

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Spencer Hanson, age 12, from "The Island," page 23

THE ISLAND

Owen can't believe his little sister rowed out to Ash Island alone

REJECT

Cincinnati feels abandoned by her family, until she finds Misty

Also: A story based on the Greek myth of Arachne

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2012

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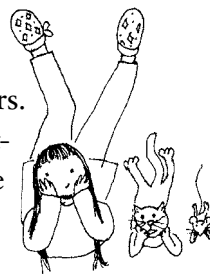
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Stone Soup

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, 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: Spencer Hanson has been making art his whole life, starting with finger painting! His mom is an artist too. Spencer's favorite mediums are watercolor and gouache, and his favorite things to paint are trees. In addition to his twin brother, Wyatt, and sister, Lyda, Spencer has a dog, a bunny, two cats, and a horse.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I am a huge fan of your magazine and have been reading it for as long as I can remember. When I was younger, I used to sneak away my older sister's latest issue and read through it before she did! Now, every year, my grandmother gives me a subscription to your magazine for my birthday. It is my favorite birthday gift because it lasts all year and now my sister asks to borrow mine. Thank you for publishing a literary magazine written and illustrated by kids like me. I love the variety of subjects in each wonderful issue you publish. Your magazine has inspired me to explore many different genres of writing that I wouldn't have considered otherwise.

MAGGIE ADEDAMOLA, 11
Norwell, Massachusetts

I am training to be a professional ballet dancer. I love gerbils, puppies, reading, writing, and *Stone Soup*.

BECCA NECKRITZ, 12
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

I just received the September/October issue. When I opened the mailbox, there it was: a fat yellow envelope that made my heart skip a beat. Then I ran home to open it, faster than I did when I received my report card or my school schedule in the mail. The first thing I did when I got home was sit down and read it, cover to cover. There are so many other talented writers and illustrators out there! Seeing my own work in a magazine that is read by tons of other people is a feeling like no other. It is even better than the feeling of receiving forty dollars!

MICHELLE DU, 12
San Jose, California

Michelle illustrated "Rose's Tree" in the September/October 2011 issue of Stone Soup.

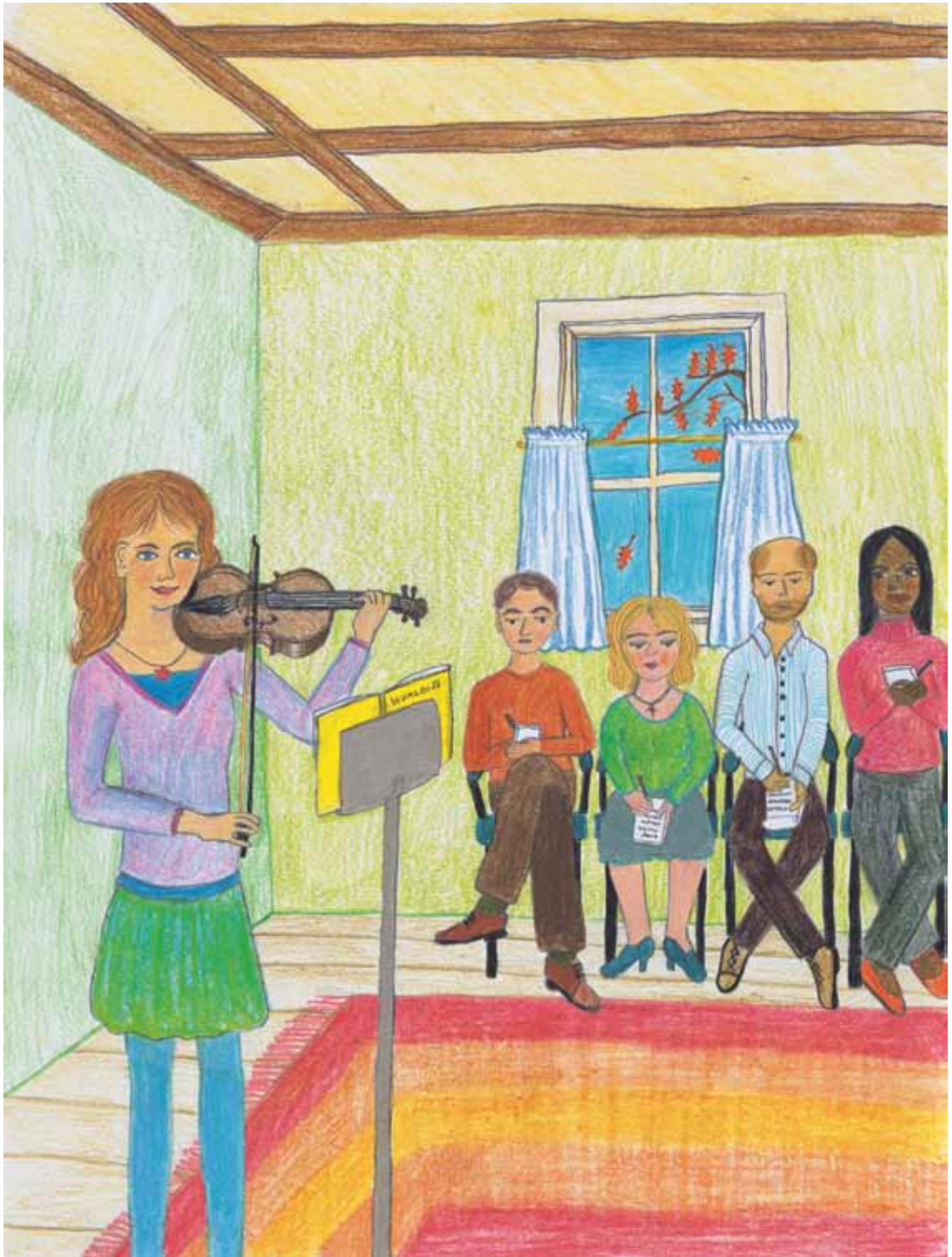
My older brother recently won first place in a creative writing contest and we all agree it is because of his great teachers and our subscription to *Stone Soup* magazine. The other day I took all our *Stone Soup* booklets and read them from cover to cover! Yes, all the ones I could find in our house and "Buffalo Hunt" [September/October 2011] and "Unstoppable" [May/June 2010] inspired me to write about my own experience at camp this past summer. I felt that, just maybe, I could write something that would show others how I had felt that day. It was the first time I was away from my family!

WILLIAM C. KELLY, 8
Queens, New York

I am a passionate literary student, and I love your magazine. It is intriguing and upbeat, keeping readers on the tips of their toes. However, I have noticed that, although beautifully crafted and a pleasure to read, most of the stories you publish never really convey a message about the depth and complexity of life. This all changed when I read "Wind Before," by Catherine Pugh [March/April 2011], about a young girl with a very bad broken leg. Jenna loves to run but is now reduced to a spectator as another girl, Alexa, races to break Jenna's mile-run record. Every surgery has gone wrong and rehabilitation does not work. Jenna never gives up hope, still wanting to be wind, the wind she was before. I found this to be a very touching story. It relates to many unfortunate children's situations and emphasizes the need to keep fighting, no matter how bleak the prospects. This story summarizes life's ups and downs, from broken legs to races won to surgery. I congratulate Catherine Pugh.

NIKKI KASAL, 11
St. Louis, Missouri

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.



And then, I play the last note

Winter Violin

By Téa Freedman-Susskind

Illustrated by Lydia Giangregorio

IT WAS A CHILLY autumn morning. I pushed my hands into my pockets as I walked out of our house to the car. “Don’t worry, Renee,” said my mom, “you’ll do great.” Still, though, I worried. Today I had an audition for a competition to play at Benaroya Hall. I had practiced and practiced and practiced and had even taken ten deep breaths, but still my nerves felt like someone was dancing the hula on them. And honestly, to tell the truth, it didn’t help that I thought I had forgotten my violin on the way out. Luckily for me, my mom was more on top of things and had brought it out to the car.

As soon as I fastened my seat belt, I was back to worrying. To try to stop worrying, I pulled out my music. It was the solo for *Winter*, by Vivaldi. I chose it because if I’m one of the winners, I’ll play at Benaroya Hall, the home of the Seattle Symphony, on the first day of winter.

I look at it, silently playing it in my head, poring over its pages, thinking things like, Play that part slowly and feelingly or, Remember, that part’s triple *forte*, play that loud. Soon, though, I’ve run out of things to say to myself about the piece, and I try to absorb myself by talking to my older brother, Jake. Sometimes he’s really annoying, but luckily for me, today he doesn’t try to get on my nerves. Instead, he’s really nice, talking and joking with me. And then suddenly we get there. It’s *supposed* to be a one-hour-thirteen-minute drive and ferry ride from our house on Bainbridge Island to the University of Washington (U-dub), where the audition is. But time sped up, and it feels like the ferry



Téa Freedman-Susskind, 10
Redmond, Washington



Lydia Giangregorio, 13
Gloucester, Massachusetts

took less time than it was supposed to, and the car magically sped ahead.

I pick up my violin and the folder that has my music and slowly walk to the doors of the music building at U-dub. When I get inside, there's a sign that points me to the waiting room. I turn left and walk into the room. It's light and airy, and everyone's got their instruments out and is tuning, playing, or just sitting there, holding their instrument. My spot is at 11:30. Right now, it's 11:15. I unzip my violin case and tune my violin. Then, I take out and tighten my bow. I scan the room for people I know. No one. Those fifteen minutes speed by, and soon a woman with her hair in a neat bun and wearing a black dress is calling my name. "Katz, Renee?"

Violin in one hand, bow in the other, I grab my music and walk over to the door. The woman leads me down a couple of dark, silent hallways. Well, not exactly silent. But they would've been silent if not for the woman talking so much. She blathers on and on and on. I'm way too nervous to hear a word of what she's saying. The walk is short, thankfully, and even better, there is someone finishing up their audition inside the room.

Then, suddenly, the door opens, and a girl a little older than I am steps out. She smiles at me. "Go on," the woman in the bun says, with an encouraging smile. It's the least amount of words I've heard her say at one time. My throat is dry as I step into the room and look around. The room is small and cozy, with four people sitting in chairs at the other end of the room.

The judges. There are two men and two women. One man looks really tall, the other looks medium height. One woman is pretty short, the other is at least as tall as the tall man. They all smile at me. The normal-height man says, "Are you Renee Katz?"

"Yes," I say nervously, clutching my violin tightly. I put my music on the stand. I say, "I'm going to play the solo for *Winter*, by Vivaldi." The judges look thoughtful. I pick up my violin and begin to play. I play the first movement, the *Allegro non molto*. Sharp and icy, you're out in the cold, miles from anywhere, it's a snowstorm, and you're freezing. Then I play the second movement, the *Largo*. While everyone else is outside, freezing, you're cozy and warm in front of a fire, with a book, hearing the rain/hail come down. After that, I play the third and last movement, the *Allegro*. You're ice-skating on a pond, building a snow person, just playing around in winter fun. You're not great at ice-skating, but you love it. And then, I play the last note. I'm stunned. Today I've played it much better than I ever have.

When I look up, the judges are busy writing down notes on notepads. One by one, they all finish. The tall woman smiles at me and says, "Thank you." I take the hint, grab my music, check to see that I have everything, and say bye to the judges as I walk out of the room, down the dark, now thankfully silent hallways and think about what just happened. I know I probably won't be one of the lucky five winners that get to play at Benaroya Hall. But



"Guess what came in the mail?" she said happily

I'm glad I tried. I soon get back to the waiting room. I pack up my violin, put my music back in its folder, and walk out the door. There my mom and Jake are waiting for me. I give them a big smile to let them know I was great. They smile back, looking relieved. We go to a restaurant in Seattle for lunch and then ferry ourselves

back on the 1:10 ferry for home.

EVERY DAY, for the next week, I went and got the mail. That was because the competition judges were supposed to send a letter within the week. Jake teased me about my sudden mail collecting, but he didn't know why. You don't

get rejection letters. If you've won, they send you a letter. The day after the week was up, I just totally gave up on the mail. I figured that if they'd chosen me, I'd have gotten a letter by now. I wondered what I should play next year for the competition. Maybe a Bach concerto. Who knows? Three days after the week, at exactly twelve, my mom was out getting the mail. Jake was in his room, listening to some rock music. I was in my room, reading a book and petting our cat, Stripes, who we found on our lawn a couple of years ago. He's now about four years old. Suddenly, the door opened. I knew who it was: Mom, back from getting the mail. "Renee! You *have* to see the mail!"

"OK! I'm coming," I said, standing up and walking to where she was in the kitchen. She was smiling.

"Guess what came in the mail?" she said happily.

"Ummm... a letter from Grandma?" I guessed.

"No! *You're one of the winners of the competition!!!*"

"You're joking!" I gasped.

"Nope," said Mom, handing me a letter that was addressed to me. The return address was to Benaroya! I hurriedly ripped it open, and a letter fell out. Here's what it said:


Dear Ms. Katz,

We are pleased to inform you that you are one of our five contest winners! Congratulations! You played your piece, *Winter*,

with true excellence. There are two rehearsals with all five winners, one in two weeks, and the other in three weeks. One week after the last rehearsal, there will be the concert on the first day of winter. See you on the stage!

I looked up from the letter and at my mom. All I could say was, "Wow!!!"

ONE MONTH LATER

ONE MONTH LATER, on the first day of winter, I wake up, half proud, half freaked out. Today, the world will hear me play *Winter*. I get up and look for a nice dress to wear. After I've put it on, I brush my hair, brush my teeth, have breakfast, grab my violin and music, and head to the car. We drive and ferry down to Benaroya Hall, mostly in silence. When we get there, I pull on my jacket, grab my stuff, and together my mom, Jake, and I walk to Benaroya. Where I'm going to play is really beautiful. I'm the last on the program, since I'm the youngest, but the other winners are really nice. We practice until the first trickle of audience members come trickling in. First Crystal Smith goes, on her cello. Then Allie Jones, on her viola. James Patterson comes next, on his bass. Then John Chen, on the flute. Then me, Renee Katz, on the violin. The announcer says, "Here is our fifth winner: Renee Katz, playing Vivaldi's *Winter*!" The audience claps as I come on stage. I smile at them, lift up my violin, and begin to play. 

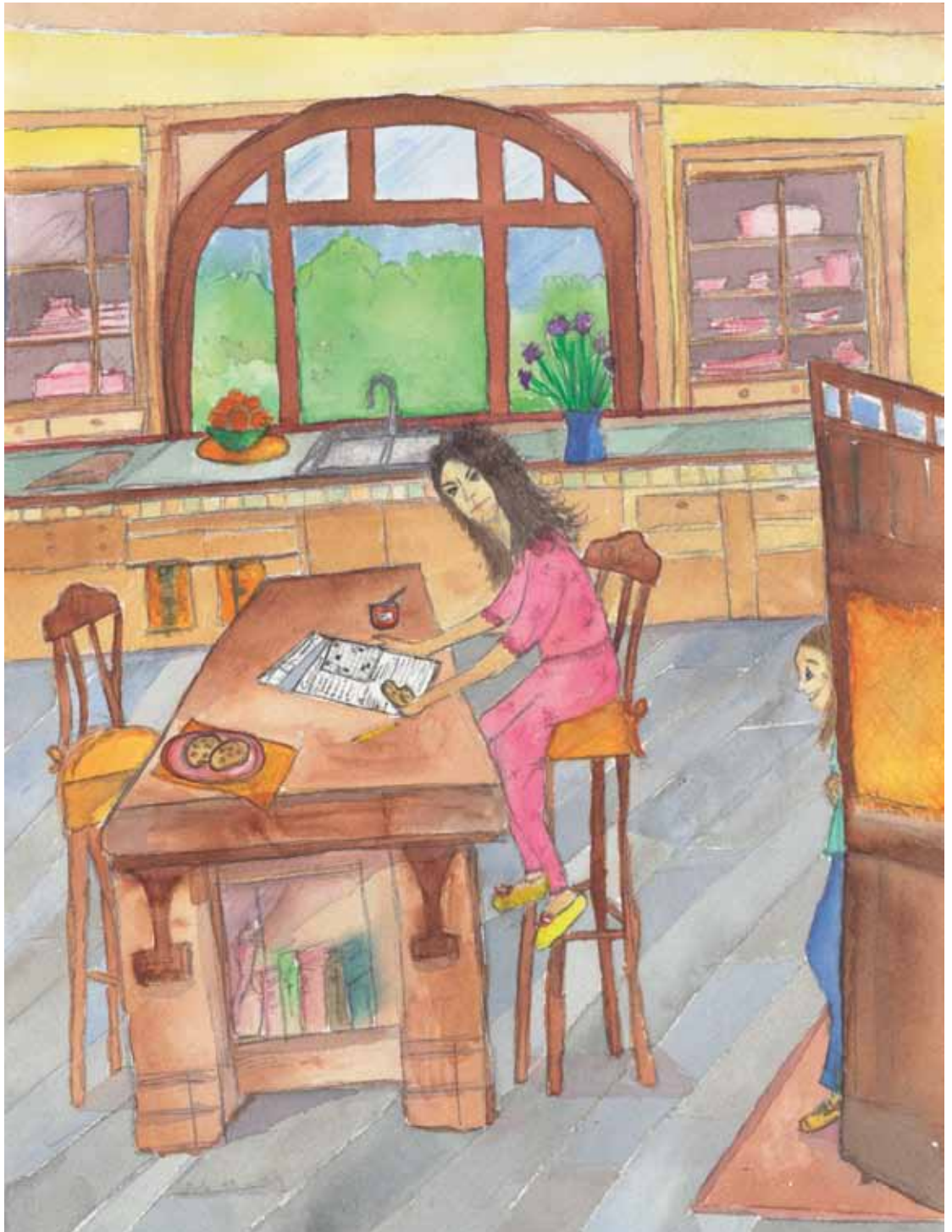
Sneeze!!!

By Jonathan Hall

Everyone was startled at the
Loud BBLLLLAAAGGGHHHH sound.
I had just sneezed
Into my trombone!
Instantly, most of the class turned
And looked my direction.
What awkward timing!
We were all in the middle of playing a song.
I felt kind of embarrassed.
I knew that was one thing
I wouldn't do again.
But I let out a chuckle,
As the band class
Paused for a moment.
The moment passed.
The band played on.



Jonathan Hall, 12
Granger, Iowa



She was like a bug that clung onto me that I couldn't shake off

Crosswords and Crumpets

By **Anika Kwan**

Illustrated by **Jo DeWaal**

I FOUND THE CROSSWORD puzzle section of the newspaper and picked up a pencil. One across: Roman goddess of wisdom. That was easy enough; I had studied Greece and Rome in fourth grade. I breezed through the crossword puzzle until I came to thirty-three down. “What will fly away if you don’t grab it soon enough?” Ten letters. I racked my mind for bird species that were ten letters long. Mockingbird? That was too long. Bluebird? Too short. I sighed and nibbled on a warm crumpet with raspberry jam. The doorbell rang, and, expecting the mailman, I answered the door.

It wasn’t the mailman.

“Hi, Ashley!” Bethany chirped.

My heart sank. Bethany was a handful to live across the street from, even if she didn’t go to my school and we weren’t the same age. I tried to dodge her whenever possible: at the town pool, riding bikes, gardening in the front yard. She was like a bug that clung onto me that I couldn’t shake off. I know I seem a little cruel, but I was on spring break, it was ten AM, I had woken up fifteen minutes ago, and I was pretty grumpy. I sighed.

“Hi, Bethany. Have you had breakfast yet?”

“Well, yes, but I’m already dressed and you’re not, and those crumpets look yummy, so maybe I could have one while I waited for you to get changed?”

She gave me a pleading, hopeful look with her big blue eyes, the color of my mom’s forget-me-nots. There was no way I could say no to her. I sat her down at the kitchen table and



Anika Kwan, 10
Foster City, California



Jo DeWaal, 12
Greenwich, Connecticut

jogged upstairs, throwing on a hot-pink short-sleeved shirt and khaki shorts. Fresh and most definitely awake, I jogged back downstairs to find Bethany polishing off the last of the crumpets.

Thank God Mom bought them in bulk, I thought, eyeing the now empty plate and the kitchen table covered in crumbs. Bethany saw me. I sat back down and picked up my crossword puzzle. Bethany leaped up from her seat.

"Can I see? I solve that kind of stuff with my dad all the time!" She peeked over my shoulder. "Thirty-three down—what will fly away if you don't grab it soon enough? Weird." She paused for a while, thinking. "Ooh! Ooh! I've got it!"

I got annoyed. I'd had it with Bethany. "Bethany, listen. Crossword puzzles you're supposed to solve on your own. OK?"

Bethany pouted. "Fine." She slammed the door without saying goodbye, which was totally fine with me.

It was when I went upstairs to my room that I felt guilty. I sat at my desk, trying to draw something. Drawing always took my mind off of something. I drew my cat, Toffee. I drew my best friend, Lizzie, who was in Hawaii for spring break, and me, laughing and having a picnic. I drew my fish. I drew my favorite cartoon character. All of them didn't look right for some reason. My mom came in.

"Ash? What's wrong?"

I shrugged.

"Who finished all of the crumpets?"

I felt my eyes narrow. "Bethany."

My mom seemed to understand. "Oh,

Ashley. You don't understand."

I hate when adults say that. "I do."

My mom slung an arm around my shoulders. "Bethany likes you. She wants to be like you."

"I get *that* much," I grumbled.

My mom continued, ignoring my grumpy attitude. "You're her role model. Remember Isabel?"

I felt guilty. "Yes."

Isabel was a girl that lived on my street when I was eight. She was my idol: tall, tan every summer, kind, pretty, not bossy. She was five years older than me, and I wanted to be with her every second of my life. She came over to babysit me almost every day; when she didn't, I would say, "Where's Isa?" She was the big sister I'd never had: I would help her study for her Spanish test; she would let me borrow her nail polish and lip gloss. We would do everything together: go to amusement parks, ride our bikes, share cotton candy, bake cookies, plant twin lavender seeds in our front yards so that they would bloom together, we did all we could ever think of.

Now, Isabel's in high school. I have her e-mail address, her phone number, and we still talk to each other, but I don't hang out every day with her. I can't.

My mom smiled. "Maybe you're Bethany's Isabel."

The tiny sprig of guiltiness bloomed into a flower. I sighed. "I'll find her."

My mom grinned. "That's the spirit."

I hopped on my bike and pedaled off to where I knew I'd find her: in the park, on



“Want to race down the slide?” Bethany asked

the playground, doing the mini-monkey bars over and over.

She saw me and dropped down. “What? I thought you were *doing your crossword puzzle*,” Bethany said.

I smiled. “Bethany, I’m sorry...”

She was trying so hard to look mad that I giggled, and eventually she did too. We laughed until other people at the playground gave us weird looks.

“Want to race down the slide?” Bethany asked.

“Sure,” I replied.

As we waited for our turn down the slides, Bethany whispered, “Want to know what the answer to the crossword puzzle was?”

I figured there would be many more crossword puzzles to do together, so I said, “What was it?”

Bethany smiled and said, “Friendship. F-R-I-E-N-D-S-H-I-P.”

I smiled too.

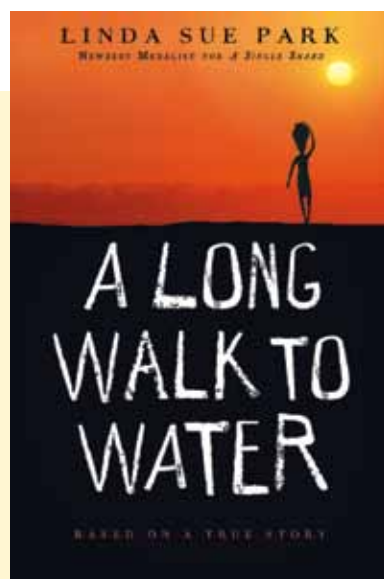
Of course.



Book Review

By Julia Elrod

A Long Walk to Water, by Linda Sue Park;
Clarion Books: New York, 2010; \$16



Julia Elrod, 13
Oberlin, Ohio

HAVE YOU EVER found yourself running as fast as you could but not really sure where you were going? Maybe you were trying to clear your thoughts or simply running for pleasure. Maybe, like eleven-year-old Salva Dut, you were trying to get away from something. Have you ever had to perform a task so terrible and tedious that you can't wait for it to be over? Nya, also eleven, must do this every day.

The year is 1985, and Salva is living in the village Loun-Ariik with his family in southern Sudan. One day, while Salva is at school, he and his classmates hear gunshots. It is not long before they realize that the Sudanese civil war has finally arrived at their village and is being fought just outside the schoolhouse. The students all hurry outside and are instructed by their teacher to hide in a nearby bush. After Salva reaches the bush, he realizes it is important for his survival to get away from the fighting. By himself, he begins to run away from his homeland and the Sudanese war, towards Ethiopia. There Salva remains, separated from his family, until the Ethiopian refugee camps are shut down six years later. Now that the camps are closing, many people begin to lose hope, but not Salva. He remembers that there are refugee camps in Kenya and leads about 12,000 young men and boys, called "the lost boys," safely to Kenya.

In 2008, Nya, also living in southern Sudan, must make the trip from her house to a nearby pond to get water. She carries a large plastic container on her head, and the trip there and back takes her the entire morning. When Nya comes home, her mother gives her boiled sorghum meal for lunch, then she leaves once again, to get more water from the pond. Each day, she walks twice, to the pond and back, to collect the family's water. One day, two men come to Nya's village and begin to discuss plans for building a well. At first the process goes very slowly, and the only water that comes to the well is very muddy. Nya wonders if the well will ever be anything more than a dream.

Reading this book made me realize how lucky I am. Every day I have enough to eat, enough to drink, and my family is always with me. Here we have two eleven-year-old children, both making long, tireless journeys and getting by on very little. Salva is part of a cultural group called the Dinka, and Nya is part of a group called the Nuer. I found out that the people of Sudan recently voted to split their country into two, in part because of irreconcilable differences between these tribes. Officials hope that it will stop the fighting. Hearing about problems such as this makes me very thankful to be living in America. Salva and Nya's stories are ones of survival and perseverance, and both tales really inspired me.

Salva's story, in particular, made a lasting impression on me, and I was shocked to find that the book was based on the true story of Salva Dut. The author, Linda Sue Park, had the chance to meet Salva, read his written accounts of the journey and conduct numerous interviews with him. Without giving away too much, I'll say that Salva was eventually able to use his amazing talent in leadership, his initiative and innovation, as well as his perseverance, to do something even greater for others and make a difference in the lives of many. Also, towards the end of the book, Nya discovers that dreams can come true. *A Long Walk to Water* is one of the most inspiring books I've ever read. 🌸

Arachne

By Victoria Boyden

Illustrated by Chloe Rose Dickerson



Victoria Boyden, 12
Taipei, Taiwan



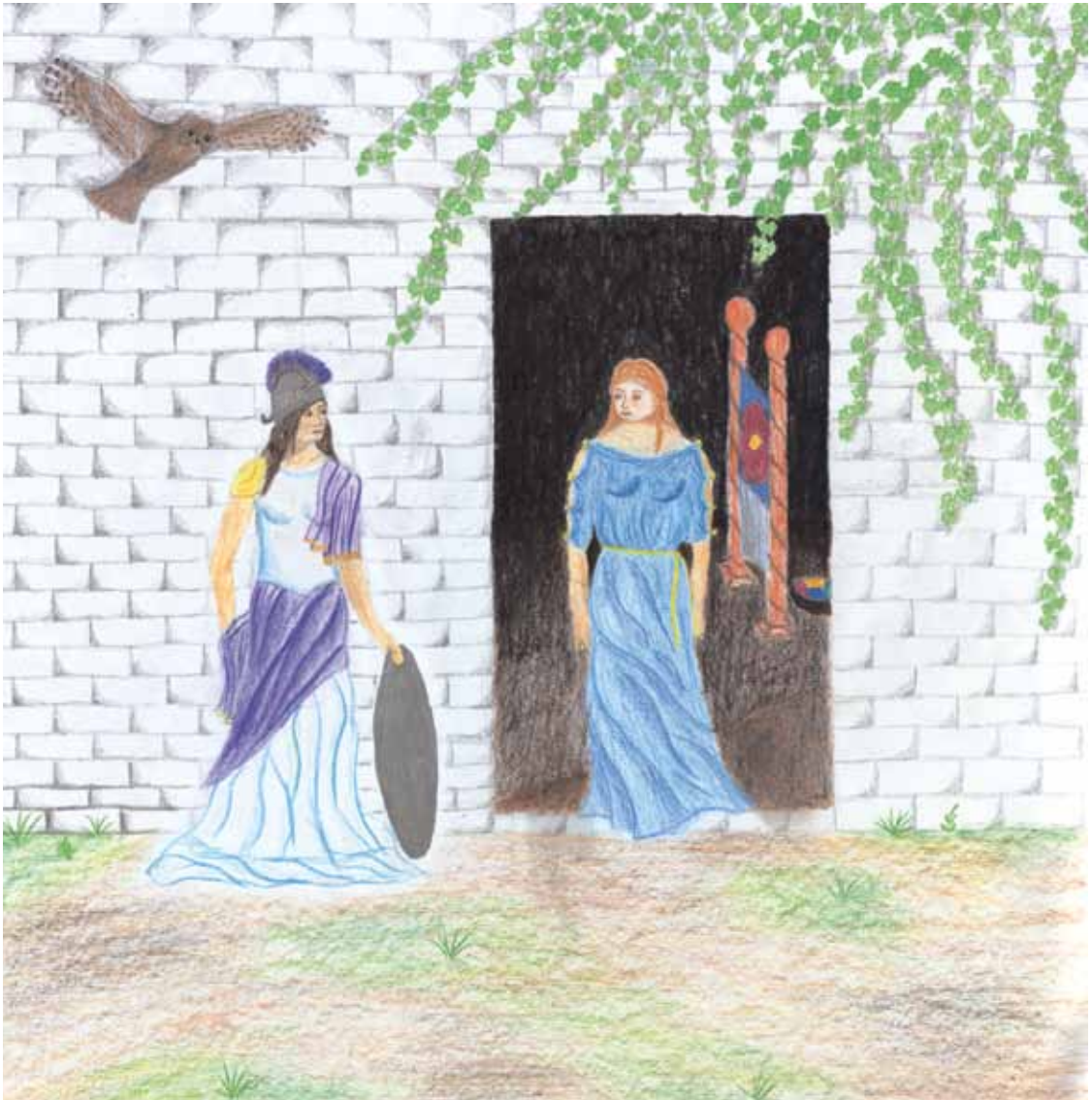
Chloe Rose Dickerson, 12
Clinton, Washington

ARACHNE WAS MY SISTER, but we were as different as night and day. I was tall and lanky, tanned from hours spent on the seashore hunting for the shellfish that Father used in his dye. She was small and pale from hours in front of the loom, doing the weaving that had brought her fame.

Ever since she was small, Arachne had been able to take an ordinary piece of cloth and turn it into a blaze of color and beauty that would take your breath away. On her work, figures breathed and flowers blossomed. Her amazing weaving had spread through Greece, and now people came from Crete, Sparta, Macedonia, places we had never heard of, to see the miracle weaver for themselves.

On the morning that it happened, the spectators were already thick around our hut. Father was behind it, dying a new batch of yarn. I was looking for my best friend, Cora. We liked to stand behind the crowd and hear their praise and Arachne's biting remarks. Besides extraordinary weaving skills, my sister also possessed a sharp tongue. Finally, I was about to resort to looking in the pig sty when I heard Cora calling me. "Alethea!" She was standing by the crowd. I joined her with a dirty look. She shrugged and mouthed, *I was at the beach*, and I mentally kicked myself for not thinking of that.

We turned our attention back to the crowd just in time to hear a man joke to his companion, "Now if only my wife could weave like that! I'd be richer than the emperor! How does she do it?"



Arachne had challenged Athena, and Athena had come

Arachne's response was quick and sharp. "I certainly did not learn by standing still and gawping like a goat! I used my own two hands, to a much better result than you!"

Another woman murmured, "What skill! Surely, dear, you must have been

taught by Athena herself!"

She made two of the worst mistakes you could make with Arachne. Father once absentmindedly called Arachne *dear* and she threw a fit and tore one of the tapestries she had woven that day into shreds. Arachne also *hated* to be compared

to anyone.

I held my breath and hoped Arachne wouldn't kill the woman or tear the cloth, because we needed the money.

Thankfully, her attack was fully verbal. "How *dare* you compare me to that goddess! My weaving is *far* better than hers, but she won't admit it! I would challenge her to a contest, but *of course* she wouldn't come!"

In the shocked quiet that followed this outburst, a hunched, ragged old woman near the front suddenly spoke in a quavering yet surprisingly firm voice. "You foolish girl. Nothing good has ever happened to mortals who challenged the gods. Take back what you said at once, and later make an offering to Athena, lest she truly come and unleash her fury on you."

For an inexplicable reason, my blood ran cold when she uttered the final threat, and I glanced at Cora. She was pale under her tan. Gripped by fear, I started to squeeze my way through the crowd, trying desperately to reach Arachne before something happened to her. I also kept an eye on the strange old woman as well as I could.

But she was too angry and too proud to notice anything but this old woman that dared to rebuke her. "I will not take back my challenge!" Arachne raged. "What do you, a ragged old beggar, know of me? I am the greatest weaver among both the gods *and* the mortals, and Athena is welcome to compete against me!"

Barely had her words died off when the old woman began to glow. She threw

off her ragged cloak and was suddenly dressed in a shining white chiton. She grew taller, and her face was radiant and beautiful, tender yet at the same time stern. I had seen that face before, on statues in temples.

Arachne had challenged Athena, and Athena had come.

My sister stood silently before her loom, and her face was a thunderstorm of emotion. Anger, astonishment, and was that *fear*? The crowd was silent with shock, waiting for something more to unfold. Finally, Arachne's mouth tightened into a thin, determined line, and she motioned Athena towards another loom that was standing in the corner. She removed the cloth she had been working on and, without any further ado, began a new weaving. Athena did too. Someone must have told Father because he came running with two baskets filled with skeins of his yarn, in colors bright as the rainbow and as varied. He silently placed one basket by Arachne and one by Athena, with a bow to her. Then he looked around and came to stand beside me. We watched without a word.

Athena wove faster than Arachne. A pattern began to take shape on her loom. I strained to see, and suddenly understood. It was a warning to Arachne. In the center of the pattern, Athena competed with Poseidon for possession of Athens. She stood by her newly created olive tree, and the sea god stood tall by his creation, the horse. The other gods were also there, Zeus in the middle, blazing with glory. It

was clear, somehow, that they were all favoring Athena. On the four corners of the cloth, the goddess had woven the terrible fates of mortals who had dared to compete with the gods. It was clear what Arachne's fate would be if she continued to defy Athena.

I turned to see my sister's weaving, and gasped. Her face was hard and angry, and her pattern was a direct insult to the gods. There was Leda, with Zeus disguised as the swan, and Danae, locked in her tower, visited by Zeus as a golden ray of light. I also recognized Europa and the bull. All the unworthy acts of the gods were displayed on Arachne's cloth.

Athena suddenly rose from her weaving, her expression furious. She had seen the pattern too. In one swift motion, she tore the cloth across and slapped Arachne across the face. The sound rang in the silent room.

Arachne stood perfectly still for a moment, then she lunged desperately for the coil of rope we kept hanging on the wall. Her nimble fingers expertly fashioned a noose, and she hung it around her neck and looked wildly around at our shocked faces.

"I won't live with this insult!" she screamed. "I can't!"

I finally overcame my numbness. "Arachne!" I cried. "No!"

But she was already reaching for one of the hooks that we used to hang plants. Athena, however, was quicker. She grabbed Arachne and grabbed the rope.

"You will not die today, foolish girl," she


said. "Live on, and spin."

As soon as these words died off, Arachne began to shrink. Her entire body became small and brown. Spindly legs grew from her body, until she had eight. When she stopped shrinking, she was a small, dusty brown spider on a slender thread, and Athena had disappeared. So had both weavings, and the only evidence of my sister that was left was her half-finished tapestry. It seemed like she had started it a century ago.

I stepped forward and tried to catch the spider that was my sister. I wanted to hold her, console her. But she swung away from me and reeled in her thread until she was on the ceiling. She scuttled across it, heading towards a small chink in the roof.

"Wait!" I called. "Please don't go! It's all right, we won't hurt you!" I was running, trying to keep up with the tiny creature. But she didn't hear or wouldn't listen and disappeared through the chink. I dropped to my knees.

That was the last I saw of my sister, until this morning. I was sweeping our hut when I saw a small movement on the floor. I bent down to see. It was a small, dusty brown spider. It had scuttled right in front of me and was standing motionless. I crouched down, barely breathing.

"*Arachne?*" I whispered. "Is it you?" The spider did nothing. We stayed like that for some time, until the spider abruptly continued its journey across the floor. It stopped at the loom, and climbed it. And while I watched it, holding my breath, it began to weave an intricate web. 

Winter Light

By Adair Brooks



Adair Brooks, 13
Black Mountain,
North Carolina

The sky pinkens.
As the first ray of sun shines over the mountains
Morning dawns.

The light travels down the hillside
Through the bare trees that stretch to the sky;
Ice-covered branches glisten as a field of diamonds.

It glints on the wingtip of a bird,
Setting out to its work
In the cold of dawn.

It flies off, and all is still
But for the babbling of the stream,
Gurgling its way around patches of snow.

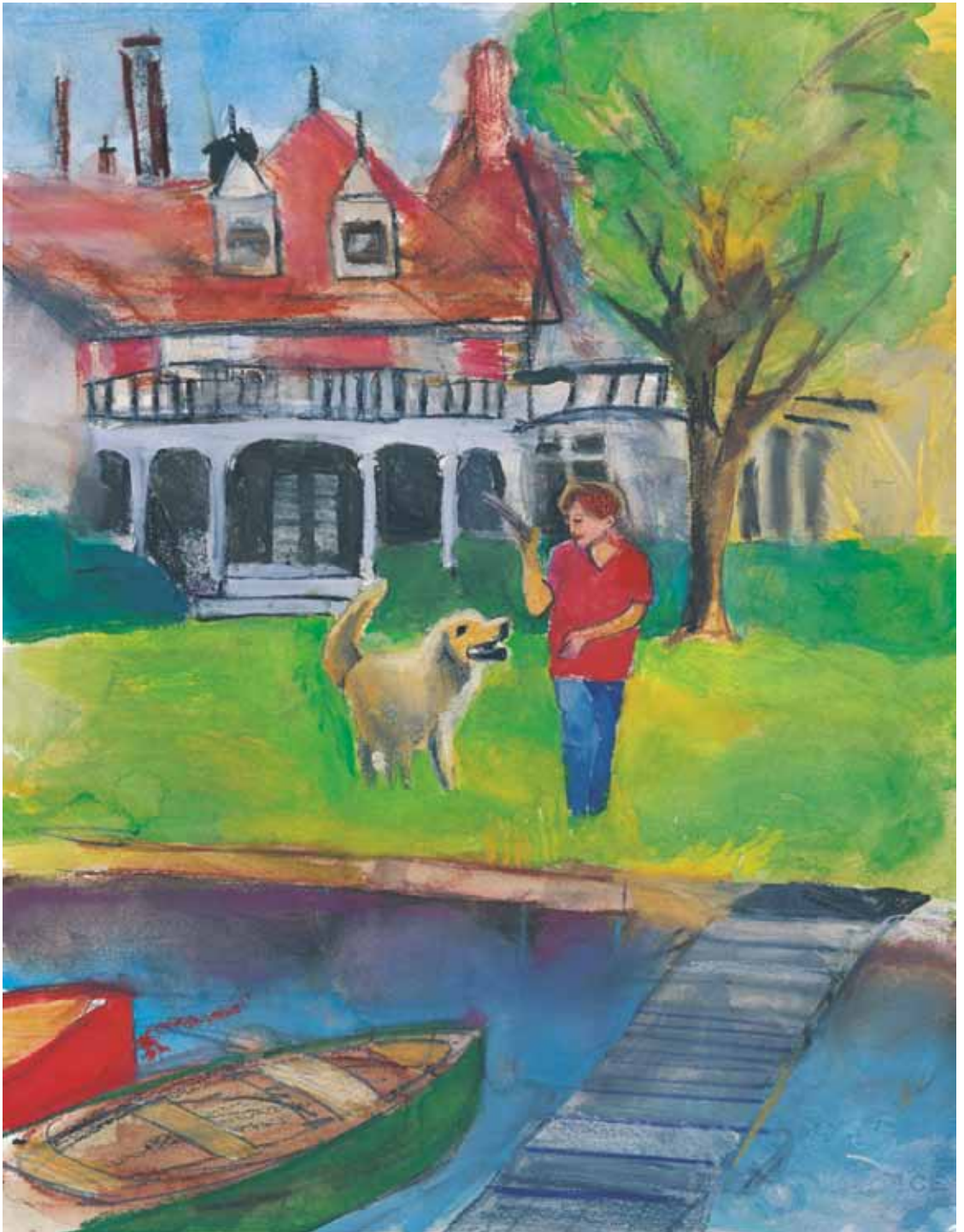
The stream runs steadily down the hill,
White-tipped pine needles on either side.

Suddenly the forest rings with the cry of a woodpecker.
His red crown flashes against the white
In a bright burst of color.

A small rabbit pricks up his ears and darts from beneath a
rhododendron bush,
Knocking off clumps of snow from the tightly curled leaves
To land on his long-footed tracks.

The sunlight continues to spread,
Chasing the purple shadow from the edge of the forest,
Its snow-lined branches stretching forth in silent layers.

To meet the sparkling fields beyond,
Which glisten and glow in a dazzling
Sea of white.



I wouldn't want to live anywhere else, he thought to himself

The Island

By **Jack Norton**

Illustrated by **Spencer Hanson**

OWEN DISIMMONS GRABBED his math binder out of his school bag and ran upstairs to the bedroom he shared with his sister. As he turned the corner in the carpeted hallway, the lanky thirteen-year-old was enthusiastically greeted by his golden retriever, Murray.

Owen laughed, “Glad to see me, eh boy? I can sure understand why—being stuck with Lyla until now!” He groaned and rolled his eyes. Murray whimpered slightly and tilted his head to one side. “Yeah, you’re right buddy, Ly’s usually jumped out at us by now. Wonder what she’s plotting.”

Lyla, his seven-year-old sister, loved to annoy him. Typically, she contradicted the old saying because her bite *was* worse than her bark. Just yesterday, Lyla had threatened to steal his rare coin collection. Sure enough, when he had gotten home, the lockbox containing his stockpile was missing from his top drawer! It had taken the remainder of the afternoon and his dad’s intervention to recover the treasure. The fact that Owen hadn’t seen her yet today struck him as strange. Where could she be?

“Hey Owen, have you seen Lyla this afternoon?” The deep voice issuing from the stairwell startled Owen. Then he realized that his dad must be home early from work.

“Hi Dad,” said Owen flatly, not in the mood to talk about his sister again. “No, I haven’t seen her today.” Shoving his wariness of an ambush aside, he sat down to finish his math homework. He glanced out of his window at the calm harbor, which nestled his village up against the tall pines. Catching a glimpse of a



Jack Norton, 12
Beverly, Massachusetts



Spencer Hanson, 12
San Anselmo, California

schooner under full sail, Owen's thoughts drifted to the open sea. He couldn't focus on his work right now. Why not walk down to the dock and think for a little while?

Owen bounded down the wide stairs two at a time and pushed open his back door.

"Come on, Murray, ol' boy," he called. The fresh fall air welcomed them. Owen and Murray trotted out across the manicured lawn toward the wooden pilings of their pier. Before he reached the boat-house, Owen made an about-face and stared at his prominent Victorian home. Its balconies and spires overlooked the immaculate port of Manchester-by-the-Sea. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else, he thought to himself. And no Lyla would make it perfect!

He half-expected Lyla to crawl out from under the pier; it was a very good hiding place. But again, no little sister. Owen felt a momentary twinge of uneasiness. He shrugged it off, though, and continued down to the dock. Across the harbor, he caught glimpses of people setting out for afternoon excursions in sailboats and motorboats. Owen also saw Ash Island, set like a crown jewel in the sparkling sea. His favorite destination, the island had given hour after hour of excitement to him and Lyla. With its small lighthouse set against the deep blue sky, and its sheltered coves, the island called to him even now.

Many years ago, Ash Island had been private property. Back then, there'd been

a clubhouse, a saltwater swimming pool, guest cottages, a tennis court, and a nine-hole golf course. Then, a devastating brush fire destroyed the whole island, leaving numerous ruins. People eventually lost interest in the island. The only building now remaining was the broken metal lighthouse which no one could enter.

Yearning to row there this very instant, Owen walked down the gangway connecting his yard to the dock. He untied his sneakers, pulled his socks off by the toes, and sat on the edge of the pier, dangling his feet in the cool salt water. He stared absentmindedly at the rowboats tied up in front of him: each boat carefully supplied with emergency provisions, each boat precisely inscribed with the name of one of the DiSimmonses. Suddenly, Owen realized that one of them was missing! It was the *Lyla*!

No longer feeling just uneasiness but rather bone-chilling fear, Owen thought, She's never supposed to row alone, she's too young! The tidal currents are too strong—she'll be swept out to sea! Then another thought flitted across his mind: the news had predicted a storm this evening! Owen stood up, taking a deep breath. I know she's on the island. He hurriedly pulled his shoes and socks on. I've got to go find her, Owen thought. He knew immediately what to do.

"You stay here, Murray. I'll be back."

Jumping into his polished forest-green rowboat, he grabbed the oars and set off for Ash Island. The shlop-whish, shlop-whish of the oars kept his arms pumping

hard as sweat poured off his forehead. As he pulled farther out of the harbor, the water became darker and low-flying storm clouds flew across the sky. Finally, he entered the island's sheltered cove which he was so familiar with.

Owen shipped his oars and the fine rowboat glided up onto the gray-and-white-pebbled beach. Stepping carefully out of the boat, he tied it securely to a large sun-bleached rock sitting on the sandy pebbles. He walked up the beach, scanning the shoreline for clues. Lyla must be here somewhere. She'd been begging him to take her to the island last week but he hadn't time with all his schoolwork. She could be so impatient sometimes.

Turning his head to look up-island, Owen noticed a small patch of yellow behind some brambles and branches. He ran towards it and began tearing the foliage away. The brambles scratched Owen's arms but he didn't care because what sat in front of him now was Lyla's rowboat! Suddenly, he stopped. What was that sound? A whimper, a gasp. There it was again. Apprehensively, he followed the noise. Behind a crumbling stone wall, just a few feet from the boat, sat his sister, with her head on her knees. Her shoulders shook with sobs and her hands trembled. Owen took a step forward and laid a hand on her arm. She jumped up quickly and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Lyla," he said quietly, "what're you...?"

"I thought you'd never come!" she interrupted angrily, a sob catching in her

throat.

Owen was caught off-guard by this less-than-cordial welcome and could only stutter. "I... I came as soon as I figured out where you were. Why'd you come alone? What's up?"

"Well... we got our report cards today and... and mine wasn't that good and I didn't want to show it to Dad and I thought he'd be mad so I just wanted to run away and... and..." Lyla started crying again.

"Calm down, Ly," he said soothingly, "it'll be OK."

Just then, Owen heard a distant rumble, and a sharp breeze rustled through the trees. He smelled the rain approaching. They'd never get home tonight. Why didn't I leave a note for Dad? As the first big raindrops spattered against the top of the stone wall, Owen grabbed Lyla's hand.

"Ly, come on," he shouted over the gathering storm. "We've got to get to the cave!"

Lyla whined, "Why can't we go home? I'm hungry!"

"We can't beat the storm." Owen turned to look in her eyes. "Just do what I say," he finished, facing into the rain.

Owen and Lyla ran helter-skelter through the tightly packed trees whipping violently in the wind, toward the cave they had discovered earlier in the summer. When Owen reached the mouth of the cave, he quickly grabbed some of the birch wood they had neatly stacked on a previous visit. The wind and rain howled through the woods, chasing them into the



Owen's head was overflowing with questions and he couldn't stop worrying

cave. Lyla and Owen crouched, shivering on the cold, dusty floor. The emergency kits, Owen thought to himself.

"Ly, don't go anywhere," Owen said. "I'll be back."

"Don't leave me alone. Where are you going?" Lyla cried.

"To get the emergency kits Dad made us keep in our boats."

"But why?"

"Matches," he explained patiently. "I want to build a fire to keep us warm to-night."

He dashed out of the cave, heading towards Lyla's boat, which he remembered

was beached on the shore straight ahead. Owen was shocked to find that the small craft was gone—swept away in the high tide. Without thinking, he sprinted down the shoreline, rain slashing against his face, to his own boat. He splashed out to the craft, now floating in knee-deep water but thankfully still secured to the rock. Owen reached in to grab the kit. Got it! Drenched to the bone, Owen turned and made his way back to the cave. As he entered, he found Lyla huddled on the floor, sobbing.

"W- will we ever get home?" She looked up pleadingly.

"Yeah, 'course we will," Owen said, not too sure of his own answer. "At least we'll be warm." He then set about making a fire with the matches he found inside the emergency kit, along with a blanket and flashlight.

Darkness soon fell on the small island with the rain still pounding on the roof of the cave. Owen wrapped Lyla in the thermal blanket as she laid her head in his lap. Softly, she cried herself to sleep. Owen's head was overflowing with questions and he couldn't stop worrying. What'll we do in the morning? Is Dad looking for us now? Eventually, Owen dropped off into a troubled sleep, waiting anxiously for morning.

Owen awoke to the sounds of the waves still crashing against the shore. The storm had blown out to sea, leaving a gray sky and drizzling rain. Lyla was already awake, sitting underneath the blanket, staring at what was left of the fire.

"Hi O'," she said in a small shivering voice. "What now?"

"Well..." said Owen, "I think we should go see what happened to our boats, see if they're still salvageable..."

"What? Why wouldn't they be?" Lyla asked incredulously, her eyes widening.

"The tide was really high last night and the rough seas might have swept them away."

Lyla responded with a very soft "OK" as they walked out of the cave together.

When they arrived at the shore, Lyla gasped, "Where's my boat?"


"I don't know," Owen said. "I saw that it was gone last night, but I didn't want to

worry you. We can always get you a new one." Owen held her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "I think mine's still here though... somewhere!"

They continued walking down the beach to where Owen had tied off his boat. As they got closer, they saw a green shape bobbing in the waves. While Lyla stayed safely on dry land, Owen waded out into the water to pull his boat in. He caught hold of the bow line and turned back into shore. Once back on dry land Owen's heart sank. His oars were missing. What are we going to do now? There's no way to swim back. Look at the waves! He hung his head in defeat.

Just then, Owen heard the chugging of a motorboat's engine and a horn sounded. He and Lyla lost no time running back to the water's edge. They had to flag down the boat. The boat! It was the Manchester harbor launch! It was headed towards them and their dad was standing in the bow. Owen took a deep breath.

"Ooh... it's Dad, it's Dad!" Lyla shouted, jumping up and down. "And look what the boat's pulling!" Owen smiled as he looked up and saw the launch towing Lyla's yellow dinghy behind it.

Sure enough, their dad leapt out of the boat, calling their names. Lyla rushed to him and threw her arms around his knees. A wave of relief rushed over Owen. Then, as Owen ran to join them, he knew finally that they were safe and would be home again soon. Tying his own rowboat to the launch, he thought, Family is the greatest treasure in the world. 

The M31: Borrowed Bus Stories

By **Charlotte Merrick**

Illustrated by **Athena Gerasoulis**

EVERY DAY, you wake up, eat breakfast, and walk down the five flights of steep, stone-cold stairs. As a cheery neighbor greets you, you put on a fake smile and fast walk out the door. You've never been a big "people person," or a dog person, or even a cat person for that matter. Should you be someone? As you step out into the traffic, you realize your morning is already buzzing by and you haven't even gotten your coffee. 7:57. A small boy and his dad walk up to the bus stop. The boy can barely reach his father's hand. They sit and talk, play patty-cake. Will you ever have kids? Or even just a relationship as special as that? A warm feeling fills your stomach. The wind blows. You shiver and watch as the small boy and his father hail a cab. 8:06. The strange old woman comes. She's the one who feeds the pigeons, who searches through trash for cans and bottles. You wonder if she ever had someone. 8:13. You kick a rock. No buses. 8:28 ticks by, the latest time you can get on the bus and be at work by 9:00. Finally. The M31 creeps down the traffic-covered hill and you step up the black-and-yellow stairs. You choose your favorite seat, near the back, sit down, and watch. You can see the whole bus, everything that goes on. A million little stories, and a million different feelings flood the open space.

The York Avenue bus. From 63rd to 91st. You spend about 45 minutes a day on average on that bus. The part that makes it all worthwhile are the people. French kids. Doctors and nurses. Crying babies. You see and hear little bits and pieces of people's



Charlotte Merrick, 12
New York, New York



Athena Gerasoulis, 12
Edison, New Jersey

days and sometimes, for the slightest moment, you take off your veil of aloneness and intertwine. Giving someone your seat, loaning someone change, or even just exchanging a glance when the cranky old lady yells at a little kid. You need the confusion, the distraction from the loneliness. When you're on the bus, you're an observer.

A listener.

A looker.

You're not there.

A fly on the wall.

Bits of conversations fly through your thoughts, you take in. With each breath you inhale the moods of others. You get on the bus and get off, leaving behind the stories for the next day.

One day, you stepped up the yellow-and-black steps, ready to absorb. As

you sat down, a cute little baby and his mother caught your eye. Buttoned up in his shiny white jacket, he was happy, and observing just like you. Suddenly, BUMP, spit-up on the seats. On the floor. On that little white jacket. "It's all right," the mother whispered, "it's OK." An old man, lifting his silent vow of isolation, offered the baby's mother a napkin. You watched. Two friends made that would never see each other again. Ever. Bus stops. Baby and mother get off. And the old man's eyes were glued to that little baby. You looked out the window and saw a mirror image. Smiling, waving, gleaming blue eyes lit up. But off the bus, continuing with the push and pull of daily life, the man and the baby disappear into oblivion. Forgotten. In the world of borrowed bus stories. ❀



The Mighty Jump

By Ella Rogers

This was it.
I could see it in front of me.
The stream was ending.
I had to jump.
The strong current was blinding.
The mischievous drops of water were going against me.
I picked up speed.
Flapping my tail fin one hundred times a second.
Propelling forward faster and faster.
I jumped.
Elegantly soaring through the air.
Slipping right through a grizzly bear's jaws.
I could see the open sky above,
and the rushing water crashing below.
Then just like that, I gracefully slipped through the quiet
and frigid waters.
My adventure was over.



Ella Rogers, 10
Lake Forest Park,
Washington

A Night of Fire

By **Jordan Dunaway-Barlow**

Illustrated by **Megan Knizak**



Jordan Dunaway-Barlow, 13
Houston, Texas



Megan Knizak, 13
Georgetown, Massachusetts

A GLOOMY HOLE SHELTERED the shivering cardinal during a raging thunderstorm. The hole was an incomplete snake house, burrowed with consummate skill. The cardinal knew he had to get out before the hole filled with rainwater. Ever so carefully, he worked his way up the shallow passage, his gorgeous red feathers now streaked with dirt. He chirped desperately; he was stuck, as water started to fill the shelter. The cardinal used his last shred of energy to try to push his way out, but it was no use. As thunder boomed and lightning cracked, the cardinal knew he was done, knew it was all over.

Just a few seconds later, a branch broke off the nearest tree, crashing to the ground beside him! The cardinal opened one eye, but the limb had not widened the hole on impact with the ground. The branch was no help to him. But he was wrong! A child had heard the branch fall as she was running home through the storm with drinking water for her family. The limb blocked her path, and as she bent to move it the stranded cardinal caught her eye. He looked up at her, up to his neck in water, and took in the girl's appearance. She was tall, with deeply tanned skin and a jet-black braid down her back. Her eyes were a liquid brown, kind, yet reserved. She had on moccasins and a deerskin beaded dress.

"I am Jessica," the girl solemnly spoke. "I will help you."

She gently helped free the bird from the earth and rain. Noticing how filthy he was, she sprinted into a nearby cave, lightning flashing all around her. In the cave, she



As he flew away, he seemed to set fire to the trees

sacrificed her family's drinking water to clean him. The brown streaks finally gave way and revealed a brilliant red coat of feathers.

Jessica stared at the now sleeping bird, transfixed. Huddled in the cave, she waited out the storm. When the cardinal woke up, it did not move.

"I will name you Fire, for the wings on your back and the glimmer in your eye," Jessica said. Worriedly, she gently lifted Fire. He simply perched on her hand, gazing at her steadily, trustingly. She tossed him in the air. He flew around her head, made a loop-de-loop, and sat back down

on her shoulder. She giggled.

"Show-off." Together, the improbable pair sat in the cave, and Jessica fed Fire some jerky, until he was comfortable enough to come over again, grab the meat, and eat it sitting right on her head. Even so, the little night of fun was bitter-sweet, for Jessica knew she would have to let Fire go when the storm let up.

As soon as it was over, she murmured a little goodbye to him and set him loose to go back to his family. Jessica watched the sun make dancing rainbows on the wet cardinal's wings. As he flew away, he seemed to set fire to the trees. ❁



I hope he'll never forget, he is Kathryn's dog. My dog

Navy-Blue Cloth— Words and Pain

By Kathryn Malnight

Illustrated by Alondra Paredes

“**H**E WAS MOSTLY your dog.” The words flew in flurries around my head. I shall never forget them. “He was mostly your dog. Mostly your dog. Your dog. Dog.” Never-ending words, a round of angels whispered in my head. A comfort I drank like I would drink elixir. I found a blanket in those words. A mission. A dream that could never be reached. To find him. For the few of us who have suffered this particular loss, you know how it is worse than a pet dying. Knowing that somewhere out there, he lives.

Hickory was a flurry of a pup. His brown and black spots said splatter paint, and his black hole eyes had an overflowing cup of happiness. “*I have a home!*” they seemed to shout, “*I have a home!*” But he was afraid of my dad.

Hickory was abused as a young dog and was separated from his only friend, his sister. We figured, over time, he must have thought my dad was the one who abused him.

In the car, we were shouting out names. We didn’t want the pup to be called Hickory.

“Juice Box!”

“Bennett!”

“Clifford!”

“Henry!”

“Wags!”

“Greg!”

“JUICE BOX!”

Then we heard the words on the radio, “Mason-Dixon



Kathryn Malnight, 11
Wayland, Massachusetts



Alondra Paredes, 12
Bentonville, Arkansas

Road Line.”

Bing. Ding. Bingo! Dixon. Dixon. Dixon. The words curved on my tongue, the way a flower does when it wilts. They floated like clouds above our heads, in a navy-blue cloth. Then they shimmered, and whoosh! Out the window they went, to tell the newspaper, the state, the country, the world, the universe about our dog. Dixon.

But good things never last. Two years later, October 16th, he is taken away. Whooshed out of my world, like those navy-blue words were, two years before. Gone from my life. But this time, the whoosh had great pain in it.

My calender became filled. On every Friday it read “eight Dixon weeks,” and so on. It had a hopeful look. All my possessions did. We all were holding our breath, we all longed for Dixon to come home, like that Lassie dog did. I still do

dream he will. I know he is out there. I hope he’ll never forget, he is Kathryn’s dog. My dog.

If you happen to come into my house one day, October 16th, you will come across six people wearing everyday clothes and doing everyday things. But if you travel upstairs, you shall see a girl with straw-colored hair, wearing dark-colored clothing, and in her hands a black band with three tinkling things on it. You shall be curious, so you shall come closer. You will see in her white-with-anger-and-sadness hands, a collar. Of a dog, who shall always have a home in her heart. And if by chance you go by New Hampshire one day and see a dog that is white and black, with splatter-paint spots and black hole eyes, you know who he is. Make sure his cup is overflowing with happiness. Rub his ears, and tell him these simple words, “I will always love you.” ❁



The Highest Football

By **Jaylen Wang**

Illustrated by **Christine Stevens**

IT'S FUNNY, SOMETIMES some things that are supposed to make perfect sense are actually totally the opposite from the truth. Like the fact that opposites attract.

Mike and I met in the good old days. Second grade. The good old days. It was actually the day I came to my first elementary school, Floral Street School. He is this hulking guy at first glance with all this... sort of classic New York look. His look makes you think big bully, football player, and you know... the things you think when the guy is big. Actually, he is a football player. But his eyes and laugh speak the best thing you could hope for when you go to a new school. A friend.

Friends are like sisters or brothers. You fight once in a while... or you might fight all the time. People used to see us next to each other with him a head taller than me, and they thought that it was such a weird thing. He always called me Jay for short, but after second and third grade he started calling me by my real name, Jaylen, and I appreciated that. It proved that he actually would take the time to pronounce my name. But some other kids in my class called me after a comedian, Jay Leno, which is a coincidence. I guess I didn't mind.

We always split in recess. So he could play football with the other, I guess you could say, "big" and "popular" kids. While I went with the other kids in my class. But there was one time, I remember, that changed that.

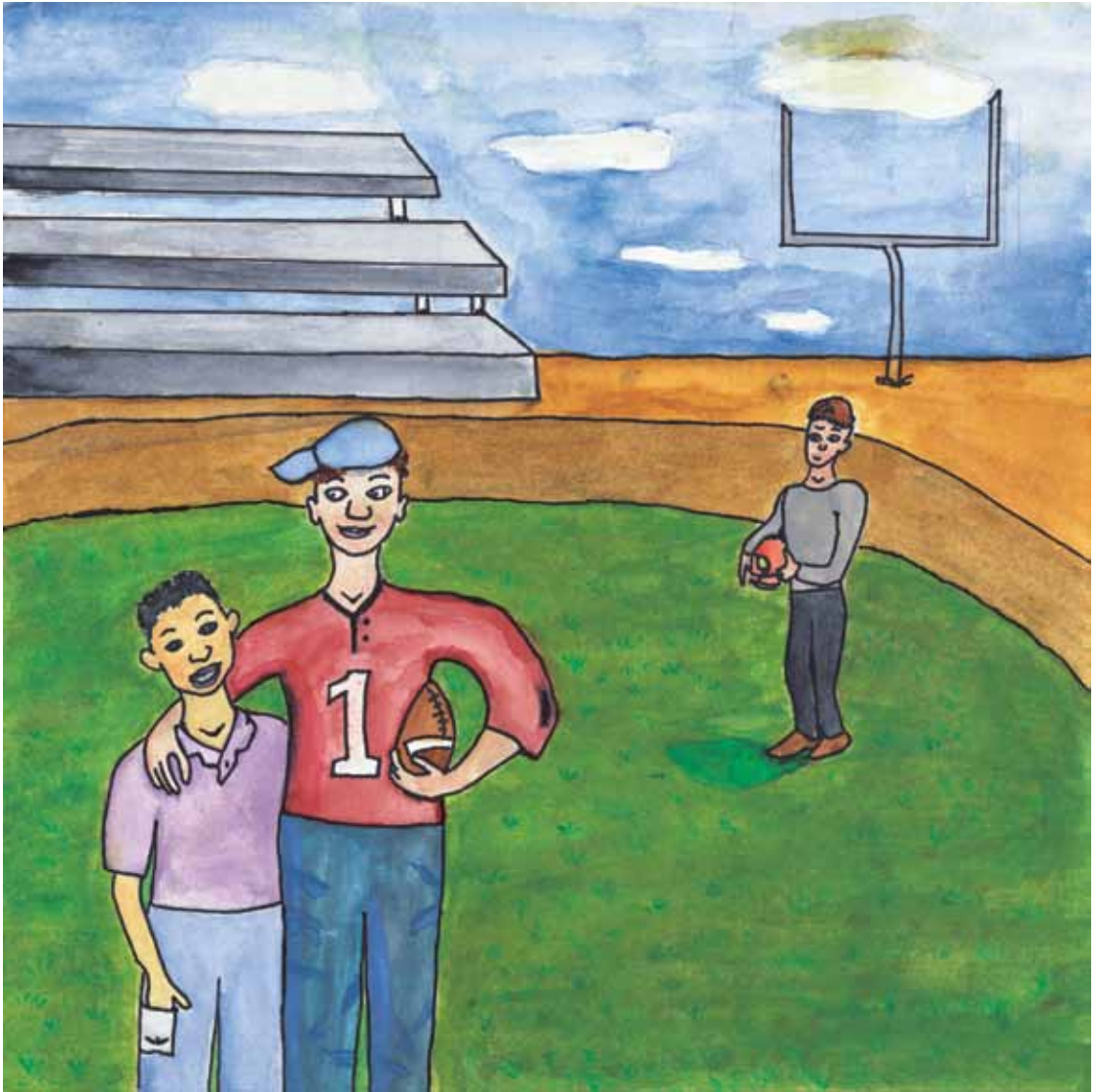
I was treading on the blacktop, bored, watching the sun start to peep out of its unreachable fort, wishing I could do something.



Jaylen Wang, 10
Wayland, Massachusetts



Christine Stevens, 12
Newark, California



“We get Jaylen!” he exclaimed to the rest of the guys

As the wind slapped my face and pinched my ears, and I rubbed my hands together in a useless attempt at warmth, I glanced at the football field with a fleeting look. Walking over there I could see that they were picking team members. So I sat at the edge of the football field and watched.

I saw Michael make a touchdown and I looked to him and smiled and he smiled back. He could have just celebrated or he could have done the thing that saved me from a hundred boring recesses.

“Hey Jaylen,” he greeted, and I nodded. “Come on.” He outstretched his calloused

hand to my soft piano-playing hand and he hauled me up like a pencil that he had just dropped.

“We get Jaylen!” he exclaimed to the rest of the guys and they nodded awkwardly and my face reddened. I am going to die of embarrassment, I thought, looking up into the sky, hoping some spirit would save me from getting trampled and becoming a part of the ground.

Mike hollered, “Hike!”

While I fled outward, dodging the oncoming army of football players, I made eye connection with Mike and, without warning, he fired. Of course it was coming at me. I ran toward the flying pigskin, scrambling toward the right position. The ball looked like a bird that has just had its wings clipped. Suddenly a bumpy ball was in my arms and I carried it as I saw the professionals do. And I bulleted as fast as I could. I saw one of the kids bolting behind me and he planted his two hands on me. But a little too hard, which was expected because I was like a half of their weight.

Plummeting face first, I outstretched my arms in a desperate attempt to weaken the oncoming agony. Instantly I could make out the oohs and ouchies from the crowd of kids enclosed around me. I sprawled on the ground as my leg erupted in flames. I could feel the tears burning through my eyes like the lava oozes out of a volcano. I rolled over on the ground

and looked up at somebody branching out their hand to me. I clasped onto it as he boosted me onto my own two feet, toweling off the tears that were spurting from my eyes with my sleeve. I looked at the people hovering around me and no longer was there an awkward “he does not belong here” look. But replaced was a considerate look.


“Jaylen! You OK?” Mike asked in worry.

“Ye-eah I’m a-a-all right,” I stuttered, dusting the the sand off of my skin.

“Do you want to sit out?” he questioned.

I widened my eyes in a look that said “are you kidding me!” As I brushed past him out to the field, playing the game of football, I could feel his smile burning my shirt, and I could feel mine forming from my mouth.

Every day there forth I never did sit on the curb watching everybody have fun again. Instead, I was the one who was enjoying myself. That goes to show you that if you have a friend you will never stay on the ground defeated. Friendship is a game of football, you get knocked down lots of times but there is always somebody to pick you up... up to keep playing.

But now I’m in a new school, one where I know I will have just as many memories. But to tell the truth, Mike will always be the highest football that will soar, everlasting in my mind. 

I Cry

By **Isabella Ainsworth**



Isabella Ainsworth, 11
Davis, California

I feel tears welling up in my eyes
I try to suppress them
I don't want to cry
At least not here
In front of people

But I do
I do cry
I cry and I cry
And I try to push it back
But I've waited too long

I think about it
About the mess
About my parents
My childhood
My home
My safety
And I cry even more

The mess is big
It overwhelms me
It makes me shiver
It makes me cry

My mother didn't love my father anymore

I can't take that knowledge
I can't believe it
After twenty-three years
Of loving
You just stop
I don't understand her

Confusion makes me cry

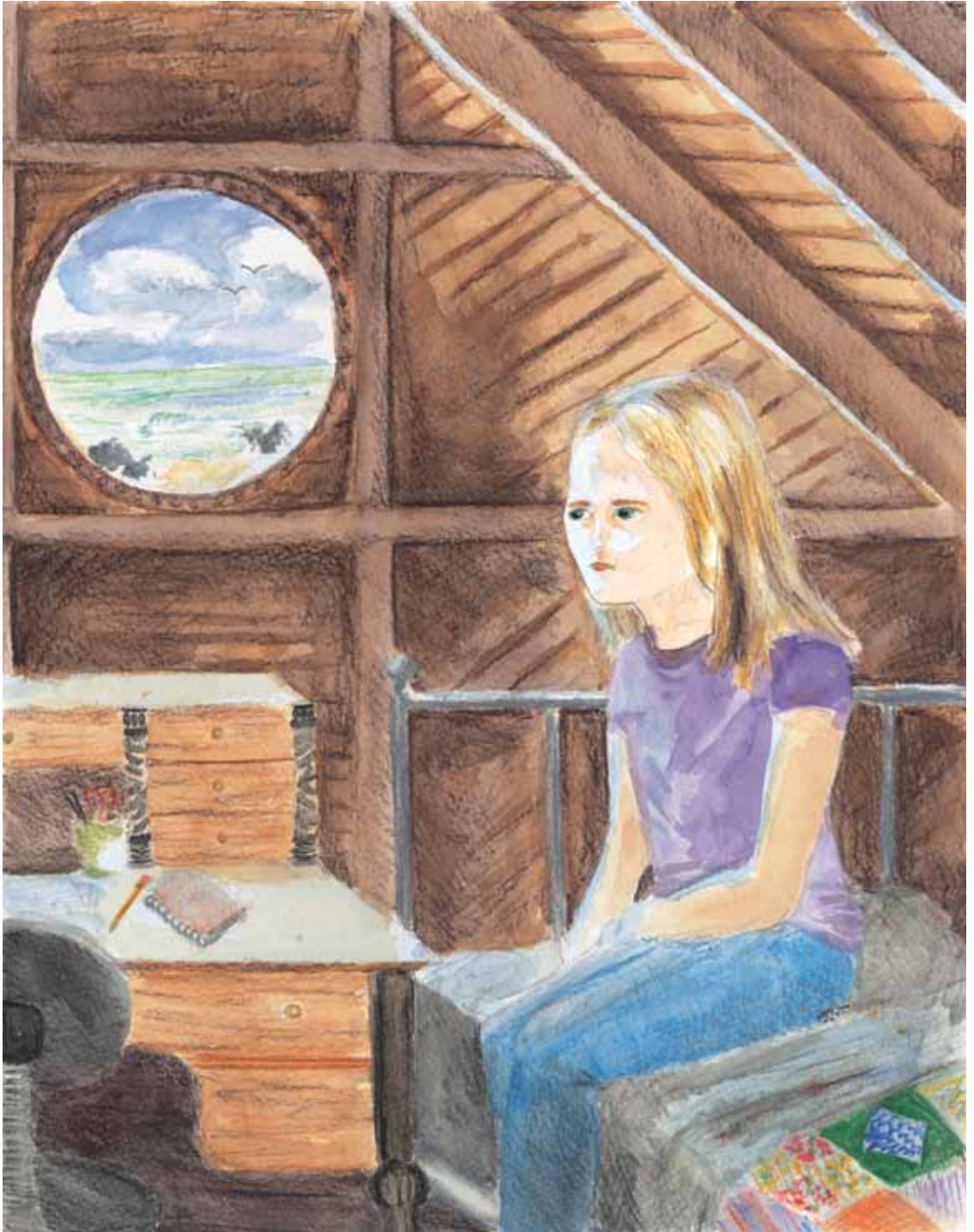
I love my mother
I love my father
I don't see
Why they can't love each other

The unknown makes me cry

I have to move
Even though we just moved
I have to pack my clothes
My toys
So I can leave my father
All alone

Change makes me cry

I cry
I cry because I am
Sad and
Confused and
Annoyed
I cry because of my
Parents' divorce
I cry



Sometimes I sat on my bed, seething, and thinking, Why me?

Reject

By **Ella Staats**

Illustrated by **Mariah Olson**

REJECT. THAT'S WHAT I was. My parents claimed that eight children in the house was too much for them to handle, and that they couldn't support them all, so they sent me away to live with my grandparents. That wouldn't have been as *much* of a problem, except that Granny and Gramps lived in Maine, thousands of miles away from my original home in Salem, Oregon. I only ever got to see my family at holidays, birthdays, and one month in the summer.

And that wasn't all that bothered me. It's just, being sent away by your own parents, rejected from your own home, isn't very comforting. In fact, it made me downright mad, and sad, and homesick. Even though I've been living at my grandparents' house since I was four (I'm eleven now, almost twelve), and I don't remember much of my other house, it still hurt to think that I was the one picked to be shipped off. I felt like an outcast.

Sometimes I sat on my bed, seething, and thinking, Why me? Why couldn't it have been one of my brothers, Carl the trouble-maker maybe? Why did I have to be the one with the unfortunate fate?

Whenever I asked my mother this, she just tersely told me, "Because you're mature enough to deal with it," and then changed the subject. But I was only four at the time. How could they have known I would be "mature"? Maybe they just chose me because, being the youngest in my family, I was too young to understand and wouldn't put up a big fuss. I probably just thought I was going to see Granny and Gramps for a visit, and



Ella Staats, 10
Burlington, Vermont



Mariah Olson, 13
Mint Hill, North Carolina

that in a week or two, my parents would come to pick me up and take me home again. Unfortunately, they never did.

So now I was living in a little cottage by the sea and had a tiny bedroom in the attic with a little round porthole window, which I could look out of and see the ocean with its rolling lace-trimmed waves, spraying salty sea foam up into the misty air. And the gulls waddling across the beach and soaring in the ever-cloudy sky, squawking in gull language to each other about some fish they had found.

I often sat and stared out that window, across the ocean, wishing I were back home with the rest of my family, and feeling lonely. And that's what I was doing just then, looking glumly out of the porthole and feeling sorry for myself.

I turned away from the window and glanced around my room. The ceiling took the shape of the roof, pointed at the top and slanting steeply down, so that I had to bend down or bump my head on one of the thick beams running down from the tip to the floor. This was also a hazard I had to remember when waking up in the morning. Even though my bed was pushed out slightly, I could still sit up in the morning and hurt myself.

On the same wall as the porthole, I had an old mahogany desk that Gramps had given me when I first came here, along with a stack of stationery and writing utensils, though I couldn't even read yet, much less write anything but a crude and barely recognizable version of my name. Now I used the desk all the time, journal-

ing, drawing, and writing stories.

That's another thing: I loved to write. It was a way for me to escape my troubles and write about someone else's, or create a world all of my own, one where no one was sent away by their family or forced to live feeling regret and longing all their life. It helped me express the way I felt about the world. When I was feeling angry, resentful, sad or confused, I would sit down and write, and it helped somehow. It was like giving away all of my unwanted emotions, like lifting a load of bricks off my shoulders.

I emerged from my daydream when I heard my grandmother calling my name. She was yelling something about a phone. Oh, that's right, it was time for the daily phone call to my home in Oregon. OK, so it wasn't always daily, more like every other day, but daily phone call sounded better than every-other-daily phone call.

I sighed and started down the rickety old staircase. I reached the bottom and briskly walked through the living room and into the kitchen, where Granny was frying scallops on the stove.

My grandmother is younger than most grandmothers, only in her mid-sixties. She always said that was lucky because if she had been any older, she might not have agreed to take me in. I didn't totally think it was so great because if she and Gramps hadn't been able to house me, I might have stayed at my own home. But then again, my parents probably would've found some cousin to take me.

Granny is only a few inches taller than

me and has gray hair tied back into a loose bun. She has soft features and a very kind smile. Her skin is pale and slightly flabby in some places, but tough like an elephant's. She is not hunched over at all and always likes to have her fingers moving, so I usually find her knitting, sewing, finger knitting, typing on her laptop, or just drumming her fingers on the kitchen counter.

I said hello to her and she smiled at me and said, "Hello, Cincinnati."

I unhooked the phone from its place on the wall and stared somberly at the keypad. I always felt excited when I called, but a bit dejected too. I stared some more, as if willing the phone to disappear in my hands, but I knew it had to be done. I slowly punched the numbers and put the phone to my ear, anxiously wrapping the cord around my hand.

I listened to the ring, half-hoping no one would pick up. But they did.

"Hello?" My sister Clara's voice sounded in my ear.

"Hi, it's me," I said, a bit more perkily. I like Clara. She was one year older than I and had sympathy for my situation.

"Cincinnati! Hi!" Clara gushed. She sounded like she meant it.

"How are things up there?" I asked.

"Fine," Clara replied airily. "Noah's grounded because he messed up the satellite dish and now we can't watch TV until the repairman comes to fix it, but otherwise everything's normal."

I smiled. I would have loved to be there to witness it, but too bad for me. "Sounds

exciting," I said.

"Moderately," Clara answered, sounding bored, like things like this happened all the time. "I suppose you want to talk to Mom."

"Oh... I guess so," I said, suddenly feeling uncomfortable. There were some scuffling sounds and then my mother's voice.

"Hello, sweetie."

"Hi, Mom," I said awkwardly.

"How are you doing? I've really missed you, you know," she said.

Enough to send me home? I thought miserably, but I just said, "Me too."

"I hope you're doing all right up there," Mom said.

"I am," I assured her, but I was half-lying. I was doing fine, just not exactly feeling fine.

"Well, I've gotta go," she said.

"OK," I mumbled.

"Bye."

"Bye." I hung up and untangled myself from the telephone cord. I couldn't believe that I'd been here for seven years, and yet I still couldn't let it go. Couldn't I just accept that this was where I was living now, that my parents had put me here and this was where I was going to stay until I was eighteen and could move away? I just couldn't.

After dinner, I told my grandparents that I was going for a walk along the beach. I yanked on a sweatshirt and pulled open the door. A blast of cold air shocked me for a moment, but then I recovered and shoved the door shut. I



With a shock, I realized that this kitten was like me: a reject

turned and ran down to the seashore. I sat on a log and stared glassy-eyed out over the vast ocean, churning and sloshing like a giant blender, only much more beautiful. At least that's one good thing about being here: the ocean.

I sat for a while, not paying attention to anything, until a flash of movement on the beach caught my eye. I looked up,

expecting to see Granny or Gramps telling me to come in, but it wasn't either of them. Instead, peering out from behind a cluster of jagged rocks, was a kitten.

It was small, with scruffy gray fur, streaked here and there with brown and black. It had huge but very cute green eyes with an unsure look in them. Its tail was held high and twitching back and

forth, as were its two abnormally large ears. It had a white muzzle and a little wet nose, and it was very thin. Its right back leg looked crooked and it walked with a slight limp. It seemed uncared-for, but by the way it didn't seem to know quite what it was doing, it obviously had had an owner at some point.

With a shock, I realized that this kitten was like me: a reject. Its owners had cast it away, to fight for its own. Well... I had someone to take care of me, but still. Maybe it felt the way I did, lost and alone in the world. I felt a pang of sympathy for the poor creature and a strong urge to take it back to the house with me and raise it as my own.

I fished around in my pocket and found the remains of a granola bar. I held it out for the kitten to sniff. The kitten looked at me hesitantly, then took another step. I waved the granola bar under its nose, coaxing it along. Finally the kitten took a flying leap, right into my outstretched arms. I gave it the granola bar, pressed it tightly against my body, and ran back to the house.

I yelled at Granny to let me in. She opened the door and I ran inside. She gave me a quizzical look when she saw the bundle in my arms, and I quickly explained the situation to her. I couldn't read the look on her face. Maybe she liked the kitten, maybe not. But either way she let me keep her.

I took off my sweatshirt and used it to make a bed for her. I gave her a bowl of water, since I read somewhere that kit-

tens can't digest milk, and she lapped it up gratefully. She was probably relieved that she had something other than salt water to drink.

"What about food?" I said suddenly, realizing we didn't have anything proper for her to eat.

"I'll have your grandpa drive into town tomorrow and get something," Granny decided. "For now she can eat table scraps."


I nodded and fed her some chopped scallop. She didn't seem to like it that much, so I got some ground beef from the fridge instead. She gobbled it up, then curled up and fell asleep on my sweatshirt.

"What are you going to name her?" Granny asked me.

I thought about it for a minute, then said, "Misty."

Granny smiled. "I like that name."

And then I realized something. I hadn't been thrown out of my home. I still had my family, and I was still cared about. Granny and Gramps had cared enough to take me in, and it wasn't like my family was abandoning me, they just simply couldn't handle such a large family. And of course they didn't want to send me away! I was their kid after all. And even here in Maine I still had family. I should be happy for everything I had. To think that I needed a kitten to make me realize that! I stared lovingly down at Misty. She had just taught me a very important lesson. One that I would never, ever forget.

I bent down and whispered, "Thank you." 

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