

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Leigh McNeil-Taboika, age 13, from "The Three Wishes," page 23

THE THREE WISHES

Clary finds a mysterious glowing sphere in the creek by her new house

MY BROTHER'S SMILE

Meena will do anything to make her brother happy

MAY/JUNE 2012

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 5
MAY / JUNE 2012



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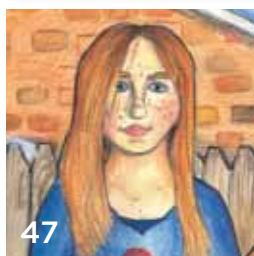
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From the Editors

It's our birthday! *Stone Soup's* first issue was published in May 1973. As we look ahead to our 40TH year, we're excited about things to come. In addition to freshening up the look of *Stone Soup* and our website, we're busy producing anthologies of stories from past issues. Watch this column for news about the anthologies.

The current issue of *Stone Soup* includes "My Brother's Smile," a story illustrated with photographs. We encourage other young photographers to send us their work. You can illustrate your own story with photographs, or send samples if you'd like to illustrate someone else's story with photos. Enjoy the new issue!

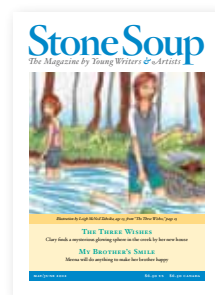
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Submissions

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ON THE COVER This is Leigh McNeil-Taboika's second cover for *Stone Soup*. Leigh's favorite medium is markers, and she also enjoys making digital artwork. She takes lessons in piano and drums, and she plays the ukulele. When she grows up, Leigh would like to be either an engineer or an animator for TV or movies.



The Mailbox

I was very moved when I read “Reject,” by Ella Staats [January/February 2012]. I love animals, and I am also the member of my family who always gets the tough situation. My pets have always helped me, too. This story left me feeling very grateful. I hope this writer submits other stories in the future!



Ella-Ruth Eckman, 12
East Petersburg, Pennsylvania

When I first got a hold of one of your magazines I was so excited and inspired! The variety of art that you publish, from poems to book reviews to stories and pictures, is wonderful. I love reading other people's creations and experiencing their experiences. One story that I found very fascinating, in your May/June 2011 issue, was called “The Race,” by Valerie Luyckx. I was a competitive swimmer too so I can really relate to her experience in the water.

Daisy Chang, 11
Honolulu, Hawaii

As soon as I get a new issue of *Stone Soup* I read it in one sitting. I am always so amazed at the wonderful stories, beautiful detailed illustrations, descriptive poems, and intriguing book reviews. As soon as I started getting your magazine I recommended it to all my friends. Now I call up a friend when I have read my new *Stone Soup* and we talk about the stories, poems, etc., that were truly stunning. Usually our conversation takes a couple of hours!

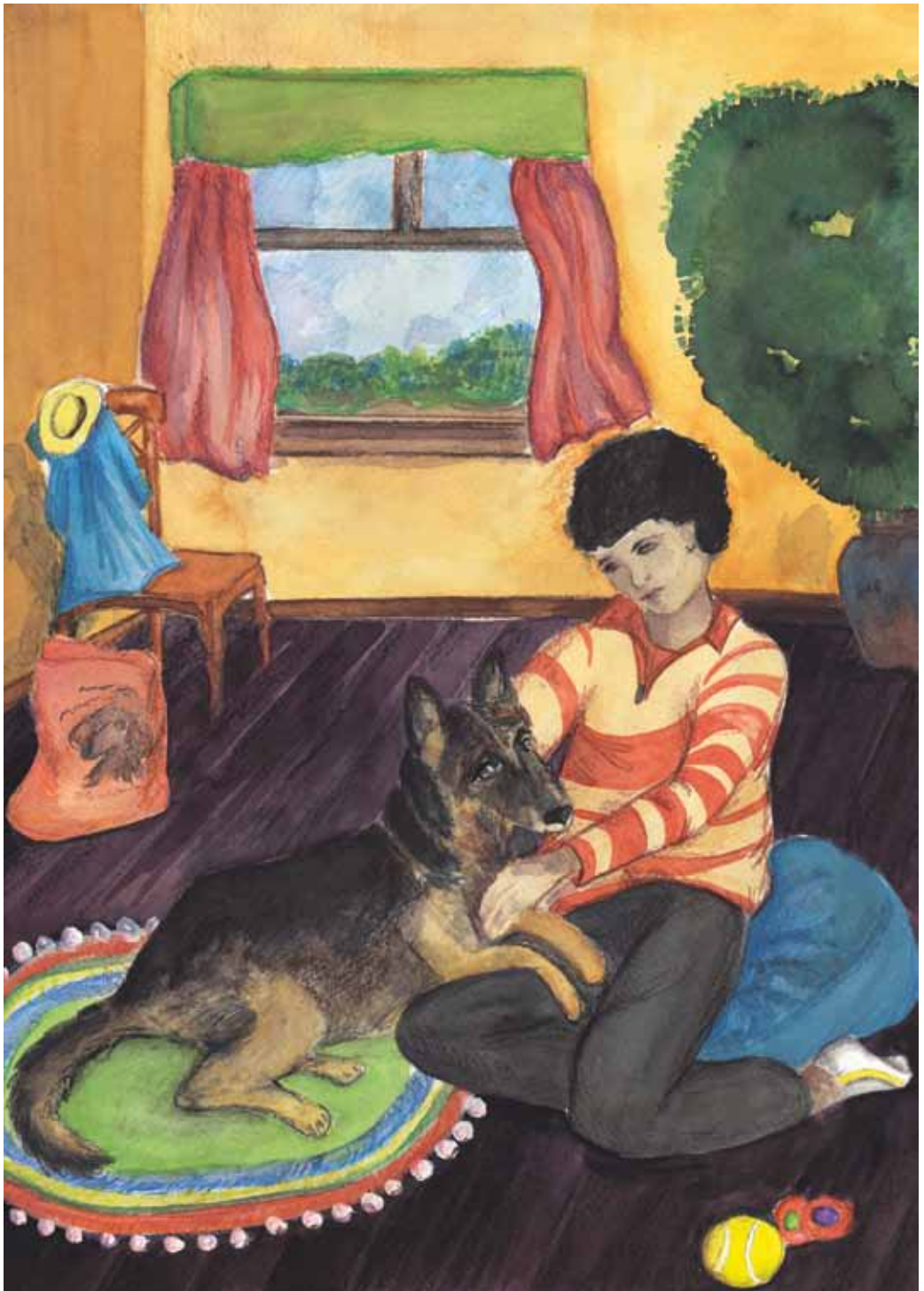
Sunny Eiseman, 12
Cummington, Massachusetts

I love your magazine, but in your September/October 2011 issue I came across something I disagree with. In “Buffalo Hunt,” Olivia Michelle Smit wrote several things about “Sioux” people that I found slightly disconcerting. Firstly, the word Sioux is a hurtful term invented by settlers. I myself am part “Sioux,” though I call myself Dakota. The story says the boy was *ten years old* when he joined his first buffalo hunt. Buffalo hunts were dangerous events, in which people could be killed. I doubt they would have allowed a ten-year-old child to participate. The writer also says the boy did not have a name. Children were well loved in the Dakota and Lakota tribes. Giving names to newborn children was a very important event. I think the writer had the wrong information because names were sometimes changed due to important events in children's and adults' lives. Her story says the boy did not know the chief and was scared of him. Tribes were made up of families and extended families, so the boy would have thought of the chief as family. Writing constantly about Native Americans in a historical setting can cause people to believe they are extinct or still living as they did all those years ago. This is a multicultural magazine, and I think stories should be written with more respect for the people.

Danielle Eagle, 12
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Thank you for your thoughtful letter, Danielle. Neither Olivia Smit nor Stone Soup meant any disrespect toward Native American people. —The Editors

Stone Soup welcomes your comments. Write to us at The Mailbox, PO Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063, or send an email to letters@stonesoup.com.



"Hi Lucy. Remember me?"

Learning to Love

By **Peter O'Shea**

Illustrated by **Erin Ruszkowski**

JOSH STARED at the rows of cages. They were everywhere. Dogs barked and cats yowled, and Josh watched dismally as his mother drove away. He was at the local animal shelter because his mother signed him up for volunteering without his consent. Now here he was, standing hopelessly in the shelter, with no idea what to do. He hated animals, ever since his aunt's German shepherd, Lucy, bit his hand. He cried the whole way to surgery, mostly because he thought he lost Lucy's love. His grandmother gave away Lucy soon after that. That was when he was five. Now here he was, seven years later, near dogs of many different shapes, sizes, and breeds. There were nervous, shaking Chihuahuas, bumbling, joyous golden retrievers, and intuitive border collies, picking diligently at the locks to their cages with their teeth, hoping to open them and run around.

Then there were the cats. Josh never liked cats. He thought they were lazy, coy, and boring. They never did anything. And the cats at the animal shelter were even worse in his opinion. They expected everything to be handed to them. He gritted his teeth. He would try his hardest to convince his mother to let him quit.

"Hi! You must be the new volunteer! I am Lindsay!"

Josh turned and saw a tall woman approaching him. She sounds so excited about everything, he thought to himself. He hoped he would not end up like her while volunteering at the animal shelter. Oh, how he wished he could be home and play



Peter O'Shea, 12
San Mateo, California



Erin Ruszkowski, 13
Keller, Texas

his guitar. Playing guitar was his only hobby. His grandfather had taught him to play and even gave him his old guitar. After school, Josh would go to his room, and he would play a song and practice it so he could play for his grandfather.

He shuffled his feet, like a naughty schoolboy. "Hi," he mumbled back. He was extremely shy, and her presence was overbearing. He hoped he would leave soon.

"Have you ever worked with animals before?" Lindsay inquired.

A rising hope bubbled inside him. He had not! Maybe they would kick him out! "No," he said in a dull voice. She would not need to know he did not want to be here.

"That is all right, you can start with the older animals. They do not need any experience to be helped and loved! Great! I will send you right over!"

Oh no! Josh thought. His mind panicked. The clockwork in his brain started to dysfunction. He felt warm. "OK," he murmured, "where is it?"

"It is on the second floor. I will help you find your way."

She guided him and together they went upstairs. Lindsay opened the door to a small room. Inside the room was a German shepherd bearing a striking resemblance to Lucy, looking dejected and abandoned.

"Here's the perfect dog for you!" Lindsay exclaimed. "She is very sweet, and a favorite among the TLCC: the Tender Loving Care Crew! And you are its new-

est member! Strangely, you are the first twelve-year-old to join TLCC. You must really love animals." She turned to leave, but Josh suddenly spoke up.

"Wait! What is this dog's name?" he asked.

"Lucy. She has been here for seven years. Some old lady brought her in saying she bit her grandson. I cannot see why, though. She is a sweet old dog."

Josh felt his heart twinge with guilt. It was his fault she was in here.

"I will leave to let you two get acquainted. See you in an hour."

Lindsay left, as swiftly as a fall breeze. Josh looked at Lucy. He sat down, carefully scared of her next move. To his surprise she lay down next to him and put her head in his lap. She looked at him with large eyes. He gently petted her head.

"Hi Lucy. Remember me?" She looked up at him and sniffed. She jumped up and for a moment Josh was scared, but she moved forward so suddenly he could not move and just waited for the pain of her gargantuan jaws. But instead of pain, he felt a warm tongue licking his face. He laughed. He spent the rest of the time playing fetch with Lucy, until Lindsay came back.

"Looks like you two had fun," she said. "Maybe you can stay for a few more minutes."

"OK!" Josh turned back to Lucy. "One more throw, OK Lucy?"

She wagged her tail. He threw the ball as far as he could inside her room. She caught the ball in midair with her power-

ful jaws. He laughed, and then petted her head.

"OK Lucy, I have to go, but I will be back tomorrow," he said. "I will bring my guitar and you can sing along." Lucy barked and wagged her tail. He laughed. "All right. Bye Lucy, bye Lindsay." Josh left the building and waited for his mother.

THE NEXT DAY, Josh rushed home, grabbed his guitar, and (since his mother could not take him) walked to the shelter. He spent three hours playing his guitar for Lucy. When he was about to leave, Lindsay approached him.

"I heard you playing guitar. You were great! Maybe you could play for all the animals tomorrow. They might like the music. I know Lucy did."

"All right." Josh bent down and tied his shoelace. "See you tomorrow?"

"Actually, no, tomorrow is my day off."

"Oh. Oh well, see you around, I guess."

Josh left the building and called his mom. "Could you please pick me up from the shelter? Oh really? Cool! Thanks!" He waited for his mom, and left.

THE NEXT FEW DAYS he spent in the shelter. Until one day, he saw Lindsay crying.

"What is the matter?" Josh queried.

"They are taking Lucy to be euthanized

tomorrow! She is too old to be adopted by someone; no one is interested in old dogs, they want puppies! I am so sorry!"

"What!!!!" Josh exclaimed. He ran all the way home. He grabbed his money box and then ran back to the shelter. He threw a fistful of money at Lindsay. "I will adopt her! She feels like mine!"

Lindsay seemed to brighten up at this. She drew herself together. She took the money with shaking hands, and counted. Then she smiled.

"As a volunteer, you get a discount on every animal adopted! And Lucy is an older dog, so that is also a discount! And she comes with a free checkup to make sure she is in tip-top shape! Lindsay hugged Josh tightly. "Oh, thank you! You have just saved a life! I will go upstairs and get Lucy!"


She flew up the stairs and returned with Lucy on a leash, a bowl, and a pet bed. "Please take these to help you care for Lucy!" She threw the leash to Josh, who caught it and smiled. Lindsay gave Josh back fifty dollars. "Your change."

Josh grinned. "Thanks."

Lucy barked and wagged her tail. Lindsay and Josh laughed.

"I bet she is really happy." He grinned again.

"You bet!" Lindsay smiled back.

And, leash in hand, Josh walked home. He had learned to love (animals). 



Why did my school have a mariachi?

Mexican Song

By Kimberly Vance

Illustrated by Frances Burnett-Stuart

NATALIE DEAN GRABBED her violin's bow and began rosining it feverishly. The International Mariachi Conference was tomorrow. It was the biggest performance of the whole year. And she had to solo, on a microphone in front of thousands of people. You can do this, she thought. Her song, "Sabor a Mí" (Savor me), ran through her head like a CD that played one song a million times, over and over...

Tanto tiempo disfrutamos

De este amor,

Nuestras almas se acercaron

Tanto así, que yo guardo en tu sabor,

Pero tú llevas también,

Sabor a mí...

Miserable questions chased after the lyrics. Why did my school have a mariachi? Not—I don't know—orchestra, or band or something? Like a normal school? And why on earth did my innocent five-year-old self join? Why didn't I see this coming? And so on and so on. Of course, she knew the answers. Davis Bilingual Elementary School was in Tucson, Arizona, which is near the Mexican border, so they had a Mexican music program. Best K-5 mariachi in town. She had joined for the same two reasons everyone else her age had joined—because everyone else did, and/or being able to play an instrument sounded fun. And you expect a kindergartner to worry about a performance four-and-a-half years hence?



Kimberly Vance, 10
Tucson, Arizona



Frances Burnett-Stuart, 11
Los Angeles, California

"Bedtime!" called Natalie's mother, Elena.

"Right... coming!" Natalie yelled back.

Once she was in bed, her mother kissed her and murmured, "Sweet dreams," before closing the door. Natalie curled up under her sheet and shut her eyes. You think she slept?

The next day, Saturday, Natalie and her mother walked up to the Tucson Community Center's intimidating double doors. Natalie was dressed in a long, black, cylindrical, double-layered polyester skirt with jingling metal bangles down each side, a matching jacket (with bangles!), a pair of faux-leather high-heeled boots, a humungous red bow tie, a red *moño* (a bow, for her hair in this case), and a ridiculously wide black sombrero. In other words, Natalie was very, very hot. The southern Arizonan sun has no mercy for ten-year-old girls with impractically thick black polyester mariachi costumes.

The backstage area was so large, a herd of the world's tallest giraffes and fifteen large elephants could've lived in there, no problem. Currently, the enormous space was filled with the oiled screeching of violins, the melodious (but loud) honking and hooting of trumpets, and the lighthearted plucking of the rhythm (the guitars, *vibuelas*, *guitarrons*, and harps). No sheet music in sight. Natalie felt faint pride—mariachi always memorized their music. Sadly, the happy feeling quickly dissipated and Natalie went back to feeling queasy with anxiety. Her mother pulled her towards her group,

Las Aguilitas. The Little Eagles. Juan Hernandez came running up to her.

"Ay! Natalie, where have you been?" Juan was a nice guy, but running the Aguilitas was a stressful job.

"What's up?" asked Natalie weakly.

"Um... could you help Joyce with 'Guadalajara'? She keeps missing the runs," he said, scanning his list of songs. "Hey, could you sing..." he began, but Natalie was already gone.

Actually, Joyce needed little help. She was a tiny little Sonoran eight-year-old, and it turned out that she hadn't realized that the runs went so quickly. "I mean, Juan and Ada go so fast on it, it's hard to keep up!" Ada, a five-foot-tall fifth-grader, was a guitarist. She was usually the one to play a song with a violin and/or trumpet who wanted to practice and could be seen strumming in exact unison with Juan. No one else needed help, so Natalie hurried back to her case and began tuning her violin by ear. Juan could've done it much more quickly with his tuner, but he was very busy, and Natalie felt sorry for the poor guy.

As the Showcase began, the wait only became more strenuous. In a desperate attempt to calm her nerves, Natalie concentrated on the strains of music that came from the stage next door.

Ayyy, sin amor

Yo tenia mi negra

At the sound of a different version of "Sabor a Mí," Natalie's stomach twisted into painful knots. If that was how it was supposed to sound, she would sound



She felt free from all her life's worries and completely in depth with the song

awful. So much for the distraction. Beads of sweat began forming on her forehead, created by a combination of crowds, black polyester costumes, and fraying nerves.

After what was, to Natalie, an eternity, Las Aguilitas were ushered through a small, claustrophobia-inducing area behind the stage. Natalie was shaking so much she almost tripped over one of the many cords that coated the floor. The group went up the steps to the stage. Instantly, they were blinded by a flood of limelights. Even if Natalie tilted her sombrero's brim down to block them out, she could hardly see the outlines of the people

in the crowd, let alone find her mother. She began taking deep breaths to calm herself. It didn't work.

Las Aguilitas played their three most difficult songs, in this order: "Cascabel," "Guadalajara," and, of course, "Sabor a Mí." Even as nervous as she was (not shy kind of nervous but oh-my-God-there's-an-earthquake-shaking-my-body-and-my-stomach-is-a-breeding-area-for-butterflies kind of nervous), Natalie couldn't help but love the first two songs. "Cascabel" was a quick but intense melody about rattlesnakes. "Guadalajara," on the other hand, was an energetic song praising a

place called Guadalajara in Mexico. But, alas, no matter how nice and distracting these songs were, they did have to end, and Natalie was quickly brought back to reality.

Arianna, the skinny eleven-year-old who was standing next to Natalie, gave her a kind smile and a little nudge. Natalie reluctantly shuffled to the solo microphone at the front of the stage. Her trembling hands wrenched it from its holder and brought it down to her side, next to the bangles on her skirt. Of all the waiting Natalie had to do that day, this part was by far the most terrifying. The musicians played the melody, but Natalie couldn't hear them. She would mess up—she knew it. Maybe she would completely miss the timing, or even forget a whole verse. Mortifying!

Yet her fingers drew the heavy microphone up to her face, and she sang.

*Tanto tie-e-empo disfrutamos
De este amor,
Nuestras almas se acercaron
Tanto así, que yo guardo en tu sabor,
Pero tú llevas también,
Sabor a mí...*

At first Natalie had been shaking, but now she felt better. The melody was slow and sad, and the words told of a lost lover. The violins and trumpets had cooperated, creating a harmony with her voice. They played along with her for the next verse:

*Si negaras mi presencia,
En tu vivir bastaría con abrazarme
Y conversar tanta vida
Yo te dí*

*Tantas fuerzas tienes ya
¡Sabor a mí!*

As Alex, the second-grade trumpet prodigy, started his solo, Natalie realized that the inconceivable had happened. She was *happy*. Singing felt like flying, like all her nervous, angry, frightened feelings had seeped out into her song, which was beautiful. She felt free from all her life's worries and completely in depth with the song. She emerged from her thoughts just in time for the next verses. The words of grief flowed to her like a stream whose dam had just been knocked down.


*No pretendo... ser tu dueño,
No soy nada
Yo no tengo vanidad
De mí vida, doy lo bueno
¿Soy tan pobre, que otra cosa puedo dar?*

Natalie could tell that the audience was surprised to hear her lone voice after so much of Alex's trumpet. She smiled faintly as she sang on.

*Pasarán... más de mil años,
Muchos más, yo no sé si tenga amor...
La eternidad, pero allá tal como aquí
En la boca llevarás,
Sabor a mí*

The rhythm strummed tensely. The next line was the last one.

¡Sabor a mí!

The violins did a little scale and then went into a shimmering tremolo. The trumpets compensated with a broken chord. The end. Natalie was really sweating now, but it had never been more worth it. Singing was part of her, and she'd never let it go. 

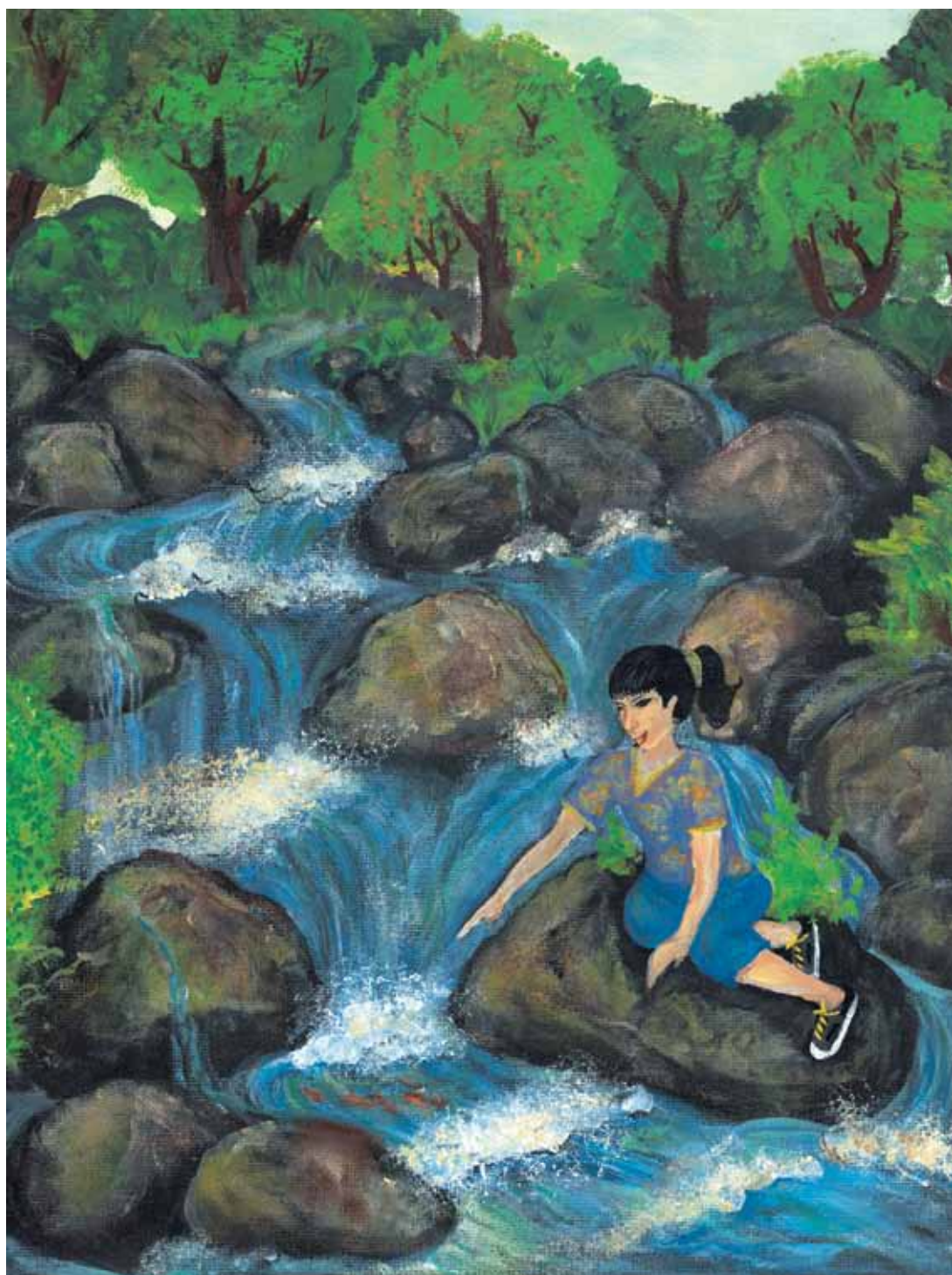
My Lovely

By Clara Bogard

I don't see her until she makes the noise
A noise that breaks my heart
I turn slowly to see the graceful face
Her pale green eyes full of hunger and want
One paw snakes through the metal bars
She twists her lithe body so that I am looking into her eyes
She makes that piteous call and I am completely transfixed
She seems to beckon me
My body obeys
I reach through the bars to stroke velvet fur
Her rough tongue caresses my hand
I instantly know
She is the one
When I come home
There she is
My lovely
My darling
My Stella



Clara Bogard, 11
Austin, Texas



The sight was so beautiful that I began to laugh

The Shimmering Waterfall River

By **Jamie Geng**

Illustrated by **Camille Abelanet**

THE SWELTERING HEAT of the day made the trail waver like water in the sun. “Ugh, it sure is hot today. Let’s take the Carson’s Crossing path to get away from this heat,” Dad muttered, wiping his brow.

“Sure! Yay!” I replied quickly. I absolutely loved walking through Carson’s Crossing’s shaded woods and sparkling rivers. It was always cool and quiet there, even on the hottest of days. My parents and I were taking a stroll through the Rancho Penasquitos Canyon to the waterfall. We sauntered down to Carson’s Crossing and entered the wooded area. Once inside, I stopped and took a deep, substantial breath, drinking in the beauty of our surroundings.

Despite the heat of the day, the crossing was cool and quiet. The thick, tall trees blocked out much of the sun, letting only an occasional golden shaft of light touch the earth. The only sound heard in the slightly misty air was the sweet, serene chirping of birds. My parents and I sidled down to the first shimmering pond and jumped over a gap onto a worn, wooden footbridge. We passed along through the lovely woods in silence, each trying to be the last one out of the trees and into the scorching sun.

When we stepped out of the crossing, the heat hit us full blast once more. “Come on, there’s not much longer until we reach the waterfall,” my father said. I continued along in silence, looking at the tall, waving grass and the shrub-covered hills, listening to my parents rambling on and on about the un-



Jamie Geng, 11
San Diego, California



Camille Abelanet, 13
Keller, Texas

reasonable price of new cell phones. Boy, what a boring subject, especially while out in nature. I tried to block the conversation out of my mind. As we continued along the trail, the scene shifted, dense woods on our right side and open plain on our left.

A while later, a massive, lumpy boulder came into view over the grass and trees. “Almost there!” I said cheerfully, trying to get my parents off the subject of new-fangled gadgets. That, of course, didn’t work. At last, we reached the waterfall. I ran down the carved stone steps and sat down at the river’s edge. The water laughed and tumbled along, tripping over rocks and at last falling over the edge of the tiny waterfall. Birds sang, and I want-

ed to sing along with them.

Then, my technology-infected parents walked down the stairs. I gave a little sigh of annoyance and wandered off. I decided to explore the area around the river. I climbed up the cold, rough rocks that lined the waterfall. I reached the top of the highest one and pulled myself over the edge. When I stood, I almost fell back down in amazement. There, below me, was the river, shimmering against the earth, twisting and turning like a snake. The water was lined with reeds and cattails, waving in the crisp, cool wind. The sight was so beautiful that I began to laugh. I laughed with the gurgling water, the chirping birds, and the crystal clear sky shining above the earth. ❁



Silent Friends

By **Emily Grant**

Illustrated by **Libby Marrs**

FREEDOM.

That was the word that came to my mind as I watched them. They were so beautiful. So majestic. They were completely unaware of my presence, and yet I was enjoying theirs so much.

They were wild horses. They walked and breathed as if they were a part of the earth. Drops of sunlight made their coats glimmer and shine. They moved with elegant grace and power.

I rested my chin on my hands and sighed. I could have sat there, behind my special rock, forever. But the sun was slowly disappearing behind the emerald trees. I knew that I should saddle up and go home. I felt a warm breath on my cheek and looked up to see my horse, Aspen, standing beside me. I smiled and leaned my cheek against hers.

“They’re beautiful, huh girl?” I said. My golden-and-white paint horse lifted her head and whinnied to the wild horses. They raised their heads in surprise. Some nickered in return.

It was a beautiful sight, one that I wished would never end. Pink, orange, and blue clouds highlighted the purplish sky as the sun hid beneath the horizon. Foals and yearlings frolicked and played, and the lead horses kept an eye out for danger.

I sighed. It was too bad I could not go any closer. I would be considered a danger if I approached them further.

But it was no matter. For now, I was content just watching them.

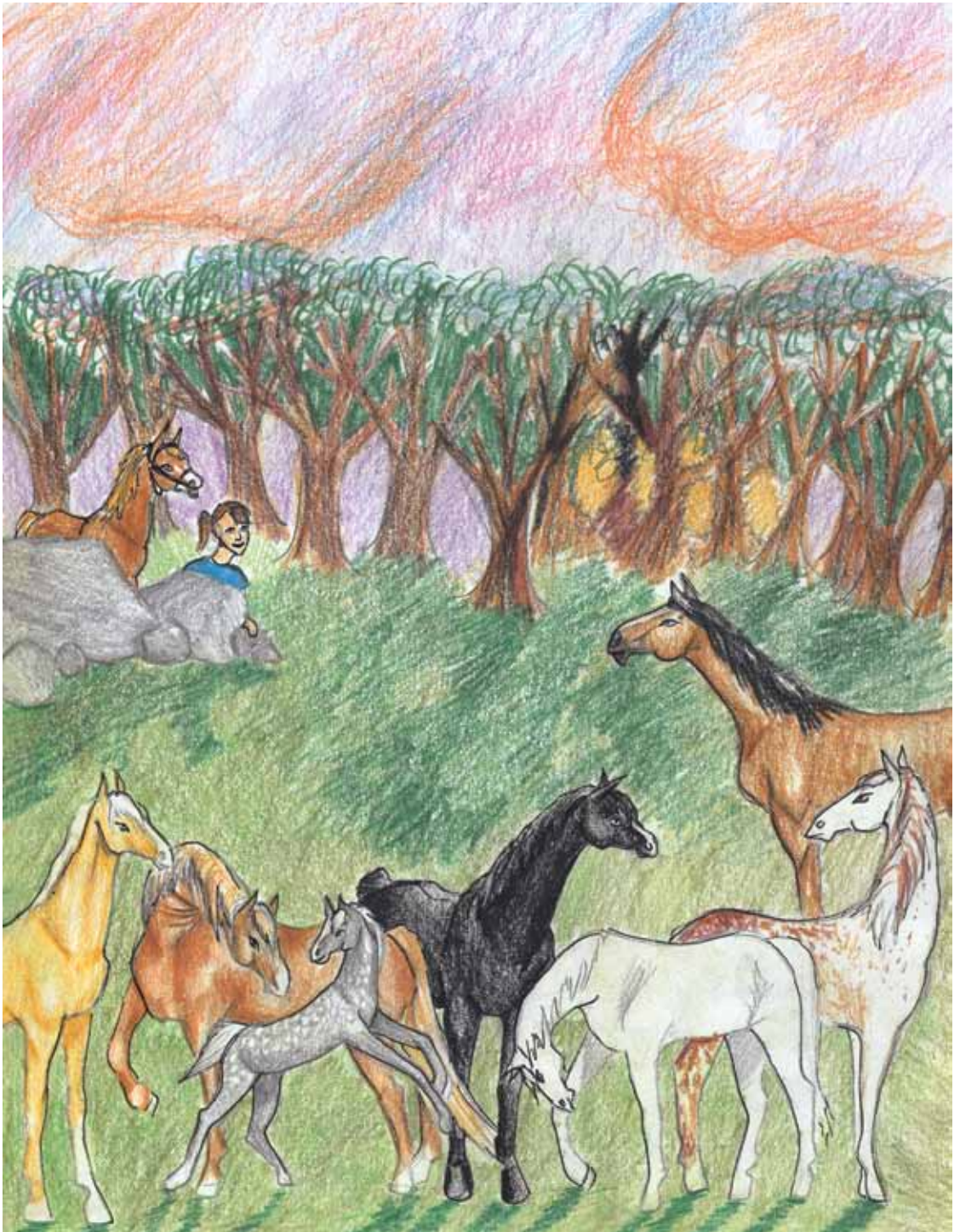
I always marveled at wild horses—their strength, their will.



Emily Grant, 13
Potosi, Missouri



Libby Marrs, 13
Albuquerque, New Mexico



It was a beautiful sight, one that I wished would never end

They suffered through many trials and losses, and still they went on gracefully.

Slowly, I moved to sit on top of my rock. The lead stallion saw me and watched me with a scrutinizing eye. When he saw I meant no harm, he walked away. Still, I could tell he was carefully aware of me.


This herd was special to me. I could not explain why—perhaps it was just because I was a horse-lover at heart. But they were my friends. They did not know that, of course—they were my silent friends. A friend that is not necessarily friends with you, but you are undoubtedly friends with them. I smiled. I liked that idea.

A name, I thought suddenly. Each horse needed a name. After all, if I was going to be friends with them—silent friends, of course—I needed to know what to call them, individually.

First I thought of a name for the lead stallion, a muscular, fiery bay with a blaze on his face... Blaze. That was perfect—not only because of his markings but because I could tell the word matched his temperament, his personality.

Next I named the cute little gray foal that always stood out to me. That was Twister—not only was he a stormy color but he seemed to like jumping and twirling like a tornado.

I gave a name to each and every member of the herd. Sunflower, Star, Bunny—I mentally marked them all with a special name that I saw fit.

But I could not always call the herd by all their names, or even simply “the herd.” That was not special enough. As night fell and I readied Aspen for the ride home, I smiled. It was simple. They were my Silent Friends. 



Book Review

By Jyasi and Tessa Nagel

Dogtag Summer, by Elizabeth Partridge;
Bloomsbury: New York, 2011; \$16.99



Jyasi Nagel, 12
Petersburgh, New York



Tessa Nagel, 8
Petersburgh, New York

I'M NOT ADOPTED, but what if I was? What if one day you wake up and find out that the people who have watched and cared for you all of your life did not give birth to you? Would it make a difference? Does it even matter who your parents are? What really is a parent? Are they the people who raise you or the people who create you?


Tracy is adopted. Her real name is the Song of the Shorebirds in Vietnam: too-et, too-et. She can only vaguely remember her biological mom from her early years in war-torn Vietnam. She never met her father and, when she begins to search for him, she must dig deep into forbidden territory.

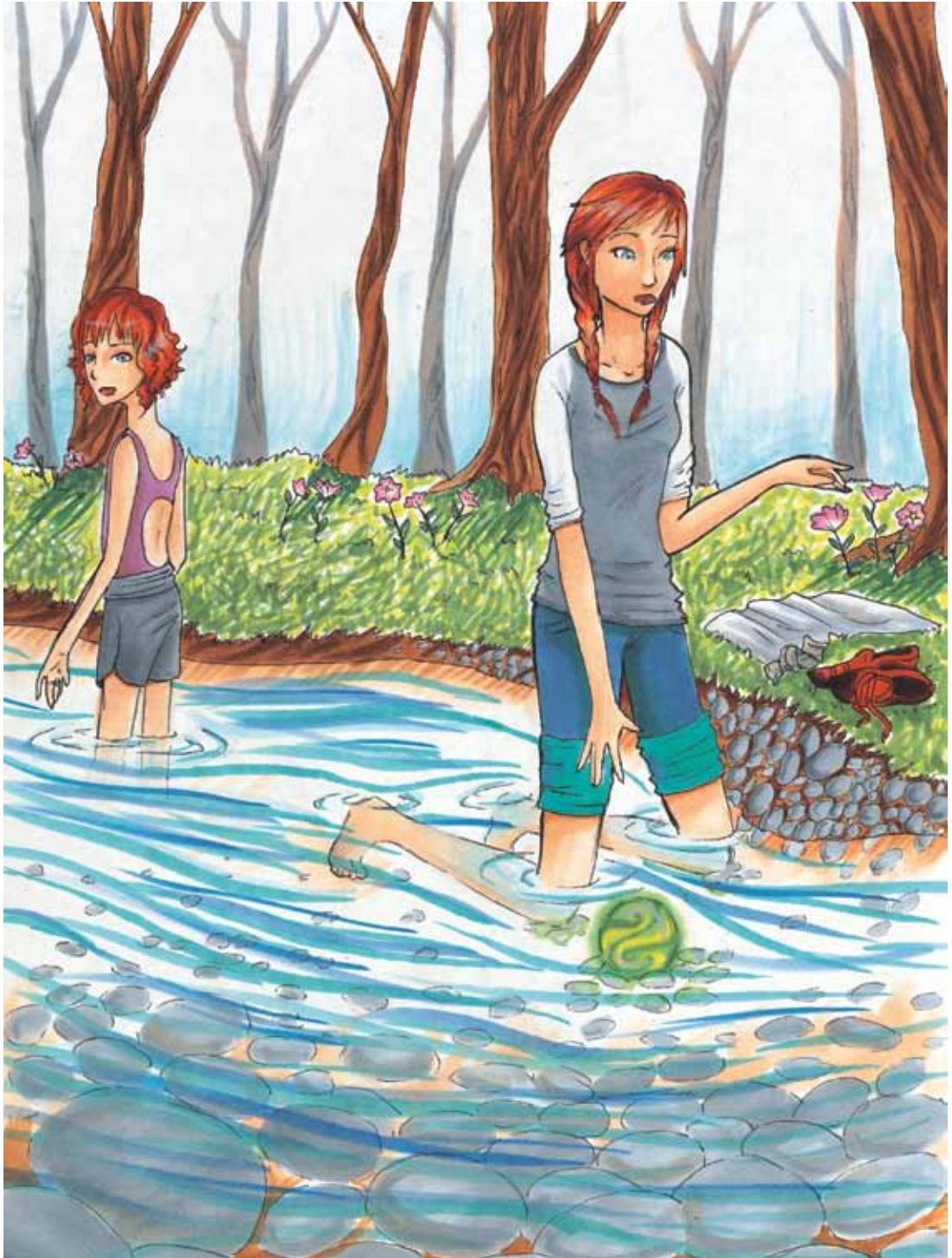
Tracy is happy in America with her American family. She is sometimes teased at school because she looks different, but her best friend, Stargazer, likes her just fine. She never thought much about her life in Vietnam, until she and Stargazer stumble upon her American dad's old ammo box and find a dogtag. Once the box is opened, it seems to release all the pent-up ghosts of 'Nam's past, and, for reasons Tracy doesn't understand, these ghosts make her dad really mad. Tracy tries to ignore all of it, but Stargazer is curious and won't give up. They soon discover

that the box belongs to her biological father, James B. Kirby, and the tensions threaten to ruin her friendship with Stargazer. Will Tracy's horrific past in Vietnam be revealed? What is her dad keeping a secret? Will she remember her early years in Vietnam? I would recommend you read the book and find out.

I felt a comfortable connection to Tracy's creativity and her love of adventure out in nature. In the summer, she and Stargazer built a Viking funeral ship out of scavenged materials. They set it on fire and watched it float down the river. My sister, Tessa, and I spend a lot of time outside hiking and exploring. We have a stream that provides many battlefields for the unexpected ambushes of our imaginations. Many days, we return home soaking wet and exhausted. Once, we built a duck sled made of cardboard for a race. The rules said that you have to make it down the hill with only cardboard touching the ground. I made cardboard slippers so I could run down the hill with huge cardboard-box overalls. That was my strange-looking sled.

Tessa read the book too, and she said, "I kept wondering where the scar on Tracy's neck came from and why she had such a strong reaction to the scissors in the ammo box. I have a scar above my lip. When I was six years old a rooster attacked me. With wings stretched out, he came at me fast and clawed my face. I was scared of roosters for a long time. I could tell that there was something Tracy was scared of too."

I strongly recommend *Dogtag Summer* for young readers from the age of seven to sixteen. If you enjoy history, adventure, or a good mystery, you will like this book. *Dogtag Summer* is a suspenseful, dramatic story that will keep you on your toes. It is a detailed description of a young girl's life, as well as a glimpse of the war in Vietnam. 



It was a small sphere, glowing faintly green

The Three Wishes

By **Alison Lanza**

Illustrated by **Leigh McNeil-Taboika**

IT WAS A PERFECT June day in the woods. The sky was royal blue, the grass looked soft, and maple trees were everywhere with golden light shining through their leaves.

Clarice Hunter was miserable.

As the car pulled in the gravel driveway, she averted her eyes from the house. It was just as nice as promised, freshly painted a blue that nearly matched the sky. Ivy climbed pleasantly up the sides. There were even bluebells in the window box. It did look cozy; Clary would have been thrilled to go there for vacation. But to live there?...

"Aren't you excited, Clary?!" asked her youngest sister, Eva.

"Yeah," Clary lied, turning away.

The car came to a full stop in front of the house, and Eva scrambled over Olivia to get out of the car. Olive, adjusting her glasses, followed suit, and reluctantly Clary slid out after them. The three red-headed girls tumbled out of the car almost at once. Clary took Mack's leash and led the straining brown Labrador up the front porch. There was, she realized, a window seat.

Olive stood by Clary, watching their parents unloading the trunk and gazing happily at the house, while Eva ran around the front yard. "I know you didn't want to come," she said. "I'll miss home too. But it won't be so bad... knowing you, you'll have three new best friends by the second day of school..."

Clary shook her head. "No. I wouldn't replace Ami. We've



Alison Lanza, 12
Saugus, California



Leigh McNeil-Taboika, 13
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

been best friends since third grade. But that's not it, anyway. What if *she* gets another best friend now that we live so far away?"

Only for a moment, Olive said nothing. Then she replied, "Can't she have more than one friend?"

"That's not it either, Olive. You don't have to act so smart all the time. You're only eleven."

Shrugging, Olive knelt next to Mack and stroked his ears. "That's only two years younger than you."

Silently, Clary handed the leash to Olive and went over to where her mother and Eva were. "Hi, honey," her mom greeted, her eyes shining. "Just *look* at this place. Isn't it beautiful?"

Clary nodded mutely.

"It was built in the 1900s, you know, and... well," she said when Clary yawned pointedly, "...well, Eva was really badly wanting to go swimming in the creek, and I was hoping you'd go with her." She looked at Clary pleadingly. "It would be a really nice favor."

Clary hesitated. Her mother *had* promised her first pick of bedrooms. And this wasn't such a huge deal... "All right," she consented, "but I'm not going swimming too. I'll just watch her."

"Thank you so much, Clary. Make sure she doesn't go out too far. You can explore the house later."

As if that solves all my problems, Clary thought.

She and Eva went inside the house together, and Clary took a sharp breath. She

liked it more than she would ever admit. Why couldn't it just be a rental house and not their house? It was, she decided, just a house; *not* a home. Not *her* home, anyway. There was something homely about it; worn places in the woodwork where other peoples' shoes had tread every day, small nicks and chips in the wood and paint, places where the wallpaper had been marked a little. Comfortable things like that.

Eva emerged from the bathroom suddenly, grinning and wearing her swimsuit. "C'mon, Clary! Let's go!"

"K..." Clary muttered.

IT WAS ONLY a short walk from the backyard to the creek. Eva skipped the whole way. There were pretty wild roses with their pink faces uplifted to the tall trees and blazing sky. Clary could hardly admire anything nice at the moment. She looked at her muddy orange sneakers instead.

When they got there, Eva jumped right in the creek. She waded with the water up to her knees, smiling and shivering at the same time. "It's cold. It's nice."

It *did* look nice to Clary, snaking deep into the woods with bright, clear water and smooth, tossed stones at the bottom. She even peeled off her socks and shoes to put in her sweaty feet. It felt good on her toes.

Eva's short mop of red hair was soon soaked, but she didn't want to get out of the creek, so Clary let her stay awhile. While Eva swam in shallow water, Clary

practiced skipping stones for a while and even got a stone to skip four times once. Then it became a way to vent frustration. She stood with the water pooled around her ankles and named each rock before throwing it. *Splash!* The new house. *Splash!* Ami's new best friend. *Splash!* Everything! It hardly seemed adequate revenge. The feeble little splash and ripples from each stone only made her more infuriated. Finally, bending to find rocks just to hurl out of pure temper, she paused. There, lying among the stones, was something else entirely. It was a small sphere, glowing faintly green.

Clary's first thought was that it might be a marble someone had dropped, but that didn't seem likely. It was bigger than a normal marble, and marbles didn't glow. She bent to pick it up. She'd expected it to be clammy from being underwater. It was wet, but to her surprise it was very warm, almost hot, tingling her fingertips. She turned the strange thing over in her hand, scrutinizing it. A few seconds passed, and the green glow and the heat began to fade. The sphere sitting in her palm was now dark blue and veined with thin, jagged white. It felt cold now.

"What's that?" Eva demanded, who had noticed Clary's sudden silence.

"Um..." Clary instinctively curled a fist around the sphere but opened her hand again. "It's this weird thing I found underwater. It's nothing."

Eva sloshed up next to Clary to take a closer look. "Can I hold it?" she begged.

"No. You'll..." Break it? Lose it? Clary

wasn't sure, but she felt very protective of the sphere. Eva stared hopefully at her, hands outstretched. "OK," Clary said, very reluctantly, and dropped it in her little sister's hands.

Eva examined every bit of it, and just as Clary was about to ask, irritated, whether she planned to give it back, Eva exclaimed suddenly, "There's tiny writing on it!"

"What? No, there isn't. Where?"

"*There,*" Eva said, leaning annoyingly close to it. "It says... t-h-r..."

Impatiently, Clary snatched it from Eva's hands, despite her sister's protesting. "Three wishes are granted to you," she read aloud. Her eyes narrowed.

"It's magic!" Eva said breathlessly, blue eyes wide.

"Of course it isn't." Clary pocketed the sphere.

"I want to make a wish!" Eva whined.

"No."

After that, Eva was so mad she didn't want to swim anymore, so she wrapped the white towel around her and walked through the woods barefoot after Clary, pouting the whole time. She couldn't resist talking, saying, "But it can't hurt to *try*" and "*Please!*" Clary didn't give in. The thing, whatever it was, was *hers*.

They arrived home to a strange sight: Mr. and Mrs. Hunter looking distressed, and Olive's normally mild blue eyes red around the edges and puffy. She'd been crying.

"What's wrong?" asked Clary.

"Mack got loose!" Olive said, her voice

tight and sad. She wiped her eyes with her wrist. "He was upset you guys left... and he just ran away!" She stopped talking then, afraid she'd start crying.

Clary stood stunned for a moment.

"It's all my fault," Olive said sadly.

"No, it's not!" Clary reassured her, but at the moment she felt so upset that really, it felt like it *was* Olive's fault. Her words made Olive look a bit better for a moment, but then...

"Poor Mack," wailed Eva. "Why couldn't you *grab* him, Olive? What if he's alone in the woods tonight?"

Olive sighed dejectedly.

"He won't be," their father told them. "We'll go looking for him right now. You three, stay in the house. Clary, watch your sisters. We'll be back very soon, I promise."

Clary led her sisters back inside.

"It's all my fault," Olive said again.

"I'm sorry," Clary apologized. "If I hadn't just left you, you could've come to the creek with me and Eva, and..."

"Clary!" said Eva suddenly. "We can use the sphere and *wish* Mack back!"

Clary looked at her. "Eva, the sphere *isn't*..."

"What sphere?" Olive asked.

Before Clary could say it was nothing, Eva said quickly, "Clary found it in the creek and it says it will grant us three wishes! That's one wish for each of us!"

"Thanks, Eva," Clary said sarcastically, glaring at her sister. "It's just some *thing*," she told Olive. "It wouldn't do anything."

Olive nodded.

HOWEVER, their parents returned thirty minutes later with no luck, and after a dinner of macaroni, which might have been cardboard for all Clary tasted of it, it became clear this might be the first night in three years she'd spend without warm Mack curled up at her feet. She would be all alone, in a strange room, in a strange house. She shivered.

"Please let me try," Eva begged as Clary and Olive came to say goodnight. "Please. I'll use up *my* wish for it."

"Well... OK," Clary whispered. She was sure it wouldn't do any good and knew it would make her feel even worse when it didn't, but she *had* to try for Mack.

Eva grabbed the stone from Clary eagerly and said, very fast, "I wish that Mack would find his way home!"

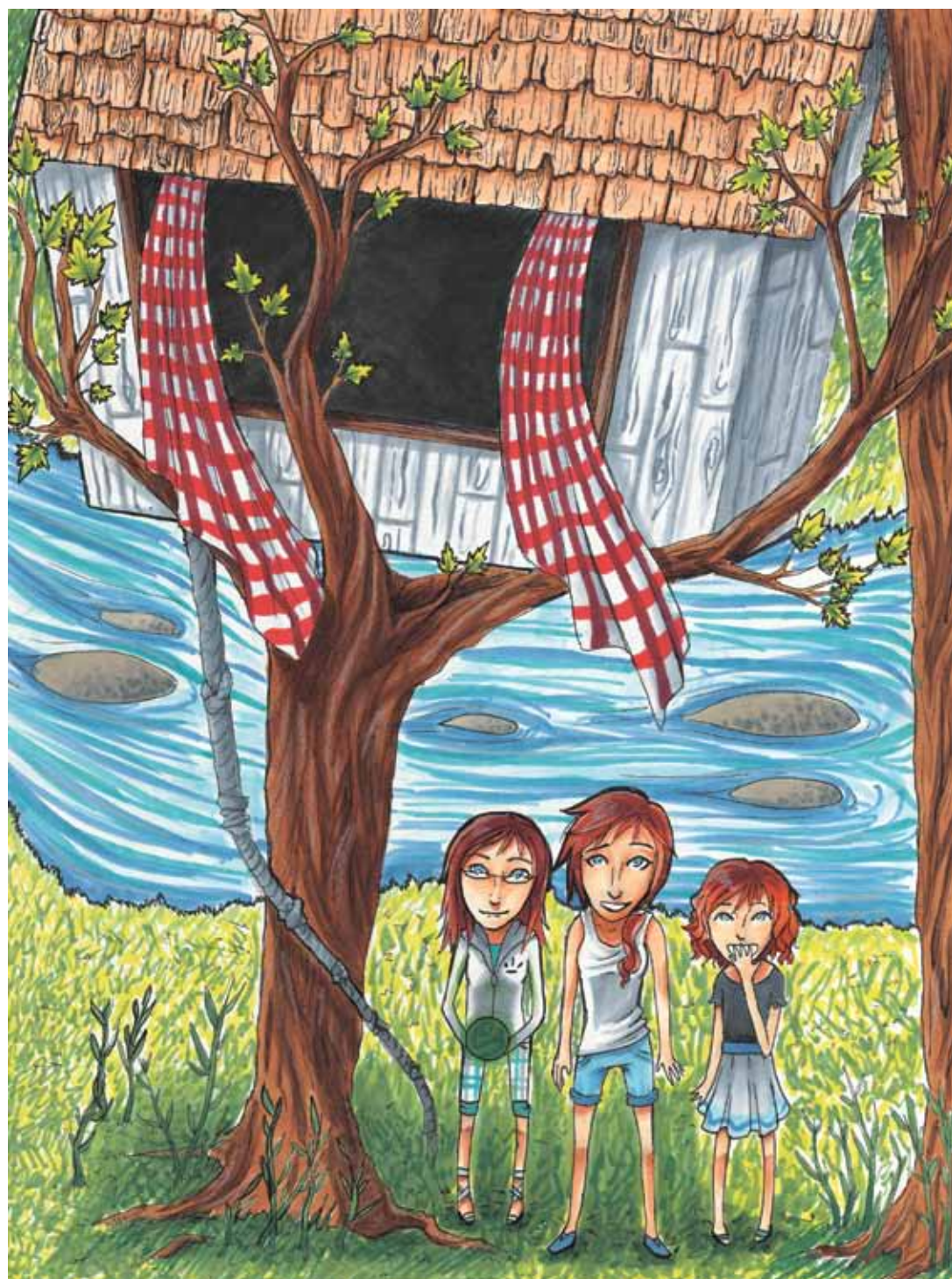
For a long second, nothing happened. Then Eva gasped as the sphere glowed green and hot in her hand. They all waited.

"Nothing," Olive said a minute later, crestfallen. "It's just some trick..." when suddenly, her words were interrupted by a very familiar bark.

"Mack!" shrieked Eva joyfully, and all three of them rushed out of the house to greet him.

Mack bounded up to them with his tail wagging furiously, and in the ensuing hugs and big, pink licks with his tongue, everyone completely forgot about the sphere, still clutched in Eva's hand. They almost remembered and then their parents came out to see what was going on, and it happened all over again.

A half hour of happiness later, however,



It looked like a playhouse in a tree

when Clary came to say goodnight for real, Eva, smiling, slipped the sphere in Clary's hand and whispered, "Told you so."

OVER THE NEXT few days, nobody made another wish. Olive and Clary discussed it often, of course, but nobody was sure what they would wish for. Eva had already made her wish, so she kept offering advice like, "Wish to meet the tooth fairy and she'll give you money!"

Olive had many times thought of what she would wish for, given the chance, but now that she had the opportunity, she just didn't know what she *would* ask for.

They tried to distract themselves by having fun playing tag in the woods and getting settled in new bedrooms.

Finally, Olive announced that she was making her wish.

"You've already decided?" Clary asked. She didn't want to be the last to make her wish. It would put pressure on her. Though, she thought secretly, I'm the one who needs a wish most of all—to go home!

"Yes, I thought about it a lot," Olive said seriously. "I decided not to ask to make my glass animal collection alive..." ("That would've been fun," Eva said disappointedly) "...because then they would break, or they'd be unhappy. Not a pet dragon either, it'd be dangerous. Then I thought of asking for a very good idea for a novel I could write, but then I thought it wouldn't *really* be my own idea, and it would be like stealing."

"So, what did you decide?" Clary

prompted impatiently.

"I'm just happy having Mack," Eva said, petting happy, lazy Mack where he was lying next to her.

"Yeah," Clary said, smiling at him, but she had thought a lot about wishing for them to live back home again these last few days...

"I decided to wish for us to have our own treehouse in the woods," Olive said, her eyes shining, "with a perfect view of the creek, and the treetops, where it's so beautiful..."

There was a silence. "You're weird, Olive. That's a great idea!" Clary said. "Where did you ever come up with that?"

"I've always wanted a treehouse," she admitted.

"Hand over the sphere, now, Clary, so Olive can make the wish and we'll have the treehouse," urged Eva.

"No, I want to see it appear," Olive explained. "Let's go over to where it will be, first."

They sprinted the whole way, Eva lagging behind ("Wait for me!") after the other two. They couldn't wait; they were too excited. They reached the area by the creek, finally, with Eva out of breath.

Clary handed the stone to Olive.

Olive adjusted her glasses, peering at the stone. "Weird," she murmured, "now it says we have *two* more wishes. I guess it changes when..."

"Never mind," interrupted Eva, "*make the wish!* Please."

Olive grinned. "OK! OK. I wish," she stated clearly, addressing the sphere

cupped in her hands, “that we could have a treehouse here that gives us a view of the trees and the creek.”

They waited; then, the sphere glowed green. “It *is* hot,” Olive said, amazed. When we next looked up there was a perfect treehouse in the tree above, with checked red-and-white curtains rippling in the window. It looked like a playhouse in a tree. Eva fell in love with it at once.

“It’s *amazing!*” she shrieked, and they all fought to get up the rope ladder first. There was even small furniture inside of it. The wood was sturdy enough to keep out cold in winter and to support their weight. There was glass in the windows that opened; Eva could even stick her head out.

When they’d all admired every bit of the treehouse, Olive placed the sphere in Clary’s hand.

“You know what you want, don’t you?” she asked.

Clary bit her lip. She might readily have wished none of it ever happened and they’d never moved. But she thought of the treehouse’s view and all the times playing tag in the woods. She thought of her new bedroom that wasn’t shared with Olive. She thought of Mack coming home.

She really *did* feel content, right now.

“I wish,” she told the sphere, “that some other kids will find you too and have three wishes.” The sphere glowed green once again. She dropped it from the window; they all watched it fall into the creek and away.

“We could have wished for something really magic,” Eva said after a silence, “like a wand.”

“No. That wish was perfect,” said Olive.

They all agreed and sat contentedly by the window to see the view better.

“Dear Ami,” Clary’s letter began, “you won’t believe what’s happened so far...” ❁



Summertide Sunset

By **Nastassja Carusetta**



Nastassja Carusetta, 13
South Pasadena, California

On cool summer nights,
My grandpa and I sit out
On the back porch.
We look at the sky,
And together,
We watch the sun go down.
Quiet while we think, we sip our tea,
Pondering the world about us.
I gaze into my mug,
Staring at my dim reflection.
Blowing softly on the smooth glassy surface,
I make the dark water ripple.
Looking up again, I watch the pink clouds
As they cushion the sun's descent.
I take in the beauty all around us.
So much of it, we take for granted.

My grandfather is silent,
While we listen to the sounds of our world.
His face is serene as he rocks
In his wooden chair,
And sips his steaming tea.
Together we look out at the rolling hills,
Sharing our favorite time together.
Gazing at a summertime sunset,
We sit,
And we listen,
And we treasure a moment,
Side by side.

My Brother's Smile

By **Namrata Ramya Balasingam**

Illustrated with photographs taken by the author



Namrata Ramya Balasingam, 13
San Jose, California

I CAN FEEL the sun's rays on my face. I open my eyes and sit up on the small rug that serves as my bed. It is four-thirty in the morning. Time to begin my long day. I go out of my room and make my way to the building opposite to the one I live in, the building where the boys live. I want to wish my brother happy birthday, as today is his birthday, and he is going to turn thirteen.

He works with the machinery in the tea industry, whereas I am a tea plucker—I pick tea leaves from the numerous tea plants on the hills of Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka. Although he is six years younger than I, he is paid more than I am since I'm a girl and he is a boy. We are greatly attached to each other because we are orphans. We always combine our salaries to buy food and to pay for our lodgings. We have to cook our own food, as the other tea pluckers are busy with their own concerns.

I walk into the men's building and go to the room where my brother is living. "Hi Raj!" I say in Tamil.

"Hey Meena!" he replies.

"Happy birthday, Raj! I'm so sorry that I couldn't buy a gift for you, but I will try to buy you something special at the market today if I earn enough money!" I say hurriedly.

"It is fine, Meena. I never expected any presents. We are obviously too poor for that," he assures me.

"Well then, I'll see you in the evening, Raj! I must get going! I have a lot of plucking to do today!"

"Goodbye, Meena!" my brother says cheerfully. Although my



The rows and rows of tea plants covering the misty mountains look so beautiful

brother seems happy, I know he is disappointed that he didn't get a present from me. What child about to become a teenager wouldn't be disappointed about not getting a single gift for his birthday?

I turn and leave the men's building and head toward my building. I go into my room and pick up my basket. I quickly slip the basket on my head and walk outdoors. I don't stop to put on shoes, as I am too poor to buy shoes. But by now, the soles of my feet are so thick-skinned and leathery that, except for a few occasional pricks from some sharp rocks, nothing bothers them at all. I look at the view from the top of the hill. The view never ceases to impress me. The rows

and rows of tea plants covering the misty mountains look so beautiful. Suddenly, I remember that I must hurry if I want to earn enough money to buy a birthday present for my brother. I run down the hill to the place where I am supposed to be plucking tea leaves.

I am paid 500 rupees (the U.S. equivalent of five dollars) per basket. If I manage to pick three entire baskets of tea leaves I will probably be able to buy my brother a small chocolate cake at the market. This was going to be a tough and arduous task. I didn't have any breakfast today, since I had to hurry to work. If I am going to pick three baskets by the end of the day, then I will have to skip lunch

as well. I decide that it will be worth skipping lunch to see my brother happy.

Picking three baskets of tea leaves is going to be a record. The most I had ever picked was two baskets. I will have to hurry. I begin to pick fast. I am an experienced tea plucker because I have been working for five years, since I was fourteen. My brother and I were born in India, but since our parents had died in a car accident in India, we moved to Sri Lanka, since we had heard tales of people managing to earn a living by working in the tea industry. I had to support both of us through my wages until my brother turned eight and was legally allowed to work.

Our life is actually quite happy, even though we live in our respective crowded huts made out of clay. Although the huts we live in are pretty bare we always keep them as clean as possible. I always pick a couple of the jasmine flowers that grow at the edges of the rows of tea plants and keep them in a vase in the hut to add a little bit of color to it. The huts have thatched roofs, and although it rarely gets cold in Sri Lanka, even on the mountains, it is uncomfortable to sleep when the night air creeps through the spaces between the pieces of straw and tickles us. My brother is my only joy, and he is probably the reason I always work hard at such a monotonous and tedious job. I look forward to seeing his brilliant smile when I come home from work every day.

I work quickly, moving my wrists and fingers fast. In a couple of hours, I finish one basket. I hurriedly empty my bas-

ket at the big bin nearby and am paid my 500 rupees by the young man who is collecting the tea leaves. I glance at the sky. There are probably only six hours left to finish the job.

I work fast, climbing slopes and slipping through the narrow walkways between the tea plants. At around lunchtime, I feel exhausted, but I know that I can't stop if I want to give my brother a present. As I brush past a tea plant, I feel a sharp, pricking sensation in my thigh. I look down at my thigh and realize that a thorn has gone through my sari and pierced my leg. The wound starts to bleed. I need to bandage the wound fast to make sure it doesn't get infected. I look around to make sure no one is around to steal the basket before rushing off to get a bandage of some sort. No one is there! I quickly drop my tea basket and hurry to a house nearby to ask for a bandage to prevent my wound from being infected.

I am given a bandage. Hastily I apply the bandage over the wound and limp back to where I left my basket. It isn't there! I quickly look around to make sure I'm looking in the right place. After looking around, I know I am definitely in the right place. I frown. If I don't find the basket soon, I won't be able to buy a present for Raj. I look at the ground to see if there are any clues as to who might have taken the basket. I spot a pink-and-purple piece of a silk sari. I stoop down and pick up the little piece. This must be a piece of the sari that the culprit was wearing! My frown deepens. I am extremely



How could someone just take away my basket like that?

angry. How could someone just take away my basket like that? It was my third and final one for the day. I must at least have around three hours left. I have to find the culprit.

I look around at the tea pluckers. None of them seems to have a pink-and-purple sari on. I go over and ask Priya, one of my friends, if she has seen anyone with a pink-and-purple sari and explain the situation to her. Priya, startled by my question, says, “You might want to ask Mani. After all, she is always rude and snobby towards all of us. She has the temerity to do such a thing.”

“Oh yeah... Mani! She is probably the one who took the basket! She’s always so

rude and stuck up. Well, I *am* going to get it back. Thanks, Priya!” I say with strong determination.

Priya nods. I wonder why she isn’t looking me in the eye, but I push my thoughts about her away and focus on getting the basket back from Mani. I half-run and half-limp as I rush over to where Mani is plucking tea leaves. “Hey Mani!” I say casually.

“Hey Meena,” she says, puzzled. “What are you doing here? You almost never talk to me!”

“Well, Mani,” I begin, “I have come to see you about my missing tea basket.” I explain the story to her.

“Meena, I know you think that I proba-

bly took the basket because I am so snobby to you, but I promise you, I didn't take the basket! Priya did! I saw her!"

"Priya? You dare blame Priya, my best friend?" I screech, incredulously.

"No, Meena, I am telling the truth. I saw Priya take your basket. But she doesn't know I saw her," Mani says gently but firmly.

I look into her eyes and I can tell that she's telling the truth. Now I know why Priya was acting strangely in front of me.

"I am very sorry for having blamed you, Mani!" I say sorrowfully. "I just couldn't guess that it would be Priya."

"It's fine, Meena, I've been bratty to you from the moment I ever met you. But I am sorry for that. I mean to turn over a new leaf," Mani says earnestly.

After hugging Mani, I hurry off to find Priya. I see her plucking tea leaves in a far corner, her back towards me. That's good. She hasn't seen me coming yet.

I limp as fast and as quietly as I can to where she is, but even though I try to be as quiet as possible, I make a noise. Startled, Priya turns around. During this moment, I happen to notice that the bottom of her sari is pink and purple. I scowl in anger.

"Hel- lo M- M- Meena! Y- you're back!" she stutters and smiles shakily.

"Hi, Priya!" I say gruffly. "You know why I've come to you! Mani saw you take the basket! Please give me the basket, Priya! I must get going, and I have no time to deal with you betraying me!"

Priya starts to cry. "I'm sorry, Meena!

I took your basket because I need the money! Please forgive me! I want to be your friend again!"

I am furious. She could have at least admitted that she had taken it when I had come to ask her about it. I snatch the basket out of her hands and turn my back on her and stalk away.

But before I go a few steps, I feel someone pulling at my arm. I whip around, annoyed. It's Priya! Priya, of all people! She knows I don't want to have anything to do with her! "Would you please let go of my arm, Priya? I think you and I both know that I don't want to have anything to do with you anymore!" I exclaim spitefully.

The grip on my arm tightens. "Meena! I won't let go until you forgive me! I really want to be your friend!" Priya says.

"Fine, I forgive you!" I say, really annoyed. Frankly, I would say anything at that point so that I could continue on my way.

"Wait, then let me help you carry that heavy basket for you!" Priya says happily. She snatches the basket out of my hands and with one quick motion dumps all the tea leaves on the ground.

"Pri-ya! How could you be so spiteful and rude?" I screech. I am close to tears. My "friend" had betrayed me twice! "You know that I am in a hurry! Why would you ever do such a thing to me?" I yell at her angrily.

"You really think I like you?" Priya asks rudely. "Well I don't!" she responds. "Ever since I've met you, all you ever talk about is that brother of yours! I don't have a

brother like that, and the fact that you are, or were, going to buy a present for him just irritated me! Anyway, good luck picking up the tea leaves!" she retorts. She runs off, laughing maniacally.

I sigh, heartbroken. I have to hurry! Suddenly, I am aware of someone calling my name!

I turn and see Mani running towards me excitedly. She is carrying a full basket of tea leaves. "Meena, take this! I want to be friends with you! I just witnessed what Priya did to you! She is out of her mind! You are perhaps the sweetest and kindest person I have ever known!" she says as she pushes the basket towards me.

"Oh Mani, thank you so much! I am forever indebted to you! Thank you very much!" I tell her as I put the basket down and open my arms to hug her.

"Oh Meena, I'd do just about anything to be your friend!" she tells me enthusiastically.

I break away from her and, after saying goodbye, I hurry over to the bin and collect my money. Although my thigh is sore, I am happy. I now have 1500 rupees.

I run downhill to the little market. I quickly buy the necessities for dinner. I only have 700 rupees left to buy my brother's present. I look amongst the cakes in the refrigerator and finally select the one I want. I look at the price.

It is 680 rupees. I am happy that I can afford the cake. I know my brother will be pleased with his present. I ask the sales clerk to box the cake and wrap it with pretty wrapping paper.

When the sales clerk finishes her job, the cake box looks so gorgeous and sparkly. I am sure that my brother will love the gift. I quickly pay for everything and run out of the store.


I walk up the hill. Although my wrists are tired from all of the plucking, and my thigh hurts, I am overjoyed that I can make my brother happy. When I finally reach the men's building, I run into my brother's room and surprise him with the gift.

"Raj! Look what I have bought for you! Isn't it beautiful? Please open the gift!"

"Meena! Thanks for the beautiful gift! You shouldn't have wasted money on me like this!" He tears open the gift.

I wait excitedly to see what he thinks about the cake.

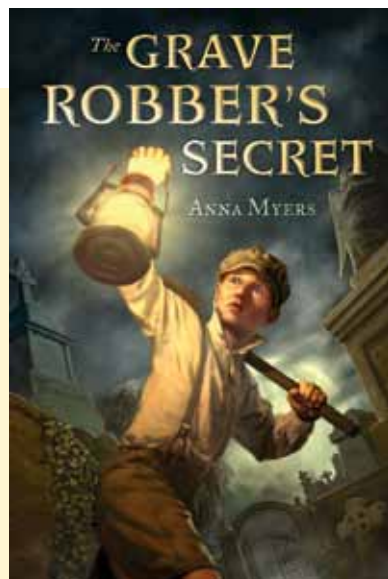
"It's beautiful, Meena!" he exclaims. "Thank you very much for this amazing cake! I can't wait to eat it!"

He moves to hug me, and smiles. I grin and hug him back. I am glad I skipped lunch and breakfast and looked for the basket despite my sore thigh. It was worth doing anything for the sight of my brother's smile. 

Book Review

By Loren Townsend

The Grave Robber's Secret, by Anna Myers;
Walker & Company: New York, 2011;
\$16.99



Loren Townsend, 12
Highland Park, New Jersey


THE MAIN CHARACTER in *The Grave Robber's Secret*, Robby, is a twelve-year-old boy who lives in a poor section of Philadelphia at the beginning of the 1800s. Robby's father thinks he has found a get-rich-quick scheme—grave robbing! In those days medical schools would buy dead bodies for their students to dissect. Robby and his mother are terrified of the idea, but Robbie's father will not hear of any disagreement. In his mind this will be an easy way to support his family, and so he begins making Robby come with him. Then William Burke comes to live in the boarding house Robby's mother runs. He is an intimidating figure who thinks he is of a higher class than everyone else because of his fancy clothes and gold cane. But Robby soon becomes friends with Burke's terribly shy daughter, Martha.

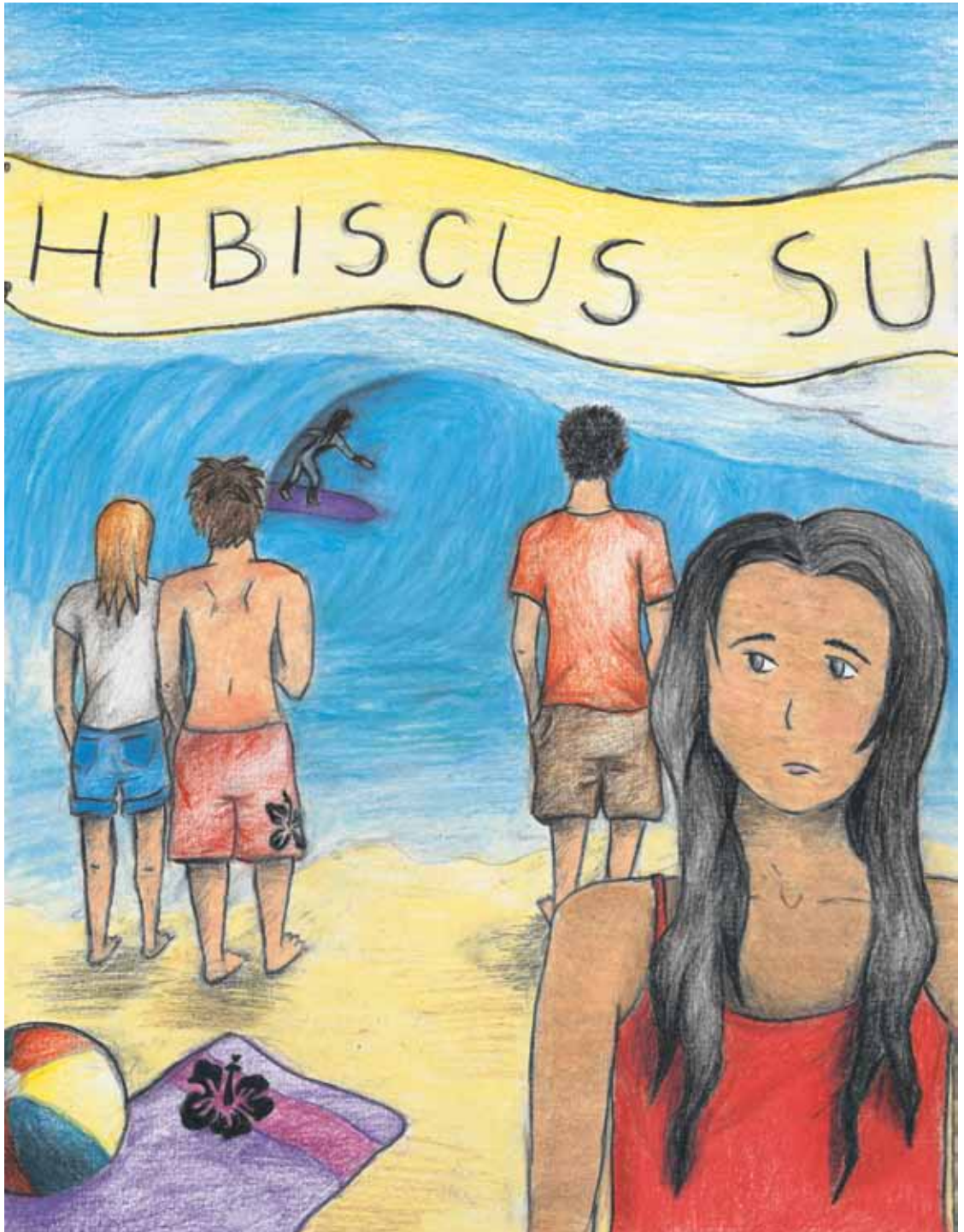
Real trouble begins when Robby finds a woman's shoe that does not belong to his mother in the hall. He had heard a woman's laugh the night before, and he begins to wonder if Burke is even worse than he thought. One night a strange man comes in to play cards with Burke and Robby's father. Martha peeks and sees something horrible. Imagine Robby's horror at finding out that Burke and his father are murdering people off the street and selling them to the medical school!

This is a book about feeling trapped. If Robby goes straight to the police his father might be hanged. He is also terrified that, without proof, they will not believe him and will let Burke go. Burke might kill him or his mother. He tells his mother what has happened, but he knows she will do nothing because she always feels powerless compared to his father. He thinks about doing nothing himself, but he cannot live with the knowledge that others are being killed when he could have stopped them. Reading it, I thought about how hard it is even now for children who are abused by the adults in their lives. I used to think, “Just turn them in!” But I now I see it’s hard to turn in someone you love and are terrified of at the same time.

Robby decides he needs more proof before he decides, and he follows the men to the graveyard one night. He sees that they are planning to kill an old homeless lady. To save her, Robby cries out for them to stop and then runs deeper into the graveyard. Robby is about to be caught by the raging men when the police come. Martha, realizing the danger he would be in, had gone to get them.

Robby is not the only one who has been feeling trapped. Martha’s mother has died and so she is dependent in all ways on a man who lies and cheats and even kills people. Yet now she is able to begin to find some strength in herself because Robby has reached out to her and she is not completely alone. I will always remember when Martha walked into the boarding house, how she came in, looking down, with a big brown shawl wrapped around her. Robby thought she looked fragile and I thought she looked like she was trying to hide or disappear. But now she has a friend to save, and so she does.

I loved this story because it is a very fast-paced, exciting mystery and yet understandable and not confusing. It also helped me understand a real-life mystery—why people in bad situations sometimes can’t just get out of them. But making friends with someone always helps. 



Of course, she would never be as good a surfer as Miranda

The Real Winner

By Michele Younger

Illustrated by Brooke Antoine

SYDNEY KALILI FLIPPED her long black hair over her shoulder and charged into an oncoming wave. It was a big one, and it swallowed Sydney whole. She felt the cool water engulf her body and sting her eyes, and she accidentally swallowed a mouthful of sea water. She tumbled onto the sandy shore and faced her sister, Miranda. Miranda shook her head.

“Sydney, you know I can do better than that.” The sisters waited until a big wave arrived, and this time Miranda ran. Sydney watched her older sister as she jumped into the wave; her sister made it look effortless. Several seconds later, Miranda jogged back to where Sydney was and said, “Bet you can’t do that.”

“But... but mine was good, too,” protested Sydney. She was sick of Miranda being better than her at almost everything. Miranda rolled her eyes.

“Sydney, if you want to prove yourself, go ahead and do it.” She paused. “Hey, here comes a big one now!”

Sydney ran into the wave, but her try was no good. She barely reached the wave before it crashed ashore, but it did knock her over. Sydney did somersaults on the sand and blinked back tears. Miranda was laughing like her sister’s failure was the funniest thing in the world.

“Stop it!” cried Sydney. “It was a mistake!” Miranda shook her head.

“Sydney, I have *way* more experience than you. I’ve been doing this since I was, like, four. I’ll *always* be better than you.”



Michele Younger, 12
Woodside, New York



Brooke Antoine, 13
Cincinnati, Ohio

Sydney could not listen anymore. She ran to her house, which wasn't that far from the beach. Her mom was cooking shrimp with her "special" sauce, which both the sisters knew was just a mixture of soy sauce, ketchup, coconut milk, and a little olive oil.

"*Aloha*, Sydney dear. What's the rush?" asked Mom as she poured special sauce over the shrimp. Sydney didn't answer. She ran into the room she and Miranda shared and lay down on her bed. She could hear the door opening, then closing, and she heard her sister's footsteps.

"Mom, is it OK if I enter this surf contest that they're having tomorrow?"

"Yes, Miranda, but..." Her mother was interrupted by Miranda.

"Awesome!" Miranda exited, and Sydney came out of her room.

Mom eyed her and said, "Sweetie, go play outside before the shrimp is done." Sydney trudged outside to the shore. As usual, the beach was packed. It was summer vacation, and tourists from all around were visiting Hawaii. Sydney noticed that a large banner was up. It read, "Hibiscus Surfing Contest Tomorrow!" Hibiscus surfing competitions were not just any type of surfing competitions. They were *Hibiscus* surfing competitions. These competitions were held once a year, and there were many rules in order to enter. You had to be over twelve years old. You had to have been in at least two surfing competitions in your life. You had to have lived in Hawaii for at least four years. You had to own a surfboard... the list goes on and on.

Miranda was fourteen years old. She had been in a total of eleven surfing competitions in her life. She, Sydney, and the rest of their family had been living in Hawaii forever—this was where Sydney's ancestors had come from. And Miranda owned a beautiful surfboard—it was deep purple and had her name on it. Miranda had never been in a Hibiscus surfing competition before.

Oke, the lifeguard, noticed Sydney strolling around and called out, "Sydney, Miranda just signed the Hibiscus papers! She will be in the competition! *Kela'apopo*."

"I heard," sighed Sydney wearily.

"And you're not happy. Why are you not happy? *Kaikua'ana* will be in the surfing contest... I would be excited."

"Never mind, Oke," said Sydney, "why I'm not happy about this." She strutted away. Miranda was gone now, and Sydney supposed that her mother's shrimp was done. Sadly, she walked back home.

"**A**LOHA AND WELCOME to the seventy-third annual Hibiscus surfing competition! That's right, friends, this special contest has been going on since 1938—and look how far we've come!" These happy words were said by a cheery announcer out of Sydney's sight. Sydney looked at her sister, who was wearing a light blue water suit and nervously leaning on her personalized surfboard. The announcer continued talking, but Sydney didn't listen. Before she knew it, Miranda and her surfboard were pad-

dling to a large wave. She rode the wave beautifully. She kept her arms out for balance, not that she needed it. The whole crowd was in awe of her. Sydney turned away. Miranda was showing off again. Of course, she would never be as good a surfer as Miranda. Never. Tears burned her eyes. Just as she was prepared to run back home, she heard a high-pitched shriek and everyone gasped. Sydney turned to where she expected to see Miranda, but her sister was gone. Her purple surfboard was floating on the surface of the water. Instantly, Sydney ran to the ocean. She wasn't dressed for swimming (she had on a thin cotton tank top and a pair of shorts), but she ran into the water. She didn't know how deep she was in the water. She didn't know if people were watching her. All of her thoughts were mixed up in her head like soup. She knew just one thing. She needed to get to her sister.

Waves came up and threatened to crash over her, but she swam through them using the trick that Miranda had taught her. Sydney had barely reached her sister's surfboard when she felt strong, cool arms wrap around her. She squirmed around and saw that they were those of Oke, the lifeguard. Instead of trying to escape from Oke's strong grip, she cried out, "*Kokua!* Help! Help!"

"It's OK, Sydney, you're OK," Oke said, trying to soothe her.

"No, Miranda, Miranda! Help her! Not me, her!" But Sydney's pleas were of no use. Oke still held her. Several other lifeguards were swimming toward where her

sister had gone down. Oke held onto her and brought her to the shore.

"Sydney, are you OK?" Sydney was sobbing now.

"Just help my sister! I'm fine!" The lifeguard wrapped a towel around the shivering girl and swam to where Miranda had gone down. And right now, the sky was beautiful and the air was warm. Sydney watched as Oke grabbed an unconscious Miranda, held her so that her head was above water, and swam toward the shore.

"She's breathing," he announced to the tense bystanders. They all breathed a sigh of relief, but Sydney was still worried. She flew to her sister's side. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she examined her sister.

Miranda's eyes opened slightly, and she said in a whisper, "*Oma'ima*," help me." Sydney desperately looked around for her parents. Finally, she spotted them as they raced across the beach to Sydney, Miranda, and Oke.

"Mom, Dad, get Miranda to the hospital. She needs help. I'll stay home until you return. "*Olelo-pa'a, 'olelo-bo'ohiki*." Sydney's parents did not even hesitate to put Miranda in the car and drive her to the hospital. Sydney waved solemnly as the car drove away. Realizing that she was quite drowsy, Sydney jogged back home and fell asleep on the sofa.

"But, Mom, I *love* surfing!"

"Miranda, you're lucky that you're OK. The doctors said that your accident could have been fatal." Sydney heard the voices of Mom and Miranda. Miranda groaned.

“But I can still swim and stuff, right?”

“*Right.*” Mom sounded exasperated at her daughter. Now Miranda spoke again.

“Dad, will you do me a favor and...”
Sydney went back to sleep.

SUN STREAMED through Miranda and Sydney’s bedroom, sending buttery streaks over the sleeping girls. Sydney awoke before her older sister. She remembered what she had heard last night. Was that conversation real? She gazed around the bedroom. Dad must have carried me in here late last night, she thought, because I had fallen asleep on the sofa. She noticed Miranda’s surfboard in the corner of the room. However, for some reason, Miranda’s name was not on the surfboard. Sydney stood up, stretched, and strolled to where the surfboard leaned. Instead of “Miranda” on the surfboard, there was her name, “Sydney.” There was also a note taped to the board. Here is what it said:

Dear Sydney,
My surfboard is now yours. Mom and Dad don’t want me to surf again because of my

“fatal” accident. Last night, I asked Dad to re-paint it and put your name on there. I’m sorry that I was such an awful older sister. You tried to save me, even though you knew that I just made your life miserable. I’m going to change. I won’t be such a big-shot anymore. Someday, all we may have is each other. Thank you so much for trying to help me. I passed Oke on the beach when I came back from the hospital, and he told me what you did. *Aloha Aula ‘Oe.* I love you.

Love,
Miranda

As Sydney looked at her sister, she saw Miranda’s eyes open and her lips form a smile. And for once, Sydney felt love for her sister. Love. And she felt herself saying “*Aloha Aula ‘Oe, Miranda.*” ❀

Glossary of Hawaiian Words

Aloha – hello; aloha can also mean goodbye and love

Kela’apopo – tomorrow

Kaikua’ana – older sister to a girl

Kokua – help

‘Oma’ima’i – not feeling well

‘Olelo-pa’a, ‘olelo-ho’ohiki – promise

Aloha Aula ‘Oe – I love you



Blood Red

By **Jeremy Trujillo**

Two black-and-white dogs
Dash across the beach
Legs pumping
Flicking mud into the sun

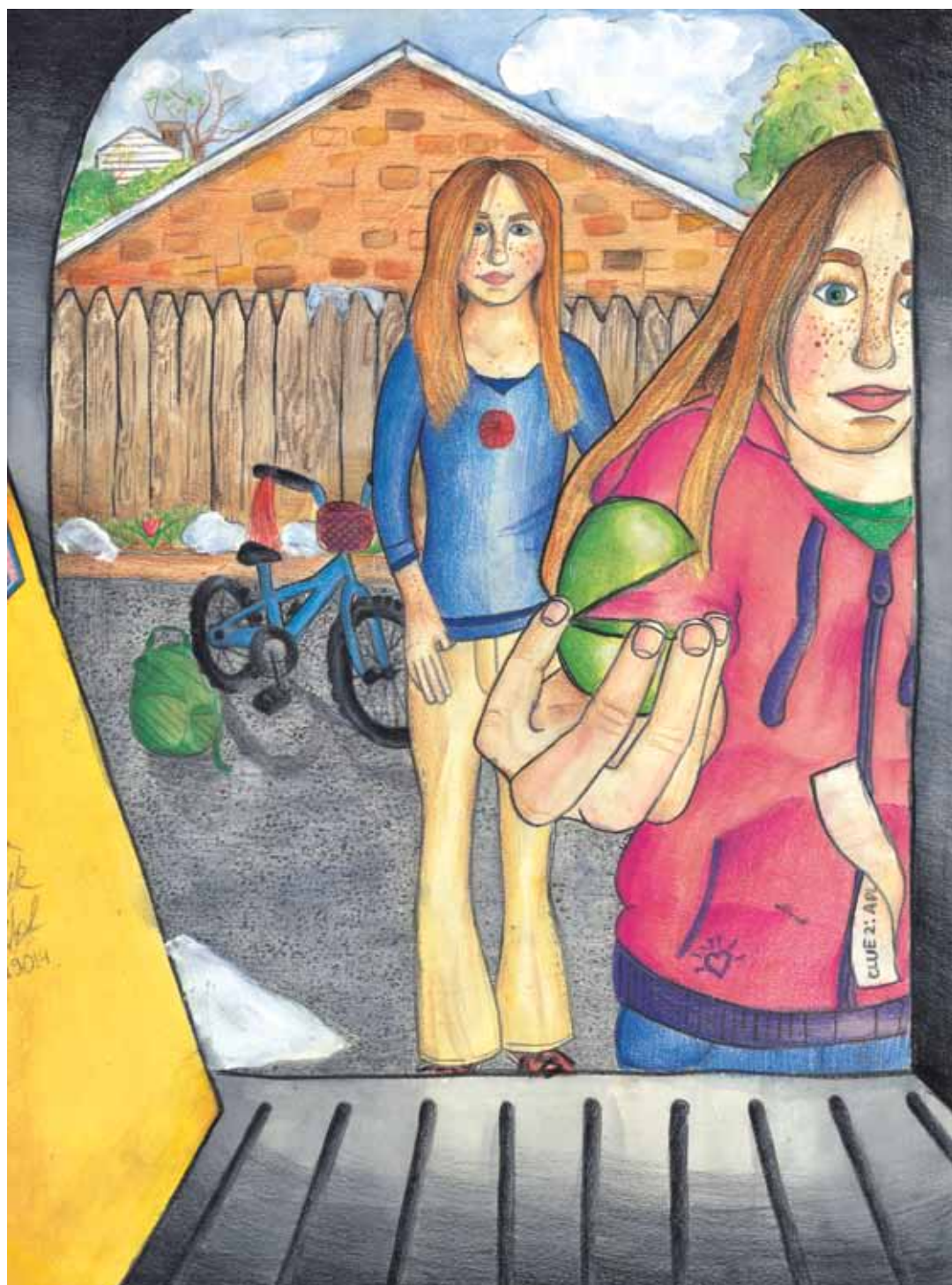
The sun
Turning the lake
Those same brilliant colors
As the glowing red rocks around it

Fiery fluid
Creeps up on the shore
Where two dogs lie
In slumber

Noses in the blood red sand



Jeremy Trujillo, 12
Montrose, Colorado



It can't get much better than this

Plastic Eggs and a Wind-Up Rabbit

By **Cammie Keel**

Illustrated by **Claire Nilsson**

S NOW BLINDFOLDED the ground, warning it not to peek. Spring was here, but the green landscape was still under construction, a curtain of whiteness hiding it. Navy paint poured itself into the sky, filling it up as night came. A white moon floated on top of the ocean of blue dye. Freezing light radiated from it. I let my head fall to the pillow, eyes slipping closed. My book crawled out of my fingers as I fell asleep.

Click-click-click-click-click. My eyelids crept apart, and I turned my attention to the perfect scene outside my bedroom window. The sky had melted into a bright blue, and patches of warm green grass showed. Smiling, I tried to fall back asleep, but just as I looked down I shrieked. A silhouette of a strange creature was next to me, shaking violently. I tore away the covers and raced to the light switch. Bitter yellow flooded the room. A wind-up rabbit hopped cheerfully across my pillow.

Easter! I forgot all about it. Snickers came from my closet, and I yanked open the doors to find my little sister, Chloe, crouched there. I gave her my best *Really?* look and pointed to the bunny hopping around on my bed.

She smiled and nodded.

“Not funny,” I said, even though she made me laugh inside. She sat there with a tiny grin on her face, not getting my hint. “Go get dressed,” I added, and giggled as I slipped the door closed behind her.

She skipped away and I went over to retrieve her wind-up toy. I twisted the handle and let it do its little dance. Chloe popped



Cammie Keel, 13
Boulder, Colorado



Claire Nilsson, 12
Greenville, South Carolina

her head back in my room to squeal “Happy Easter!” and grab her rabbit toy from my palm.

I fell into my fluffy beanbag and thought about what a great day it was going to be. A scavenger hunt with clues in eggs that all led up to a grand prize at the end, a happy sister who I got to find it with, the sickly sweet candy that would make us happy but later regretful of eating so much. Chloe stuck her head in my room again.

“Come *on*, Rachel!”


I met Chloe in the garage where she was getting onto her bike with pink streamers. Her Easter basket was taped to her handlebars. I had a backpack on my shoulders because I thought it was a pain to carry around a basket everywhere. Our scavenger hunts went all over the neighborhood. Usually our mom left the big prize back at home, so we would always wind up there again.

“Mom gave me the first clue! Can I read it?” Chloe looked hopefully at me for approval. I nodded.

“Cold, dark, black, and empty, visited by those seeking information.” Chloe scrunched up her nose. “What?!”

I knew it was the mailbox, but I liked to let her guess it on her own.

“Well, what place...?” I started, but her eyes shot open and she interrupted me.

“Mailbox!” she shouted, and I smiled as I took off after her. We shot down the long bumpy driveway, bouncing up and down on our seats. Chloe was an expert rider for an eight-year-old. She didn’t even wobble. Smoothly, she skidded to a stop and opened up the mailbox, pulling out a lime-green egg. She opened the egg by pinching it at the seam so it cracked apart. Our clue fluttered to the ground. She picked it up and started to read. All the while I was staring into the blue sky, dotted with puddles of white paint. The first pink flower was shoving dirt out of its way as it reached for the surface. Then I looked at Chloe, her face grinning eagerly. And I thought, It can’t get much better than this. 



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