet the house was. “I can’t come out now.”

“Why not? It would be a good experience to explore the unknown—at night, that is.” Silvia pushed a stray wisp of hair be-



Amanda Kneppel, 13
Bloomington, New Jersey



Leigh McNeil-Taboika, 13
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

hind her ear. "Come on, please?"

"Are you sure it's safe?"

"Sure it is! Just crawl out the window. I'll help you."

"But what if..."

"It's fine. Don't worry. We'll only be out for a little while." Silvia danced a little happy dance before whispering, "We can catch fireflies and watch the moonlight dance on the water."

It *did* sound pretty neat. But I couldn't. Night was scary. Night was unpredictable.

"Just jump down. It's easy," Silvia whispered again.

"Are you sure?" I threw on some shoes.

"Of course I'm sure, silly!" She reached out a hand. "Here, I'll help you out."

I didn't know what led me to grasp her hand, but after a matter of a few seconds I was outside my window under a bright moon, Silvia beside me.

"Follow me," Silvia whispered softly as she pulled my hand.

I followed her through a small path cutting between two pine trees which I had never noticed before. "Where are we going?"

"I'll show you."

A silver moon wore a scarf of lacy clouds as I followed Silvia through the path, shivering all the way. A chilly wind rippled through the trees that also sent swirls through the pond. I was so enchanted by the sight that it left me with a new desire to see the world at night. To hear the world at night. Maybe to even feel the world at night.

"Look, Jess!" Silvia pulled a branch

aside with her delicate hand, revealing a huge field that stretched for miles, looking full of undiscovered wonder and mystery eager to be known. I could see fireflies blink in the magical blue night. I could even feel the sudden warmth of this field wrap its arms around me. It was a beautiful sight.

Silvia scampered into the field and then turned, a sparkle in her eye. "I call this the Infinite Field."

I tucked a strand of hair behind my ear, too caught up in the beauty of the grass glistening in the moon-drenched light to answer my friend.

"Come on," Silvia urged. She skipped back to where I stood and pulled me deeper into it. "We can catch some fireflies!"

'tis the night of the fireflies. A soft giggle escaped my lips. Yes, it was their night, but it was also going to be my night.

The carpet of grass seemed to wave to me, almost beckoning me to come and play. The stars above seemed to wink at me, almost assuring me that I would be safe in their sight. How could I refuse and leave when wonder was going to unfold before my eyes?

Without any more hesitation, I pulled off my shoes and followed my friend barefoot into the field, feeling the sudden coolness of the grass beneath my feet.

One after another, the fireflies twinkled and came within catching distance. Occasionally, I caught one and then let it fly high into the sky, blinking its farewell. But otherwise, they would wink and dis-

appear completely.

"Twelve... thirteen... fourteen..." I listened to Silvia's soft voice in the quiet night as she collected the fireflies in a small glass jar she had brought from home. I would've never thought of bringing something like that along!

And I started thinking.

How did she seem to know every detail of nature? She was the type of girl who would stop and smell the flowers even if she was in a rush to get somewhere. I have never cared to take the time to look closely at nature. But Silvia? It was her enjoyment—her delight—to explore the beauty around her. I would have never imagined myself underneath stars I could almost touch with my finger, or see the vivid picture of a moon casting pools of water on the grass. It was all too perfect to be real. But it *was* real.

I suddenly jolted from my thoughts when Silvia started lifting the glowing jar above her head. "I want you to say 'now' when I nod at you, OK?"

"OK," I agreed. Curious, I watched her eyes twinkle excitedly. I wouldn't miss this for the world... whatever it was!

Once Silvia adjusted her hand to twist the cap off the jar, she nodded her head eagerly.

"Now!" I shouted enthusiastically, throwing my arms into the air.

On cue, she popped the cap open, releasing a spray of dazzling light into the night sky. The shower of firefly light danced high with the stars, before they parted into different directions.

"Whoa," I managed to say.

Silvia just laughed and slipped the jar back in her bag. "Come on, let's run!" Without waiting for my answer, she was already racing across the field.

"Hey," I giggled as I followed after her.

The wind's soft breath rippled my hair. I would've closed my eyes if I wasn't hurtling down a slope, gaining momentum. Faster and faster we went with fluid motions. Every step I took was my own, strong and determined. That was when I was filled with a new feeling.

Freedom!

The freedom I felt wasn't just the ability to do whatever I wanted. It was like having wings to fly, feeling the wind beneath them, and to hear my friend beside me, enjoying every moment of this night. Because it was our time to act any way we pleased. To enjoy this time that had been given to us. And I knew I mustn't waste a single second of it.

I continued to race around in my grass-stained sweatpants, sweat trickling down my neck, all of which I didn't notice because I was having fun—too much fun to even realize how late it was getting. But the beauty captured in a blade of grass, or the yellow fire that outlined the moon, just couldn't be ignored. I was going to sit back and take it all in.

Silvia whirled around once more before flinging herself onto the grass, still laughing.

I did the same and panted, "Wow, that was tiring."

"Yes, very." Silvia sat up and patted her

belly. "But it took off a few pounds."

"What are you talking about?" I punched her arm gently. "You are already skin and bones!"

After a few minutes of silence, Silvia stretched herself out on the grass and sighed, "Ah, what a sky. To think that there is a blanket of stars stretched over us, observing the world below. We are like a grain of sand on an endless beach."

I watched my friend, her long black hair falling behind her shoulders. Then I whispered softly, "Is your mind always running on high speed, Silvie?"

Her blue eyes reflected the moon's light as she turned to me and laughed, "Anyone can express their thoughts if they want to.

I'm just sharing mine with you."

"I don't think I have ever heard anyone say something like that before."

Silvia pointed her index finger to her head. "It's all in here. You just need to think of the right words to say, a little imagination, and then express yourself."

I thought for a moment before pulling myself up from the spot I lay in the grass. "Thank you for this wonderful night, Silvie. I'll treasure it always."

She smiled warmly. "And thank you for the company. Tomorrow night again?"

I watched the hills rolling along, the quiet houses afar, and the dark blue sky stretching above it all.

Then I breathed, "I'll be here."



The Island of Mysteries

By **Erin Wiens St. John**

Illustrated by **Dominic Nedzelskyi**

THE AFTERNOON STARTED in perfection on the rain-forest-island. Trees waved lazily, birds cawed in each limb, monkeys chattered greetings as they swung from vine to vine, and waves landed on the shore. A few feet off of the island, however, the watery perfection was silent. Other than the gentle lapping of the waves, not a sound was heard.

Around four o'clock the soft hum of a luxury yacht split the calm. The white front of the boat divided the crystal blue neatly in two and left a trail of bubbling water behind. On its deck stood a young man in long trousers and a T-shirt, and through the wide observatory windows a tough-looking young woman stood at the wheel. The motor's hum softened as the yacht drew near the island, and the young man on deck turned to go inside the spacious wheelhouse. A moment later he reappeared with a backpack. He pressed a button, and a wide dock began to unfold itself luxuriously from the depths of the boat.

The young woman opened the door of the wheelhouse and walked down the bleached-white dock after the young man. They both stood shin-deep in water for a moment, looking at the island, and then they walked toward the shore.

Both started. Their ears exploded with the sounds of a rain-forest that had been absent only feet away.

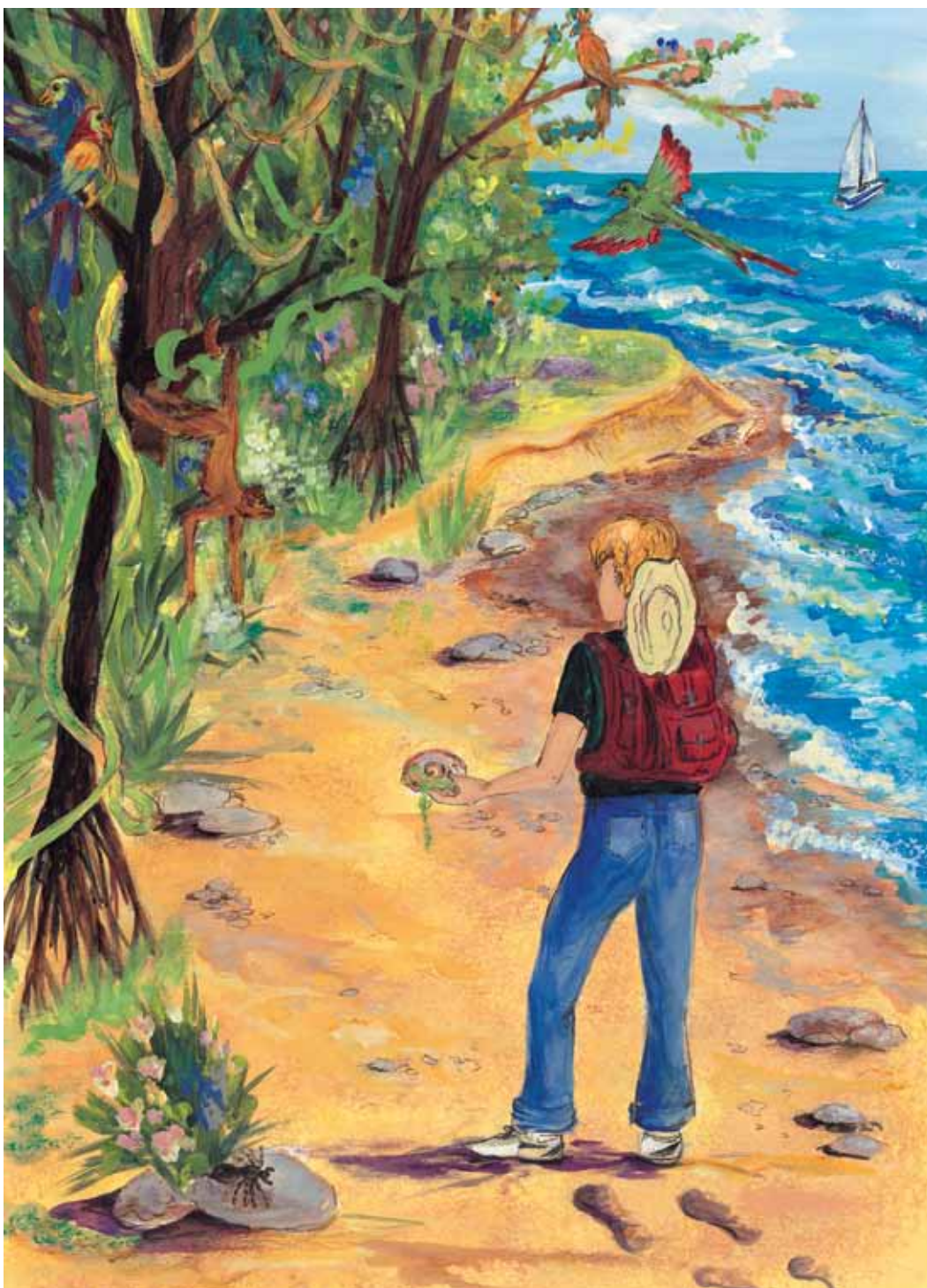
Martha paled until her face resembled computer paper. "I'm getting out of here," she whispered. She hugged her passenger roughly, kissed him briefly on the cheek, shook sand out of her army boots, and walked back on board. As the dock refolded



Erin Wiens St. John, 13
San Rafael, California



Dominic Nedzelskyi, 12
Keller, Texas



Something did not make this island fit for a resort, but no one knew what

itself and tucked back into the depths of the boat, she gave a sad smile to her friend back onshore.

The man trudged back into the silent world of water. "Are you sure you can't wait for me, Martha?" he yelled. Martha shook her head, looking uncharacteristically frightened.

"No! As it is I'm getting out of here as soon as I can. This place gives me the jivers. I might have said yes before now, but it's too unnatural. Whoever heard of a... a... whatever that is, a wall of *sound*? And besides, no one's ever explored this place, unless you count the poor souls who didn't come back." She crossed herself. "No, it is you who should come back to the mainland with me." Her voice turned brisk, and it was clear that she was trying to put her fear behind her. "But as you won't change your mind, I'll be back to pick you up tomorrow at noon. I'll wait for an hour, and then I leave at one. Remember, if you get yourself killed, I will have to be the one who brings the news to your parents, so I will expect you alive and relatively unmutilated." She walked back into the wheelhouse, folded the dock, gave a last sad wave, and sped away.

Dave stared after her until the yacht was just a speck on the horizon, and then he turned to look at the island. It looked just like a rainforest was supposed to look, bursting with exotic animals and towering trees. It could be a perfect vacationing island resort, with sandy white beaches and hot-tub-temperature water.

Something, though, did not make this island fit for a resort, but no one knew what. When a sixteenth-century explorer had first landed on the island in hopes of conquering it for Spain, he had vanished without a trace. His last communications consisted of a letter and a map, marking the island. Ferdinand and Isabella sent a division of the Navy to find him three years later, but those men had not come back either. The first people to come were certainly not the last, however. Over the centuries, a long line of adventurers had sailed out to the island, hoping to explore for varying periods of time, but none had ever returned. As far as anyone knew, Dave was the first to get to the island. Now, each country had banned its people from going there, keeping lookouts from afar to enforce the law. When Dave had expressed a wish to go there, Martha had promised that she could get around the lookouts and get Dave to the island. He had gotten here without getting caught, safe and sound, but the question remained: Would he be safe and sound when Martha came to pick him up in the morning? Dave shook the questions out of his head and went off to explore.

By late evening, Dave was wondering why people had ever called the island dangerous. He had never seen any place more charming, and he had been studying rainforests for seven years. Had all of the fateful explorers simply been unlucky? A small, sensible part of Dave knew that the answer was no, but he couldn't help feeling hopeful anyway.

When night fell, Dave trudged out of the rainforest and back onto the beach, feeling confident. Already, in the few hours he had explored the island, Dave had found several new species, relatives of known animals, but new nonetheless. He had already filled pages of his journal with notes and drawings. Plus, he had found the sound wall, defying many of the basic scientific laws. Based on all of this, Dave knew that if he stayed the night he would be hailed as a hero. He just had to wake up alive.

Dave found a nice sandy hill and set up his tent and stove. After a hasty dinner, he got inside the tent and debated whether or not to say prayers. Finally, he decided on it, for though he had never been the religious type he thought that he could use a little extra help.

"Dear God..." he began, stumbling a little on the words, "I... I hope that you protect Mother and Father and Martha back on the mainland and that you keep me safe, too. Help me to find something great and benefit the international community with my discoveries. Amen." Once he finished the prayer, he crossed himself thrice as he had seen Martha do, because it seemed impressive, and drifted off to sleep.

Around fifteen minutes later, he awoke abruptly, a faint roaring noise in his ears. He peered out of the tent flap and saw a dark mass on the watery horizon. He could barely make out its streaks of red. Somehow, Dave's body was telling him that the mass was not a good sign. Nerves

jangling their alarm, he dressed, clambered out of his tent, and grabbed his backpack. Looking up after his frenzy, he felt alarmed to see that the mass was now spitting thunder and lightning and that it had moved about a hundred miles in the past few minutes. In a panic, he scrambled down the small embankment and sprinted the half mile to the rainforest, noticing that the waves had become distressingly large, slamming farther and farther up the beach. Right before he disappeared into the outer reaches of the trees, he saw that his old campsite was completely flooded, ravaged by ferocious waves. Shuddering, he realized that he had left just in time.

Dave began sprinting into the rainforest as fast as he could. Finally, he stopped, took out a compass and a GPS, and oriented himself. He had indeed succeeded in getting into the very middle of the island, so Dave started looking for shelter.

He soon found a clearing. Now that he felt some semblance of safety, he began to notice his surroundings. It was then that he noticed that something was missing. Where were the animals? Surely their instincts, like his, had told them to find shelter as far inland as possible? And yet he saw neither hide nor hair.

Suddenly, he heard something nearby. Water. Roaring. The waves had moved inland. Dave began looking for a shelter with panic. He could hear the waves coming closer and began to run around the clearing, looking for hollows in the trees, lower limbs that would take him high up, any-

thing. After a minute and a half of frenzied running around the clearing, Dave heard a new roar added to that of the water. Suddenly, a high wind began to whistle through the clearing. First rain, then hail began to fall, enormous heavy hail that pounded Dave on the head and shoulders.

And then he spotted a place to hide. It was a hole in the ground, outlined by the roots between two huge trees. If he could get in and cover the hole with his backpack, he might be safe from the oncoming storm and tide. Dave thought about his chances of survival. He could jump into the hole or find a nonexistent limb to climb.

Dave jumped.

It took him far longer to reach the ground than he anticipated, and for a split second the sensation reminded him of Alice in Wonderland. Then he hit the ground with a thud. Dave stood up, pushing himself up on a smooth dirt floor. Then, Dave looked around, and he almost fell over with shock.

Thousands of lamps burned around him, yellow orbs at different heights and spacing, hanging in midair. Dave felt for his flashlight and turned it on.

The orbs were not orbs at all. They were eyes. Thousands of animals stood around him, every specimen that lived in the forest, no doubt. They all stood around him, from the tallest gorilla to a family of tarantulas.

The words came out of his mouth before he could think about them. "Don't hurt me."

"They will not hurt you."

This time, Dave did fall over in shock. A woman, with skin as black as coal, came over to him and offered her arm. Dave took it in wonder.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The woman smiled. "There will be enough time for that later," she said. "You have been through enough tonight already, while we have been waiting for you. You may call me Mathilda for now."

Dave just stood and stared. The woman's beauty was astounding, from her brown probing eyes to her flawless bare feet.

Mathilda's voice broke the silence. "I must seal the passageway before the water covers the hole," she said. She climbed an earthen ladder that Dave had not noticed before and stuck her head outside. When she came back down again, she was still smiling.

"You have questions," she said. "Come, sit, and I will answer them."

Dave sat, realizing that he was more comfortable than he had ever been in his life. But before he could open his mouth, Mathilda said, "The storm outside is called the Red Storm, though others call it the Eye of the Monster. It was first known to the humans who lived on a nearby island, which has long since disappeared. When they moved away, the legend survived, although it has been diminishing in popularity," she added.

Dave was about to open his mouth to ask how Mathilda knew so much when she started talking again.



"You have questions," she said. "Come, sit, and I will answer them"

"With the creation of the universe, the storm has ravaged the island every evening, but it does not affect the places around it. Over time, the island's animals evolved with the instinct to take shelter in this hole. I... I suppose one could say that I evolved with the island. I am the caretaker, of sorts. Of you, of the animals, of everyone, really." She gave a tinkling laugh that sounded like the most beautiful bells Dave had ever heard. "I constructed a sound wall around the shores to keep the island's secrets.

"So far, you are the first human to have found our hole, though others have come

on our shores. The others perished. I was sorry to watch them go. But they did not find the hole and the storm killed them. I still hold them in my heart." She stopped, her head bowed.

"I will get you something to drink now," she announced. She got to her feet and walked away down a long tunnel filled with animals. Dave was about to call after her that he did not like many drinks when she added, "I happen to know that you do not enjoy most beverages, so I will give you what I drink. I think you will enjoy it."

She disappeared as the animals blocked

her from view. A moment later she returned with two mugs of something hot and a plate of his grandmother's special recipe for biscuits, with his favorite sliced peaches and strawberries, cooked to perfection. He no longer pondered the woman's strange knowing but instead helped himself to the biscuits. After a moment, he drank a mouthful of the hot liquid and gasped with delight. Its sweetness trickled down his throat and bubbled in his stomach, filling him with a fiery energy. No longer tired, he felt perfect, ready for anything.

The woman smiled at his delight. "When Martha comes to pick you up in the morning, you may choose whether or not you want to tell her, or anyone, about the hole and the storm. But some will not believe you if you choose to tell the world. Do not try to take people back to this hole because others must find it for themselves. You would not find it again if you bring anyone with you. You, however, will always find me here at night and will al-

ways be welcome, as will anyone else who finds it alone, as you did.

"But now, it is time to go out and see the new day. You may have the honor of being the first outside." She cleared the tray as Dave shouldered his backpack and started toward the earthen ladder.

Dave looked back. "Will you leave now? Don't, please!"

Mathilda smiled once again. "I must leave. You and I will meet again in person. I am, in fact, with you all the time. I am both in you and around you. Goodbye." She began walking away down the long tunnel, the sea of animals again parting to let her through.

"Wait!" Dave shouted. "Who are you, who knows and cares so much about me?"

Mathilda had been swallowed by the sea of animals, but Dave felt her in the wind that brushed gently across his face.

With wonder, Dave hoisted himself out of the hole, and as the clearing filled with animals around him, he looked toward the rising sun, ready to greet the new dawn. 🌻



L'eau/Water

By Ella Csuros



Ella Csuros, 8
Montreal, Canada

Pour moi, l'eau c'est la plage
Où vit ma grand-mère,

Les grands ours bruns
Qui rôdent autour de la maison,

L'océan qui me chante une berceuse,

Le bateau de mon oncle qui part
À la pêche.

Pour moi, l'eau
C'est une vague salée.

For me, water is the island
Where my grandmother lives,

The big brown bears
That creep around the house,

The ocean that sings me a lullaby,

My uncle's boat that goes out
fishing.

For me, water
Is a salty wave.

The Woolly Bear Caterpillar

By Lydia Taverne

Illustrated by the author



Lydia Taverne, 13
Auburn, Washington

RACHEL SITS on the cement garage steps, clutching a green toy car, while I push baby-blue Crocs onto her feet. My fingers grasp her hand as I help her stand up.

Our feet—mine big and bare, and hers the tiny delicate ones of a three-year-old—pad on the cold, dark garage floor. My hand is holding Rachel's, but not to support her. It is simply for the sake of feeling her tiny, pudgy fingers wrapped around mine.

I push open the creaky backyard gate, and we cross the pathway and our sun-warmed patio to the brick wall by our garden. A puff of wind pushes Rachel's long ringlets out of her face, and her big hazel eyes shine back at me.

I hoist Rachel up on the faded, rough, rosy-colored bricks and then plop down beside her.

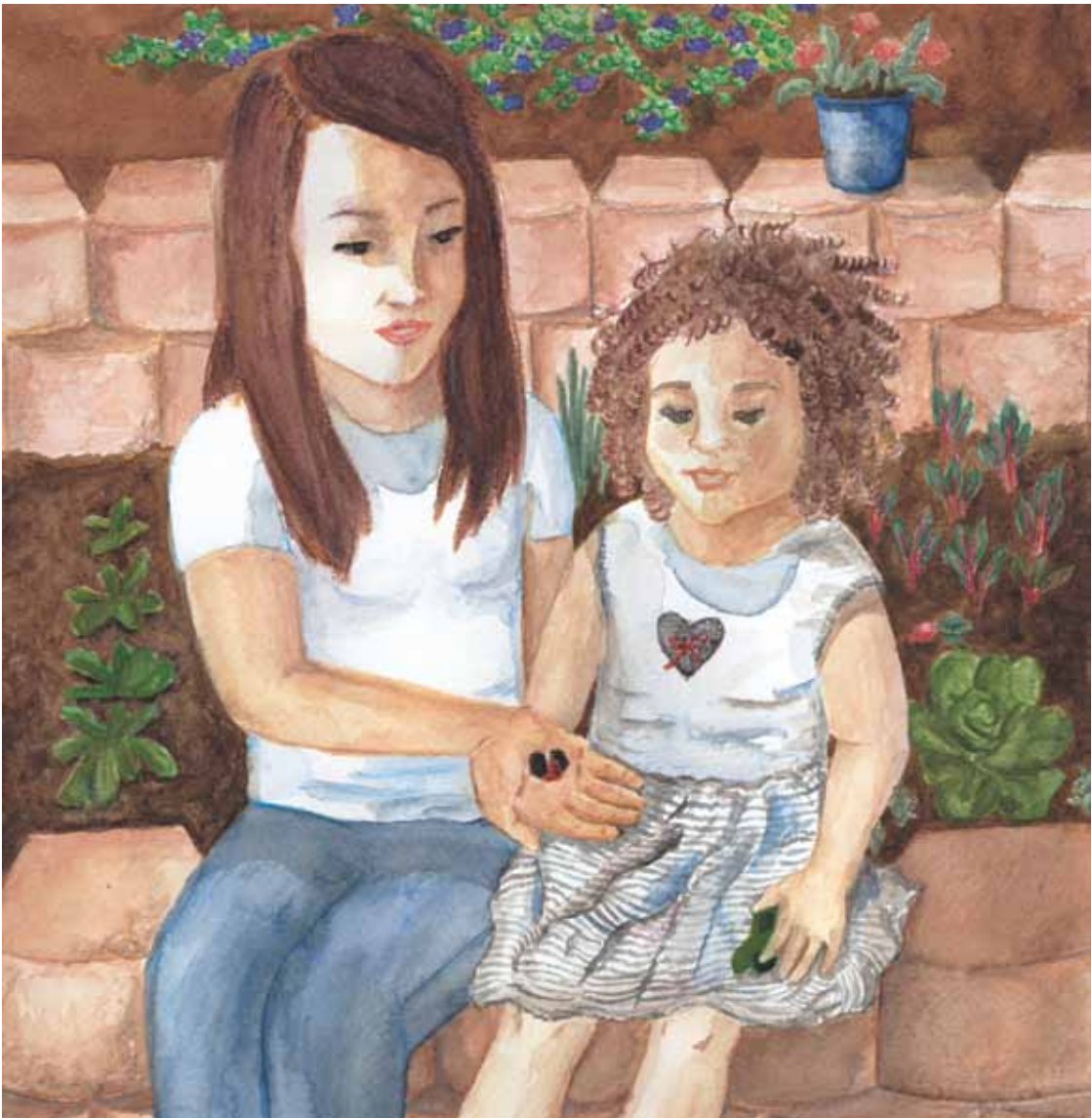
Mikey comes running up just then, with his hand curled into a fist. "Look what I found, Lydia," he says seriously, and opens his hand to show me what is nestled inside.

It is a caterpillar, bristling with stripes of black and brown hair, curled tightly into a ball.

"Cool! It's a woolly bear caterpillar," I explain, and he hands it to me. I show it to Rachel, who is amused by the small creature. It sits very still on the palm of my hand. It won't uncurl, but I know it is not dead. It is simply shy, afraid.

Mikey stands around to watch it for a minute or two, but then he is off like a rocket to go do something else.

"It's just you an' me here, an' da callapidder," chirps Rachel, and I laugh because she is exactly right. I set the insect down



"It's just you an' me here, an' da callapidda," chirps Rachel

on the rocky dirt of the garden and pull Rachel onto my lap.

We sit silently, waiting. Finally, the caterpillar feels safe. He stretches out once more into his original shape and plants his gray suction-cup feet onto the ground. He wriggles off to explore his surroundings,

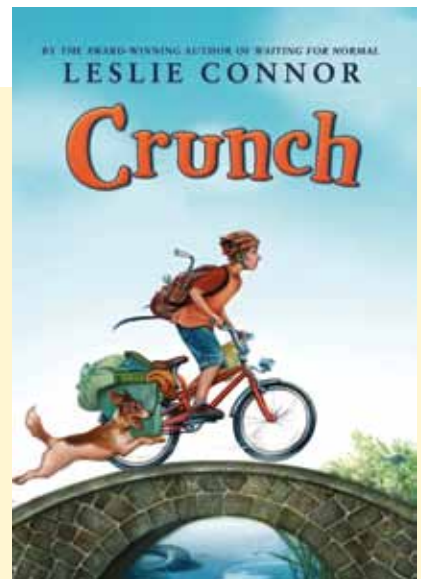
while Rachel observes cheerfully.

I smile, knowing that each moment like this brings me and little Rachel closer together. And as we grow up and mature, just like the woolly bear caterpillar will, I will always be there for her as her older sister. ❁

Book Review

By Juan Martin Velez

Crunch, by Leslie Connor; HarperCollins:
New York, 2010; \$16.99




Juan Martin Velez, 11
Houston, Texas

A YOUNG BOY named Dewey Mariss is running his dad's bike shop during his parents' anniversary trip. Unfortunately, the trip is right in the middle of an oil shortage. Just as Dewey's parents are returning, the oil shortage heads into the extreme and leaves them with no gas. Dewey's got an enormous responsibility to handle, and he's not about to let it slip away. Due to the oil shortage, everyone wants a bike and no one expects lower than their standards. Pretty soon things start to get hairy, and Dewey's five-year-old brother and sister have their bikes stolen. Luckily, he's got his thirteen-year-old brother and Robert Deal (a guy he helped on the highway) as employees. Then bike parts get stolen, and Dewey starts to worry. Will he be able to manage? The person he's suspecting is his neighbor, Mr. Spivey, who has stolen a couple of eggs and berries from the Mariss farm, so why not steal bike parts? After catching the thief by painting him blue, Dewey thinks his troubles are over. But when his dinky little shop gets tons of customers, his sister decides to close and not take in any more repairs. Also, he learns that his father was seriously injured—just as his parents were starting to shove off! Now he gets worried. He promised to manage the shop and now it's fallen apart.

He's going to need a brilliant plan to survive.

I started reading the book as an environmentalist. Though my position on the environment hasn't changed thanks to the book, I think it goes hand-in-hand with my views of a (somewhat) utopian world in which all cars are electric and everyone rides a bike. Since there's barely enough oil to go around, everyone is either walking or biking to work and home. This means no carbon emissions! However, the book does seem to suggest that life will get better when gasoline is back. I personally disagree with this view, no matter how much of it is legitimate. Really, this book shows how life can be good even without much oil, but that isn't what it focuses on. Instead, the book's central theme is survival. I can definitely connect to the "ain't nobody here but us kids" style of the book, since I have been home alone several times. Fortunately, I have had a cell phone on all but one of those occasions. And communicating over the phone is something that I can also connect to, since Dewey and his siblings communicate with their parents in the same manner I do.

Now, here's how I imagine the way *you* would feel when reading *Crunch*. At the beginning, you would think "Wow, that is one big responsibility for a couple of kids," and when the bikes get stolen, I picture you saying "Now who would do such a thing?! The nerve!" When Robert Deal joins the shop, "Phew! What a relief!" may be universal, as well as you whispering "Yikes! Who's the thief?" when bike parts get stolen. While Dewey leaves the thief feeling *blue*, mouthing out "I'm glad that's over!" will be a pushover. And it's no surprise that you'll be muttering "Gee, what's he going to do?" as Dewey's sister closes the shop. Fortunately, it's another happy ending. Hooray!

I think *Crunch* is a great book and will capture your attention. You certainly will enjoy it. If I had to give it a rating, I would say it is one of my favorites and is definitely worth reading. 

The Race

By Valerie Luyckx

Illustrated by Emily Jackson



Valerie Luyckx, 12
Sedona, Arizona



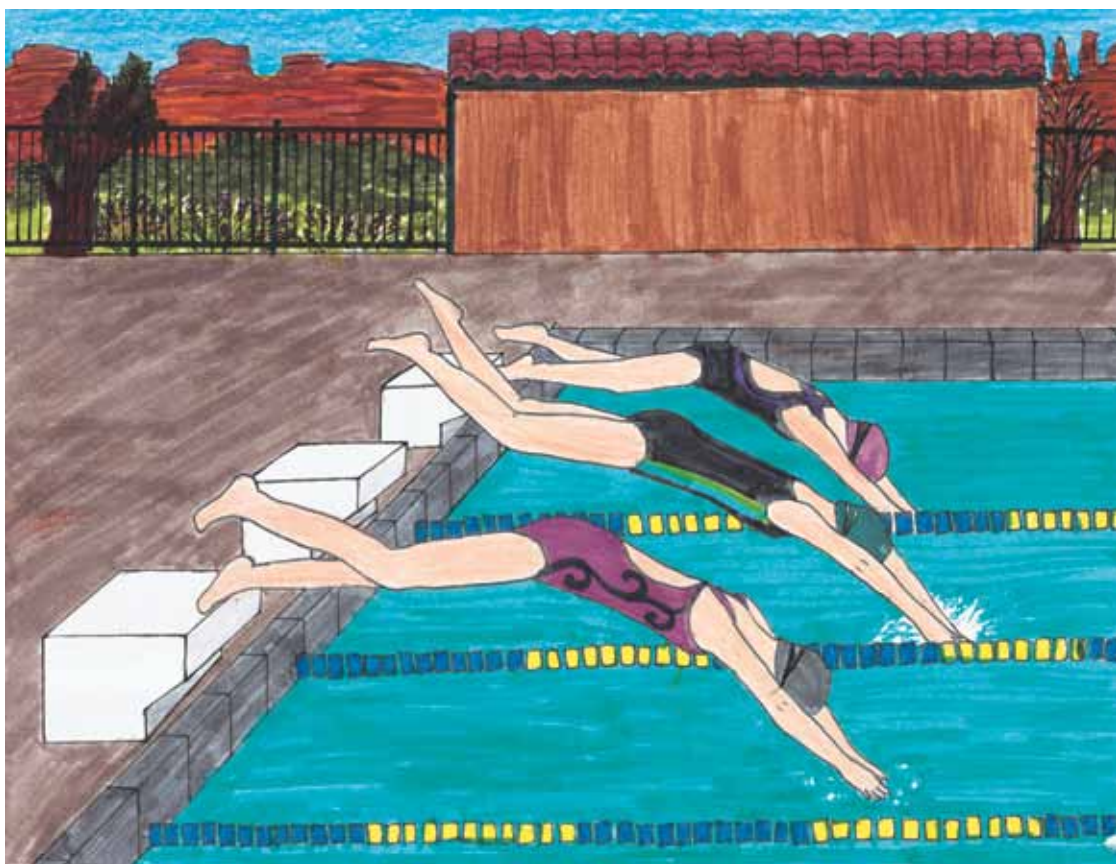
Emily Jackson, 12
Maple Valley, Washington

I HEAR THE WHISTLE BLOW, bellowing a long note that echoes, bouncing off the tall bleachers on the far side. I look down, gazing at the deep blue water. It laps onto the gutters as the ripples smooth out and meet at the sides. My heart skips as the whistle blows a second time, this time shorter. I slowly step up onto the white, smooth block. The blood pulsing in my ears, my hands shaking as they reach down to grasp the slippery surface. *Deep breath, deep breath*, I tell myself. Then the starter machine beeps and my body leaves the ground and plunges into the cool darkness.

As I dive it seems as if time stands still. Time freezes all around me. The light flashing on my side. First, in slow motion, my hands divide the water and make a path in the calm, waveless liquid. Then follows my body, the water submerging me in complete coolness. As soon as my feet enter the pool, they kick vigorously, sending tiny bubbles up to the surface. I open my eyes and am suddenly surrounded in a blue world. The reflection of the water casts blotchy shadows on the smooth, white bottom.

I drift to the surface and turn my head to the side. I gasp for a breath that refills my needy lungs with sweet oxygen. Automatically, my face falls back into the water and my arms slice through the waves. Out of the corner of my eye I see the spray of droplets of water spewing out from my legs.

Above the water it is very noisy. People cheering, whistles blowing, and the yelling of coaches can be heard from the other



As I dive it seems as if time stands still

side of the structure. But under, enveloped in this flowing atmosphere, is silence. The essence of silence all around me. Like the water suffocating my ears, drowning them in a pool of tranquility.

The water slips through my fingers like air, only denser. I am thinking about the next turn, the next stroke, the next breath I am going to take. Looking towards the far wall, I eat through the water, driving myself to the next level. I pick up the pace, feeling the competition drip into my brain, taking over all other thoughts floating around. My lungs ache

for air, but I don't relieve them, instead I force my head down and sprint towards my goal.

The wall is so near I can almost taste it. But instead I get a mouthful of chlorinated liquid. The tips of my fingers tingle in anticipation. Three more strokes... I am so close. Every muscle in my body stretches forward. I finally crash into the wall, touching it with my fingers first, then my whole hand. I pop out of the water, dip my head back and glance around. A big smile spreads over my face as I realize I have gotten there first. ❁



Something about the shell makes me feel good

Girls at the Beach

By **Lucy Tantum**

Illustrated by **Analisa Milkey**

I'M AWAKENED BY MY DAD, who is gently shaking me. I'm tired, so I just turn over in my warm bed. My dad whispers, "Kat, wake *up*. We're going to the beach."

I grumble in response, and my dad tries harder to get me to wake up. "Kitty cat, you love the beach. Remember? You can build sand castles and play in the water and, um... look for crabs... uh, eat hot dogs..." his voice faded off. I know he's trying, but really? Eat hot dogs?

First of all, I don't love the beach. Maybe I loved it when I was seven, but that was five years ago. It's always foggy and cold there, even if it's the middle of summer. And the water is *freezing*. Besides, sand crabs freak me out.

But that's how I end up in our Honda minivan, strapped in next to my talkative six-year-old sister, Anna. As if that's not bad enough, Anna's about to lose her breakfast. No matter how hard I press my iPod's headphones into my ears, I can still hear whimpers of "my tummy's rumbling" every so often. The three-hour drive on twisty cliff-edge roads is starting to make my stomach feel like a washing machine, too, so I'm relieved when I see the beach.

MY DAD PULLS into a sandy parking space and stops the car. Anna clicks off her seat belt and jumps out of her seat. She gallops down the dunes, kicking up piles of grayish sand. Finally, she stops, waves her arms, and shouts, "Mommy! Hey Mommy! C'mere!" My parents and I unpack the car and



Lucy Tantum, 12
Belvedere, California



Analisa Milkey, 12
Los Altos, California

stroll down toward the water, where Anna is waiting impatiently.

My parents unpack our bag, and I sit on a beach towel to read my book. Even though I'm wearing a sweatshirt and jeans, I can't stop shivering.

Then, I hear Anna's voice. She calls out to me, "Hey, Kat!"

"What, Anna?"

"Come here!" I look and see that Anna is standing knee-deep in the water and waving at me. She is completely soaked.

"Aren't you freezing?"

Anna shakes her head vigorously, making her blond pigtails fly back and forth. "Nope. It's... um... warm."

I don't believe her, not for a second. Anna turns around again and starts dripping some wet sand through her fingers, and I go back to my book.

A FEW MINUTES later, I close my dog-eared book and stand up; I'm stiff and pretty much frozen. I walk over to where my mom is sitting and reading. I say, "Hey, Mom? I'm going for a walk, 'K?" My mom gives me her consent, and I leave.

Before I walk three steps, Anna rushes out of the water. "Kat! Kat! Where're you gonna go?"

I sigh. "Nowhere."

"Can I come? Pleeeease?" Anna is jumping up and down with elation.

I look down at her. "All right. But I'm not going in the water."

"Yay! Thanks, Kat!" Anna gives me a big (and very wet) hug.

I meander down the beach, Anna skipping in front of me. She talks nonstop. "Kat, wanna build a sand castle? We can play fairy princesses! What color will your princess dress be? What's your favorite color, Kat? I like pink. My swimsuit is pink. Ya see my swimsuit, Kat? I'm hungry. I want ice cream. I like strawberry ice cream. What kind do you like, Kat?" And so she continues, never stopping for anything. Anna has the thinking process of a butterfly.

FINALLY, I STOP walking and look around. My parents are two tiny dots far away. All around me there's just water, big mounds of sand, and gray sky. And Anna, who is currently trying to dig a hole to Australia. She looks up from her freshly dug ditch. "Kat, dig with me. Please?"

"Fine." I step into her hole and kick into the side. But the sand doesn't give like I thought it would; instead, my foot hits something sharp and spiky. Ow. I reach down to pull the sharp thing out, expecting it to be a broken plastic toy or a rock. But instead, I yank out a big, sand-covered seashell.

I look at the shell more closely. It looks like a conch shell, the kind you see in magazine pictures. It's dirty white, and dotted with tiny barnacles. But under all that, I can see how perfectly shaped it is, smoothed down by the ocean. I turn the shell over and see the inside, which is a light, glassy pink. The pink shines brightly, even though there's not much sunlight.

I turn to Anna, who's busy digging the

hole. "Hey, Anna, look what I found!"

"Huh? What is it?"

I hold the shell up to her. She strokes it carefully. "Pretty. *Now* do you want to play princesses?"

"Um, maybe later. Hey, I think I'm going to head back to where Mom and Dad are." I jump out of Anna's hole and start walking. Anna trails behind me, talking on and on, but I only half-listen. I'm too busy looking at the seashell. It's beautiful, with its inside and its symmetrical shape. The pink is the color of a sunset. It's smooth as glass and almost looks wet, but when I run my finger across it I can feel how dry it is.

Something about the shell makes me feel good. Maybe it's the light pink inside, the perfect shape, or the fact that such a beautiful thing could come out of such a... not-so-beautiful beach. But the shell evokes warm beach memories, happy ones, like when I was eight and went boogie boarding, and the time when I was five and tried to empty out the whole ocean with a plastic shovel. Those were some of the times when the sun shone over the beach, and when Anna was only a toddler. The brightness of the shell makes me remember about the other side of the beach,

the side with the sand fortresses and treasure hunts and eighty-degree days.

I'M LOST in these pleasant daydreams as I head back to my towel. The afternoon suddenly seems brighter, the water sparklier, and Anna more enjoyable. A little while later my family rolls up our beach towels and heads home. I hold the shell during the car ride, and I'm amazed at its beauty for the whole way.

When I get home, I stick the shell on a bookcase in my room, between my old soccer trophies and a clay bowl I made in preschool. As I'm placing it, Anna walks into my room and looks up at me. "Hi, Kat."

"Hi, Anna Banana," I answer.

"Guess what? I made friends with a seagull at the beach. It flew next to me, and then it ate my sandwich." I laugh. Anna pauses to think for a minute.

"Hey, Kat?"

"Yeah?"

"Didja have fun today?"

I think of the fog and the cold weather, and I start to shake my head no. But then I look up at the beautiful shell on the shelf, and I know the answer.

"Yes."



Wishing Star

By **Hayden Brame**



Hayden Brame, 13
Chehalis, Washington

My favorite part
Of staying the night
Was after
The “fun” stuff
It was bundling up
And going outside
Staring into the deep black sky
Finding the perfect star
And making a wish

After hearing
The fatal news
I went outside
Stars magnified with tears
And wishing
For time
Just one more year
After a second
I took it back
In your eyes
Was hidden agony
And I couldn’t prolong it
My tears

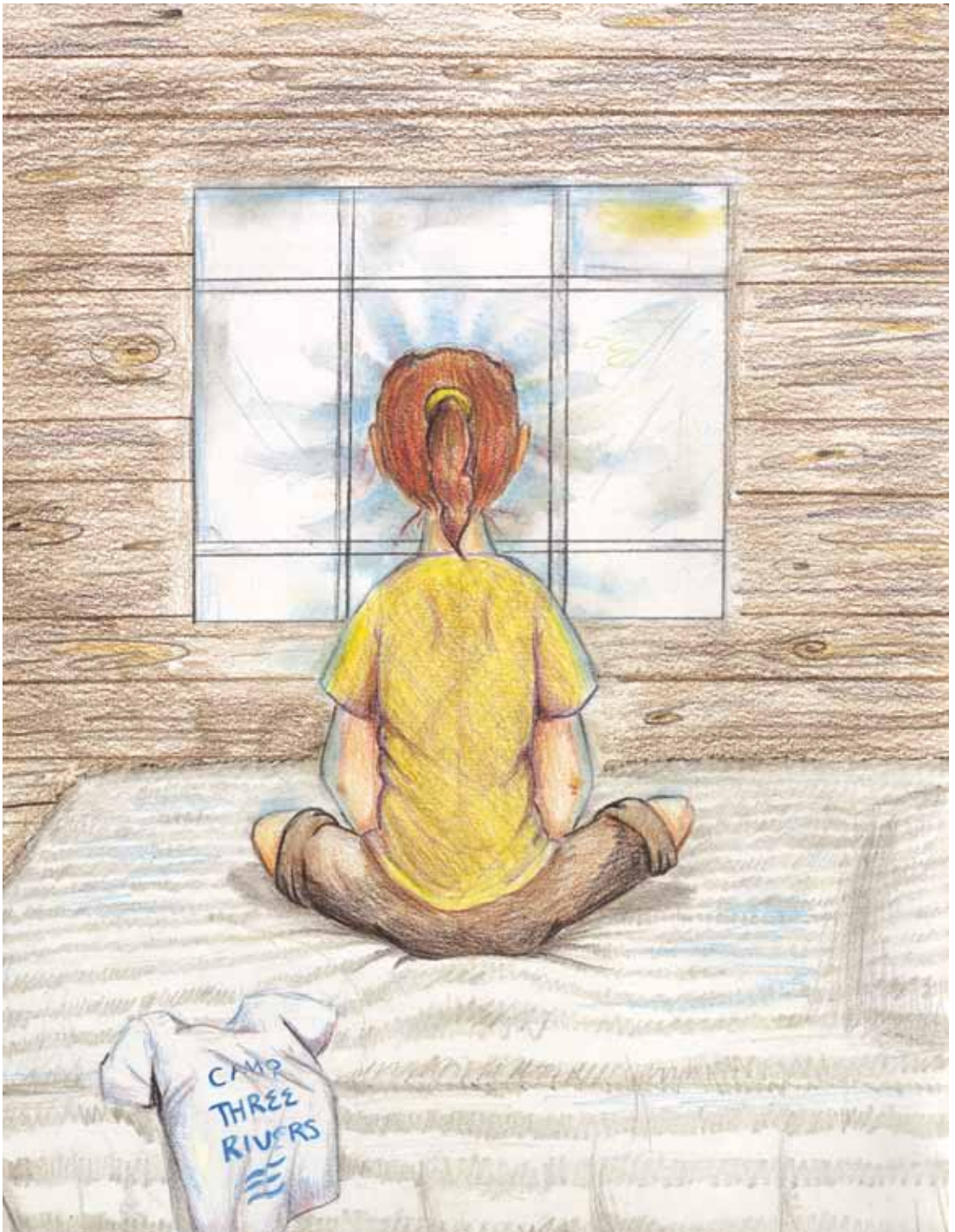
Soaked the sky
As I pondered the end

When I heard the news
I wasn't as shocked
As I should've been
Instead
I imagined you hearing
My plea

And trying to hold on
Just a little more time
For your favorite

I imagined you
Peace etched on your face
As you sense the change
And take your final breath

In the never-ending sky
There is one more
Wishing star



I sat on my bunk and waited for the dinner bell to ring

Last Summer at Camp

By Eliza Edwards-Levin

Illustrated by Alondra Paredes

THE BOAT THRUMMED, vibrated for a few seconds, then stopped completely. “All *right!* All *right!* Everybody out! Everybody out!” yelled the driver. The whole scene made me think of some classical book or movie. But I liked it. It made me think of how much I loved camp last year—how excited I’d been for months leading up to now to go back.

I shoved the little sliver of homesickness that was already crowding into my throat and grinned. Things were starting to look familiar.

There were hills covered in tiny dots of brownish-gray that would be our cabins. There was a colorful, big dining hall, big enough to feed eighty kids three times a day, with signs all over it that said Recycle or Camp Three Rivers 1990. And the counselors were lined up on the dock, ready to meet and greet us, ready to attempt to impress our parents. All of them wore T-shirts that said Camp Three Rivers on them in big blue block letters.

Counselors. Last year I’d had *the* perfect counselor. Pretty. Young. Sweet. Smart, but not nerdy. Cool, but not stereotypical. I hoped for her. I prayed for her, despite my not being religious. I...

“Zoe? Are... *are* you Zoe?” asked a voice, rapidly cutting off my stream of reminiscence. I looked up. It was a counselor. She was on the chubby side, smiling, and young. Looked nice. I nodded.

“I’m Lyla,” she smiled-said. You know what I mean. When people say something, but you could really tell what they’re



Eliza Edwards-Levin, 11
Chicago, Illinois



Alondra Paredes, 12
Bentonville, Arkansas

saying even if they weren't saying it. Only people with big smiles can do this. Definitely not me.

"It's great to meet you," Lyla said. "I'll be your counselor this year!"

I had no idea what to say. It's not like, in that moment, I really *could've* said anything. I managed a weak smile.

"Your cabin will be Heron Hill, and your junior counselor will be Emma," she went on. "I'm so *so* glad to meet you! This'll be the best session! Ever!"

The cabin—*my* cabin—was small. Really small. I eyed my bed—the only bed left unoccupied. I eyed the kids playing outside. I looked up at my parents, and suddenly what used to be only a sliver of homesickness became a small, heavy coin, pushing, pushing, pushing me to beg my parents to take me back home.

In five minutes, I thought, they'll be gone. Gone—for twelve days! Twelve days with no Nicky to toss a ball with, no Dad to embarrass me in the supermarket, no Mom to brush my hair even when I don't want her to...

After my bed had been set up, and the goodbyes had been said, and I'd seen with my own eyes my parents walking down the steps and onto the boat, I stood there, perplexed, almost. I sat on my bunk and waited for the dinner bell to ring. The food was one of the elements at Camp Three Rivers that could never fail. It was always the same delicious, kid-friendly, home-cooked food that even the pickiest of the picky eaters loved. I'd get to meet the rest of my cabin at dinner. I'd start to settle in.

"SO," I SAID, thirty minutes later, sitting around a table with the rest of my cabin, plus Lyla and Emma, our junior counselor, "what's everyone named?"

We went around.

"Emily."

"Nora."

"Lily."

"Meghan."

Suddenly, a girl opened the door to the dining hall, looked around, smirked, and came over to our table. "I'm Mia," she said. She didn't just say it. She said it in a way that lets you know who's boss. I shrunk back a little. Paranoid, I know—but better safe than sorry. I decided I'd keep my profile low around Mia.

"Oh," said Lyla. "Hi, Mia. Have a seat."

She stood for a minute, staring at us like there was something obvious that we were forgetting to do.

"*Move*," she finally said to me. Not wishing to make an enemy on the first day of camp, I obliged.

"Nice... hair," I told her, trying to make peace. It was. It was long and golden and highlighted pinkish-red. "The highlights are nice."

Mia scoffed and didn't say anything. Not a good sign.

THE REST of the week went on. I rode a boat, made some nice friends, drew outside or in the art shed, and tried to tell myself that everything was going great.

But it wasn't.

Whenever I walked into the cabin, be

it bed, changing into a bathing suit for free swim, getting ready for dinner, or fetching something that I'd forgotten in my trunk, Mia was there, ready to tease us, laugh at us, make mean remarks about us, annoy us, or tell us off. And she never ran out of ways to hurt people's feelings. Never.

"Write about what a great time you're having!" my dad had said as we kissed each other goodbye. So I did. I wrote home every night about activities, about my newfound friends, Nora and Meghan, and the delicious dinners that Margot, the camp's cook, had most recently prepared. I didn't write anything about Mia.

ONE MORNING, as we were getting ready for breakfast, we were all sort of acting silly, playing around. Nora jumped on Mia's bed. "Wheel!" she shrieked.

Mia laughed, too. That was one of the few times I've ever heard Mia laugh.

Nora did it again, three times over. Everyone giggled.

"Stop it," said Mia. "Move. I have to *put on my clothes*."

Nora got off but kept giggling. She made a puppy face at Mia. "Just a little bounce?" she asked.

Mia's face turned stony. We all knew this wasn't a good sign. "Nor-" I said, trying to warn her.

"One more little, bitsy time?" Nora pleaded. "One more? Just *one* more?"

"No!" Mia yelled. Then her face hardened into an evil kind of grin. "Nora," Mia

said, "I don't like you anymore."

I don't like you anymore? Really? Could she have said anything less mature, less thoughtful? Thoughtful. Thoughtful is the opposite of what we're thinking about here. Thoughtful is the opposite of Mia.

I found Nora on the bed that day, crying and crying into her pillow. "Hey," I said, "what's up?" I knew I didn't have to. I knew perfectly well what was up.

"M-Mia," she said between sniffles. "Sh-she d-doesn't like me anymore."

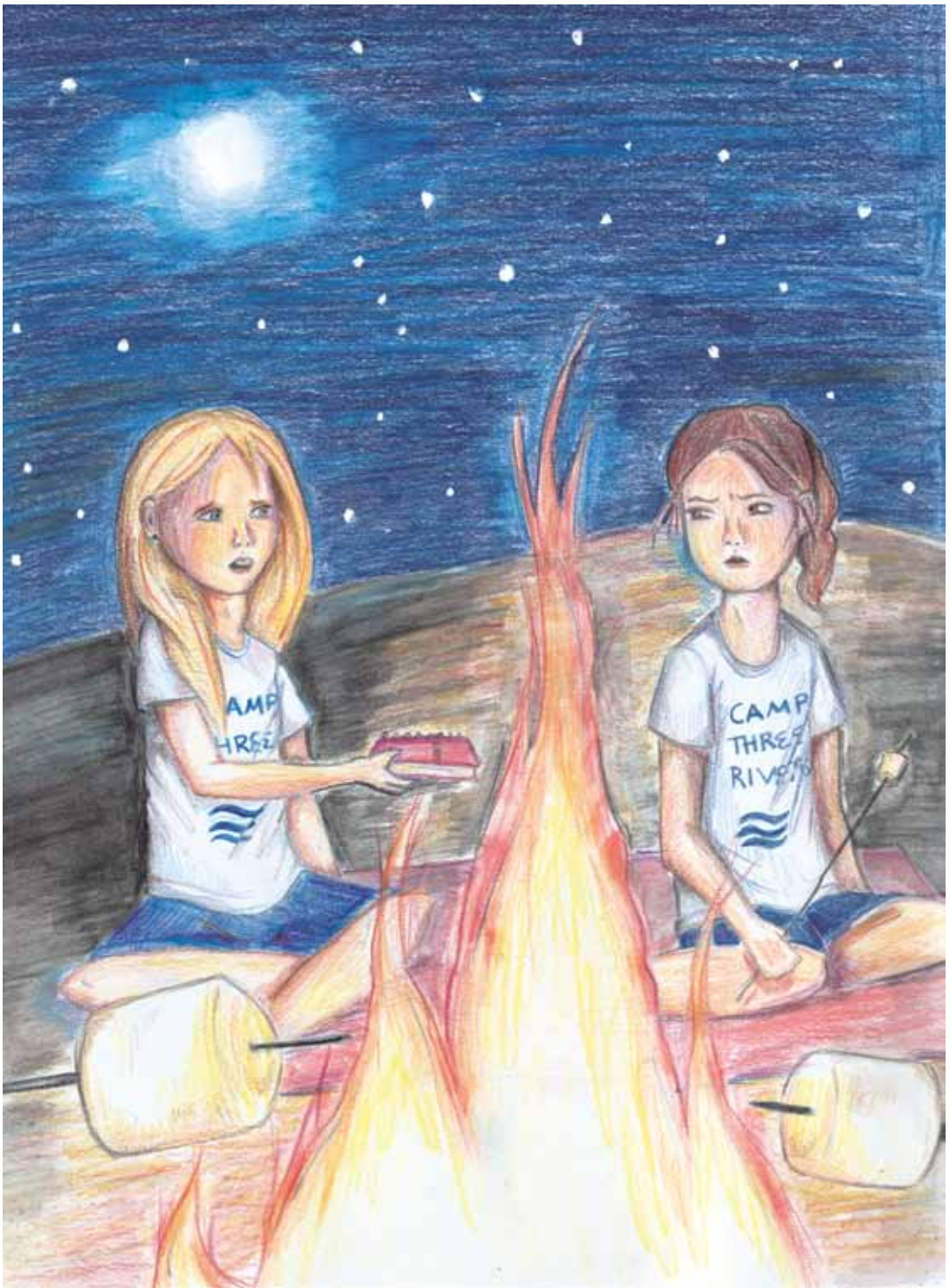
I reached over and sort of patted her. "Don't pay attention to Mia," I said. "She's a jerk to me too. She's a jerk to everybody."

"Last year," Nora sniffled, "last year we were best friends at camp. I d-don't know what happened."

"You'll be fine," I repeated. I knew I sounded dumb, like something cheesy out of a movie, but I didn't know what else to say. We sat there, together, for a little while. Then the dinner bell rang and we ran to the dining hall. Tonight it was spaghetti.

A COUPLE days later, something strange beyond belief happened. I love to write poetry, and I had been reading one aloud every night at the campfire. Mia had never really congratulated me or anything, but one night, out on the beach, she shyly—is it possible that Mia could do anything shyly??—approached me.

She sat down on my towel and pulled out a pink notebook. "I... I've been writing a little..." she said, "and I was wonder-



"I... I've been writing a little..." she said, "and I was wondering... if you could read it?"

ing... if you could read it?"

She sounded sweet. She sounded... nice! Like... a little kitten, or something! What was wrong? Was she sick? Was she being sarcastic? She didn't sound it.

I nodded. "Y-yeah," I said. "Sure I'll read it. I'd be glad to."

Mia tore a page out of her notebook but hesitated a little before she gave it to me. She looked like she was about to say something. Finally, she took a breath and spoke, so quietly that I could barely hear. "I... I'm... I didn't... I'm s—"

Nora walked over and saw us talking. She frowned. "What's up?"

Mia's voice went back to the harsh tone that we were all used to. "Leave us *alone!*" She took a deep, shaky breath and pursed her lips together.

Then she passed over the crumpled slip of paper that she'd ripped out of her notebook a few minutes ago, on which was written the best poem I've ever read. I don't even remember what it was about—just how good it was, and the strange sensation that this was something that you would read about happening in a book. Or maybe it wasn't the poem that was so amazing. Maybe it was the fact that Mia—aloof, bitter, resentful Mia—had almost switched over to her other side. I


hadn't known she even *had* another side. From now on, I wouldn't think of Mia as the bully who sort of ruined my camp experience. I'd think of her as the erratic bully who wrote poetry. Poetry!

"It's really good," I told her, my voice a little shaky. Not shaky because I was scared—shaky because I was, I don't know, so surprised. Touched, I guess, would be the word.

She sort of raised her eyebrows. "Thanks, I guess."

We sat there for a few minutes, silent. Then Mia walked away.

I COULD MAKE this the end of the story. I could pretend that after this, everybody had a realization that Mia was, underneath, the nicest person, the best poet, and forgave her. But that would be a movie ending. It would be cheesy. And second of all, that wasn't the end. The day after, Mia called Meghan stupid and told Nora twice that she looked dorky.

I went home three days later. Back to my family. Back to my apartment, my bedroom. Back to my friends. Away from Mia. I might never see her again. I most likely won't. But whenever I think of camp, I'll remember Mia, Mia's bullying, Mia's poem... 

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