

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Zoe Hall, age 13, from "Jess and Lizzy," page 37

THE CHESAPEAKE BAY MANATEE

The manatee won't last long without Adriane's help

FALLING INTO EARTH

A routine space mission turns deadly

Also: Jason responds to racist taunts with a poem

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2011

\$6.50 US \$6.50 CANADA

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 2
NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2011

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 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 40, Number 2. 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 subscriptions to: *Stone Soup*, Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 567, Selmer, TN 38375. Send submissions to: *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 567, Selmer, TN 38375. 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 more than 38 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt 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: This is Zoe Hall's third cover for *Stone Soup*! Zoe wants to thank *Stone Soup* for the chance to try different mediums and techniques, and for exposing her to work by other young artists. When she's not drawing, Zoe runs cross country. See more of her art at zekslite.typepad.com/she_came_from_planet_z

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

“Fern, the Queen of All Hunting Dogs” [July/August 2011] was a very well written story and I thought that this young writer was very good at her job as a story writer. I have to confess that this story made me cry. I have a soft spot for animals and only well written stories make me cry at the end. It was a bittersweet story and I loved it. I’m keeping the magazine so I can read this story over and over again. Shyla DeLand, you did well! I’m ready to hear more, so I hope you get another story in this magazine!

KRYSTAL JANKOWSKI, 13
Lake City, Minnesota

I really liked “Blue Eyes” from the July/August 2011 magazine. It really describes the way an older and a younger sibling act around each other. I have a younger brother and he is definitely annoying, but we both depend on each other. Thank you, Eve Driver, for writing such a wonderful story.

LINNAEA MONROE, 10
Kenmore, New York

I just wanted to say how fantastic you are! I can never wait to get the next edition of your magazine; I jump up to get the mail every time it comes. Then I run back to my room and don’t come out until I’ve soaked up every word. I’ve read some stories and poems maybe five times! My very favorite story that you’ve ever published was “Sisters,” by Cameron Manor [March/April 2010]. It really captured the ups and downs of having siblings. Also, I think my little sister and I are just like MaCall and Cameron. I absolutely love your magazine! Never change a thing! (Except if maybe one could come every day?)

CAMMIE KEEL, 12
Boulder, Colorado

Stone Soup is a unique children’s magazine that inspires the authors, poets, and artists of tomorrow. An unbelievable amount of work is put into every issue, creating a delightful experience for the reader. I am honored to be a part of such a wonderful cause as yours is, and I won’t ever forget how great an experience illustrating for you has been.

MARIAH OLSON, 13
Mint Hill, North Carolina

Mariah illustrated “All You Need Is Love” in our September/October 2011 issue.

I really love *Stone Soup*, which I have been reading for three years. The stories are meaningful and realistic, the artwork is gorgeous, and I love reading about amazing books! It’s my absolute favorite magazine and offers me insight into the types of things other kids can create. When I read a book review in your magazine, I am often so inspired that I go get a copy of that book. I love the way other kids describe books to me, and I’d like to be one of those children who reviews books for other children.

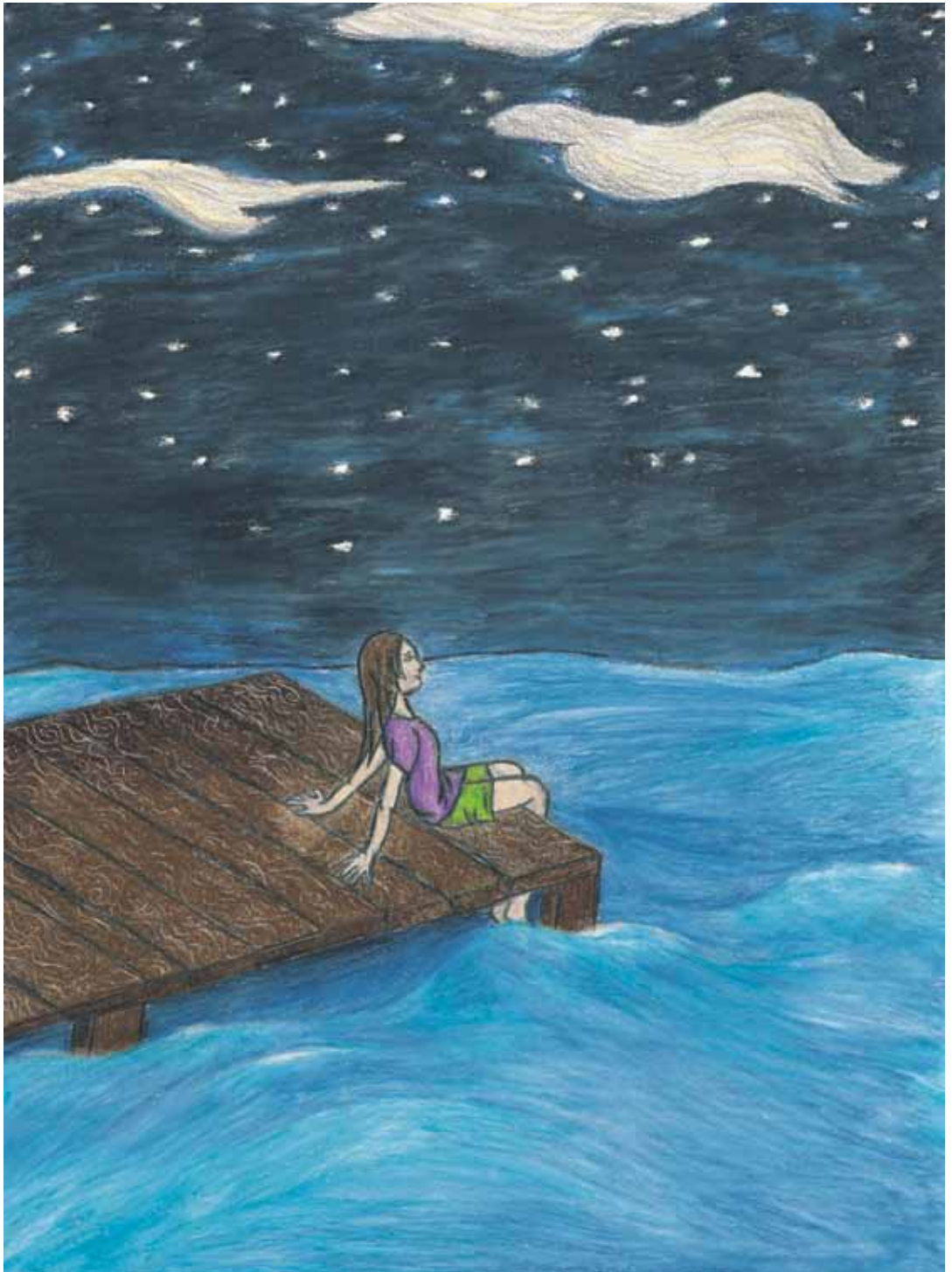
ANANYA KAPUR, 11
Chevy Chase, Maryland

I feel I’ve really grown as a writer and illustrator while doing work for your magazine. Thank you for the wonderful opportunities you’ve given me.

EMMA T. CAPPS, 14
San Carlos, California

Emma had three stories published in Stone Soup between 2009 and 2011. She illustrated her own stories, and she also illustrated three stories by other authors during that time. Emma is too old to contribute to Stone Soup anymore, but you can keep up with her at her website: chapelchronicles.com.

Note to our readers: Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We also like to receive anecdotes (150 words or less) about interesting experiences you want to share with our readers. Send letters to The Mailbox, Stone Soup, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address, phone number and e-mail.



She watched the water froth and spin, dancing between her toes

The Chesapeake Bay Manatee

By **Brooke Antoine**

Illustrated by the author

ADRIANE SLOWLY OPENED her bedroom door, glancing down the hallway to make sure no one was awake. Once she was positive, she slipped through the small opening and closed the door. She hurried down the stairs and past the kitchen, wincing at her heavy footsteps, hoping no one would hear. As she reached the back door she slowed, looking for the key her mom kept on the counter. Once she spotted it, she picked it up and felt the sharp edge of the single key jab into her palm. Adriane turned toward the door and yanked it open, then walked into the night.

A sharp wind caught her off guard and snaked over her skin. She shivered, tucking her arms across her chest, wishing she had worn something other than the old green shorts and a threadbare T-shirt. The worry faded, though, as soon as she looked up.

Stars littered the sky like glitter on black tile, illuminating the moonless night. The glowing orb's absence only added to the otherworldly experience the sky was performing for Adriane. Looking closely, she could see the small patches of sky covered by gray clouds, swirling like the Milky Way.

Glancing back down, Adriane remembered what she had come out here to do and began making her way across the yard. Once she was walking on the road, she quickened, smiling with anticipation. She was risking a lot; if someone was to see Adriane they would tell her parents, or at the least, order her to leave and go home.

Finally, she reached it. She walked out onto the boardwalk,



Brooke Antoine, 13
Cincinnati, Ohio

listening to the patter of her feet on the old wood and the slap of waves on the metal below. The shore fell away as she made her way out to the front, sliding her hands off her chest.

The ocean below bubbled, inviting her in. She smiled, bending down to sit on the edge of the boardwalk. Sharp pricks of cold stabbed at her feet as she slid them into the waves. Kicking slightly, she watched the water froth and spin, dancing between her toes. The cold began to fade as her skin adjusted to the temperature, allowing her to slide more of her legs in, until the water was hitting her calves.

Leaning back on her elbows and then her back, she stared up at the sky once again, the boardwalk swaying beneath her. She closed her eyes and let her mind wander, the night scenery seeping into her skin, disguising her beneath the stars. She almost forgot where she was until an unpleasant nudge hit her foot.

Adriane's eyes snapped open, glancing around. She was still on the boardwalk, but it seemed as if quite some time had passed by. There was a bright blue tint to the once black sky, and the stars had faded quite a bit. Just as she was about to stand, something nudged her foot again. Gasping, she pulled her legs out of the water, blinking to shield her eyes from the spray of water that was brought with them. Holding her legs against her chest, she peeked over the edge of the boardwalk.

Gray and leathery, a manatee sat just below the surface. Adriane had never

seen a real manatee before. Chesapeake Bay wasn't an uncommon place for them, though. Leaning in closer, she tried to get a better look.

The manatee was small for its kind, with heavily creased skin like an elephant. It had two flat plate-like flippers on either side of its gigantic body and one large flat flipper at its back. Its eyes were tiny and beady, staring past Adriane.

"Hey there," she offered, trying to calm the creature. The manatee gazed up at her in response, gently pumping its fins.

Adriane raised her head, looking for a fisherman or someone who worked at the docks, but she saw no one. Wondering if she should report the elephant-like creature, she turned back to the water.

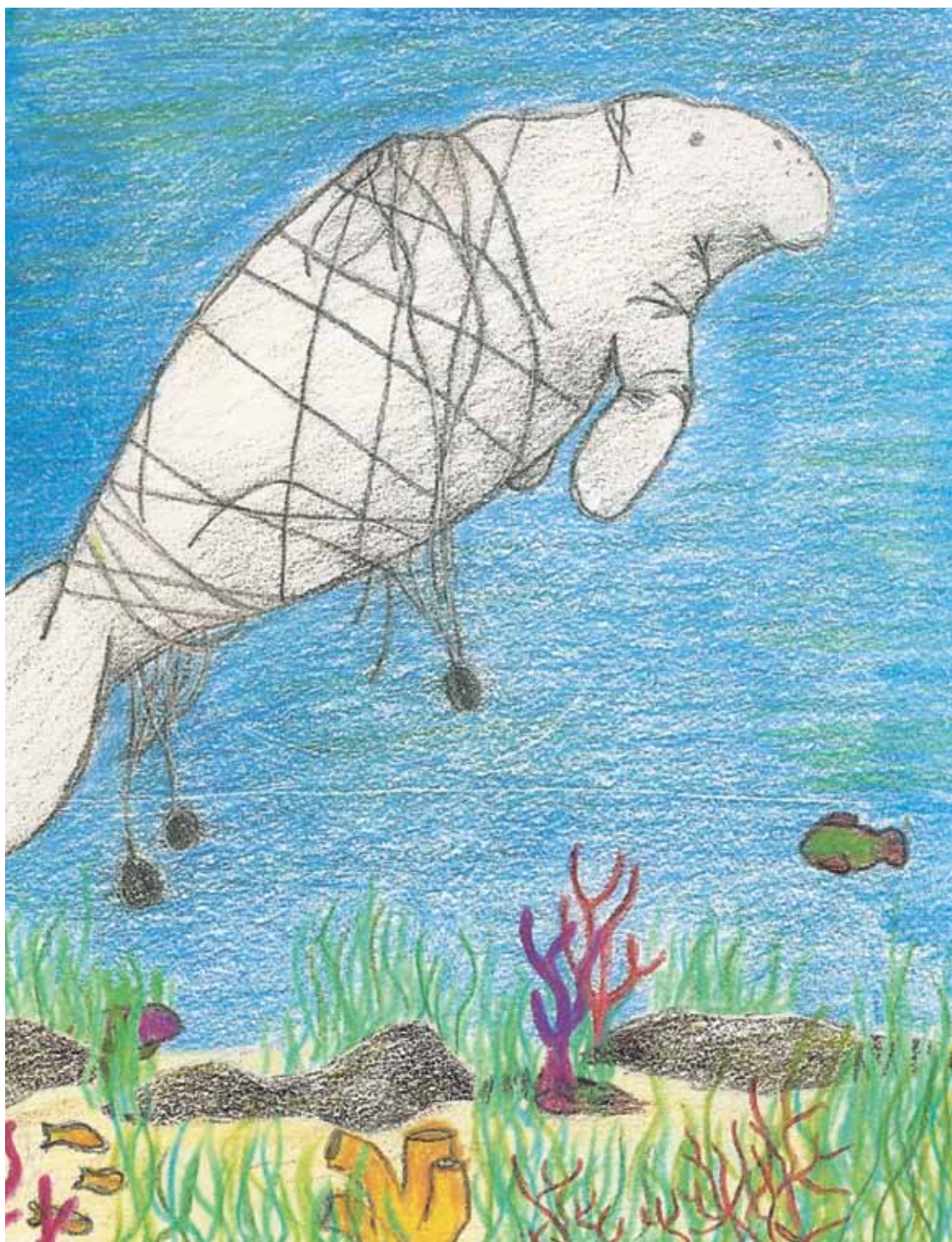
The manatee was still gazing at her intently, tilting its head as if in pain.

"What is it?" Adriane asked, placing both her hands on the edge of the boardwalk. She watched the manatee as it slowly tilted its head again, pleading with its eyes.

"What's wrong?" Adriane's voice faltered as she stared down at the enormous creature. Calmly, she put her hand in the water, just touching the surface. Almost instantly, the manatee nudged it, sliding its nose up against her palm.

That's when she noticed it.

A huge net lay stretched across the manatee's back. It was tangled up, strangled. Adriane looked back at its face, understanding the pain held in its eyes. It was suffering, and with this net around it, the manatee wouldn't last long.



It was suffering, and with this net around it, the manatee wouldn't last long

"Hold on, little guy, I'll be right back," Adriane spoke, hoping the manatee didn't hear the fear and sadness that came with it.

The pounding of her tired, heavy heart matched that of her feet as she ran back up the beach, kicking up sand. Looking at the sky above her, she watched as blues and purples stained the sky like splashes of paint across a canvas; the sun was rising. Switching her eyes forward again, she urged her feet to move faster, hoping to reach her house before it was too late.

Adriane turned onto her yard and made her way to the door, practically smashing into the red-paint-coated panels on either side of it. She jammed the single key into the lock, then hurried up the stairs, yelling, "Mom! Dad! Hurry!"

She slipped twice on the stairs in her haste, groaning and getting back up each time. When she had finally made it to the hallway, her parents were already there, looking surprised, scared, and tired all at the same time.

"Manatee..." she bent down, putting her hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath. "It's stuck... in a... net! We have to... come on!" Spinning around, Adriane headed to the stairs, only to be held back by her father's hand on her shoulder.

"What? Is this a dream you had?" he asked impatiently, then yawned, rubbing his eyes.

"No! No, this is real! It's going to be strangled!" Adriane moved towards the stairs, relieved that her mom and dad were following her. She was over her fear

of being in trouble for going to the beach this late. She was almost positive her parents wouldn't mind as well. Not after she showed them the manatee.

They all ran down the beach, Adriane's mother and father gripping their loose pajamas tightly, trying to keep warm. When they finally reached the boardwalk, they were all out of breath.

"Here." Adriane moved towards the edge, hoping a scene of devastation wouldn't meet her eyes. To her relief, the manatee was there, its head resting up against the wood. At Adriane's arrival, it looked up, pleading for freedom.

"Oh, honey!" Adriane's mom sighed beside her. "We have to call someone..."

After that, things blurred for Adriane. A truck full of people came who lifted the manatee out of the water and onto a crane, which put it on a flatbed. A swarm of tourists stood to watch and even a small news team came up to film, flooding Adriane with questions. The only thing she seemed to be able to pronounce, though, was, "Is the manatee going to be OK?"

Adriane spent the days that followed thinking of the manatee, which specialists identified as a female. Chess, they had named her, after Chesapeake Bay. Even though Adriane had only known her for a few short seconds, she was sure the way Chess had looked at her meant something.

One morning, about a week after the rescue, Adriane got a phone call.

"Yes?" she squeaked.

"This is Valerie, from the Marine Care

Center. I'm happy to inform you that Chess is fine now. Thankfully, you found her before she could wind her way too far into the net. The cuts she had were minor, if anything."

A surge of joy hit Adriane, knocking the breath out of her for a second. When she found her voice again, she answered, "Great!"

"We would like to discuss her placement now. She obviously can't go back to Chesapeake, so we were thinking of taking her down and releasing her in Florida. Since you were the one to find Chess, we are offering a full-paid trip to come down and release her with us."

She wasn't going to pass up that offer. "Perfect."

THE DAY of departure came sooner than Adriane expected it, and suddenly, they were flying over America. They landed in Daytona Beach, Florida, and stepped out into the overcrowded airport, dragging their luggage behind them. A taxi picked them up and drove them to their hotel, where they stayed for the night.

Adriane tossed and turned in her overstuffed bed for quite a while, too excited to fall asleep. Her nerves were on fire, jumping inside her head like tennis balls. She couldn't wait to set Chess free.

In the morning, the atmosphere was a mix between nervous and excited, and for Adriane, a little bit sad. But the family carried on like normal, until twelve, when a Marine Care Center car picked them up.

It took them to the beach, where a team of people were waiting. They brought Chess on a boat and slowly lowered her into the water.

Stepping out into the tide, Adriane looked at Chess, only a few feet away. She was halfway submerged, about to go under. Pushing through the water that felt as heavy as sand, Adriane made her way to Chess's side.

"Do you remember me?" she asked, giving a hint of a smile. Chess gazed back, tilting her head. She remembered.

"OK, clear out, everyone!" an official yelled from behind them. The team of people surrounding Chess dispersed, leaving Adriane with her. Slowly, Chess edged under the waves. When the water was deep enough for her to swim, she dove down into the blue abyss.

Adriane turned, looking down at the water. Slowly and somberly, she started making her way back up to shore. She was stopped short, however, by a nudge on her hand. Looking down, Adriane found Chess staring back. Smiling, Adriane smoothed her hand over Chess's nose, laughing as whiskers tickled her palm.

"Go on, girl," she urged, sliding her hand off Chess. "You're free."

But Chess wouldn't move.

Tilting her head, Adriane gave Chess a puzzled look. "What?"

The manatee tilted her head back, her eyes glistening. Suddenly, Adriane understood what Chess wanted. Adriane walked out until the water was at her shoulders, tugging her down, and then ducked under.



Adriane experienced what she thought to be the most magical moment in her life

Adriane opened her eyes, blinking against the sudden sting, looking for Chess. Finally, she spotted her, a few feet away. The heavy water carried Chess to Adriane's side, where she dipped down lower. Submerged in weightlessness, they swam, curling beneath the surface and over the sand. For a few short seconds Adriane experienced what she thought to be the most magical moment in her life.

Tucked beneath the waves and swimming among the fish, Adriane felt peace. She felt the world Chess lived in, and she understood, then, that Chess wanted to leave. This was her way of saying goodbye.

Chess passed by Adriane, gazing up at

her. Gently, Adriane lifted her hand and placed it on the manatee's head. Their eyes connected one last time, then Chess turned, pumping her enormous tail into the deep.

Adriane became aware of a dull ache in her chest, lingering in Chess's absence. It wasn't all because of Chess, though. Adriane was running out of air, and her lungs were bursting.

The second Adriane surfaced, she took in a long, fast breath. Refreshed, she looked out towards the horizon and smiled.

She'd never forget her.

"Goodbye, Chess."



What Is Laughter?

By Zoë Cassinelli

Water

Laughter is like a cool glass of water.

Refreshing, enjoyable.

A cool trickle going down your throat.

When you laugh, you forget the pile of homework,
waiting at school for you.

You forget about the fact that your mom is in the hospital,
and you're not sure if she's ever going to come out again.

You forget about grades and projects and friends.

Your mind goes blank like a blackboard...

and you laugh.

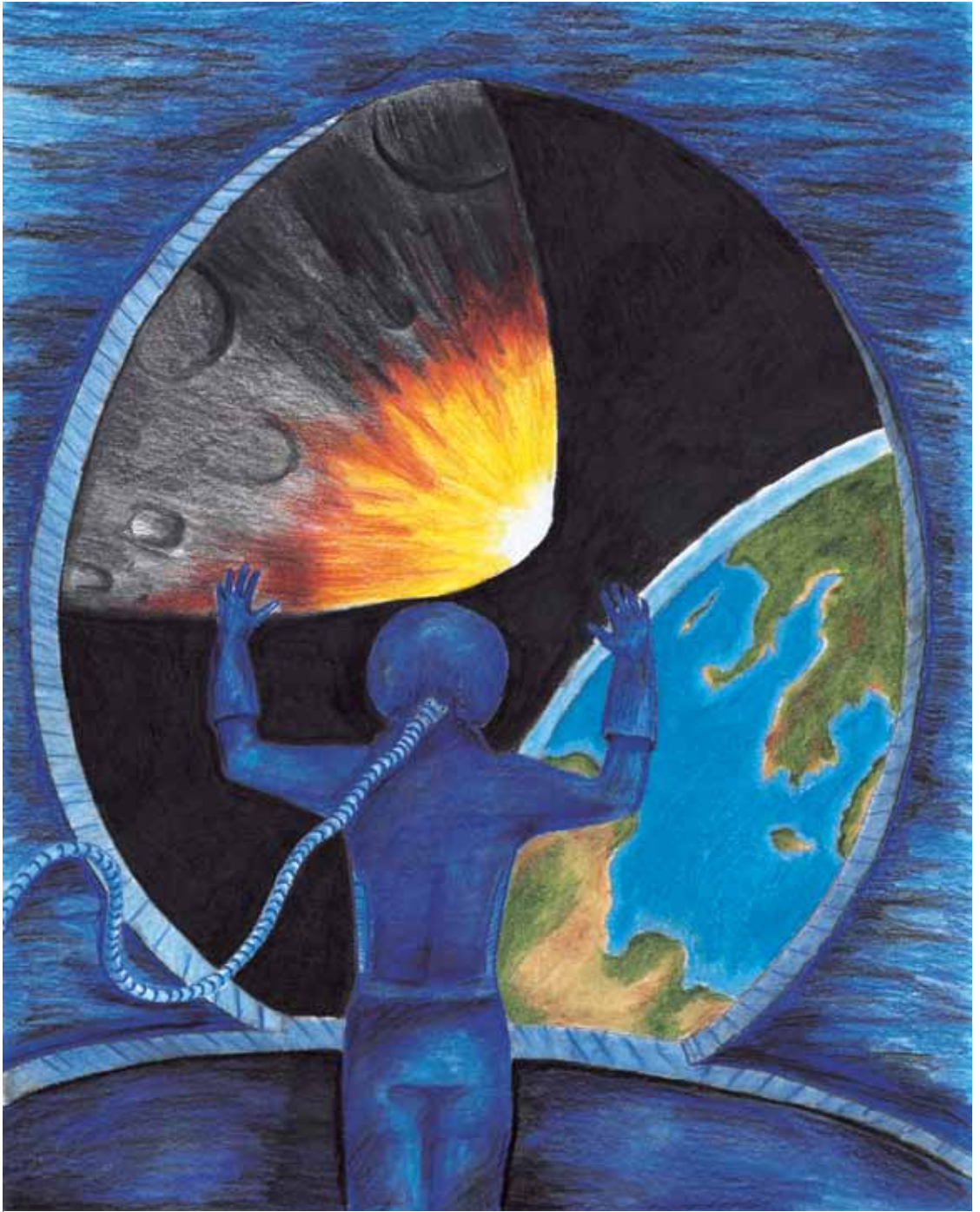
You laugh to forget, you laugh to enjoy, you laugh to feel free.

And as the sweating glass of water empties,
you are forced back into the real world...

The world where you belong.



Zoë Cassinelli, 12
San Rafael, California



The meteorite kept hurtling towards Earth, and Cam watched as her vision darkened

Falling into Earth

By **Ethan Levin**

Illustrated by **Charlotte Myers Martin**

PART I: A NEW MISSION

DALLAS TOOK HIS last breath of fresh air and put on his helmet. It was as hot as an oven in his space suit. In about thirty seconds he was sodden with sweat; nevertheless, Dallas and Cam took a spirited step into the elevator.

“Say your goodbyes to the ground,” said Dallas. “You won’t be seeing it for a while.” Dallas caught a sullen look in Cam’s eyes; something was plaguing her.

“Something has been seriously scraping at my instincts.” Dallas looked bewildered.

“Like what?” Dallas goaded. Silence. The drone of the elevator scaling up the ship was the only thing disrupting the awkward silence between the two astronauts.

“I don’t know,” said Cam, eradicating the silence. “I’m just getting some foretaste of a bad thing, like a preview of a movie.” The elevator was almost at the top of the ship, and Cam stared out the transparent window. They were at the top finally, and the elevator doors opened.

“Bzzzzzt.” The interstellar mission was to repair the broken lunar module on one of Jupiter’s moons; as simple as breathing. It would be a breeze. The two astronauts stepped onto their space shuttle, which was in the middle of nowhere.

“All systems are go!” said Cam. Unresponsive, Dallas just stared into the bright blue sky.

Although it would be a piece of cake, Cam hesitated to start



Ethan Levin, 13
Maitland, Florida



Charlotte Myers Martin, 13
Bellefonte, Pennsylvania

the spaceship. She didn't feel right about the mission.

"Hey," Dallas said calmly. "Don't worry about it! It'll be fine."

Despite her instincts, Cam started the spaceship and blasted into space. Blasted into danger's way.

After the jostling of the atmosphere, Dallas could think clearly and was back on track. They were now passing the moon. "All right. Prepare for hyper-jump!" Dallas started pulling the lever and listening to the ultra-powerful engine get ready for light speed. But Commander Jenkins showed up on the monitor in the middle of his controls. Dallas and Cam snapped to attention and saluted.

"At ease, astronauts."

"What's the problem, sir?" asked Dallas.

"Well, it seems our satellite has picked up a giant meteorite, on the trail for Earth."

Cam's face turned chalk pale.

"How much longer until impact?"

"About twelve hours. You better get some rest because when you wake up, you're gonna stop this thing."

"*What?*" Dallas yelled. "With all due respect, sir, how are we possibly going to stop a giant meteorite?"

"That is for you to figure out, Mr. Graham."

"But what about Cam? She's got a family at home."

"All the more reason to make it home. I'm done here. You have exactly eleven hours forty-seven minutes. Good luck,

astronauts." The monitor turned black, leaving Dallas Graham and Cam Donston praying for their deaths to be quick and painless.

Cam stared blankly into space. Literally.

"I was right," Cam said, with no emotion. It was like she was in a trance. "I knew there was something wrong, but I went anyway. And now we're going to die here in the middle of the void of space."

"But we'll die with pride, honor, and patriotism. Now let's go to bed and wake up early, so we can plan how we're going to stop this big rock!" So Cam mindlessly slumped into bed and lay there, silently crying and saying goodbye to everyone she loved.

PART II: FALLING INTO EARTH

"**W**AKE UP, CAM. Wake up." Dallas stood over Cam and gently shook her awake.

"How much time left?" Dallas looked at the time on the monitor.

"Three hours and 54 minutes," said Dallas.

"We better get started," Cam said somberly.

"No need, Cam. I got *no* sleep last night. Spent the whole time devising a plan. I know how we're going to stop this thing." Cam looked at the several bags under Dallas's eyes and the completely slumped way he held his shoulders.

"That's great!" said Cam. "We'd better start preparing!"

The plan was simple. The ship had mining lasers on it in case they needed to

cut through rock. They would fly closer to the meteorite, try cutting it into the smallest pieces possible, and turn it into space dust. They contemplated that they would cut it into fractions, until it was so small, the impact would be no more destructive than dropping a bowling ball from a building. As long as people go to underground shelters, they will be fine.

"Thirty minutes left. We should be seeing it in about three... two... one!" Sure enough, they could see the meteorite, coming in way faster than expected. "Uh-oh. Start mining lasers now!"

"Zzzzzzz!" the lasers heated up. Cam grabbed the controls and started the ship going in reverse.

"We're not fast enough!"

"Then we'll just have to let the meteorite hit." Dallas looked at Cam. She was silently crying.

"OK." Dallas grabbed the controls and veered right. But it wasn't enough.

THE METEORITE smashed into the engine part of the ship, with a terrible screech of metal ripping. The ship was totally exposed to the void of space. The shock wave threw Cam and Dallas against the side of the ship, and Cam knocked her head bad, even in her space suit. The meteorite kept hurtling towards Earth, and Cam watched as her vision darkened. Before she went unconscious, she saw the impact of the meteorite and the end of Earth. And then everything went black. Cam and Dallas were unconscious, falling into Earth.

FINAL PART: ALONE

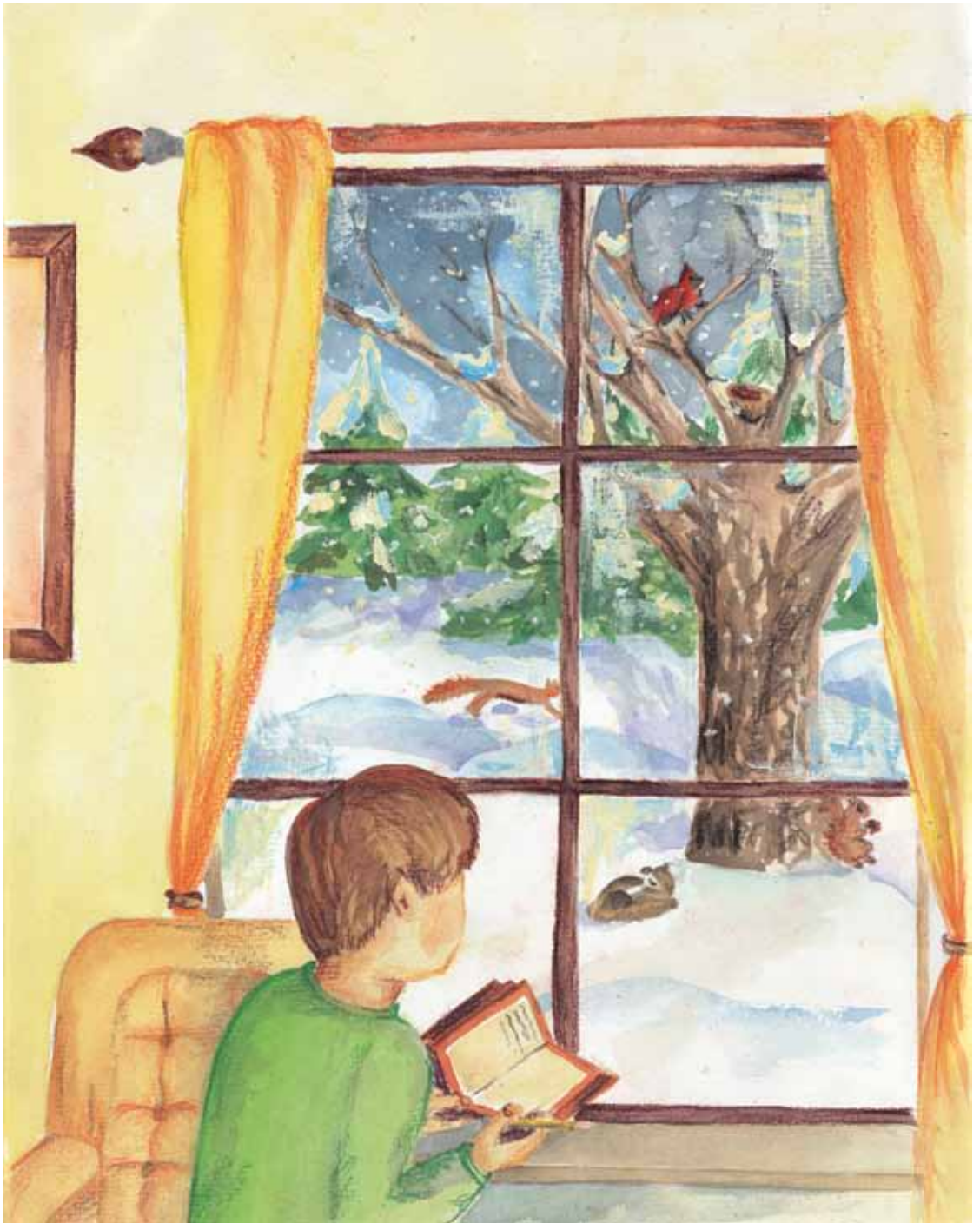
"CAM... CAM... CAM! Wake up!" Cam Donston slowly let the light flood into her eyes. Immediately, dust covered her vision, but when she wiped her eyes, she saw Dallas Graham, standing over her, looking casual as ever. "Geez, you took quite a nap there, Cam!"

Cam was confused. Was she dead? Did she somehow make it? Or was it all a dream, from beginning to end? No, she thought. It doesn't matter. I'm moving, breathing, and somehow on a destroyed world. Then Cam remembered seeing the meteorite hit.

She did a full 360-degree turn around the desolated planet. Just blackish-gray sand. She then realized she somehow made it, and the dust that fell in her eyes was actually ash. So she and Dallas were alone, on the planet Earth, or whatever the ball of ash was. But she would have to get used to it.

EPILOGUE

IN THE YEAR 2520, Cam and Dallas were long dead. But they had children together. And those children had children, and from the year that Earth was destroyed, in 2082, a little more than 400 years later, there were about two million people back on Earth. It wasn't 6 billion, but it was a start! Cam and Dallas were remembered like Adam and Eve, the first people on planet Imagine, the name of the ship that held the two most famous people on Earth. Cam and Dallas would live in the people of Imagine forever. 🌱



An unseen hand painstakingly covers the bare trees with white snow

Look

By **Ani Wilcenski**

Illustrated by **Erin Ruszkowski**

AN UNSEEN HAND painstakingly covers the bare trees with white snow. It doesn't leave a square inch of land untouched, filling the brown earth with clean white. The snow forms a blanket, worn like a comfortable sweater by every tree and every foot of ground. Slowly the hand encases each pine needle with clear ice, adds a slick layer of black ice to every driveway. For the final touch, it sweeps the sky with pale gray, bleaching the blue to a boring charcoal.

A young boy excitedly watches this, staring out of his brightly lit house at the snow settling on the big oak tree. To an adult, the old wood and the frail, thin branches look abandoned and gross, as if they've been forgotten by Mother Nature. To a child, the squirrels running around its base, the cardinal nesting in the branches, and the chipmunk curled up underneath its cover are plainly visible. They see how majestic the tree is, standing tall and proud. This boy is no different, staring in awe as the flakes tumble from the sky and onto the branches. His father, dressed in bulky layers, joins him at the window. He sees none of the beauty only young eyes can catch. Instead, he angrily mutters about how awful the view is and makes a mental note to chop down that oak tree in the spring.

The boy's dad goes out to shovel snow, but the little boy curls up on his chair and gazes at the scene. As the air grows colder and the drifts of snow pile up, a young chipmunk is amazed at the white fluff falling down. He can't catch it, and it doesn't taste good, and it doesn't smell at all. All it does is lie there on



Ani Wilcenski, 11
Ballston Lake, New York



Erin Ruszkowski, 12
Keller, Texas

the ground, like a trap for him to sink into. Instead of daring to move and get stuck, he shelters himself under the oak and waits for the stuff to go away. Suddenly, a snowflake falls through the canopy of branches and settles on his furry nose. Shocked, he tries as hard as he can to get a glimpse of this invader. It tickles his forehead, is cool on his fur, and really smells pure and sweet. Its beauty makes him think about things that weren't snow at all, like courage and love. Happy with his new friend, he runs in a circle. Only after he misses catching a snowflake does he realize that his guest has melted, leaving only wet fur behind.

IN A FOREST like this one, food is scarce. She knows it. Why else would she work nonstop in the summer months storing food? Why else would she guard her tree ferociously to make sure nothing is stolen? In a way, it's ironic that the one time she leaves her oak tree, half her supply is stolen. So now, being a lousy squirrel at the bottom of the food chain, she's only got one chance to get her food back. After tracking down the skinniest male squirrel that has her precious red berries, she begins to chase him. Chattering furiously, the two animals streak through the snowy forest and around tall pine trees.

As the snow falls faster and the day grows colder, she can't help wondering if she should just give up. After all, he probably ate half the food anyway. On the other hand, if she runs fast enough, she can get to his stash. Pivoting nimbly, she darts

through the woods. Sure enough, in a few minutes, a squirrel is eating juicy berries with what seems like a smug expression.

The old man obeys no rules of the forest. Daily, he plunders the stock of the other animals there. He is lazy, but smart enough to know that he can be. Why should he work, when there is bountiful food to be had just three feet away? Today, the old cardinal gazes out at what he likes to call his territory. Rightfully, at least in his mind, he's earned that forest. Ever since he was a young bird, he's made his home there. He battled the elements, and now he gets to relax. No more hoarding food, freezing to death, being scared of the forest animals. He's done it all. Foolishly, he thinks he can do whatever he wants now.

As if proving his point, he flies lazily to the birch tree where two young squirrels store food. Within seconds, the proud cardinal is soaring through the gray sky, carrying a heaping mouthful of food. Who says you have to work to survive?

The little boy watches all this and writes it down in big block letters. Then he closes his favorite rust-colored notebook, full now with all his observations. Carefully, he ties a green string around it and wraps Kleenex around this treasure. Prying open a loose floorboard, he places it gently inside the dark hole. Then, he walks out of the study and flicks off the light.

FIFTY YEARS LATER, the study has been transformed into the room of

a little girl. Pink flowers decorate pink walls, and a white fluffy rug covers old wood floorboards. It's one of the many renovations that have transformed the ancient house into a modern house for a modern family. Barely six years old, she's twirling around and singing. At that moment, she stumbles over the edge of the rug and falls. Her hand hits the ground, and a *snap* echoes throughout the tiny room. Cautiously, she pushes the rug aside and sees a dark space where a floorboard used to be. Inside there is a package tied in gross green string and wrapped in yellow paper. She tears off the tissue and unknots the thread. A look of disappoint-

ment spreads across her face. Nothing important, nothing except a book. The book has yellowed pages and is full of writing that she doesn't want to read. Sadly, she pushes the rug back and drops the journal onto her bed. A name is written into the front—Eddie Jones. She doesn't make the connection, but Eddie is her grandfather.

Unaware of how special this book is, she puts it with her Barbie dolls. One day, she will grow up and read it again and take a second look at the forest outside. One day, she will give it to her kids, and one day they will give it to theirs. Right now, she's just a child, and as she runs out of the room, a cardinal swoops over the sky. 🍁



Go Back to Asia

By Jason Fong



Jason Fong, 11
Manhattan Beach, California

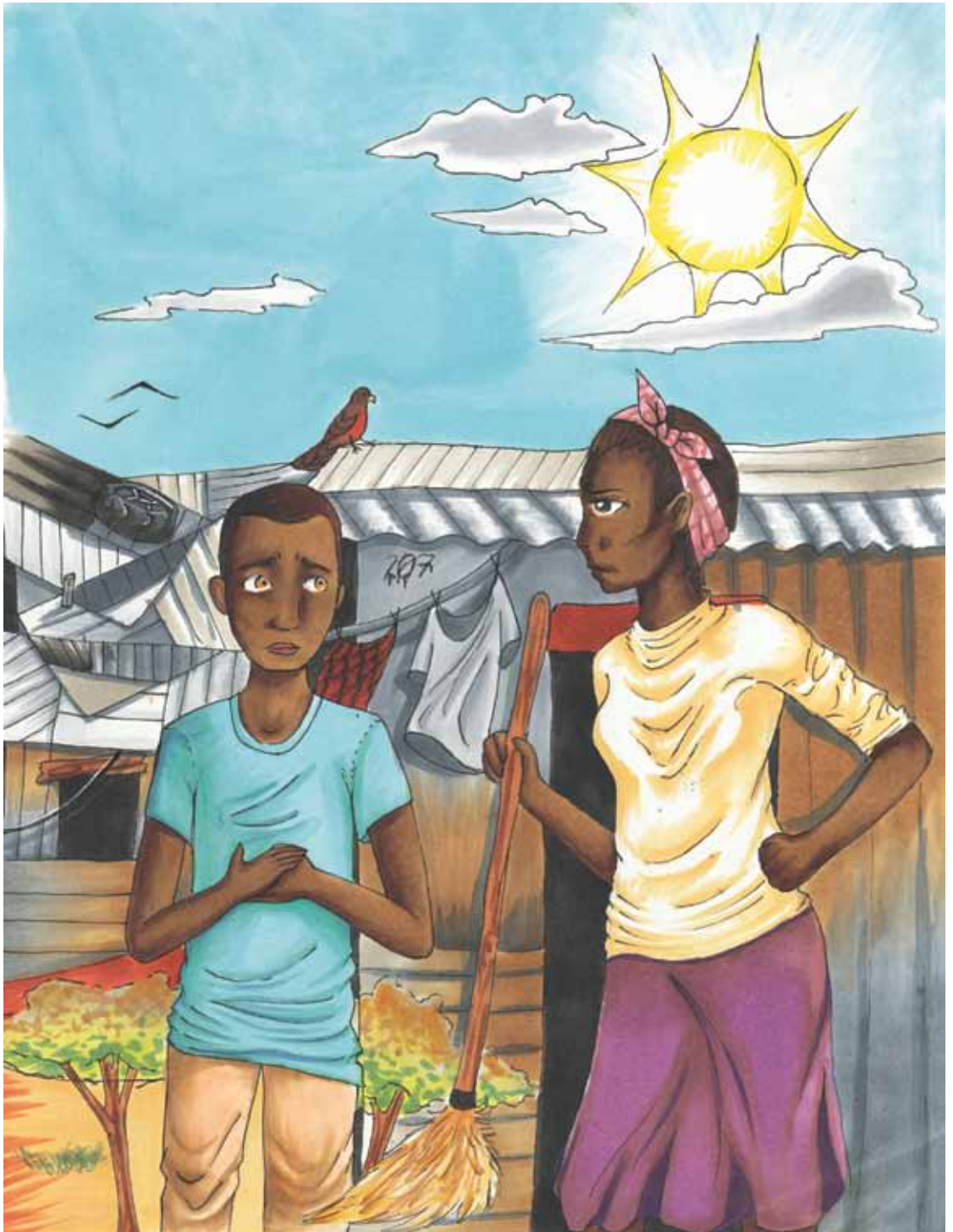
“Go back to Asia!”
He says and sneers and snarls.
He lacks imagination.
He is so predictable.

Sometimes he spreads his pain and says,
“Go back to Egypt!”
“Go back to Mexico!”
“Go back to Africa!”
He must be a travel agent
Waiting to book a flight.

Maybe he’s right.
Maybe we should all go back
And thank the Native Americans
For their hospitality,
For their generosity.

But where would we go
When our home is here?
I was born here and raised here
Just like you.
My parents were born and bred here too
Just like you.

My grandparents' souls left for the sky but were buried here
Too.
I'm staying right here.
With you.



“Where were you all that time, Sereto, hmm?”

The Bright Star

By **Ella Jane Lombard**

Illustrated by **Leigh McNeil-Taboika**

This story takes place in 1976, in South Africa. At this time in its history, the country was in the middle of apartheid, a governmental policy that discriminated against non-whites and gave authorities nearly unlimited power to arrest and kill civilians. By 1976, students in the Soweto township were staging protests and uprisings, and a secret guerilla army called the MKs had formed. Rebellion was in the air...

I WALKED HOME alone in the reddish dirt, kicking a rock along in front of me.

“Sereto! Get over here, boy!” Mama’s shout rang out across the rows and rows of tin-topped shacks that were the Soweto township.

“Ja, Mama!” I called over the distance, running all the way back to our little hut, where Mama was sweeping the cracked-dirt stoep.

“What’re you doing, hmm? There’s work to be done, water to be fetched. Are the buckets full from the pump? And where’s Ledi?”

I scuffed my toe in the dirt.

“Ledi’s inside, minding the pots, remember, Mama? And keeping an eye on Tustin. I’m gonna go do the buckets now.”

“Where were you all that time, Sereto, hmm?” Mama set the broom aside and looked down at me with a furrowed brow. “I know it’s difficult, and I’m sorry about you not having enough time to play, but with your Pa gone there’s only so much I can do alone.” Her voice was all business, but I knew the sorrow



Ella Jane Lombard, 13
Amherst, Massachusetts



Leigh McNeil-Taboika, 13
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

behind it—Pa had died only four months ago, in a riot where the police had opened fire. With Pa gone, everything was floaty and unsettled. It was a struggle just to remember the things that needed doing, like filling the water buckets and fixing meals.

I looked into Mama's quiet gray eyes and sighed.

"I'm sorry, Mama. I was playing with Billy." It wasn't true, of course, but how could I say that her oldest child was giving himself up to the same cause that killed her husband? She *couldn't* know that I was secretly taking part in the student uprisings. She *couldn't*.

To my surprise, Mama didn't even seem angry that I had snuck off. She just shook her head sadly.

"Ah, Sereto," she murmured, "I am sorry things have to be this way."

"They'll be better someday, won't they, Mama? Things are already changing." I almost bit back the hint at rebellion, but I couldn't help myself. I wanted her to feel the hope I felt at the rebellion.

"Ja, Sereto," she said sadly, "but not before many more innocent people are destroyed."

Then she picked up the broom and hustled off, leaving me standing on the stoep as the sun set behind me. I heard little kids playing and mothers shouting, and I smelled suppers being prepared. The fiery sun sank and sank, lower and lower, and I wondered if I should feel something. Everything was being taken away from me. Pa was gone, and Ledi

and Ma and me were overworked. There wasn't any time to talk anymore, no time to process what had happened. Tori, who was my closest friend except for Billy, had been arrested in the middle of the night, along with her father, and many other students had been arrested, injured, and killed. The riots were no laughing matter, whether they were led by children or adults, and this apartheid was taking everyone I loved away from me.

I stood there, watching the sun sink, so detached that it was as if I looked down at myself from several feet up in the sky. I couldn't decide how I should react, what I should feel. Then, like a faint tickling that grew steadily in my stomach, a feeling crawled up my throat. *Anger*. They had taken everything from me. Everything, and yet they could still take more. They could *always* control me because they could always take more: they could hurt Ledi or Tustin or Mama or Billy, they could arrest me, they could kill me. I remembered something Pa used to say: "That government, those whites—they can do anything they damn please." I laughed, a bitter, harsh sound in the dusking air, and spat on the dirt, trying to rid my mouth of the sour taste. I spun on my heel to grab the water buckets. And as the last traces of light faded from the sky and I walked towards the water pump, I started to whistle a little tune. It was only when a bird tweeted the last note with me that I realized it was the song we had sung that day at the uprising. I stopped, dead cold. A breeze passed straight through me

and a night bird hit one last solemn note. The stars were bright, almost too bright—like a warning. Something was unnatural in the night.

I ran the rest of the way, to shake the eerie feeling, and filled the buckets quickly. On the way back, I talked aloud to calm myself.

“You’re just being jittery for the sake of it because you’re scared, Sereto, and anyone would be. But don’t you go getting all worked up over nothing. Just now, everything’s fine, hmm?” I went on like that in a whisper, not even realizing I was imitating Mama.

My footsteps pressing the earth, I strode back onto our street in Soweto. I stopped, shifting my weight. Every night, even after sunset, the township’s darkness was filled with the clanking of cooking pots and the quiet babble of family conversation. But now there was only silence. The bright stars, the pinprick stars, froze above me. The shacks reminded me of those stars in some odd, disjointed way—*too* still, *too* unmoving. Something was wrong, as if the wheels of heaven had stopped turning.

I left the buckets behind a few scraggly bushes and crept around the back of our hut. I heard voices from inside—but they were different. Harsh voices. Male voices. I stiffened.

“We have reasons to believe that your son is one of the leaders of these rebellions.”

“Please believe me. Sereto would never endanger himself like that. He’s a good

boy!”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know... don’t know...”

“Where is he?”

“I really...”

“Do you want me to arrest you for being uncooperative?”

“He... he went out a while ago. To visit a friend.”

“After dark?”

Mama didn’t respond. The policeman snorted and there was the sound of something being written down.

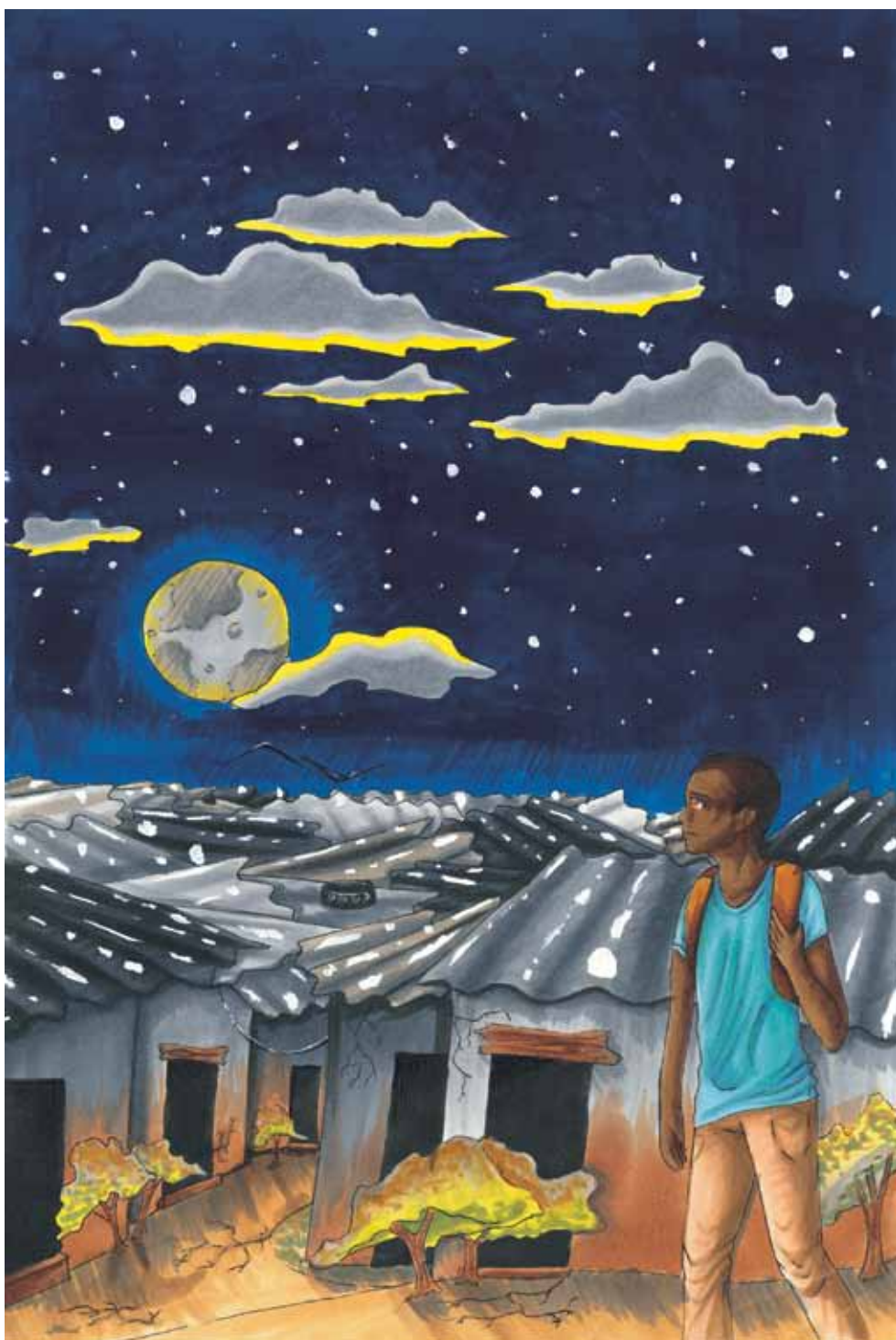
“Mama!” It was Ledi’s voice, and it was a hopeless wail of grief. My heart went cold.

The door to our shack opened. *They’re leaving. They’re leaving.* Then I saw Mama stumbling out the door, her hands tied. *No.* For a moment her eyes passed over the spot where I was hidden, and her eyes met mine briefly. *No.* Her mouth formed one subtle, barely discernible word.

“Go!”

No! There were tears dripping onto the ground, but I didn’t know where they came from. Then I heard Tustin start to cry and Ledi wail. *No no no no no no no they took her away they couldn’t just take Pa they had to take her away too and now we have no one no one and they’ll be back and they’ll take me away and kill me just like they’ll kill her...*

I went to leap out of the bushes, to hurt them, to kill them, to somehow stop them from taking her, to tear into them with tiger claws until they couldn’t hurt anyone else. With a numb speed filled with pounding adrenaline and the identical pounding of my heart, I lurched to-



The tin-roofed huts gleamed with starlight, as if they were their own type of star

wards them, but my shirt caught on the bushes and they held me back. As my fingers worked to free the knot and my Mama vanished into the night, my body shook uncontrollably with some strange, overpowering emotion. I think it was fear. There was nothing I could do to help Mama, nothing at all...

Numbly, I sprinted into our hut. The other shacks remained closed in the darkness, hiding from the shadows. The shadows that had claimed her.

Running inside, I embraced Ledi and Tustin and held them tighter than I ever had before. We cried all together, collapsed on the floor in a shaking, hopeless heap. Eventually, I pulled away, my voice broken with tears.

"Ledi. Pack some things. As much as you can, and for Tustin too. We've got to see if Mrs. Pebrele will take you in."

Mrs. Pebrele had a daughter Ledi's age, and they had played together for as long as I could remember. If anyone could keep Tustin and Ledi safe, it was her.

"But Reto," cried Ledi, "where will you go?" I could hear it in her voice, the hollowness, the emptiness. It was the voice of a girl whose heart had been shattered time and time again. Her voice echoed utter defeat.


"I'm not putting anyone else in danger," I said bitterly as we ran about, trying to pack. "I'm tired of it all—protesting, protesting, none of it did any good, and now everything's gone and..." I shook my head and my tears ran even harder. "I want to

do something. I'll go to Mozambique, to train with the MKs. I want to *fight* for this. Besides," I added with a grim smile, as the separate part of my brain wondered how anything could matter enough to smile anymore, "they said I was a riot leader. So I'll *be* a riot leader. They asked for it." Some part of me recognized the same hollowness in my voice that I heard in hers.

"*Ja*, Reto. You'll be the best." She embraced me tightly, then backed away. "We can get to Mrs. Pebrele's on our own," she continued, forcing strength into her too young voice. "If she won't take us, there are other places. *You* need to go. They'll be back, and if they find you..."

I remembered Mama's last word to me—Go! I nodded and hugged them both one more time.

"I love you," I whispered. "Stay safe, Ledi, Tustin. *Amandla*." I shouldered my pack and left, drawing away from them with this murmured prayer, and I knew that they were looking out past me, Ledi with Tustin on her hip, and I was walking into the night with nothing but one breath after another, deep and sweet, leaving Soweto with the dirt under me and the dark sky above.

And behind me, the tin-roofed huts gleamed with starlight, as if they were their own type of star in their own endless night. Silvery, subtle, and as I walked, looking from the shacks to the sky and back again, I couldn't help but notice that they both shone unnaturally bright. 

Book Review

By Maya Martin

Forge, by Laurie Halse Anderson;
Atheneum: New York, 2010; \$16.99



Maya Martin, 13
Battle Ground, Washington

PICTURE THIS: you are ordered to build a shelter in the icy, cold snow wearing an old, worn shirt and torn pants. You haven't eaten since yesterday, and even that was just flour and water. Occasionally, you have water flavored with your friend's old shoe, which you call soup. You're lucky enough to have shoes, but some of your friends' shoeless feet are turning purple in the crunchy, numbing snow. You must do everything just right if you don't want to get into trouble with the commanders. This is what it was like for soldiers at Valley Forge in 1778.

Forge is the sequel to the novel *Chains*. The two books tell the story of two slaves, Isabel and Curzon. Each has their own goal: Curzon wants freedom, while Isabel searches for her sister, who was sold to another family as a child. Curzon is promised his freedom if he signs up for the American army. As a soldier, he is captured by the British army, but he escapes with Isabel's help. At the beginning of *Forge*, the two have separated.

Curzon suddenly finds himself in the middle of the battle of Saratoga. He soon discovers a young private who is having a face-off with a British soldier. Quickly, Curzon saves the


boy's life and in the process rejoins the army. The boy's name is Ebenezer, and the two become fast friends.

Curzon suffers a lot of prejudice in camp. One of the privates teases him, ignores him, is rude to him, blames him, and eventually even steals from him. Also, Curzon has a lot to think about. He is concerned about earning his freedom, maintaining good standing in the army, and then, where is Isabel? Is she alive? He is constantly thinking about her.

Before reading this book, I had no idea that African-Americans were involved in the Revolutionary War. Slaves could work as spies because they could listen to their masters' conversations, or they could fight in the army just like any other man. Slaves didn't only help shape our nation, they helped make it.

This story is very unpredictable, which I enjoyed. Sudden turns and twists made the story entertaining. I was surprised at nearly every chapter's ending. It is a very descriptive book that gives you a great mental image of the life of a soldier.

I was amazed that Curzon did so well through so much pressure and injustice. It's amazing to think that there were really people who were treated so poorly and went through that much prejudice. I won't spoil the end, but it is shocking and very intense. I can't wait to see what happens in the next book in the series!

I highly recommend this book to anyone because it is so interactive. I found myself gritting my teeth at the enemies of Curzon, feeling hungry for food, and missing Isabel like he did. I also recommend the preceding book, *Chains*, which is from Isabel's point of view. They are both remarkable stories of early America, slavery, and the Revolutionary War. Any girl or boy who enjoys fiction stories would love this book. 



Her hands traced the quilt that her grandma had made for her when she was a baby

Blue

By **Isadora Loftus**

Illustrated by **Anna Hirsch**

MOONLIGHT FELL through Nancy's bedroom window. It came to rest on her last birthday present. Today I am ten, Nancy thought to herself. Double digits! Nancy had gotten some very sad news, which had eaten away at her excitement. She started to wonder if she'd ever remember these thoughts. Her hands traced the quilt that her grandma had made for her when she was a baby. Grandma had given every color on the quilt a number. Orange was one, yellow was two, purple was three, and so on. Last year she had been nine, which was red. This year she was ten, which was blue, like the ocean.

Frost clouded the window, and outside snow lined the streets. Cars' headlights cast shadows across Nancy's bedroom walls as they drifted down Elm Street. Headlights illuminated her tidy, small room. The walls were painted blue, and the floor was wooden with a little, oval gray carpet next to her bed. On the windows were little white curtains with a rose design. Nancy's bed was plain and wooden with yellow cream bedsheets covered by her grandma's quilt. In the far right of the room was a little desk with a chair. Also, there was a little bedside table next to her bed and in front of the window. The room was tiny but Nancy felt safe and cozy in it.

Nancy turned to look at the last present, enclosed in a plain, wooden box. It was the only one from her grandma. A sob rose to her throat. Her grandma had died just today, on her birthday. She wiped her eyes with her sleeve and tried to blink back the



Isadora Loftus, 11
Newton, Massachusetts



Anna Hirsch, 13
State College, Pennsylvania

rest of the tears. Grandma's doctors told them that she had died of a heart disease. She imagined her energetic grandma lying on the floor, frail and helpless, unable to move. A shiver went up her spine; she didn't want to think about it.

Uncertainly, she reached towards the box. Her fingers swept gingerly over the rough wood. Did she dare open it? Her hands clasped the lid and slowly lifted upward. Nancy drew in her breath as she saw what was inside. A beautiful conch shell lay nestled at the bottom of the box.

A vivid memory came flying back to her. Suddenly, Nancy was a five-year-old, walking at Hanson Beach, staring admiringly up at her grandmother with devoted love. Her grandma had a young look about her that Nancy had never seen before. Her name was Hillary; it seemed to fit her, the little girl had thought, while looking at her grandma's round blue eyes, gray bouncy curls and rosy cheeks. Her grandma leaned over and picked up a big shell and handed it to Nancy. "This is a

conch shell. When you put it to your ear you can hear the ocean," she had said.

Back in her room, Nancy carefully picked up the shell and put it to her ear. It did sound like the roar of the ocean. Nancy ran her hands over the shell's rough grooves. Inside it was shiny pink and twirled around like the inside of a human's ear. Nancy dipped her nose toward the pearly pink inside of the shell. It seemed to smell like her grandma's perfume mixed with the salty smell of the ocean.

Why had her grandmother given this to her as her last present? She twisted her hands together and tried to think. Gingerly, she turned the shell over in her hands repeatedly. Soon Nancy came to a conclusion; this was the conch shell she and her grandma had found on Hanson Beach. The answer hit her like a punch to the chest. Tears of happiness and sadness poured down her cheeks. This was her grandma's goodbye present to her, a souvenir of a memory they had shared together. ❀



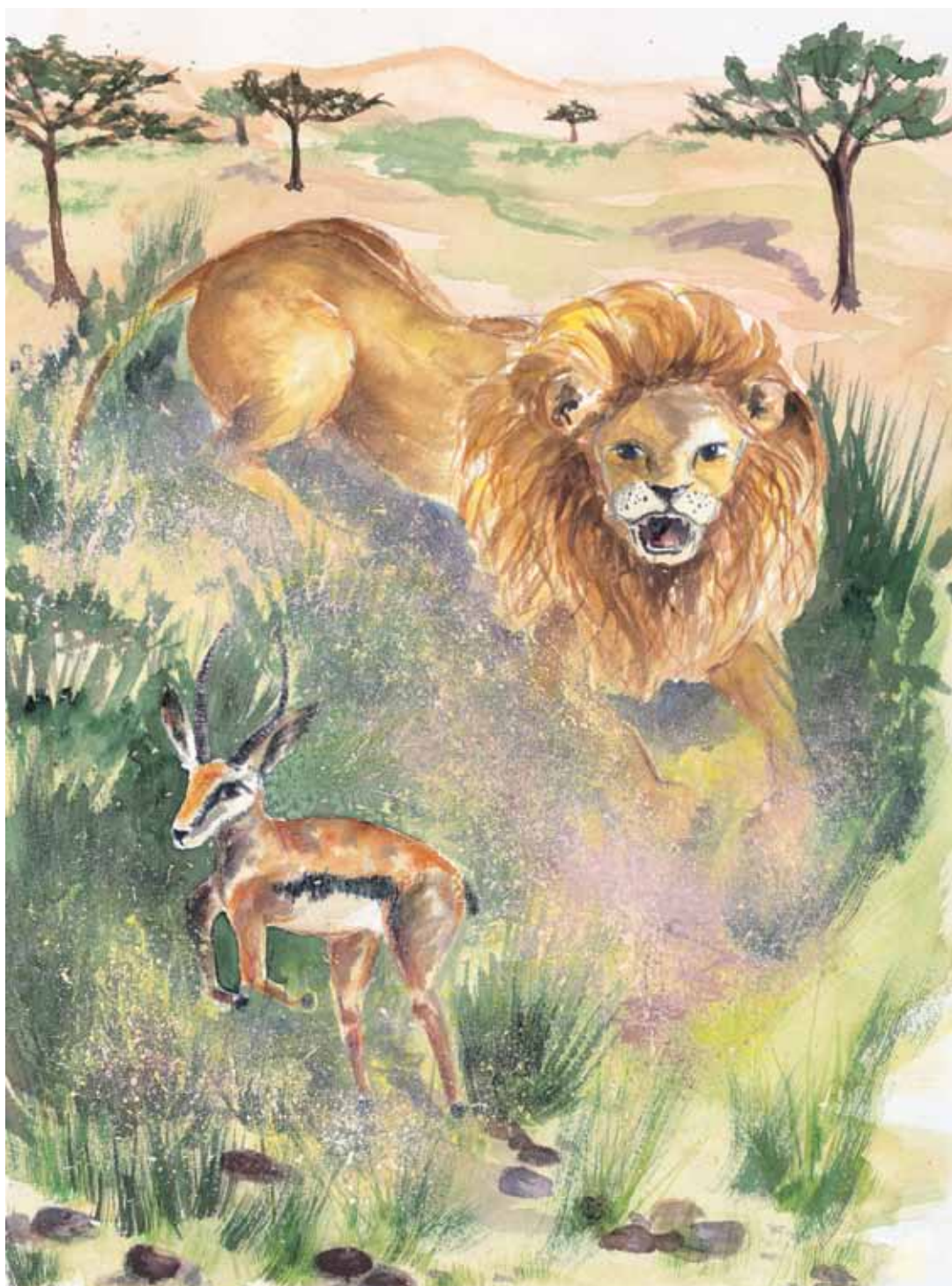
Slipping on Raindrops

By **Zinnia Schwartz**

It was a funny, sunny afternoon when
Something hit my cheek
A cloud of a loud boom
Came from above
Then dark splattered all over the park
Like black paint hitting white paper
I ran as fast as I could,
slipping on raindrops



Zinnia Schwartz, 10
Evanston, Illinois



We are running for our supper, yet they are running for their lives

The Hunt

By **Hannah Berman**

Illustrated by **Dominic Nedzelskyi**

I SIT IN THE TALL GRASS. It licks around my face, and I almost brush it away. But I can't, not now. The sun is beating down on my neck. I yearn to move underneath the nearby tree, but I dare not. Any second now. I stick my tongue out, hoping some relief will come from the heat.

Finally, they come. All in a herd, stomping down on the reeds hard, as if they had ever done wrong. I wait still, until I see it: a baby, barely steady on its feet, behind the rest of them. I look at my family. There they lie, staring at them all, wondering which one seems the best. I finally move. Just one ear, but my family understands. We stand as one and rush out of the tall grass.

They weren't expecting us. Not our strength or our numbers. We are still outnumbered five to one. We surround them, forcing them to compact into a ball. I see their delicious hides closing the baby in, protecting it from harm. But we can't just kill them all. I only want the baby. So I open up the circle, and we push them out. Then the race begins.

We are running for our supper, yet they are running for their lives. Paw and hoof alike pound the ground in hopes that it will prevail. Now I care not about the silly grass that bothered me so a few mere seconds ago. I push it down, crunching it, so that no silly animal may ever eat it again.

It bothers me that the world works this way, in circles. The gazelles eat the beautiful, healthy grass. They are the bad guys. But then, when we hunt them down, they turn good and we are suddenly evil. And when we die, the vultures come down from



Hannah Berman, 12
Brooklyn, New York



Dominic Nedzelskyi, 12
Keller, Texas

the sky and peck at our remains, and suddenly we are the poor, pathetic prey and the vultures are bad. Why is consuming considered bad? I have never held a grudge against the vulture who pecked up my mother, leaving me the head of the clan. The grass never strikes back at the gazelles. We just give in, again and again, to the circle of terror that keeps us all alive.


They have separated out now, the strong in the front, the weak closer to us. I spot the baby somewhere in the middle. I claw down a sickly beast, then continue running. If we find it again, we will enjoy it. If not, the vultures can have it. Now all I care about is that juicy baby, crying for the mother I have just killed. Somehow it continues to run. Now it understands: this is not a game.

If I didn't have to kill to eat, would I still kill? A hard question. Sometimes I enjoy the chase and feed. But if I didn't have to kill, I would probably never kill again: I don't want to be part of this circle. I don't want to give in to the set idea of what's right.

I look at the baby. It looks as appetizing as before, yet somehow I have lost my appetite. Suddenly I think: What if it is all a game? What would happen if, just

once, I let my supper go? What would happen then? I wouldn't be giving in, yet if I could not find that mother gazelle, my family might go hungry for days. I think for a moment or two. But my decision has already been made for me. I flick my ear yet again. My sons and my daughters understand yet again, but they complain. They howl up at the sky in hunger. But I am different; a changed animal. I will never again kill the young and healthy. I now know: it is wrong.

We stop chasing the gazelles. They stop too, wondering why. Normally I would just pounce on the baby, being mere feet from me. But I don't. I hold my head high. My mouth is watering, but I don't even look at the baby. It takes a step towards me. My self-control wavers as it rubs its small head on my furry mane. I don't look down. I close my eyes. When I open them, the beasts are gone. I see their tails disappearing over a hill nearby.

We go back. I might not go by the rules, but I do have to eat. We settle down to a nice meal of gazelle. She was still alive when we got back. My sons tore in with valor, making her cry out with pain. Her blood stained the floor as we gorged. I guess some things can never change. 

Jess and Lizzy

By **Maia Donahue**

Illustrated by **Zoe Hall**

JESS SAT DEJECTEDLY on the playground swing. She kicked the sand around her feet as if personally punishing it for her lack of friends. It wasn't fair that she should have to sit here on this swing, lonely and bored, while the other kids had a great time. Her eyes flickered restlessly from face to face, until they landed on Sarah Smith and her posse who were happily making fun of some poor kid whose mom still dressed him in the fifth grade. Jess had a burning hatred for Sarah. It seemed to Jess that Sarah's favorite pastime was making fun of Jess and her all-black wardrobe. Even though Sarah was mean, Jess still wished that she would stop to admire her bright red Converse high-tops, or how good she was at reading. No such luck. People never seemed to notice Jess. She wasn't pretty or ugly. Her hair was stick straight and reddish and her eyes were a muddy brown. And she certainly wasn't an athlete, unless running away from doing her chores was athletic. Jess was an outcast, a loser, one of those people who just fade into the background. In fact, the girl walking toward the swings right now probably just saw the red brick of the school behind Jess, not Jess herself.

Jess was just about to walk away when she really looked at the girl coming to the swings. She tried not to stare, but it's hard not to when the person you're staring at is so weird-looking. The girl had electric blue eyes the size of the moon and light blond hair so curly it reminded Jess of a poodle. Unlike Jess's, this girl's skin was really pale, as if the sun didn't touch her. Apart from



Maia Donahue, 12
Midland, Michigan



Zoe Hall, 13
Rockville, Maryland



"I saw you sitting here by yourself and thought you could use some company!"

the scary eyes and pale skin, the strangest thing was that she didn't have a gaggle of friends with her. Weird, Jess thought.

"Hi there!" The girl plopped down on an empty swing.

"Uh... hi?" Jess's face had turned scarlet. She wasn't used to talking to people her age.

"I saw you sitting here by yourself and thought you could use some company! The name is Lizzy by the way!" Lizzy smiled.

Apparently, Lizzy's grin was infectious because Jess couldn't help but smile back and say, "My name's Jessie, but you can call me Jess."

"Oooh, I love the name Jessie! That was my dog's name!"

Jess wasn't sure if that was a compliment, so she said, "Yeah, OK. By the way, I... uh, don't think I've seen you here before. Are you new to Penbrooke?" Jess crossed her fingers that Lizzy actually was new and Jess hadn't just been unobservant.

"Oh yeah, I'm new in Mrs. Raymond's fifth grade. You're probably in the other fifth grade, right? Isn't Mrs. Marsh, like, really mean or something?" Lizzy looked at Jess curiously.

Jess let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding and replied, "Yep, I am in

Mrs. Marsh's and she's super nasty. She reminds me of a bird 'cause she has a beaky nose and weird beady eyes."

"Caw, caw!" Lizzy giggled, imitating a bird.

Jess smiled and laughed.

"But seriously, you have to tell me about this school," said Lizzy.

"What do you want to know?"


"Everything."

So Jess proceeded to tell Lizzy about the cutest boys, nicest teachers, and the way Sarah Smith thought that using Proactiv acne medicine was something to brag about. Lizzy laughed at the funny stuff, was sympathetic at the right times, and not once did she call Jess a loser. Jess was elated and she could tell Lizzy was excited to have a friend too.

When the bell rang, Lizzy turned to Jess smiling and said, "So I guess I'll see you around. Maybe we could go to my house sometime?"

"Sounds like a plan!" Jess grinned.

As they ran off to separate classrooms, Lizzy yelled, "By the way, cool Converses!"

Jess walked to class with a huge smile on her face. So maybe Lizzy was a little odd, but who was Jess to judge? All that mattered was that Jess finally had a true friend. 

Music

By Leah Berger



Leah Berger, 12
Shelburne, Vermont

I finger the valves.
They are cold and uninviting to the touch.
I take a breath.
My lips form an embouchure.
I blow.

At first there is noise,
Much noise,
Then the music starts.
It flows through my veins,
Coursing through my body.

I play from the heart.
I love it,
No,
Need it.
Music is me,
I am the music.

I need it,
I want it,
I can't get enough,
I play until my heart swells
And my body sways.
I feel it in my bones,

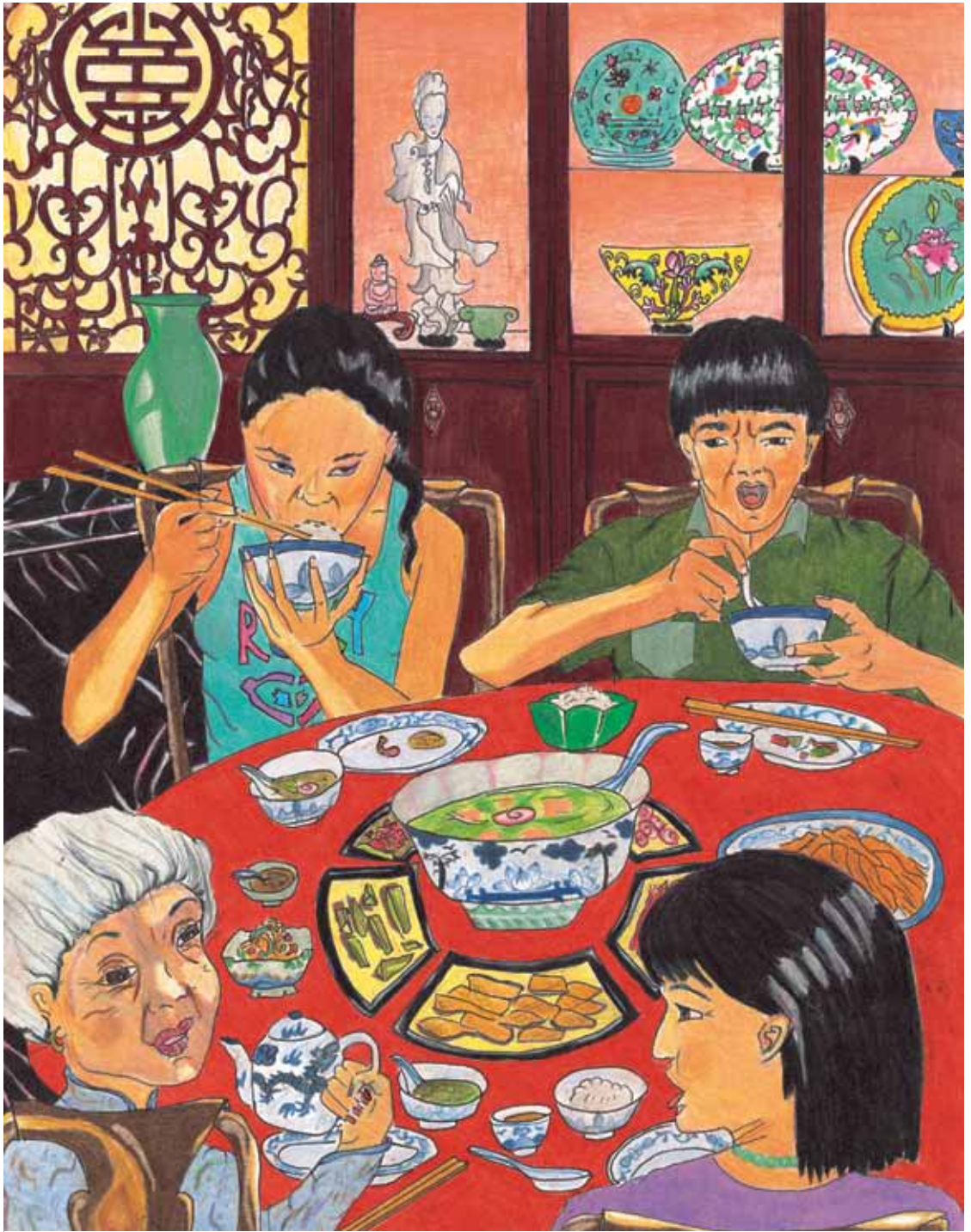
I feel it in my toes,
I reach deep,
And pull the music from me.

It keeps coming,
I play the notes.
But they aren't just notes.
It's a beautiful, swirling music.
It's a loud leaping leopard,
And a quiet mouse,
It's for everyone,
It's for me.
It fills my room,
My valves are fluid.
My fingers dance across them.

Another melody,
It sounds like a trundling tortoise,
Marching home.
It goes high,
It goes low,
My lips never slow.
I breathe in,
And out.
In and out.

The music ripples like a river,
Creating smiling pools of pleasure in my heart.
I can't let it stop.
I won't let it stop.

Music is me,
I am the music.



Her family had done nothing wrong, why was she so angry?

The Gap and the Gift

By **Shannon Jin**

Illustrated by **Tiger Tam**

SHERRY HAD NOT RETURNED to her home country in years. In a way, it was no longer her home country. What had been home is now the past. Father was the one who had insisted on the trip. She had been indifferent at first, but her father had persisted. China had changed; no longer a third-world country, it was now a Mecca of wealth. Yet once in a while, Sherry would catch a glimpse of the slums, normally overshadowed by the forever reaching skyscrapers. The day after their arrival, Sherry's father had purchased a round-trip train ticket to his hometown.

Sherry watched the city view zoom by, crushing the assumptions and conclusions Sherry had carefully welded from outdated books and movies on modern China. She closed her eyes, and a billion years seemed to float by, accompanied by the soft rumble of a train and a low patter of words she once knew.

TEN YEARS AGO

ASIX-YEAR-OLD SHERRY knelt in the garden, dirt tickling her bare knees. Her grandmother knelt beside her, her fingers skillfully separating weed from vegetable. Sherry's grandmother did not believe in planting flowers. "They only feed the eyes." Instead, the two planted a wide array of vegetables to supply the family kitchen. So many wonders were cultivated in the garden, tomatoes for pasta, cucumbers destined to fulfill a delicious egg drop soup. Sherry relished the moment, the day was warm but not stifling; her backyard was well shaded by the great



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oaks behind her. Yellow orchids framed the old wooden fence wrapped around her backyard. Sherry liked spending time with her grandma; she eagerly helped with the gardening and cooking; it generated a swelling pride within Sherry. "*Lai, bang wo jiu yi xia zhe ge cao,*"* her grandma spoke again, her Chinese punctured with a few heavy pants. Sherry pulled out the weed and then paused for more instruction. Sherry watched as her grandmother gently examined a cucumber before holding it out for Sherry to pluck. The cucumber fell into the palm of an awaiting hand. Sherry's grandma smiled, the corners of her eyes crinkling.

FIVE YEARS AGO

SHERRY WATCHED as her grandma wandered their street. She watched as her grandma picked up the prickly seedpods that no one knew a name for exactly and threw them into her basket. She watched as her grandma bent to pull up dandelions from the lawn, throwing them into her basket too. What was she doing? "Nai, Nai, what are you doing?"

"These *cao* can be eaten. They are very nutritious." Her grandma's voice was a little shaky. She had aged. Nowadays it seemed everything was a challenge for Grandmother to achieve.

"No! You can't eat those, they're weeds! Nobody eats those! Nai Nai, come inside and go... watch some TV."

"*Ai yab!* You don't know! I used to eat these all the time as a kid!"

Sherry frowned before turning to head

back into the house. Sherry rarely spent her time outside anymore, for fear of growing freckles. Sherry instead spent most of her time in front of a screen of some sort; if it wasn't the desktop then it was the laptop. Her parents frowned and shook their heads, warning her of premature wrinkles.

"Go practice piano," Sherry's parents urged her.

"No, I don't want to."

"It's not a matter of want or not."

"Yes it is."

Her father peered down at Sherry, stern and rigid. "You don't give up on this. Don't be a quitter. Sherry, do you know what the poverty line is?"

Sherry sat deaf to his words.

"It's the line between happiness and sorrow. And do you know who is on the other side of the line? It's the unlucky ones, and the quitters. Your grandma was unlucky. But she worked hard, and now she lives well in America."

Father continued. "You are lucky; you were born on the right side of the line. If you want to stay there you have to work hard." His voice was sharp; it cut Sherry with a truth she overlooked. But she stared ahead, refusing to look him in the eye.

That night for dinner was a bowl of dandelion salad. Sherry's mother crinkled her nose and in broken English muttered to Sherry, "She probably pick that from somebody yard." Dinner that night was a soup of silence.

* "Come, help me pull out this weed."

TWO YEARS AGO

“**E**VERY RICE GRAIN comes with a drop of sweat.” Sherry’s father pleasantly quoted his favorite Chinese saying. Sherry glared, angry, before shoving more rice into her mouth. “Look at all those rice grains wasted.” A few more grains slipped from the firm grip of Sherry’s chopsticks to the table.

Sherry shot back in English, “Shut up.”

“Is that how you talk to your parents?”

Sherry growled. Her father dramatically sighed, then continued to reminisce about his childhood days. Sherry’s mother joined in, and so did her grandmother.

“It was so difficult back then... We were so poor.”

“Aye... I used to live in a one-room shack. Ma, do you remember?”

“Nowadays everybody has a mansion.”

“It was incredible that you even made it into college.”

“Yes, used to walk six miles to make it to school.” Sherry’s grandmother paused, then sighed, “My mother was against it.”

“Things are better now.”

Sherry’s mother joined in. “So much better that you are getting fat!”

The whole table erupted into laughter, only Sherry continued to silently shove rice into her mouth. She grew more and more vicious, and finally erupted.

“*Shut up!*”

The room froze. Sherry could feel her family’s eyes on her, but she continued to shove food into her mouth. Sherry’s mother found her tongue first. “Why?”

Sherry faltered; she didn’t have a why.

Her family had done nothing wrong, why was she so angry? “I don’t know...”

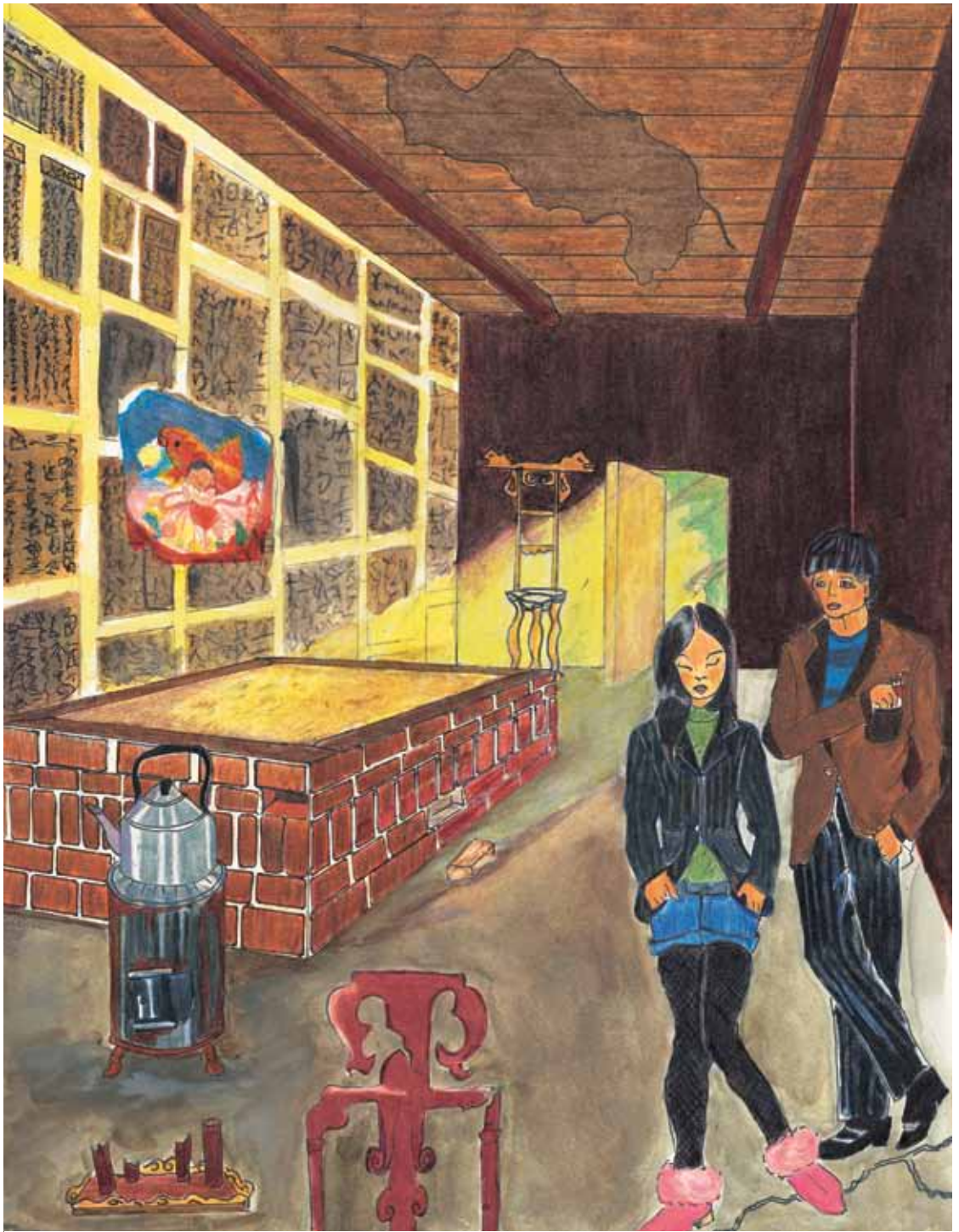
Her mother carefully examined Sherry for a second before speaking. “Is it because you don’t know how to relate?” Her voice sounded gentle and warm.

“Yeah. I suppose so...”

The silence soon evaporated, as the conversation moved on, skipping past Sherry’s outburst as if it had not occurred.

PRESENT DAY

SHERRY WATCHED as the busy crowded hustle and bustle of the city slowly changed to the slow wide greenery of the empty countryside. She watched as the crowd on the train began to thin with each passing station, till at last only Sherry, her father, and an old withered woman remained on the train. Her father sat beside her, his face buried in a newspaper, only the furrows of his brows visible. The steady hum of the train was the only sound. Sherry observed the old woman across from her. A click-clack sound joined the hum of the train; the old woman was knitting. She thought of her grandmother and wondered how Grandmother was doing. She had not seen her grandmother for years. Sherry had begun to appreciate her parents for the things she once despised. But at the same time, she no longer relied on them so much. Sherry examined the clean car. It reeked of new, not a single fleck of dirt could be found on the floor. She looked at the old woman across from her. Sherry examined her frayed gray hair, the naked



"Dad, why did you bring me here?"

age spots in her skin, the old-fashioned Mao-style coat she wore, and the plastic bags that served as her luggage. The woman undoubtedly lived in the countryside, where things moved a little slower and signs of harder times could still be found.

The train halted, and its automatic doors flew open. A smooth mechanical voice drifted overhead, thanking passengers for their patronage. Sherry, her father and the old woman shuffled to the exit. Sherry watched as the old woman shuffled away, a slow but persisting force, before briefly turning in her own direction.

Sherry stood in the empty house. It was a simple one-room house, with a *kang** near the wall, aged antique furniture on cement floors, no windows, and no doors. Sherry was silent. Her father pointed out memories, places, the nooks and crannies of his childhood. Sherry's father pointed out the place where he and his cousins huddled together in the cold days of winter, the table where he would fight for a second bowl of rice. Sherry felt strange standing there; she tried to pose as if she

could care less, but truthfully, every molecule within her was pulled toward the door. She felt awkward, almost unworthy of the shabby hut. She suddenly felt guilty for her own prosperity.

"Dad, why did you bring me here?" She looked down at the floor as she said this. Sherry pinpointed a crack in the concrete to observe. She nudged the crack with her UGG boots.

"I just wanted you to see." Her father's answer was straightforward, his voice empty but full of unseen words.

"Why?"

Sherry's father paused for a moment. He rifled in his pocket for a moment before pulling out a pack of cigarettes and lighting one. His eyes wandered off into the distance.

"Remember this."

The cigarette remained lit for a few more moments, before being promptly smashed onto the floor. Then, Sherry's father swiftly turned towards the door.

"There's nothing left here."



* heated bed



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