

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Raise of a Toast," by Olti Naska, age 13, Tirana, Albania

MUSIC FROM THE HEART

Can Caitlin convince her parents that Bullet is the dog for her?

THE MOMENT OF DECISION

Jesús is a Little League star, but a lie is tearing him up inside

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2003

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VOLUME 32, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2003

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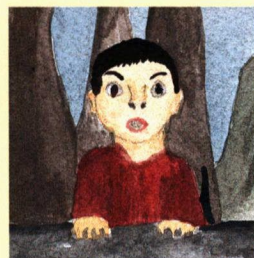
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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 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 Web site at www.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 in four to six 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 some samples of your art work, 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 and phone number.

Cover: "Raise of a Toast" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy of San Jose, California. For over 25 years, Paintbrush Diplomacy has worked to promote children's artistic expression around the world and to raise awareness of children's causes. Special thanks to Kristina King and Char Pribuss.

The Mailbox



I have greatly enjoyed reading your magazine, which I find fun, interesting, and enlightening, since I was five years old. I love reading stories written by children, especially because I can learn so much from writing by my peers. The works that you publish are top notch.

NATHAN HAKIMI, 13
Skokie, Illinois

I just wanted to thank you for including my drawings for "A Sour Note" in the March/April issue of *Stone Soup*. I received the copies you sent me and loved them. I have been reading all of the stories and poems and am very impressed by the talent of these authors. I feel honored to be included with them. Some of the drawings are so delicate and some others are so dramatic, I love the diversity. I showed the magazine to all my teachers, friends, and relatives in a state of pride and joy and they were very impressed. My school library is going to put a copy on display.

ELIZABETH WRIGHT, 12
Las Vegas, Nevada

Elizabeth also illustrated "The Moment of Decision" on page 31 of this issue.

I just read the review of *A Greater Goode* on your Web site [from the March/April 2003 issue] and, needless to say, I was absolutely touched beyond words by the review 12-year-old Martina McLarty gave it. I am the author of that book, and if it's at all possible, could you contact Martina for me and tell her she moved me to tears!

AMY SCHOR FERRIS
Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania

I am in fourth grade at Ascension Day School in Lafayette, Louisiana. I enjoy reading and my favorite thing to do is play with my dogs. I liked your story, "Music Sown with Love" [January/February 2003] because it tells about a girl who has a dream and doesn't give up. She had courage and her dream came true.

ELIZABETH MALIN, 10
Lafayette, Louisiana

I would just like to compliment the book reviews. Especially the ones of *Our Only May Amelia* [January/February 2001] and *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* [September/October 2000]. Both were outstanding. I went to my local library and borrowed the books and I thoroughly enjoyed both of them. I would never have known about them if it wasn't for *Stone Soup*!!! Thank you!

AMY GOODNOUGH, 13
Plymouth, New Hampshire

Congratulations on your 30th Anniversary Issue of *Stone Soup*! [May/June 2003]. Amazing! Thank you for including Leigh's [Leigh Marie Marshall's] two drawings illustrating "A Stroke of the Bow." She was thrilled to be part of it and as usual you did a beautiful job. We like the format changes/the "new look." May *Stone Soup* continue with many more years of success and enjoyment to young people all over the world.

CHRISTINE M. LANDO
San Francisco, California

You can read all the stories mentioned in The Mailbox on our Web site: www.stonesoup.com

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



"Hey, look at this relic," he said. "Think it belongs to Captain Volge?"

A Lasso for Adagio

By Julian March

Illustrated by Noel Lunceford

I LOOK BACK ON THAT NIGHT and wonder why I was so scared. Was it the noises—or the fact I was alone, surrounded by water, with nothing overhead but the glittering stars and the Cheshire moon?

That day began just like any other Thursday. At school I almost fell asleep in math class, and by the time I got home, I was ready to go outside. Unfortunately, my mom made me finish my homework first.

I had just finished my homework when I heard the announcer on the radio say, “It’s five-thirty and the temperature is sixty-three degrees.”

“Yes!” I cried. Grabbing a jacket and telling my mom goodbye, I got on my bike and rode to Jim’s house. He usually finishes his chores and piano practice by five-thirty.

Jim lives near the Cypress River. I found him behind his house, working on the model boat he planned to enter in the county’s annual model boat contest.

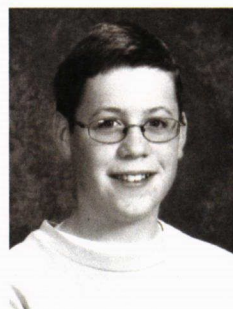
“How is the boat coming?”

“Fine,” Jim replied as he tangled his finger in a ball of string.

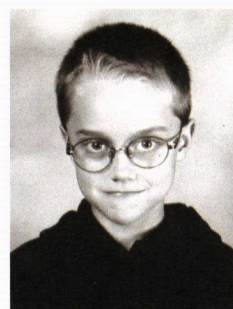
“Do you want to go to the river—that is if you aren’t too wrapped up?”

He rolled his eyes. “Sure. I’ll leave a note for my mom.”

I raced him the two blocks to the river. Jim won, but he was out of breath. This section of the river has immense oaks, cypress and willow trees growing beside it. Sometimes when the wind blows hard it sounds as if they are whispering among



Julian March, 12
Elizabeth City, North Carolina



Noel Lunceford, 9
Grandview, Missouri

themselves.

The pier creaked under our feet as we walked out to the edge and sat down. The breeze off the river felt good against my skin.

I was watching an egret flying against the pink skyline, scanning for fish before dark, when I heard Jim mutter, "I wonder what that is." He was staring at the reeds to the right of the pier.

"What?"

"That green thing in the reeds."

Jim went over to investigate. With a stick he knocked away the brown reeds to reveal an old wooden fishing boat about three feet wide and twelve feet long. Its once white color had faded to gray. The paint was peeling on the sides like sun-burned skin. A frayed yellow rope tied to the bow led up to a cypress root.

"Hey, look at this relic," he said. "Think it belongs to Captain Volge?"

"Do you think it belonged to the Captain?" Captain Volge was a one-eyed fisherman rumored to have been a pirate. One morning he went out on the river to check his nets and that night his boat washed ashore empty. His body was never found.

I must have looked a little scared, because Jim looked up at me and laughed. "If it is and we mess with it, he's liable to come looking for you." Jim pulled the boat into the water. "Sure is rickety."

I decided to prove to Jim that I wasn't scared. I got in and sat down on one of the three slats that served as seats.

"Still seaworthy," I declared.

"Tell it to the captain."

"I ain't scared of no ghost!" I stood up and began swinging an imaginary sword in the air.

"You'd be heading for the hills leaving a cloud of dust behind you if you saw the captain," Jim taunted.

"Oh is that so?" Trying to execute a particularly daring sword thrust, I lost my footing and fell back into the boat. The shifting weight pushed the boat on out into the river. I sat up and grabbed the rope at the bow, hoping to pull myself in, but when I pulled on it there was no tension on the end.

Jim was frowning at the boat, as if he was trying to think of a plan. I could see him, receding away from me.

"Turn it around," he called. "Try to paddle it back to shore."

I frantically searched around the boat for an oar, but all I saw was a frayed rope. "There's nothing to paddle with!"

"Jump in and swim!"

I started to slip over the side—and then I remembered hearing about a swimmer who had been bitten on the foot by a sand shark down at Spivey's Point, only a mile or so away. Shark sightings weren't that uncommon in this section of the river, which was only a few miles from the Albemarle Sound.

"What if there's a shark?"

Jim shouted something back but I couldn't hear what it was. The boat was moving fast now in the current, and in the fading light I couldn't make out the expression on his face. He ran along the

bank, trying to keep me in sight, but after a while, I couldn't see him anymore at all. The boat moved away from the bank, into the center of the wide river, and headed south toward the sound.

It was dark, and the eerie cry of a screech owl sent a chill down my spine. I saw the ghost of Captain Volge, his blade shining in the light of the moon. At such times, my imagination can be my enemy, transforming driftwood carved by years of water into a ghost, and a jumping fish, scales shining in the moonlight, into a sword blade. Knowing it was my imagination didn't help.

I huddled up in my windbreaker, shivering in the wind that chilled my bones. I looked out at the river, shining like onyx in the moonlight, and wondered what was lurking beneath its depths. A shark? I couldn't let myself get carried off to the sound. I'd read about boats overturning there and people drowning. I tried to pray, but the only thing I could think of was "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep." I felt OK until I got to the part about "if I should die before I wake." Somehow that didn't seem very comforting.

I lay back in the boat, resting my head on one of the slats, and tried to relax. Jim will tell my parents and they'll have the Coast Guard out looking for me, I thought. I'll be all right. Lulled by the gentle rocking of the boat, I drifted off to sleep. I dreamed that my parents were on a road trip singing "One Hundred Bottles of Pop on the Wall," without my tenor voice.

The boat lurched in the current and I woke up, seeing a flash of white overhead—a snow-colored owl swooping down toward me. I got in the position you are supposed to get into during a tornado and covered my head with my hands. My muscles tensed as I waited for the talons to dig into my back. But the owl splashed into the water near the boat, and rose up clutching a fish in its talons, then flew up into the starry sky. I envied the owl. It could go wherever it wanted, and I was trapped in a ghost's boat on the river—swept along in a current that was carrying me off to an unwanted destination.

I wondered what my parents were doing and what Jim had told them. I could picture them sitting around the dining room table, staring at the empty place setting where I usually sat. I could kick myself for trying to show off. Why did I have to get in the boat? Why did I have to be so foolish?

I was distracted from my reverie by something bumping the boat. My heart leaped, and I remembered the story about the shark-bitten swimmer. I peered over the side, expecting to see a dorsal fin, but all I saw was a shadowy shape with a head sticking up. It was a big old snapping turtle, the size of a washtub.

"Go away," I said. And I lay back down in the boat.

The dim outline of a plan began to take shape in my tired mind. I sat up and saw that the turtle was still there, swimming in the same direction as the current.

I looked back at the rope, then at the



I envied the owl. It could go wherever it wanted, and I was trapped in a ghost's boat on the river

turtle. I made a lasso and went to the bow of the boat again. I missed with my first toss. The boat tipped as I leaned forward, plunging my face into the chilly river. I came out sputtering and dried my face off with my sleeve.

I had to get the turtle before he got

away.

"Please God, let my aim be true," I prayed. The lasso seemed to move in slow motion. It hung in the air above the turtle's head before it dropped neatly around his neck.

I got it! I got the turtle!

"Now go to the shore," I said.

But the turtle swam steadily alongside the boat.

I had to figure out a way to distract him, get him to pull me to shore. Leaning out as far as I safely could over the side of the boat, I began swatting at him with my windbreaker. "Go on, Adagio," I said. In musical terms, *adagio* means "very slow."

Slowly, Adagio turned north, pulling me away from the center of the river, toward shore.

Adagio lived up to his name. The sun was coming up before we neared the shore. The golden treetops appeared to be on fire.

I almost jumped for joy but the boat would have tipped. When the water was knee high, I jumped out and slipped the lasso off Adagio's leathery neck, being careful to maintain a safe distance from his ferocious-looking jaws.

"Thanks for the help, Adagio," I said. He stared at me a moment, his flat black eyes full of ancient mysteries, then he slowly turned around and headed back out to the sunlit river.

I dragged the boat up onto the bank and tied the frayed rope around a cypress root. Then I walked up through the woods, toward the road. My body ached and my head hurt.

I was behind Hugo's Texaco Station. The current had taken me about five or six miles down river from Jim's house. Hugo's station had peeling gray paint and the fluorescent lights over the gas tanks

were flickering. I sat down on the curb and felt a sudden attack of dizziness, as if I were about to fall off the edge of the world. I shut my eyes, took several deep breaths, and thanked God for sending me an angel in the form of a snapping turtle.

When my head cleared I stood up and walked into Hugo's. I asked the man behind the counter if I could use the phone and he nodded at a black phone on the counter. I picked it up and with trembling fingers I dialed the number to my house.

My mother answered on the first ring. "Hello," she said, her voice cracking.

"Hey, Mom."

"William! Where in the world are you?"

"Hugo's Texaco, I . . ."

"What in the world are you doing there? Where have you been? We've been worried sick!"

"It's a long story, Mom. I'm fine. Can you pick me up? I'm really tired, and hungry."

"We'll be there as soon as we can."

A few minutes later, my daddy pulled up in his car with my mom and Jim. They all ran up and hugged me, even Jim.

I told them everything that had happened on the way home.

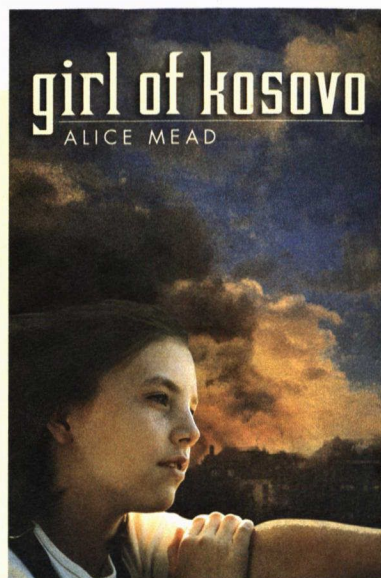
"Oh, honey, you must have been terrified out there, all alone on the river," my mother said.

I thought about how I hadn't been completely alone on the river. There had been fish, a snow-colored owl, and a turtle I'd never forget as long as I lived. ❀

Book Review

By Eesha Dave

Girl of Kosovo by Alice Mead; Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2001; \$16



Eesha Dave, 11
Ardsley, New York

WHEN PEOPLE THOUGHT the Holocaust was over, it wasn't. For the Jews it may have been over in the 1940s, but for the Albanians it wasn't over until 1999.

Girl of Kosovo is a marvelous book. Beneath the cover unravels a story thick and chock-full of courage, hope and sadness, which I think is written so eloquently and precisely.


Throughout the book Zana Dugolli, an eleven-year-old girl, struggles to keep the hatred of the Serbians out of her heart. Zana is an Albanian girl growing up in the time of a holocaust against Albanians. Every day she faces the struggle to survive and is alert to any gunshots and bombs, which may crumble her life to itty-bitty pieces.

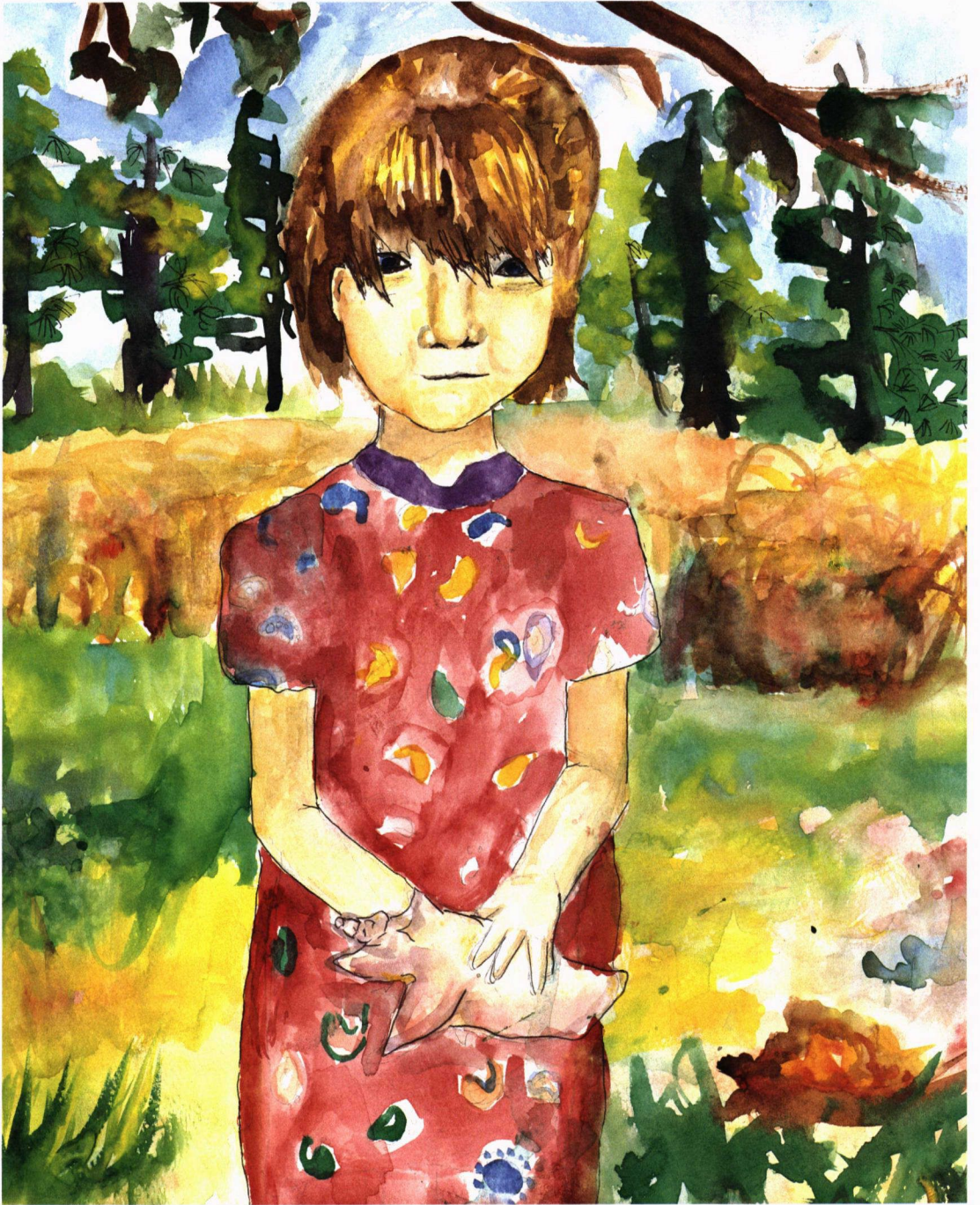
Zana is an amazing character, who out of necessity has converted her heart into a rock. In an attack in her village her ankle is obliterated and shrapnel weaves its way through her hip. Zana is sent immediately to a hospital in Belgrade seven hours from her home and family. Although wishing she didn't have to go, she finds the courage inside of her. This amazed me because I wouldn't want to be alienated from my family during war. I have never been separated from my family for more than a couple of days, and if at all I was separated it was with trusted close

friends. Zana was sent away with absolute strangers. This I thought was a wonderful example of spirit. I realized how fortunate I was living in the USA, where unprecedented medical treatment is taken for granted.

It was so unfair that the nurses at the hospitals chastised and called innocent Zana a terrorist for being an Albanian. Zana tried to ignore them but somehow the obnoxious comments won her over, and filled her heart with even more sorrow. At several such points in the book tears filled my eyes. I realized the Albanians were treated like dirt and pebbles on the road. After reading about so much injustice, I wanted to make a difference. I decided I had to make children my age read this book, and experience the aftermath of war from the perspective of a girl their age. Especially during today's times, when the news is primarily about the US going to war with Iraq and biological terrorism threats on us.

When there was no spirit in the air and sadness was just down the road, hope was still not defeated. An example of hope is when a British doctor helps Zana's injury heal, and when a Serb takes Zana to the hospital. Both these incidents surprised me because from Zana's point of view the Serbs were horrible. Also, it made me think why would a British person want to help an injured girl. Just as every cloud has a silver lining I realized that all Serbs weren't bad; some had a side covered in sweet honey.

What I thought made this book such a mandatory read is that it helped me understand the politics in this world. With North Korea threatening to send out nuclear bombs and Osama Bin Laden supporting terrorism, this book sends a special message out to its readers. "Don't let anyone fill your heart with hatred," as the author quotes in the story. Also, do not tolerate injustice. 



Streaked with orange and tinged with shades of brown, the shell was a symphony of colors

Finders, Keepers

By Holly Wist

Illustrated by the author

I FOUND THE BOX TODAY. It was on the dust-covered shelf in the new room. While I was searching for one of my many misplaced books, I picked up this plain-looking plastic box to set it out of the way. To my astonishment I discovered it was quite heavy.

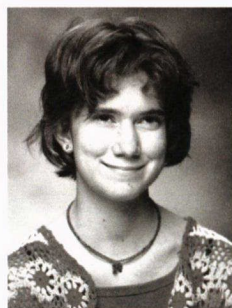
Placing it on my knee, I tugged the lid off and peeked curiously inside. What could it have contained? There they were. Beautiful oddities of every pastel shade were piled onto one another.

Curling, twisted, spiky, flat, ruffled, scalloped, and every kind of seashell imaginable was in that mundane box. I ran my fingers along the tops of them. The shells had been my sister's. She must have left them behind.

They brought back a memory to me.

ONE EASTER, long before my sister left, our parents decided to go out to a camp called Turkey Hill, so we loaded up the car and drove out. It must have taken us about five hours of driving. We went on and on, until I'm sure every part of me had become numb from sitting so long. Some other people went too. We planned to enjoy the Easter celebrations together. I recall one of my friends going with her parents.

Anyway, when we were on the way to the camp in our hideous minivan, my sister and I sketched funny little pictures into a tiny Lisa Frank notebook I had brought. We drew a multitude of things, little cars, planes, and animals. We eventually arrived.



Holly Wist, 13
Murphysboro, Illinois

We pulled onto a long dirt driveway that led to the cabins. As our tires dug in and out of the potholes, a billowing cloud of thick dust rose behind the minivan. All along the road were majestic pine trees that cast shadows over the ferns. We parked in front of the main office building, which was painted brown with peeling biscuit trim around the door and the windows. I was delighted to see a swing set and jungle gym to the left of the coffee-colored building.

When we explored the camp later that day, we encountered winding hiking paths that led through fields of bent yellow grass. After walking a distance there was the lake. It reflected a twisted willow tree with long whips of leaves just beginning to unfurl. Pond skimmers zipped across the water causing tiny ripples. It was serene.

Our few days at Turkey Hill went much like this:

It rained. We played in the mud. It rained more. We went on hikes and consequently caked our shoes with mud. My sister and I had to remove our shoes every time we wished to enter our rooms. A row of twenty-six dilapidated shoes was set outside across the porches of the cabins our group had rented.

Somewhere in the middle of these days, between sitting with my sister in the swings behind the cabins, and when we walked around the lake, I found a giant seashell. Strangely, instead of being by the shore of the murky lake, the conch shell was in the grass outside the cabins. I didn't think about that, but went immediate-

ly and showed it around like the proud five-year-old I was.

The shell was a creamy shade of pale pink. Its inside was smooth, shiny, and the surface felt like blown glass. The outside of it had once been rough and pointed, but years of enduring the conditions of the ocean floor had rubbed it flat. Streaked with orange and tinged with shades of brown, the shell was a symphony of colors.

"It's mine!" I cried.

Two children who had been staying in one of the other cabins demanded to have the seashell that I had found. "We brought it from California!" They squealed like pigs. My parents forced me to give it back to the other kids. I was furious.

It wasn't fair, I thought to myself. Why should I have to give it back? They were the ones who had left it in the grass. It was just like the cliché, "Finders, keepers, losers, weepers." They had lost it and I had found it. It was mine!

I gave it back. I glared at them the whole time. I gritted my teeth to keep myself from calling them baboons. Afterwards my sister promised to help me look for another shell around the lake. We searched for a lengthy period of time, but all we discovered were the fragments of clamshells. The rest of the days at Turkey Hill passed gloomily as I thought about the perfect seashell I had found and lost to the reptilian children of cabin six.

The day came for us to drive home, and the weather was rainy. Thick cumulus



"You can pick any one of these you want, but only one"

clouds blanketed the sky with insipid gray. Torrents of water cascaded over the car windows. On the front window the squealing windshield wipers kept the water off the window.

I sat again with my sister beside me in the back seat of our tan minivan. Another five hours dwindled away before we were home again.

When we reached our house she said, "You can pick any one of these you want, but only one." My sister slid the plain white plastic box from its place on a shelf in her closet and let me choose a shell.

I dumped them out onto the carpet and pawed through all of them. They had black frills and purple underbellies. Their

undersides shone with iridescence. The small ones resembled barnacles, while another was so white and smooth it felt unnatural. In the end, I did not take one of the huge monstrosities. Instead, I chose a small, curling nautilus with bright stripes running up each of its curves. Although its size was not gigantic and its colors were not bright, it was beautiful.

AS I KNELT in the new room, I slowly slid the lid back into place. It was only a plain plastic box filled with overly dusty seashells, but it had brought back what I had lost, the kindness of my sister. She was right there in that place of my heart all along. ❁

Forgotten Words

By **Natalia M. Thompson**

Illustrated by **Natalie Chin**



Natalia M. Thompson, 11
Madison, Wisconsin



Natalie Chin, 11
Bellevue, Washington

IT WAS A SULTRY DAY in August. Sofia lay on her bed, her eyes closed. She heard Isabela, her sister, playing with her cousins downstairs. Cousin Diego's radio drowned out baby Ana's wailing.

Quietly, Sofia tiptoed out of the room. She darted down the stairs, through the kitchen, and out the back door, unnoticed. Out on the lawn, Sofia ran as fast as she could. The wind rippled through her black curtain of hair as she ran. Sofia ran down the noisy street, past the clear brook, and into the woods. As Sofia threw herself onto the pine-needle-covered ground, she felt the quietness of the woods settle around her.

This was Sofia's quiet place, her thinking spot. It was her secret place to escape the noise and chaos of her home. This was where Sofia came when she felt angry or confused. Sofia thought in the quiet shade of the tall trees. She felt protected.

Tilting her head back, Sofia gazed up at the bright sky through the pines. Why had she done this, why? Why had she forgotten her Spanish? Sofia longed for the days when the melodic language flowed freely off her tongue. The days when she communicated in Spanish with ease with her grandma, easily switching languages back and forth with her parents.

Sofia still remembered her classmates' harsh words . . . "Spanish is the poor people's talk." Her face burning, Sofia vowed to herself never to speak a word of Spanish again. That was back in Iowa, where her parents had worked in a factory from dawn to dusk.



Why had she done this, why? Why had she forgotten her Spanish?

Then one night, the phone rang. It was Sofia's Uncle Manuel, who lived in Minnesota. Tío Manuel had urged Sofia's Papi to move north, where there were better jobs with better pay.

So the family had moved. Now Sofia's family lived in a small house in a suburb of Minneapolis with Tío Manuel's family, Sofia's aunts, and her grandma. Papi and Mama both had full-time jobs. Sofia would be entering the seventh grade in the fall, Enrique kindergarten, and little Isabela pre-school.

Sofia's life was so different in the United States than it had been in Mexico

City, where her family had lived until she was four. Although Sofia hadn't been back to Mexico since, she was determined to return. She missed her friends and family in Mexico.

Sofia stood up. Shaking off the dirt, she began making her way home, slowly but steadily. Sofia knew she would never change her ways to be popular again. She knew that her mistake would make her stronger than before, more ready to face new challenges. Sofia would never be the same. Easing the back door open, Sofia knew she would relearn her Spanish. Whatever it would take, she could do it. ☸

Music from the Heart

By Kyle Eichner

Illustrated by Jessie Hennen

HE'S BACK AGAIN?!" exclaimed Kaitlin, dropping her backpack on the floor. "What did the owners complain of this time?"

Steve, the thirty-year-old manager of the animal shelter, replied, "Oh, the usual. He barks too much, bites, growls, and they simply can't put up with him."

"Poor little Bullet," she sympathized, going over to the sign-in desk. "This is the fifth time he's been here. Wasn't his mother an Australian shepherd?"

"Yep. We still don't know what his dad was. He's cute though. Anyway, today you get a fun job. You get to clean all of the cages!"

"Whoopee! What fun I'll have," Kaitlin said sarcastically. She turned and got a bunch of plastic bags, a pile of the last week's newspaper, and rubber gloves from a closet on her right. Over her back she called to Steve as she left the front office. "See you around!"

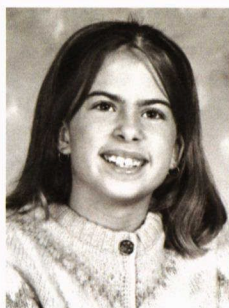
"Oh, Kaitlin! Wait!" he exclaimed, apparently remembering something. Kaitlin backtracked at his call to listen to what he had to say. "There's a girl coming today and she's going to be working here from now on. Her name's Gabriella; be nice!"

"Don't worry! Of course I'll be nice. I mean, she's going to have to put up with you and that's always really . . ." she ducked as Steve threw a pencil at her.

"Begone, rascal!" he said good-naturedly. Laughing, Kaitlin left, and went to her job.



Kyle Eichner, 12
Alexandria, Virginia



Jessie Hennen, 13
Shoreview, Minnesota

I wonder what the new girl will be like, she thought. It had been years since anyone except for Steve and Kaitlin had worked at the shelter. As she started the first cage, she glanced down the dark row and toward the big black dog she and Steve had been talking about earlier. After being found when he was seven weeks old in a gutter, he had come to the shelter, and had had four owners since. Now he was a year old, with a bad reputation. Still, Kaitlin believed that he could be trained if someone just found the secret trick to getting him calmed down.

A cat pulling on her long, red braid brought her back down to earth. "OK, OK, I'll feed you," she told the cat. "Just let me finish cleaning the cages first."

Forty-five minutes later she was done, and she went to the storage room for food for all of the animals. There, she found Steve giving a girl of about fifteen a tour of the building. She was a tall, skinny, Hispanic girl, with long black hair that hung below her waist.

Steve grinned as Kaitlin walked in the storage room. "Here she is!" he exclaimed. "Gabiella, this is Kaitlin, who will be working with you. She'll show you how everything runs here in more detail. We have a lot of fun here, and are really happy for you to join us! You can help Kaitlin feed the animals now, and later you can walk the dogs together. So long!" As he walked out the door of the storage room, he tripped over a bag of birdseed and knocked into a shelf, toppling a bag of dog food and causing it to rip open. Soon it

was raining dog food.

Kaitlin burst into laughter instantly. Steve looked hilarious lying on the ground with a confused expression on his face, and dog food in his dark brown hair. Gabriella was trying her best not to laugh out of respect for her new employer, but finally gave up and laughed hysterically.

Bright red, Steve got up and went to get a broom, mumbling about how he should have hired a boy.

In bed that night, as she did every night, Kaitlin tried to think of a way to convince her parents to let her get a dog. They were convinced that she wasn't ready for the responsibility, because she had play rehearsal three days a week after school, and spent almost all of her other time at the shelter. "You can't have a pet. You're only thirteen, and you're too busy." Really, it was ridiculous that she couldn't have a pet because her dad owned the shelter. Not that he cared about it at all; he had inherited it. Every month he would send Steve the money to pay for food, supplies, the vet bill and, of course, to pay him. It had been Kaitlin's dad's idea to hire someone else because he and her mother thought that Kaitlin spent too much time at the shelter. The very idea, Kaitlin thought, was absurd. Of course, her parents also worried about her because she didn't have many friends. That was even more nonsense. She had Steve, all the animals at the shelter, and her teachers. But by the time she got to bed at night, she had always made out a pretty sorry case for herself.

THE NEXT DAY, as Kaitlin was doing her homework in the auditorium during rehearsal, a girl walked up to her. At first, she was so startled someone had even noticed her that she didn't realize who it was. It was Gabriella.

"Oh! Uh . . . hi!" she finally managed to say. "Are you in the play? I don't remember seeing you here before."

"No, I'm not in the play," was Gabriella's reply. "My younger sister, Maria, is. She's in seventh grade."

"Oh, I see," Kaitlin said. She tried to think of what to say next. I know I'm not very good at talking to people I don't know, she thought. What do I say? Is she trying to be my friend?

"I was just wondering if you could tell Mr. Riley that I won't be at work this evening because I have a dentist appointment. I'm really sorry, but I just found out, and my mom couldn't change it." Gabriella waited a moment and then asked cautiously, "Do you think he'll mind?"

Mr. Riley? Who's Mr. Riley? Kaitlin wondered. Oh! She means Steve! Aloud she said, "He won't mind at all. He's really nice. I'll tell him for you though."

"Thank you so much!" Gabriella said. After a while she added, "Well, I'll see you tomorrow!" and with that, she left.

Later that evening, when Kaitlin was almost done at the shelter, she found herself kneeling in front of Bullet while he slept in his cage. She wondered about his life and how miserable he must be after having so many owners. After the first

one, who killed his spirit, Bullet never trusted humans again. Poor dog, she thought, for the millionth time. Soon she found herself singing to him.

All of a sudden, he seemed to relax. Bullet was almost purring with delight, and his tail started to wag. Kaitlin was so startled that she stopped singing, and Bullet got tense again. As she sang a few more lines, he relaxed. Mystified, Kaitlin called Steve. When he saw her singing to Bullet (whose tail was wagging again), he just stood still in amazement.

Was this the dog that had had four different owners, who all complained that he was too wild? Was this the dog that nearly bit your hand off when you petted him? Apparently, Kaitlin had found the secret of Bullet's heart.

That night at dinner, once again Kaitlin brought up the subject of pets. Now that there was a specific dog that she wanted, she was going to get him. "Dad?" she started tentatively.

"What is it, honey?"

Kaitlin winced at the baby name and continued. "The shelter is getting a little crowded. Maybe if . . ."

"Put them to sleep," was the gruff interruption.

Again, Kaitlin winced, "Dad, you know that neither Steve nor I would ever do that to the animals. They're our responsibility. Anyway, maybe if I brought . . ."

"No! I can see where this is heading and no! How many times do we have to tell you: you may not have a pet! The animal would make a mess, and our lives would

be in chaos! *No!*"

"Now, John. Maybe that's not what she was saying." Mother took a glance at Kaitlin and tried another route. "You're being a little harsh. She is responsible . . ." hearing this, Kaitlin's face lit up, ". . . and she wouldn't be asking for sixteen pets. Maybe we could allow her just one. A hamster maybe, or a turtle. They don't take much to take care of."

Kaitlin had become hopeful as her mom was standing up for her. "Maybe, Dad, I could bring home one dog to train, and he'll go back at the end of a month, unless you decide that you like him. I think that you're only allowing yourself to remember the bad things about having pets. There are many more good things."

"You may not have a pet, Kaitlin. When I say no, I mean no. This fall, you'll be in high school, with a lot more homework, and more social obligations. You can't be spending too much time at the shelter, and having a pet would make it worse. When school is out in two weeks, I have also decided to cut back on the time you spend at the shelter."

"What!" Kaitlin interrupted. "There's no such thing as spending too much time at the shelter!"

"Yes there is," her mother put in. "It's for your own good, Kaitlin. You don't have many friends, and that's not good for someone your age. This summer, your father and I have also decided to send you to a camp, and you'll have a great time there. I have many great memories from camp when I was a kid. You'll love it."

"No I won't," Kaitlin mumbled as she went to bed.

The next day was a rainy Saturday, so she could spend all day at the shelter. She loved keeping busy, because then she didn't think so much. She tried to stay out of the way of other humans, looking to the company of animals for comfort.

Gabriella, Steve and Kaitlin had a nice lunch together, sitting on the floor and quietly listening to the rain pit-pattering on the roof. While they ate Kaitlin thought, It's so true that you can communicate without words. It's great being here, and I feel closer to Gabriella already. Maybe we could be friends. Mom and Dad would be happy then.

After lunch, the three of them played card games until the animals started complaining for want of food and exercise. Kaitlin and Gabriella laughed and talked as they did their jobs. It turned out that they had a lot in common. Both of them liked music, loved animals, and wanted to work with animals when they grew up.

Kaitlin told Gabriella about her troubles because she seemed to be such a good listener. She told Kaitlin that camp really wasn't that bad, and that she really would have fun. Gabriella felt sorry for her because she didn't have a pet but envied her because she had worked at the shelter almost all her life. Together, they also plotted a way that Kaitlin could talk her parents into letting her get a dog.

"Is there a certain dog that you want?" Gabriella asked as they were feeding the cats.



"This is the dog I want," she proclaimed

Kaitlin lit up. "Yes, there is! Follow me." She led Gabriella to the part of the shelter where the dogs were, and stopped in front of Bullet's cage. "This is the dog I want," she proclaimed.

"He's adorable!" cried Gabriella, reaching a hand in to pet him. "Ow! He bit me! You *want* this dog?"

"Yes. As you said, he's adorable. He was horribly mistreated when he was a puppy, but I think I know the secret to relaxing him now." As she explained, Kaitlin pulled out a radio, and turned the channels until she found one that was playing soft, clas-

sical music. Bullet immediately relaxed, and Kaitlin reached in a hand to pet him. "The secret is music."

"That's amazing," Gabriella whispered, with a look of awe on her face.

As the two girls watched and cautiously played with the now relaxed dog, Steve walked in with Kaitlin's dad. "As you can see, Mr. O'Neal," Steve was saying, "everything is running very smoothly. We have good facilities, supplies, and a great vet who comes once a month. We have been very successful lately in finding new homes for animals, and people come to

look at them almost every day. On top of that, I have two superb helpers. We are in fine shape here at the Appleton Animal Shelter. Now, what brings you here today?"

Glancing at Kaitlin, Mr. O'Neal grew red and said, "Well, I was just coming to see how everything is running, because this summer I am planning to send Kaitlin away to camp for two or three weeks, and I wanted to make sure that you can make do without her. I had forgotten that you'd hired another girl. Also, I wanted to look at the dogs here."

A look of rapture spread over Kaitlin's face. "Really, Dad?" she exclaimed.

Growing embarrassed, he simply said, "Well . . . uh . . . I wanted to make sure that it wasn't too crowded here at the shelter."

"Oh. Well, I have to finish feeding the cats now. I'll see you later." With a crestfallen look, she walked away.

TWO MONTHS LATER, Kaitlin cried as she said goodbye to all of her new friends from camp. They had spent a month together, laughing, playing, and just talking, in this beautiful valley. It was covered with trees, and spotted with cabins. They knew all of each other's secrets and dreams. The loud Taylor, shy Tu Uyen, joking and laughing Mclain and Mimi, fun Casey, thoughtful Alyson, and silly Angie. She would miss them all so much. But Kaitlin couldn't wait to see Gabriella, Steve, her parents, and all of the animals at the shelter. She waved goodbye as she

left on the bus, wondering when she would see them again.

Kaitlin ran home from the bus stop, trying her best to drag her heavy suitcase behind her. As she opened the door, the people inside yelled, "Surprise! Welcome home!" Kaitlin was shocked. All of her favorite people were there. Mom, Dad, Gabriella, Steve and . . .

"Bullet!" she exclaimed. "How did he get here? And he's so calm!" She then realized that music was softly playing from another room. Laughing, she hugged her friends.

The next day, Kaitlin started training Bullet. She brought a CD player into the front yard, so that he wouldn't bite her hand off while they worked. She started with the basics—come, sit, stay, down. It was much more exhausting than she thought it would be. They worked almost all day. By sunset, they hadn't gotten very far by Kaitlin's standards, but her mother was calling for dinner.

Panting, she called, "Come—*heb*—Bullet—*heb*—come." And for the first time all day, he came.

From then on, they developed a regular schedule. Every day, when Kaitlin woke up, she and Bullet would eat a quick breakfast and then train for an hour. They would then go down to the shelter, and Bullet would play with the dogs while Kaitlin worked with Steve and Gabriella. Kaitlin and Bullet would go home at around five o'clock in the evening, and get in a little more training time before dinner. Kaitlin would stay up talking to her

parents (with Bullet at her feet), and then collapse into bed.

Training Bullet was tiring and frustrating, but Kaitlin began to see results. A strong bond developed between girl and dog, and soon he followed her everywhere. Gabriella thought that she had worked a miracle. Word spread around their town about Kaitlin and Bullet, although the two of them didn't know that.

Kaitlin was as happy as can be, although she didn't like to think about school starting again in the fall. The world seemed to be trying to please her, and she was happy day in and day out. Of course, the inevitable day had to come, and come it did; the first day of school.

SHE WAS LATE waking up, and so she only had a few moments to throw some clothes on. Not enough time for a shower, or even to brush her hair. She ran to the bus stop, only to find that she was too late, and the bus had already left. So she ran to school. As she opened the door, she was met with the biggest cluster of confusion that she had ever known. She was so mixed up that she hardly knew how to stand. Dazed, she looked at the schedule that had been thrust into her hand. It was in some illegible handwriting, but she could just barely make out that she was supposed to go to her homeroom. Almost crying with the difficulties she faced, she forced her way through the crowds, trying to find a room that could be the one that she was supposed to be in.

What seemed like hours later, she found a room labeled HOMEROOM in big letters, and stumbled in. As she opened the door, all eyes turned toward her and stared at her accusingly. All of the girls broke out in whispers.

"Look at her hair! Has she ever washed it?"

"Oh my gosh. Those shoes are so out of fashion."

"Her clothes look like they were made for a first-grader!"

A group of boys in the back of the room were laughing hysterically at her.

"*Silence!*" a voice boomed. A teacher who looked like he was seven feet tall scowled at her. "Why are you late?"

"I . . . I lost my way," Kaitlin mumbled, mortified.

"How could you have lost your way? That is impossible!" Turning to a big book, he declared, "Where is your homework?"

"H-homework?" she stammered. "I didn't know that we had homework over the summer."

"That is not acceptable. I'm afraid your grade will be moved to a C for this semester." The class giggled at the punishment. "And . . ."

He was cut off by an announcement over the loudspeaker. "Kaitlin O'Neal, report to the principal's office at once. Kaitlin O'Neal. Kaitlin O'Neal, report to the principal's office at once. Kaitlin O'Neal."

Sweating nervously, she woke up.



Julia had the same love of music that Kaitlin had

KAITLIN WAS anxiously packing her backpack as Bullet walked in her room. He whined, as if he wanted to know what the matter was.

Sighing, Kaitlin explained to him, “I have to go to school today, Bullet. I won’t be able to be with you all day. Steve will come and take you to the shelter at noon. I’ll be fine.” She swallowed, and tried to convince herself of what she had just said. Managing a weak smile, she hoisted her backpack up onto her back and went out to the car. She waved goodbye to Bullet as her dad pulled out of the driveway.

Kaitlin walked slowly in the doors of the school. There was almost as much chaos as there was in her dream. She took a cautious look at the sheet of paper that had been handed out during the orienta-

tion the week before. She was to go to room 213, on the second floor and to the left. Her locker would be right outside the doors, and it was number 456. She trudged upstairs like someone who was about to be killed.

Surprisingly, she found everything easily. Everything was where they said it was. Taking a deep breath, she walked in the room. She wasn’t the last one there. No one was staring at her, as each person was nervously staring into space. Many people came in after her, all looking very flustered.

The teacher’s name was on the board in rounded, cursive letters: *Miss Wright*. She looked to be in her late twenties.

“Just take a seat,” she called out. “Any one will do.” She waited for the students

to get settled, and then introduced herself. "As you can see, I am Miss Wright. I am your homeroom teacher this year, and may be teaching some of you language arts or French." Her voice was low and comforting, and everyone relaxed a little. She went on to explain how a regular day would work and then assigned them to all of their classes.

Miss Wright gave the students a chance to talk awhile, and Kaitlin turned to the girl on her right. She had smiled at Kaitlin as she walked in the room and seemed friendly.

"What's your name?" Kaitlin asked. "I'm Kaitlin O'Neal."

"I'm Julia Shoticem," was the reply. "What do you think of Miss Wright? She seems really nice. This building is so confusing, though!"

"I know. I almost didn't have the courage to come to school today."

Julia nodded an agreement, and then asked, "How did you stop thinking about the first day of school? The only way I could was to concentrate on baby-sitting my crazy brothers."

"Oh, that was easy. I just played with my dog." Kaitlin grinned as she finished talking, thinking about how much trouble Steve was probably going through right at that moment, trying to get Bullet to go with him.


"You have a dog!" exclaimed Julia. "I love animals. Our black lab died last spring of cancer."

"Oh! I'm so sorry." Kaitlin's pity was erased by a smile that flashed across her face as she thought of an idea. "Come to the shelter with me this afternoon! You can meet Bullet!" In her head she added: and Steve, and Gabriella . . .

"I'd love to! Do you go there often?"

Kaitlin laughed, and told her about the shelter, and all of the animals there. They spent the rest of the time they were allowed to talk telling each other about their favorite things. One thing Kaitlin really liked was that Julia had the same love of music that Kaitlin had, although they differed on almost everything else.

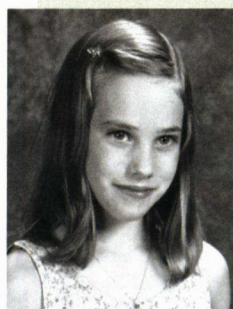
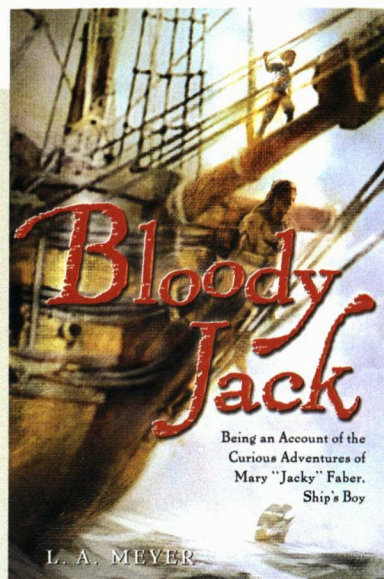
The freshmen spent the rest of the day journeying throughout the building, finding all of their classrooms, and saying hello to their teachers. By the end of the day, they all had a pretty good idea of the layout of the building. Kaitlin was in a wonderful mood. Almost all of her teachers seemed at least decent, if not nice (the exception was the science teacher), and none of the students had teased her at all. A boy had even smiled at her!

As Kaitlin walked to the shelter with Julia chattering at her side, she was singing softly under her breath. Lost in their thoughts, the two girls rounded a corner and approached the shelter. A big dog bounded out. Barking, he ran straight for his owner, and managed to knock her down. Laughing, Kaitlin stood up and ran toward the shelter. What a perfect life I have, she thought. 

Book Review

By Julia Kete

Bloody Jack by L. A. Meyer; Harcourt, Inc.:
New York, 2002; \$17



Julia Kete, 11
West Hartford, Connecticut

SOMETIME IN YOUR LIFE you most likely will experience the thrill of getting involved with something and loving it. It brings about new friends, new adventures, and sometimes even new hopes and a better life. Unfortunately, this new experience may not really be what you had overall expected. For example, many kids take up playing an instrument and get hooked on the idea of giving an exceptional concert. A lot of times the kids don't realize that practicing and rehearsals take time and energy. I realized this after I started violin lessons!

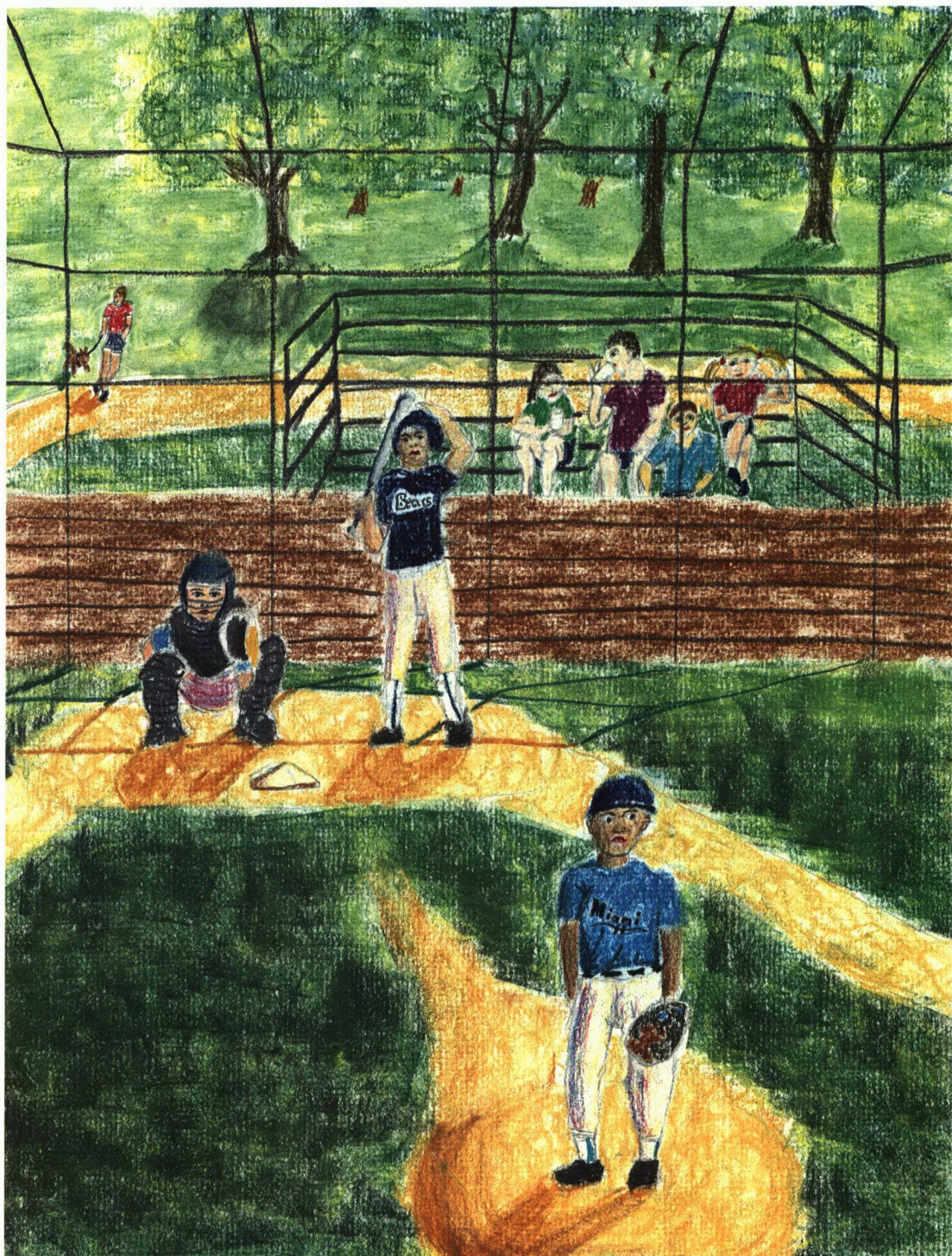
In *Bloody Jack*, an exciting new change also occurs. It is the eighteenth century and Mary Faber had been living on the streets in London. She is an orphan and she was living with a group of friends. The book called it a gang but I was surprised because everyone in the gang was so sweet and kind to one another and protected each other from harm. This new way to look at some gangs as being nice, substitute families touched me and now I will never look at gangs the same way again. When the leader of the family gang is mysteriously found dead in a nearby alley, Mary brushes away her grief and disguises herself as a boy.

"Jacky" gets taken in on a ship going out to sea because she

can read fairly well. Life starts to look up. She meets a group of boisterous boys and battles pirates, killing one and therefore earning her the name Bloody Jack. But killing is not as heroic as she had thought, and the gore and cannons terrify her. She gets sick at the beings and blood all around her. She never really got over the shock of her first real battle, as I never really got over the shock of my first time at "Laser Quest" (a game indoors where each person tries to zap another person with his or her laser gun). I related to Jacky here because I felt both overwhelmed and excited about the game at first glance. But, like Jacky, I was aghast at the idea that people were actually shooting at me! *Bloody Jack* is not a light read. Shootings and diabolical pirates cost lives from the ship. Jacky constantly has to watch out for her own safety, and when she relaxes she gets sexually harassed and beaten up!

I had to put down this book a couple of times because the events seemed to be just too awful for me to continue. Happy experiences where Jacky was fully comfortable with what she was doing were scarce. I was disappointed that there were not a lot of passages with pure adventure. Sure, there were disputes and passages about what everyone did on the ship, but I felt the book was missing a lot of description, character development, and the supposed thrills of adventure on a ship. I was so relieved to be reading something exciting when Jacky was abandoned on an island in the ocean. She had to fend for herself and the plot was based more on her survival than her love life. I remembered the time I explored an island in the middle of a big lake and how I felt so little and alone compared to the natural wisdom of the plants. I thought that must be how Jacky felt!

Bloody Jack is a complex, rather depressing, high-level read that will most definitely stir the reader and make them appreciate the little happy things in life. ❀



He had pitched one of the most memorable games in Little League history

The Moment of Decision

By Kevin Zhou

Illustrated by Elizabeth Wright

“**S**TRIKE THREE!”

The quarterfinal game was over. Jesús Castillo had tossed his fourth perfect game in a row, earning the Little Leaguers of Miami a bid to the semifinals of the Little League World Series. His face was all over the newspapers. Headlines of Jesús becoming the next Koufax streaked across the tops of the pages. Even though it was in the Little Leagues, when was the last time any pitcher struck out every batter he faced in a game?

As Jesús was leaving the locker room, a man in a polo shirt he had seen on TV ran up to him and shook his hand.

“Congratulations, Jesús,” he said. “I’m Harold Reynolds from ESPN, and I was wondering if I could do a quick interview with you.”

Jesús timidly nodded his head.

“I got to ask you this, little man. What’s it like being the most famous twelve-year-old kid in the country?”

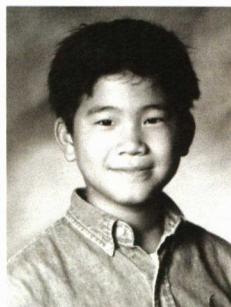
Jesús felt his heart drift into his throat. Trying to find an answer, he found his mouth saying the words, “It’s great.”

“Tomorrow’s the semifinal game. You must be nervous.”

“Yes,” Jesús agreed.

“Jesús, scouts from the Yankees, Mets, Athletics, and Rockies will be at tomorrow’s game and the championship. Just about every scout from every team will be watching these Little League games. Do you have anything special up your sleeve?”

“No,” Jesús replied. “I’m just going to pitch like I normally do.”



Kevin Zhou, 13
Danville, California



Elizabeth Wright, 12
Las Vegas, Nevada

Harold Reynolds laughed. "I know you're twelve years old, but there is talk around the league that you'll be the number one pick in the Major League Baseball draft someday. How does that make you feel?"

"Great," he answered.

"All right, Jesús, I got one last question. How did you get such an incredibly strong arm? I mean, it defies the laws of physics that a kid your age could have such a powerful arm."

Jesús could not answer that question. He simply looked into Harold Reynolds's eyes.

"It's all right," Reynolds said. "Your secret can stay a secret. Anyway, thanks a lot for giving us your time to do this interview. Good luck in tomorrow's game." With that, he left Jesús. For ten minutes, Jesús sat in his chair, looking at the ground, thinking.

"PLAY BALL!"

Team Miami was up to bat first. Jesús anxiously sat in the dugout, waiting for his opportunity to go out and pitch. Yet the look in his eyes was not that of the predator, but that of the prey. He sat back and closed his eyes. As Jesús sat in the dugout with his eyes closed, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He glanced at the scoreboard and found out that Roberto had hit a home run.

Jesús was not the only superstar for team Miami. His best friend, Roberto, the catcher, basked in the glory that Jesús also shared. For a league of twelve-year-

olds, Roberto displayed incredible power. In the previous three games that the Miami team had played, Roberto had hit five home runs. The team from Miami was truly blessed to have these two remarkable players on the same team.

Anyhow, it was time for Jesús to go to work. That inning was a breeze for Jesús. To the delight of the capacity crowd, he struck out all three batters he faced. Strangely, he did not feel any satisfaction with what he accomplished. After each batter that he struck out, he did not feel joy, but anger. His heart was heavy. He returned to the dugout, and sat in the same exact spot that he had left. He didn't like to be disturbed whenever he was pitching.

The next inning was essentially the same for Jesús as the first. Before he threw each pitch, the crowd would rise in eager anticipation to see what the result would be. Even though the stadium was packed with people, Jesús could not sense any of them sitting there. To him, the only people he could see were his teammates, the opposing team, and his father. After every pitch, he would take a look at the stands and see his father smiling with pride.

Five innings had passed. Jesús had been pitching like a man on fire. During those five innings, he had fifteen strikeouts. Thanks to two home runs by Jesús's friend Roberto, team Miami had a two-to-zero lead. As Jesús made the jog to the pitcher's mound, he looked into the stands and saw his father. Seeing that Jesús was staring at him, his father gave

him a thumbs up.

Jesús handled the first batter of the final inning incredibly. Three pitches and he was out. The second batter was also remarkably easy and Jesús struck him out on three pitches. The third batter, however, presented more of a challenge. Refusing to go down, he constantly fought off the pitches by fouling them into the stands. Finally, Jesús threw a curve ball that seemed to fall from the heavens. The batter swung and missed.

Every player from team Miami ran toward Jesús. Roberto ran from home plate and embraced Jesús. He had pitched one of the most memorable games in Little League history.

Night had arrived, and Jesús knew that he would need his rest for tomorrow's big game. To his dismay, however, he tossed and turned in bed. He cupped his hands behind his head and lay there, thinking about times when he was little.

IT WASN'T TOO long ago. Jesús was still living in Cuba at that time. He was thirteen years old, and all day long it had been stormy. He had been inside fiddling with his glove and baseball when he heard screaming come from outside. His father quickly snatched him off the ground and left the house in a full sprint. After hours of running, Jesús and his father finally approached the Caribbean Sea. At last, Jesús understood what they had been running to. He saw a rickety boat tied with some old rope to a harbor. He came to the conclusion that he and his

father were leaving Cuba.

Jesús and his father entered the lower deck of the ship. It was, by far, the most horrendous place that Jesús had ever been. Rats infested the area and flies were buzzing around meat that was still lying on the floor. There were no windows, so the room was extremely dark and possessed a pungent smell. The voyage to America had been long. After what seemed like days of traveling, Jesús's father told him that the trek was over.

Jesús's father managed to find a job washing dishes in Juan's Gourmet Mexican Food Restaurant. The job was absolutely grueling. He worked eighty-hour weeks for seven days. The pay was low, but he found a shabby apartment in a section of Miami called Little Havana. The apartment was not only small, but also dirty. Jesús befriended Roberto, a boy who lived across the street from him. They had a lot in common. They attended Diablo Vista Middle School, were born two days apart, came from Cuba, and loved to play baseball. After going to school, the two would go to the Community Park and play baseball every day.

One day, they saw a flyer mounted in a store window advertising Little League baseball. It exclaimed how tryouts for Miami's Little League team would be held that weekend. At first, Jesús and Roberto were ecstatic. After all, this could be the time where they could both showcase their exceptional talents in baseball to the world. As they continued reading, it felt as if the world had collapsed on them. On

the bottom of the flyer, it said that the tryout would be held for kids age twelve and under. Jesús and Roberto's birthdays had just passed, so they both had just missed the cutoff date. Jesús snatched the flyer from the window anyway and shoved it into his pocket.

When his father got back home at night, Jesús angrily showed the flyer to him. At first, his father was also disappointed that Jesús could not participate in the Little League World Series, but then he came up with an idea.

"Jesús," he said, "perhaps you and Roberto can still play." His father left the apartment.

The next day, Jesús received a phone call from the manager of Juan's Restaurant. He angrily shouted at Jesús about how his and Roberto's fathers had not shown up to work and that they would be fired if it ever happened again. Jesús quizzically hung up the phone. Where could his father possibly be?

All day long, Jesús stayed home. He constantly looked out the window to see if his father was coming home, but he would always see nothing. It was midnight when his and Roberto's fathers walked through the door. They were both laughing happily.

"Jesús," he said, "get ready for your tryout tomorrow. Tell Roberto to do so, too."

THE NEXT DAY, Jesús and Roberto stepped onto the baseball field and saw that there were at least a hundred kids trying out. The manager of the team

approached Jesús's father.

"Hello," he said. "Before I let your child and his friend try out, I'm going to have to see both of their birth certificates. Do you have them with you?"

"Sir," Jesús's father said in an ashamed tone, "I am terribly sorry, but I left those at home. It will probably take me two hours to go back and get them. I will leave immediately, but please let my son and his friend try out."

"I'll see about that," the manager said.

The first half of the tryouts were for the pitchers.

"Number 56!" the manager shouted.

Jesús walked up to the pitcher's mound and was told by the manager to throw his best pitch, so Jesús decided to throw his fast ball. As he delivered the ball, it was thrown with such power that the cover of the baseball seemed to be torn right off. The baseball hit the catcher's mitt with a loud thud, and the manager looked at his radar gun in awe. The pitch had clocked ninety miles per hour.

Roberto's tryout was also as successful as Jesús's had been. During batting practice for all the position players, he would continually hit the balls over the fence for home runs. However, the baseballs that he hit did not merely scrape past the fence. He had even hit a few that went a monstrous 400 feet.

Just like he had said, Jesús's father came back to the baseball field two hours later.

"Sir," he said to the manager, "I am, once again, tremendously sorry. I have misplaced both Roberto's and Jesús's



"Roberto, it's time," Jesús responded. "It's time for us to tell the truth"

birth certificates and I cannot find them. What should I do about it?"

The manager held up his hand as if to signal Jesús's father to cease talking. "Jesús and Roberto are phenomenal. There's simply no other way to put it. They are the greatest baseball players I have ever had the chance to work with. I am truly thankful that I have the chance of coaching both of these wonderful kids. They can be on my team any day."

"Thank you, sir," Jesús's father said. "We are truly grateful that you are so kind."

"No," the manager exclaimed. "Thank you."

JESÚS WOKE UP early in the morning. He sensed that his heart was beating wildly. Baseball was the love of Jesús's life. Every time he played the game, he felt happy. During the course of the Little League World Series, he had not even felt one minute of satisfaction. Despite playing as well as he ever had, he felt anger building up. He knew that it was time for him to confess.

The first thing he did was go over to Roberto's hotel room. Roberto had given him a key to his hotel room, so Jesús entered. Roberto was still sound asleep, but Jesús gave him a nudge, signaling him to

wake up. Reluctantly, Roberto opened his eyes.

"What's wrong, Jesús?" he asked. "It's still early in the morning."

"Roberto, it's time," Jesús responded.

"Time for what?"

"It's time for us to tell the truth."

Roberto sat up. "Jesús, are you out of your mind? The championship game is today. If we told everyone, all of our hard work would be wasted. We can't do that."

"Roberto, you not only have to work hard for your dreams, but you also have to work honestly. Both of our morals are too high to be doing this. There is no way that we could live our lives with this constantly lingering in our minds."

"Listen to me, Jesús," Roberto remarked, "you are my best friend, and I care about you. But you're talking crazy."

"Roberto, I know you'll do the right thing." With that, Jesús left Roberto.

THE HYPE surrounding the Little League World Series championship game was overwhelming. TV stations and reporters from all over the country had come to cover the game. However, there was an unexpected change of events. The team from Miami had called for an unanticipated press conference prior to the game. The reporters flocked to the room in which the press conference was being held and saw the entire team from Miami sitting on the stage. Jesús had a microphone in his hand. The reporters settled down.


Jesús glanced at Roberto, but he turned his head away.

"I have something to say to all of you," Jesús addressed the crowd. "I have always loved the game of baseball. I remember when I was younger and played catch with my father, I felt a joy that I cannot describe. Despite the success I've been having of late, I have never felt an ounce of joy. As a matter of fact, I've felt guilt. There is something riding on my back that I must tell all of you. I am not twelve years old. I am, in fact, thirteen."

The reporters gasped. Every member of the team from Miami glanced at Jesús with shock. Every single player except for Roberto, who still was looking the other way.

"I am sorry," Jesús apologized, "for any grief I've caused to my teammates. I take full responsibility for my actions. Once again, I am deeply sorry."

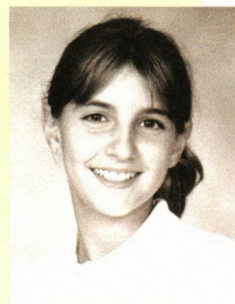
The next day, Jesús woke up early in the morning after a red-eye flight back to Miami. He went outside and saw that the newspaper had been delivered already. He opened it up to the sports page and saw a huge picture of Roberto. The words "Roberto Garcia Wins the Little League World Series with a Pair of Home Runs" streaked across the top of the page. Jesús continued to read and saw that "the commissioner of Little League baseball has banned Jesús Castillo from youth baseball forever."

Jesús sighed to himself and walked back into the dilapidated apartment. 

Sunrise

By Dalia Sabbagh

At first the moon seemed to have spilled onto the pond,
A silver color illuminating the night,
Casting a pale glow over the tall grass.
Silver stars twinkled,
Seeming so close to the earth,
I thought if I held my hand out,
I could scrape some off,
Then the stars slipped deep into the black night's pocket,
And the dark night's black swallowed the moon whole.
A blur of crimson, orange, hot pink began to appear
in the sky.
There was a change in the air,
It was starting to light the sky,
A golden ray bathed the hills in sunlight with a gentle touch.
The air was so light and fresh it almost sparkled.
There was a still moment,
When everything seemed to hold its breath,
And then the sun woke,
Like a queen.
It was a flaming pearl spit out by the night.
I gazed out at the sun's swollen face,
It unleashed its amazing blood-red flush,
And my face was furrowed,
With Smile.

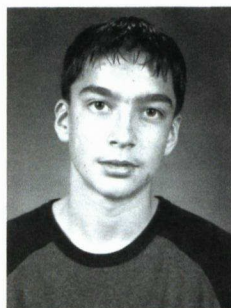


Dalia Sabbagh, 13
Miami Beach, Florida

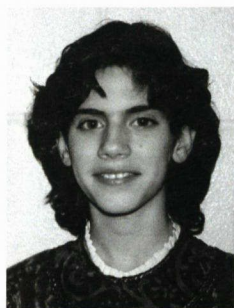
Small Lives

By Travis Royce

Illustrated by Anthony Pape-Calabrese



Travis Royce, 13
Portland, Oregon



Anthony Pape-Calabrese, 11
Chevy Chase, Maryland

I GAZE FROM THE GRAY wooden bench in my neighbor's backyard as the water from the hose quietly flows out onto the budding tomato plants. I watch the plants and rest easy, knowing the hose is taking care of the plants, and there is nothing more I can do. The roots and soil soak up the water almost as fast as I can make it flow. And so I sit with a blank stare, for there is nothing to do but watch the excess water drip to the ground. The drips from the hose become puddles, and soon the puddles seem to become rivers on the brown-tiled ground.

I see a farm of these red-brown ants, scurrying along around their home. What will happen when the water reaches the farm? Will they survive? The ants' small, lithe bodies work rapidly at what they are doing, smelling the inevitable. They all run away from the water, which is rapidly closing in. They all rush back to their farm, their home, their creation. They spend their whole lives working together to create, make better things, and now they are looking at the end of it all straight in the eye. I take a moment and wonder if this is a reflection of the world. Is this how it really is? I keep watching as the water first attacks and then surrounds two ants. They twist and turn, struggling to stay afloat as the water closes in on them, getting deeper and deeper. I know if I do nothing, refrain from saving them, the guilt will lay heavy on my heart for years to come. Finally the guilt takes over, and I rush to my knees, water soaking my shorts. I try to get these two to come on my finger, but they will not. They



It stuns me how much these little lives mean to me

refuse to let me save them. The water closes in on them, and soon overwhelms them as I lay helpless. Only then do they decide to climb onto my dirt-covered finger. It almost took them until death to trust one such as me.

I check to see if they are alive, and both can move fine. I set them a step above the water, so they may be able to escape. Then I go for more. I see the bodies of them, floating in the water, certainly dead. If I were religious I would pray for them. But now I write for them instead.

I spot one moving in the water. I lay down my finger and scoop, hoping to save one of these poor tiny creatures. Almost magically, one is there, atop my finger, alive. I set it down with the others and scavenge for more, but there are none. All were swept away by the water. How much I wish I could turn off the hose, turn off this machine of death, but I cannot. I have a job to do, and no matter how many

lives at stake, how much guilt fills my soul, I cannot turn off the hose. I must complete my job.

It stuns me how much these little lives mean to me. When I was a small child, I would make a sport of killing them. I would make a fort of rocks, and whoever tried to breach the walls would meet their doom. Now, I cannot hurt a bug. I can't even hurt the mosquitoes that pester me and drive me crazy. I catch them in my hand, proclaim them dead to my audience, and secretly set them free outside.

It is empathy that drives me, what it would be like to be hated and small, with no self-defense. The spiders I hated as a small child I now smile at, talk to. I call myself crazy for doing so, but it helps me fight the small fear I still have for them. How much these small lives mean to me, I cannot tell you. But just watch them, try to understand, and you will see how much those small lives affect you. ❁



Before she could take anything out of her bags, a knock sounded on the door

A Window by the Sea

By Alison Citron

Illustrated by Dara Green

EVE SET HER BAGS DOWN with a sigh, and looked around. The room's white walls stood out in stark contrast to the wood floors, the bed, with its antique-looking iron headboard and footboard and the patchwork quilt, and the bare walnut bookshelf. The only ornament in the room was an old-fashioned fishing net hanging on the wall, with seashells and sea creatures attached to it. Eve looked at her relatively bare surroundings, and remembered her room at home, misty green, Eve's favorite color, with a huge bed and a canopy. Eve blinked away a tear, and began to unpack.

Before she could take anything out of her bags, a knock sounded on the door. "Come in," Eve called. The door opened, and Nan Carter appeared. Nan was Eve's foster mother for the month, tall, motherly, and gray-haired. Nan had two children, twins, a boy and girl, a bit older than Eve's age of fourteen. The twins would be sixteen in October, which was four months away. Eve was just one of the many foster children who came to the Carters' house.

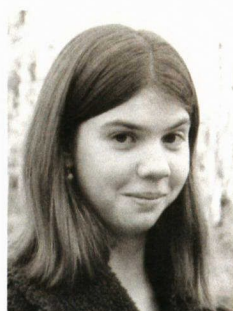
"Well," Nan said, concern showing in only her eyes, "How are you doing?"

Eve bit her lip. "I'm great, Ms. Carter. Thank you for the room. It's beautiful."

"It's not much," Nan said, sighing, "I need to paint it a nice color, and maybe get a couple of rugs down. But the view from the window's lovely, and I've got some nice curtains I'm going to put up tomorrow."



Alison Citron, 13
Raleigh, North Carolina



Dara Green, 13
Marshall, Virginia

Eve nodded. "That'd be nice, Ms. Carter."

"Call me Nan, please. Supper's going to be on the front porch in about an hour, so I'll leave you to get unpacked and settled. You get your own bathroom, it's right down the hall, and we made a little sign with your name on it for you, and there are towels in the linen closet. You can get Jasmyne to give you a tour of the house, if you want. This is pretty much your wing of the house, because my room's on the other side, and the twins have the upstairs, so don't worry about disturbing any of us. I hope you'll be comfortable here during your stay. We'll talk more during dinner."

"That's good," Eve said. She turned back to her packing as Nan closed the door.

Pretty soon, it got too dark to work without a light, so Eve switched on the electric light overhead. It didn't work, so Eve had to make do with two bedside lamps and a floor lamp that lit the room surprisingly well. Pretty soon, Eve had her worldly belongings unpacked, and arranged. She lay on the chaise lounge and looked out the window at the rocks and the ocean.

Nan Carter owned a small island with a "cottage," and from almost every window, you could see the ocean. Eve had a room that looked out over a rocky area, and then ocean until the mainland, with its little twinkling lights.

Eve sighed, and settled down. It had been a tumultuous day, what with her

coming to her first foster home, and the flurry of getting to Carter Island, and introductions, and so many countless little things. Eve kept busy, not liking to think about her parents, her loving wonderful parents, who had been working at the prison. While Eve had waited at home, there had been an awful fire, and both of her parents had died. Eve had no other relations, and so she ended up in foster care.

Before Eve was even settled, there was a rap at the door. It came again, so Eve ran to the other side of the room, and opened the door. Jasmyne and Jake were standing in the doorway, grinning. Eve suppressed a sigh. "Hello," Jasmyne said, coming in and perching on the bed. "Are you settled yet?" Jasmyne was beautiful, so beautiful that Eve had nearly walked into a pole the first time they met. Jasmyne had long, thick, glossy black curls, with wonderfully fair skin, and not a freckle. Her eyes were big and violet, her mother spoiled her, and she was dressed at the height of the fashions. She had pierced ears, a professional manicure, and Eve would have bet anything that Jasmyne had a huge room, elaborately decorated, and with big windows. Jake was Jasmyne's perfect counterpart, tall, handsome, with glossy black hair, and gray eyes. Eve was all too aware of how she looked next to these Carters. Eve had long thick blond hair, with startling green eyes, and red lips, but she wasn't really pretty. Eve had older clothes, her ears weren't pierced, and manicures were unknown to her. The twins, despite their an-

gelic appearance, were on Eve's bad side though. She didn't trust them, not one bit. And they knew it.

"So," Jasmyne said, smirking. "Is this all of your stuff? Cuz it isn't very much. My room is packed with stuff."

"This is it," Eve said, retreating into her shell. That was what her parents called the quietness and mumbling that came with Eve being upset, or embarrassed.

"May we look around?" Jake asked.

"I'd prefer you didn't."

"Oh, but surely," Jasmyne said, "you don't have anything to hide?"

Eve didn't, but she didn't want these twin devils looking at her parents' pictures, and at all her other stuff. To change the subject, Eve said, "Why don't you give me a tour of the house? Nan said you should."

Jasmyne frowned. "I dunno. Why would you want to do a thing like that?"

Eve smiled. "I want to know where I'm living for the next month. I'm sure your room is lovely. Can I see it?"

Once upstairs, Jasmyne flung open the door. Eve bit her lip to keep from gasping. It was a large room, about the size of a master bedroom. The room was painted a pale yellow, and it had thick yellow carpeting. Jasmyne's bed was a queen-size, was made of white painted wood, and it had a large net canopy. In one windowed corner, there was a large window seat, with a magnificent view. There were two bookcases, french doors with a balcony, a vanity table, a desk and many soft chairs to sink into, plus a small fireplace. Eve bit

her lip, thinking of her small bare room, with one window, and three pieces of furniture. Jake's room was just as big, painted white, but with another balcony, and lots of nice carpeting. Both the twins had their own magnificently furnished bathroom, and Jasmyne even had a Jacuzzi. Eve had a small tub/shower, a toilet, and a little sink.

Jasmyne paraded Eve through the rest of the upstairs, showing Eve the three large and beautifully furnished guest rooms, Nan's room, the downstairs, which contained a library, dining room, family room, rec room, computer room, and kitchen. The house was huge, and clearly, Nan had money, so Eve wondered why she got the smallest and barest room in the house. Eve supposed that some foster children could be destructive, so if there were few furnishings, they couldn't be destroyed.

Eve was silent all through dinner, and through breakfast next morning, listening to Jasmyne rattle on about shopping and cheerleading.

Jasmyne was going off to her hundred different Saturday activities, and Jake was out with his friends, so Eve wandered down to the beach, alone, where she explored amongst the rocks, and wet her feet in the ocean. She was staring at nothing in particular, when suddenly she gasped, and looked at a certain spot very closely. Then she gasped again. There was somebody or something in the water. Eve silently made her way down to a rock close to the water, and waited. A head



Eve stared. "Wh- who are you?" she asked, her voice shaking

emerged from the water, beautiful, with long brown locks, and blue eyes, and a sweet expression. Eve stared. "Wh- who are you?" she asked, her voice shaking.

"Merdeel, on wes ceartge!"

"What? I— um, I speak English." The head disappeared. Eve sat on the rock for another hour, and then, certain that the thing wouldn't come back (had it been a mermaid?), made a little doll out of grasses on a sand dune, and left it for the thing, and went back to the house to ask Nan a question. When Nan agreed, Eve went up to the attic, and began digging through old boxes, looking for old picture frames to hang some of her pictures in. Eve found something far better. An old old diary, with lots and lots of writing in it. Eve made her way down to her small room, and sank down onto her chaise to read it.

Dear Diary,

My name is Catharine Dubloe, and I am thirteen years old. This is my first diary, so please forgive any mistakes. It is June, 1820, and we are staying at this quaint little beach house on Diamond Island. It is a tiny island, and a tiny house is on it. The house has a nice front porch, and several rooms inside, but of course it is nothing compared to our mansion at home.

At this point, Eve looked up, thinking hard. This house must be the same one, as Nan had told Eve that the house was over a hundred years old. But this house was huge. Catharine must have just been used to a palace.

We are here for the summer, diary, and I expect to be lonely, as there are no young people my age on the island, and trips to shore are few and far between, except for the servants. I suppose I will have to take the air a lot, since we came to the beach because my health is poor, and I suppose I will have to rest a lot, so expect a lot of rambling entries. Just so you know, dear diary, in April, I came down with an awful bout of pneumonia. I was sick for weeks, and my April was ruined. I lost my appetite, and wasted away to nothing. My health is still poor, and Papa says that we can stay here until the roses come back into my cheeks, and I look healthy again. I need to eat a lot of meat, and take the air a lot, so I expect that I will be on the rocks often. I prefer parties and socials to this dull sitting by myself, but I don't think I will have any gay times for quite a while. Well, diary, I must go, so I remain your loving,

Catharine Dubloe

Eve skimmed through the book, but it was full of more entries that only talked about the weather, or Catharine's health. Nothing that Eve was looking for. Near the back, though, Eve found an interesting entry.

Dear Diary,

I cannot believe my eyes. It must be a local trying to trick me. But what a beautiful local and what an accent. This couldn't be a mermaid. Could it? I was sitting alone on the rock, taking the air, when suddenly, there was a disturbance of the water. I was looking at it, thinking it might be fish; a head came up. I cannot tell you, diary, how

lovely this head was. It had long brown flowing hair, and a sweet countenance. She spoke several different words; I couldn't pick up the language. What does this mean?

Eve sighed in frustration. That was the last entry! Eve stuck the book under her mattress, and went to help Nan make dinner.

At the dinner table that night, Eve was aching to ask about the mermaid, but didn't know how to without sounding idiotic. Finally, she just said, "Does anybody here believe in mermaids?"

Jake rolled his eyes and went on eating, but Jasmyne said, "Not really. Why do you ask? Do you think they exist?"

"No," Eve said, "I was just wondering, seeing how you all live on the beach. Nan, what do you think?"

"Well, Eve, I don't believe in mermaids, and I don't encourage any of that fairy-tale trash. I'm glad to hear you feel the same."

The next day, Eve went down to the rocks again, and spent the whole day there. Finally, toward evening, the mermaid came up again. Eve scrambled to her feet, and said, "Um, who are you, and why are you here?"

The mermaid laughed, a lovely laugh, and said, "My name is Catharine, and I am sorry for startling you."

"What's your last name?"

"I had a last name, years and years ago; I believe it was Dabloe, or perhaps

Dabloe."

"Were you ever human?"

"Yes. I was like you, a human girl, and the mermaids brought me down to live with them. Would you like that?"

"Very much."

"Very well, you may bring several of your favorite personal items with you, and be here in an hour."

Eve, shaking with excitement, ran to the house, and gathered her jewelry, her pictures of her parents, and several of her favorite knickknacks. Then she went up to Jasmyne's room, and knocked on the door.

"What?"


Eve came in. "I just wanted to tell you," she said in a calm voice, "there are mermaids, and your home is lovely." She wanted to tell Jasmyne that she was a brat, but Eve decided her parents wouldn't have approved.

Jasmyne smiled, that "we must humor the insane child" sort of smile. "Are you gonna go with them?"

"I might."

Jasmyne outright laughed. "Right, well, since you said something civil, take this." Jasmyne tossed Eve a pearl necklace that looked costly.

"Thank you," Eve said, touched. "I enjoyed staying here."

Eve left Jasmyne's room, and went down to the shore. Catharine was waiting. Eve slipped into the water, and began to swim. 

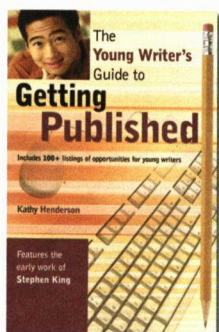
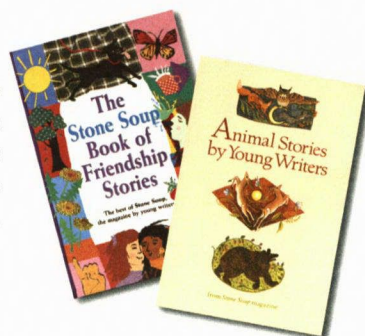
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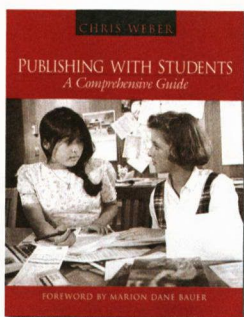
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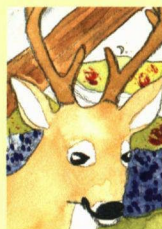
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Links

We invite all our readers to pay us a visit at our fantastic Web site, stonesoup.com. Here are some of the things you'll find there:



- ▶ Detailed guidelines for contributing your work
- ▶ Over 200 stories, poems, and book reviews from past issues
- ▶ Recordings of our authors reading their own work
- ▶ Hundreds of examples of children's art from our international collection



- ▶ The collected work of our best illustrators
- ▶ A best-selling novel written by an 8-year-old in 1890
- ▶ Photos of the people who work at Stone Soup
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