

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Dominic Nedzelskyi, age 13, for "The Power of the Swan," page 46

FRIENDS FOREVER

Rachel wanted a horse more than anything, but not like this

THE POWER OF THE SWAN

When he needs her most, Jay's mother returns to him

Also: New illustrations by Erin Ruszkowski

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2013

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Editor's Note

As the editors of a magazine for children, William Rubel and I are careful to choose writing that is appropriate for our readers, some of whom are only eight years old. We try not to publish violent or scary stories. However, we do like a good sad story. In this issue, we have a very moving story called "The Power of the Swan," about a boy named Jay whose mother has died. She comes to him in a dream with a message. Jay eventually learns what the message means. I have read this story many times, and every time it makes me cry. I believe it touches something deep inside of us that longs to see a lost loved one again. What do you think? Do you have a favorite sad story in this issue of *Stone Soup*, or in past issues? Have you written any sad stories yourself? We'd love to hear from you.

— Gerry Mandel

Subscriptions

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Submissions

Please read our guidelines at stonesoup.com before sending us your work. Send submissions to Stone Soup, Submissions Dept., PO Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. For questions, email us at editor@stonesoup.com.

ON THE COVER Before he turned fourteen in November, talented artist Dominic Nedzelskyi illustrated one last story for *Stone Soup*. That brings his total to six! We hope our readers have enjoyed Dominic's work as much as we have. We wish him success with whatever he pursues in the future. We know he will go far.



The Mailbox



I first saw your magazine at a bookstore in Santa Cruz and fell in love with it. It was an outlet for young minds to indulge in their creativity, get in touch with their muse, and find their voice. The idea

was old-fashioned, but it was executed in a sleek, contemporary style. As a creative and unique individual myself, I couldn't resist the combination of these two ideas. I found it a sheer delight to see young people being able to share their talents in a magazine painted with the rich, vivid emotions and excitement of its young poets, writers, and artists.

Hannah M. Hightman, 12
Modesto, California

Thank you for your magazine and the opportunity for my students to submit their writing pieces. The experience of reading your magazine and writing to possibly become a part of it was wonderful and inspirational.

Grace Pak, teacher
Seoul, Korea

I love to read and write, and about six months ago my grandfather, who regularly reviews my work, as well as about three or four other relatives who do the same, got me a subscription to your magazine. When I first read it, I knew this was going to be the magazine for me, and I was right. I am eager to see how you like my poems and stories. I'd love to see my work appear in your magazine, which I wait eagerly for every two months.

Jackson B. Darby, 11
Silver Spring, Maryland

I've really enjoyed reading your magazine and I think the fact you offer younger writers these opportunities is really great, especially as some of them are so talented! I really enjoyed Jason Fong's poem, "Go Back to Asia," in the November/December 2011 issue, and I thought both Hannah Berman's "The Hunt" and Dominic Nedzelsky's illustration of it were amazing. I'm turning fourteen this week, so this is my last chance to submit writing, but hopefully both my younger sister and brother, who also love the magazine, will send in something as well!

Rachel Diamond, 13
Cambridge, England

I love writing and would like to be a writer. I also write stories during school and free time. When I got my first *Stone Soup* my mom read to me and my sister "Working for Sparkle" [May/June 2011]. It was a great story and wow to the drawings! I love writing so much that it's why I think *Stone Soup* is amazing!

Lena Oldfield, 8
Altadena, California

Thank you so much for being such a great magazine which gives children like me the amazing chance to get their work published! I cannot express my gratitude that you provide a motive for kids to keep writing and trying to achieve their goals. I absolutely love *Stone Soup*!

Ananya Kapur, 12
Chevy Chase, Maryland

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.



Now, Cocky was a big, kingly rooster

The Scarlet King

By Shyla DeLand

Illustrated by Erin Ruszkowski

IT WAS AN ICY cold morning. I struggled to wake from the blissful sleep I had enjoyed all night. I stretched luxuriously and half smiled, but then, glancing at my clock, I abruptly jumped up into the frigid air our clumsy black woodstove was desperately trying to warm.

“Oh...” I moaned, suddenly remembering it was Saturday. Oh, well, I was already up. I pulled my flannel shirt and overalls on over my long johns and tugged thick wool socks onto my bare feet. Then I trudged out into our living room. No one else was up yet, except my toddler brother, Josiah. His big, dark eyes watched me curiously as I donned my coat and snow pants.

“Hey, Jo,” I grunted as I yanked on my hot-pink winter boots.

“Hi, Becky,” Josiah yawned.

I stepped outside into the cold air, which stung my nose and bit at my ears. The sun shone dazzlingly on the crunchy snow. I grabbed an old, red Folgers can and filled it with chicken food for our three chickens, Johnny, Lacey, and Cocky, my rooster. They were the results of a homeschooling project a few years back. We had bought eight eggs and borrowed an incubator from a nearby farm. Every single day we turned the eggs over evenly, the way a hen would, and once a week we candled them. This was when we held a flashlight up to the eggs to see the chicks inside. In three of the milky brown eggs, we could actually see the chicks growing and developing. The rest were all duds.

Finally, on the twenty-first day, the chicks hatched. I could remember that morning well. We woke to a strange peeping



Shyla DeLand, 11
Remsen, New York



Erin Ruszkowski, 13
Keller, Texas

sound, like a cuckoo clock gone wrong. There, nestled deep in the incubator, was a little chick, my Cocky. I reached my chubby six-year-old hand into the incubator and stroked him. Cocky pecked my finger. Then there was Johnny, a coal-black chicken we'd named Johnny Cash after the Man in Black. She turned out to be a hen, but the name stuck. Finally came Lacey, my mom's chicken. In the beginning, she'd been weak and sickly, but after a short time she bounced back and grew to be a huge, fat chicken who proved to be our best layer.

Now, Cocky was a big, kingly rooster. His beautiful feathers were a mix of orange, scarlet, and auburn, his long tail feathers an iridescent green. Like a king, he herded his ladies around, showing them to the choicest bits of grain and juiciest grubs. Cocky also defended his wives from intruding humans. I smiled a little as I recalled the day Cocky had attacked my dad, who had been cutting firewood at the time. All of a sudden, Cocky came hurtling out of the brush ("Like a football," my dad winced) and spurred my father. I was lucky Cocky hadn't ended up in the stewpot that night, but my father took pity on me, seeing how much I loved Cocky.

There was only one person Cocky was never mean to. Me. Maybe it was because I fed him, or maybe, I liked to think, because we had a special bond, but Cocky loved me. He rode on my shoulder or in the basket on my bike and hustled me around like one of his hens. I loved him to bits.

Now, as I hurried over the short trail to the chicken coop, I noticed a small set of tracks in the thin layer of powdery snow that had descended during the night. Mouse, I thought, or maybe squirrel. Far inside my head, tiny warning bells clanged, but the thought of a cup of hot cocoa and a plate of steaming pancakes filled my mind and covered over the bells like a cloak of snow covering the ground.

The chicken coop looked strangely desolate in the frozen gray air. A few snowflakes floated lazily through the air and rested on the high banks. A soft clucking came from the chicken coop, but it was so quiet I knew it could only be one of the hens. Where was Cocky? He was normally crowing, proudly proclaiming his rule of the roost, but now he was silent.

I unconsciously began to run, tripping in the softer snow. In front of the chicken coop lay a dark lump, partly covered by frost and blood. It was Lacey, our beautiful Golden Laced Wyandotte.

"Lacey." I half fell to my knees. "Cocky!" I ran to the chicken coop and threw open the door. Only Johnny stood there, alive. I looked quickly past her. In a corner lay Cocky. He was dead. Gone. My rooster. I took a long, hard look and, feeling weak, ran into the house screaming. My mother looked grumpily at me when I burst in the door.

"What?..." she groaned, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Cocky," I sobbed.

"Oh..." Mom looked upset. She reached out to me.



"OK, you got me, buddy, I love you"

"Lacey, Cocky," I sniffed. "A weasel, I think." Tears dripped down my cold cheeks.

"Oh, sweet baby." Mom grabbed my snowy form and held me close, the frost on my coat dripping down her robe. "Oh, Becky, I'm sorry."

FOR A LOT of people, it might seem, well, strange to love a chicken, but I raised Cocky. Now, I sit on our front porch. It's May, and Mom is getting a new shipment of chicks from the Lewiston Chicken Hatchery out in Idaho. The post office called this morning to say they had a peeping parcel waiting for us. Mom was so excited that she stuffed poor

little Josey in his car seat and roared off. She wanted me to come, too, but I said no. I think she's trying to make me forget about Cocky, but I won't, ever. And I will never get a new chicken. I gaze up at the bright, blue sky, the sun warming my back. The wind whips my hair across my face in dark, wild streaks. Suddenly, the sound of a loud horn interrupts my thoughts. Mom pulls up in our beat-up old Buick and happily jumps out. Josey carefully climbs out of the back seat, cradling a box with air holes in the sides and fragile stamped all over it. I can't even help myself, I run to see the chicks.

They are nestled up inside the box, cheeping pitifully and looking all around,

their beady eyes wide with excitement and fear. One chick is downy and yellow, one is brown and fluffy, but the last is sleek and shiny, all black except for streaks of silver on its wings. I pick it up carefully and it pecks my finger.

"Cocky pecked my finger when he was a chick, too," I say, the words running together before I can slow them down.

Mom nods encouragingly. "That one's yours."

I bite my lip, hoping Mom hadn't seen its trembling. "Just cause nobody else wants her..." I break off and look at Mom quizzically.

"Him," she says.

"Sawyer," I murmur. I'm good at naming things and this mischievous little chick is a Sawyer if I've ever seen one. He reminds me of the famous vagabond who terrorized the Mississippi River so many years ago. My Sawyer now toddles to the edge of my hand and nearly falls. I gently push him back to safety and he looks up at me and cheeps sadly.

"OK, you got me, buddy," I say softly. "I love you."

Mom looks up. "What?" She's neatly arranging the wooden box in which the chicks will stay. It will keep them safe until they are old enough to live with Johnny. She stuffs in a last handful of hay and loosely pats it down, then switches on the lamp to keep the chicks warm. She gently places the chicks, now

dubbed Lacey the Second and Hilda, into the box and stands, wiping her hands on the back of her grubby jeans. "What?"

"I said I think it's getting cold," I say loudly.

"Better put it in the box with the others." I place Sawyer in the box gently, then clatter up the steps into the house and to the safety of my room, where I dive head first into my bed and cry.

Mom looks up when I come red-eyed out of my room. "Do you like your chicken?"


I burst into tears. "I love Sawyer, and I feel disloyal to Cocky. It's wrong, Cocky was the best, and..." I don't know how to explain myself. Mom grabs me in a hug, as if that will actually help. I pull away and glare meanly at her.

"You don't get it, do you?"

"How do you think I feel about Lacey?" Mom asks. "I know Cocky was special to you, but, oh, I loved Lacey." I don't, can't say anything.

"I'm sorry," I finally sniff.

"Becky, just because you love something once doesn't mean you can never love again. Sure, we grieve, but we move on. And no matter what, Cocky will always be your first and favorite pet."

Mom's right. Even though I now love Sawyer, even though I may love many animals in years to come, Cocky will always be my Scarlet King. 

I See Only Beauty

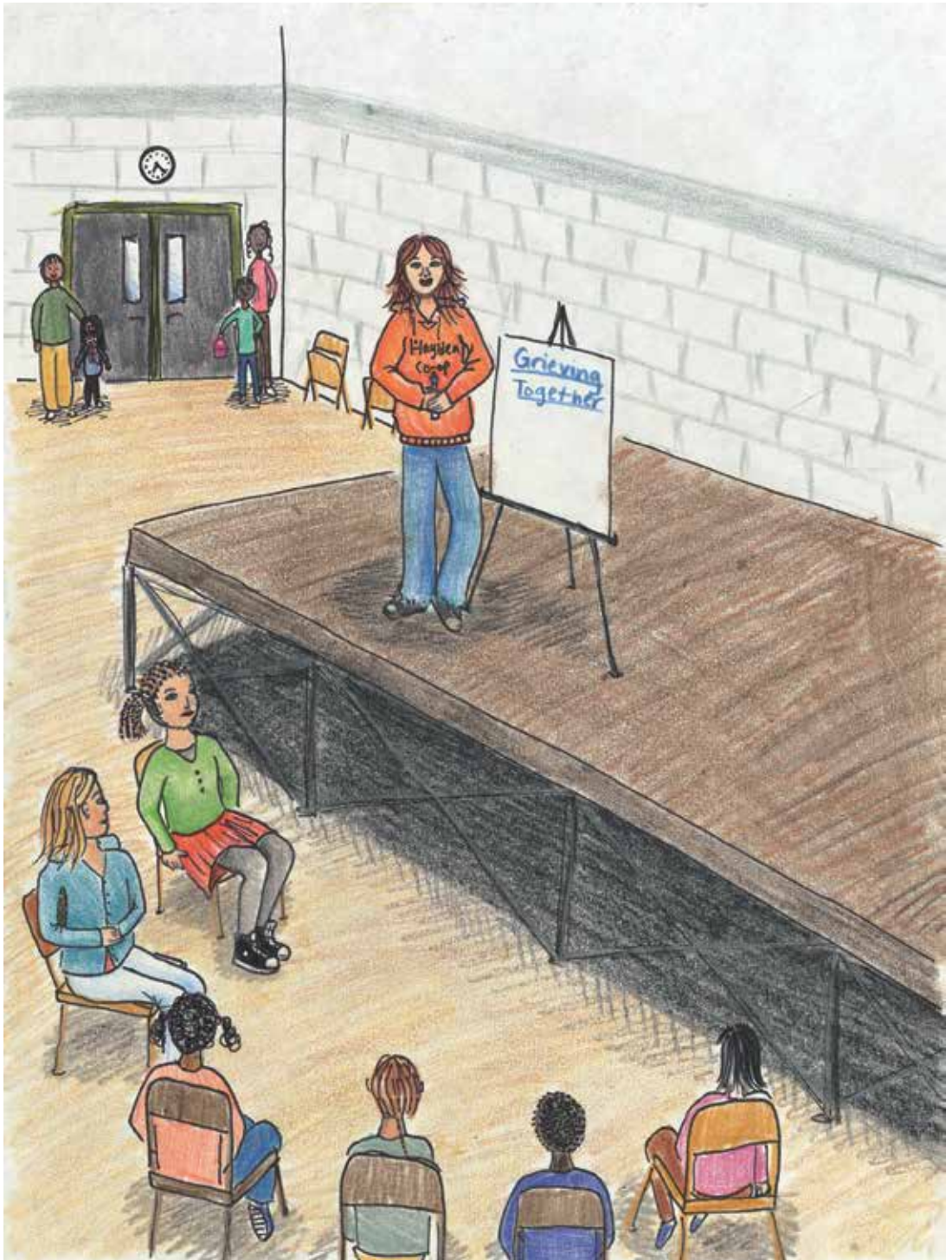
By **Jeremy Long**

Liquid glass shatters on the sidewalk from the angry sky
Scattering all the pedestrians like ants
They hurry home to the comfort
Of their TV dinners and their television sets
While I walk the streets—
A garbage bag as my raincoat, my heart light

I find Picasso in a puddle
And stories in the sky
Orpheus is playing his lyre tonight
While gentle Chiron nurses his wound
The sky is my storybook
And as I settle myself under a peeling park bench
I see only beauty



Jeremy Long, 13
Mission Viejo, California



"A loss, no matter the size, hurts"

Finding Keeper

By Annabel Chosy

Illustrated by Isabella Xie

IT WAS LATE OCTOBER on the verge of November and the sky had lost all of its brightness, taking on the stark, ink-black tone of night. On and on it stretched, broken only by occasional clusters of stars. It was cold, too. A cold that seeped all the way to the bone, turned exposed skin to marble. Overhead, the stars, unaffected by the cold, winked down at you, and you could almost hear their laughter.

The car came to a gentle stop, and my father turned and looked at me. Bracing myself, I leaped into the cold and dashed to the front of the school. The light inside was a beacon, calling me to its warmth. I pulled open the doors and hurried through them. In the center of the atrium stood a woman. She spotted me, her face spreading into a wide grin. Her layered auburn hair stretched just beyond her shoulders, framing her face and jade-green eyes. Her shirt hung in folds around her and read Hayden Co-op. She wore frayed jeans. “Hi,” she greeted me, “I’m Maggie. Are you here for GT?”

I nodded.

“Great! I think we’re waiting on just a couple people now,” Maggie told me. She waved me over and ushered me into the gymnasium, where metal chairs were arranged in a circle right in front of the stage. Some were filled, the others empty. Everyone there went to my school. We weren’t all in the same grade, but I had seen most of them around. “All right, here we go... You just sit down, get settled in, OK?” Maggie said. “I’ll be back in a jiffy.” She hurried back out.



Annabel Chosy, 11
Minneapolis, Minnesota



Isabella Xie, 12
Newton, Massachusetts

I smiled and said hi as I looked around for an empty chair. I took a seat beside a girl who was in my grade. Keeper. I didn't know her well. We hung out with different people, didn't have classes together, that sort of thing. Keeper looked about as glad to be there as I did: lips pursed into a thin white line, widened eyes, and fingers wrapped tightly around the edge of the chair. Her recently washed hair was damp. There were many small braids starting at the scalp and continuing to the back of her head, held in place with clips. She wore a gray shirt under a sweater and a vibrant red skirt with tights. Her feet, in Converse, moved up and down, nervously. Her face and eyes were blotchy, as if she had rubbed them after crying. She was like a mouse, with her shoulders hunched up to her ears, cowering against her chair.

Soon, Maggie came back in with a couple more kids, who reluctantly edged their way toward the chairs, and the meeting began. "Welcome," Maggie said from the stage, "to Grieving Together, or GT." She wrote the words out at the top of a large piece of paper clipped to an easel. "I know," she continued, "that you have lost a loved one. A loss, no matter the size, hurts. It's natural to be feeling this, but none of us want to go through that alone. In this group, you can talk about your experiences with others, and my hope is that this will help lessen your pain.

"Every meeting, we will have a focus word. Today, that word is 'who.' Who are

you missing? You are going to team up with a partner, and when I say go, person one, you are going to tell person two anything and everything about who you're missing. Don't leave out any detail, big or small. Got that? Ready! Person one, go!"

Keeper and I were together. Right away, I began talking about my Aunt Kay. How her house was my second home, how she would call just to hear the sound of my voice, how she did such nice things nobody else thought to do, and how she smelled of fresh-baked bread. Then I grabbed a piece of paper and sketched a drawing of her. I was putting on the finishing touches just as Maggie called, "Time! Person two, you're up!"

I handed the paper to Keeper, sat back, and looked at her, ready. But Keeper just stared at the ground, and swallowed. Then she whispered, "Be right back," and slipped out of her chair. I watched as she went up and spoke with Maggie. Maggie put her arm around Keeper and said something in her ear. Keeper nodded. I thought she would come back and tell me about who she was missing, but she didn't. Keeper stayed with Maggie for the rest of the evening.

Afterwards, when I was waiting for my dad to pick me up, I pressed my face up against the cold glass of the front doors of the school, watching. I saw Keeper and her father pulling away. And, not for the first time that night, I wondered who Keeper was missing.

The weeks came and went, and at each meeting, we covered a new word—

“when,” “how,” along those lines, sharing more about who we were grieving for each time. But still, Keeper had yet to open up. Even so, I came to look forward to GT. I got to know some of the other kids, and I felt it was helping me.

Our fifth meeting was near the end of November. We were just starting our session on the word “reaction,” and Keeper seemed to be having a particularly hard time. She kept sniffing and swallowing. Her eyes welled with tears frequently, and each time she blinked them away, they reappeared. I was trying to think of what I should do when all at once the lights went out. There were some cries and yells as the gym plunged into darkness. “Stay calm!” Maggie’s voice broke through the noise. “I’m going to find the switch. It must have been bumped.”

We all listened to her shuffle her way across the room and feel the walls for it. She found it, and flicked it. Nothing. “Power failure,” Maggie pronounced, trying to keep her voice level. “It’s all right, everyone. Just join hands with the person next to you. We’re going to go to the office. They’re bound to have some flashlights.” We did, and together the chain made its way out of the gym, slowly, and stumbled up the stairs and through the halls. Once there, Maggie found a box of flashlights. She took one and turned it on. “Let me count you,” she said to us. “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven...” She broke off, and her face paled.

“What is it?” she was quickly asked.

“I’m one short.” Her voice shook. “I’ve lost someone in this dark school.”

She counted again. “Eleven!” She was nearly sobbing now. “I have eleven! How? Oh, how did this happen? Who are we missing?”

I scanned the line. As it dawned on me, my throat tightened. “It’s Keeper.”

Keeper was missing. It weighed down on me and pressed against my lungs, making it hard to breathe. Why hadn’t I noticed she didn’t clasp my hand? I was responsible. She had been sitting next to me. I should have watched out for her. I had to make up for it. “I’ll look for her,” I volunteered and dashed out the door, not waiting for an answer.

I ran up and down the dark hallways. I tried every classroom. I checked offices and bathrooms. Everything. I looked in every hiding place I could think of, circling each floor. I came back to the main doors, at the opposite end of the hall from the office. “Keeper!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. “If you’re in here, please come out!” Nothing. Just shadows and silence.

I thought I heard my Aunt Kay’s voice saying, “Honey, you’ve done all you can for your friend. She’ll be OK. Everything will be OK.”

“No,” I cried. “You don’t understand, I have to find her!” I fled toward the doors and burst outside, pausing to catch my breath. It was snowing. A wet, heavy snow. The snow was a thick blanket over the school and everything around it. The power lines sagged under the weight



And what I saw at the top of the paper broke my heart


of the snow. That's why the power was out. "Keeper!" I called, hurrying into the schoolyard. "Keeper!" My voice was hoarse. I felt the tears coming on. "Keeper, where are you?" I shouted. My voice echoed.

And in that moment, all I wanted was a place to hide. From my failures, and from my entire life right now. Across the schoolyard, up into the prairie garden I ran. Behind one of the trees, right against the fence, the ground wasn't even. It sunk down. I collapsed there, pulled my knees up to my chin, and cried. I heard something and looked up. There she was. Tears ran down Keeper's face, too. I scooted up next to her, put my arm around her, and our sobs became one.

Gulping for air, Keeper pulled something from her pocket. It was the paper from the first meeting with my drawing of Aunt Kay on it. On the other side, Keeper had drawn her own picture. I had never been in art class with Keeper, so I was unprepared for how good of an artist she was. She'd drawn a laughing woman with short hair that came to just below her ears. She had a necklace on her long, slender neck and wore a flowing top. And what I saw at the top of the paper broke my heart. Keeper had written, "I miss my momma." And then she told me everything. How her mother was deaf, how she loved laughing and had been an artist, and how she had died in a car accident. Keeper told me how she missed her hugs and smile, and how she no longer had someone to sign to who

understood. "I really do miss my momma," she cried, her voice ragged. I squeezed her hand. "I know. I know," I murmured. And we cried together a bit longer. At last, we quieted and I helped her to her feet. It was then that we felt the cold and we headed for the school, running.

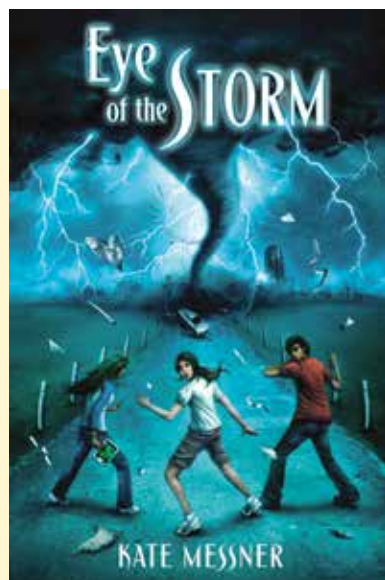
As we reached the school, Keeper's father and the police cars were just pulling up. Her father slammed on the brakes and jumped from his car. "Keeper? Oh my goodness!" She told him and the police everything. I stood to the side, shivering, as it all got sorted out. A few minutes later, she came over. "I have to go," she said. "But first, I wanted to show you... something." I watched as she made a gesture with her hand. "F," she said. She made another. "R." One more. "I." And three last ones. "E. N. D. That's how you say friend in sign language," she said. Keeper embraced me and ran to her car. With a wave, they drove off.

The next day, during lunch, I was sitting at a table with my friends. My gaze drifted across the cafeteria and I saw Keeper. She was sitting alone, her head drooped. Without a second thought, I strode across the room and took her hand. I led Keeper over to our lunch table. "This," I said to everyone, "is my friend Keeper." Keeper looked stunned and then happy, very happy. I pulled her and she sat down. Underneath the table she made several quick motions with her hands. "That," she whispered to me, "is how you say thank you in sign language." 

Book Review

By Sarah Bosworth

Eye of the Storm, by Kate Messner; Walker Books:
New York, 2012; \$16.99




Sarah Bosworth, 13
Snoqualmie, Washington

HAVE YOU EVER thought about what the future will hold? My first thoughts have been drastically altered after reading *Eye of the Storm*, by Kate Messner. It's the year 2050, and twelve-year-old Jaden Meggs is going to spend her summer at her dad's house in Placid Meadows, Oklahoma. It's no coincidence that Stephen Meggs, her dad and famous meteorologist, lives in Placid Meadows, and he created it as the first StormSafe community ever. Because in the future, the weather is extremely different than today. Huge twisters have been causing chaos all over the planet, even making the tornado scale change. But these deadly storms seem to pass right by Placid Meadows every time, making it a huge bargaining point for Jaden to persuade her mother to let her go to Oklahoma to attend the exclusive science camp called Eye on Tomorrow.

With the help of newfound camp friends Alex and Risha, Jaden realizes that something very wrong is going on in Placid Meadows. Suspensions are formed when the data used for the Sim Dome, a simulation system that uses actual wind and buildings to predict how the data will react when faced with the real elements of a storm, fails three times. It was Alex who initially asked Jaden to sneak into her father's office at the StormSafe compound to get the correct data for their experiment. When

Jaden finally carries out the “mission,” they discover a number of things that both shock and scare them. One, Stephen can actually control the tornadoes, and whatever keeps them out of Placid Meadows is a dangerous thing. Two, Jaden’s long-lost grandmother, scientist Athena Meggs, is actually alive after countless years of faking her death. And three, it’s all up to Jaden, Alex, and Risha to stop the biggest storm yet from destroying everything.

Although I have never faced down a tornado or gone to an elite science summer camp, last summer my family and I went on a vacation to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, where we perched as high as the birds in our cabin. Multiple thunder and lightning storms occurred during our stay, and they were always a treat to watch from the safety and comfort of the living room couches—and always with a fire flickering in the fireplace. While witnessing the sheer beauty of crackles of lightning and thunderous, earthshaking booms of thunder from less than a mile away, I was struck with the same feeling that Jaden and her family must have had: while within the gates of Placid Meadows, you were completely safe. But somewhere out there, a tornado was raging, destroying farms, homes, and countryside mercilessly. I also thought about climate change while reading this book. I am concerned that if we do not do something to protect our planet from the potentially disastrous effects of climate change, Jaden’s story might become our reality. I learned from Jaden and her experiences that not only is it necessary to act when something is very wrong, but also that one of the most valuable tools a person can possess is their friends.

I would recommend *Eye of the Storm* to anybody who likes action, a sprinkling of science and technology, and, most importantly, a good read. This is a book of discoveries, friendship, and loyalty. Reading it showed me that, with determination, anything can be accomplished. 

An Indescribable Feeling

By Ben Hayes

Illustrated by Soyi Sarkar



Ben Hayes, 13
Fox Point, Wisconsin



Soyi Sarkar, 13
Short Hills, New Jersey

THE FINEST TIME to go fishing is at dusk. A hazy fog is settling over the lake, and the sun sits perched just above the crown of the tree line, casting a multitude of soft colors. I prepare myself, sliding slowly into the canoe, balancing myself and making sure not to fall into the crisp dusk waters. Row after row, my paddle breaks the water's surface and pushes me along. I look to the rear and a long line of small waves glide off the canoe like a halo on an angel. I look to the left and then the right, and all is quiet on the lake. Far off in the woods I can hear twigs being broken under the pressure of another animal's weight. I look back to the water and spy a tree that has fallen weak and into the water, marking my fishing spot. Foot by foot I steady the canoe closer to the shore. I can see the weed beds through the clear water now, and I know I'm in my territory.

I stop for a second and let my head fall back as I admire the beautiful sky. The stars are timidly peeking out from behind the clouds. Soon enough their bodies will glow with light, but not now. I turn my head back to my main intentions: fishing. I slowly reach for my pole, lying parallel on the canoe, and I gently raise the lure to my eye's level. The knot seems good. I unhook the taut bait for the pole. I hold the pole lower now towards the reel and lift it slowly over my head. I look behind me and the bait dangles on the thin fishing string perpendicular to the pole. I take a deep breath.

I gently toss my bait towards the shore just before the weed




The finest time to go fishing is at dusk

line. I have a popper which floats delicately on the surface of the water until, with a swift pull of my reel, it pops, imitating a frog. I slowly jig the lure closer to the boat. Back to the boat and nothing, but fishing takes patience. Cast. Nothing. Cast. Nothing. Again and again this pattern repeats. This cast is different though, it floats in the air and then lands precisely where I want it, right above the weeds. I start to jig the bait in... nothing bites. I take a breath of frustration. I watch the line calmly sit on the lake, and *BAM!*

The once calm line becomes taut with a gentle pull and there is no doubt that a fish is on. All the patience has now paid

off, and there is an almost bubbly feeling deep inside me. Panic sets in. Set the hook, my mind screams. I jerk my pole up and the fish is on. The whole world is spinning now as I reel in the fish. The fish is near the boat and just as tired as I am. One last battle to go.

Instinct sets in and my hand plunges into the ice-cold water. I can feel the fish struggling with all its might as my hand wraps around it. I lift the fish and take control of the battle. One final surge and the fish is out of the water. It's a keeper. This is my favorite feeling in the world. Nothing, absolutely nothing, surpasses this feeling. 

The Trains That Went By 31 Years Ago

By **Stella White**



Stella White, 11
Newark, Delaware

I watch the trains go by
The sky takes on a purple haze that seems unique to London

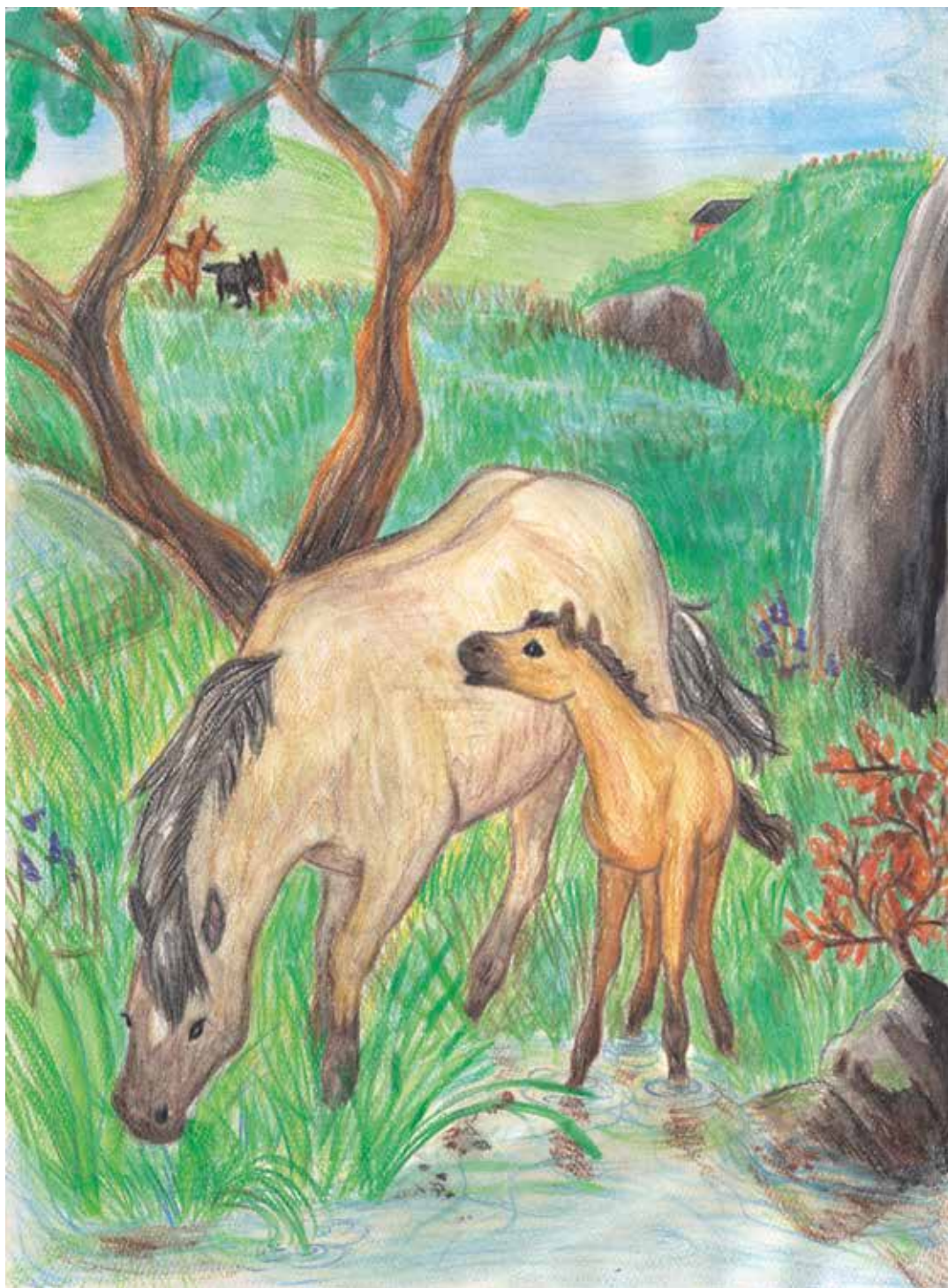
As I slowly fall asleep,
I try to imagine my father doing the same thing, decades ago
I am lying in the house he grew up in, in the same bed,
with the same blanket

I imagine living in London
eating dinner at the little table where you have to tuck
your elbows in
then going upstairs to bed and looking at the trains
Would I enjoy it as much?
Would I even consider myself lucky?

I wake up and look out the window
The sun is glaring in my face even though it is early morning
I watch the trains going by, the same ones as last night

The trains feel as if they are right next to you
close enough that you can watch the people going past
as the trains follow their everyday routine

The people on the trains never notice you
But they can see everything you do for those brief seconds
before they disappear



I was just beginning to graze when I heard her whinny

Friends Forever

By Naomi Vliet

Illustrated by Jessica Birchfield

CHAPTER ONE

THE MARE

I RAN, THE SCENT of humans growing ever stronger. I had to protect my foal. I nosed her into a crevice, which any human would pass by without a second glance, and then I too followed her into the crack. We had lost the herd from the very beginning. The humans singled us out, a mare and her hour-old foal. Luckily, I knew more of the mountain than they ever would. As we stood there, breathing heavily through our nostrils, our flanks covered in sweat and heaving, I wondered what happened to the rest of the herd. Would we be able to re-join them, or did they get captured? I shuddered at the thought. But, for the time being, none of that mattered.

CHAPTER TWO

RACHEL

I PUT PENNY AWAY in her stall and waited for my mom to come home from work. I really wanted a horse of my own; I had wanted one since I was four years old. Ever since then, I had begged my parents to get me one, but to no avail. They always said, "Maybe next year." They had said that for eight years running, and did I have a horse? But my parents had said that if I was responsible and took care of the horses at our stable, they might actually get me a horse of my own soon. I heard my mom's car pull in and raced to meet it, greeting my mom with the question I always did: "When can I have a horse?"



Naomi Vliet, 11
Lopez, Washington



Jessica Birchfield, 13
Clemson, South Carolina

CHAPTER THREE

THE MARE

I LISTENED carefully. Although I didn't sense anything amiss, I wasn't going to take any chances. I had learned that humans can be tricky when they want to. I stayed in the crevice until I was more than sure that it was safe, then cautiously poked my head out. The coast was clear. I led my foal over to a nearby stream and was just beginning to graze when I heard her whinny. I whipped around, ready to fight the hunters, but was pleasantly surprised to find that my foal was just greeting the herd. I excitedly greeted the herd, and we all headed off to find a place to spend the night.

CHAPTER FOUR

RACHEL

AS I LOOKED out the window, I saw two lone figures in the distance. Was it...? Yes! It was the mare! And she had a foal! I had been watching the mare for weeks, waiting for her to have her baby. And here it was! Suddenly, I saw a cloud of billowing dust that meant the herd was approaching. I wondered why they had been separated; usually herds stayed together, but I was distracted when I heard a pounding on the stairs that told me my older brother, Daniel, was back from work as a police officer. I flew down the stairs and we nearly collided as I asked excitedly, "Did you catch those mustangers yet?"

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MARE

WE FINALLY settled down in a place all but hidden from those human hunters. As we rested and ate, a calming peace fell over us, and we settled down for the night.

CHAPTER SIX

RACHEL

"NO, NOT YET, cowgirl," Daniel replied sadly. "We almost caught up with them at Miller's place, but his dog ran in front of us and we had to stop so that we didn't run him over."

"Dang!" I exclaimed vehemently. "Oh, guess what! I saw that mare that looked like she was about to foal."

"So did she have it yet?"

"Yup, she had it. I think it's a filly, but I can't tell from this far away."

"How do you know it's a filly?"

"Just a guess."

"Well, I bet it's a colt."

"You think?"

Just then our dad stuck his head in the door. "Dinner time, you guys! Hey, what're you arguing about?"

"First of all, we aren't arguing. We're *debating* whether the new foal in the mustang herd is a colt or a filly," Daniel said.

"Yeah, I think it's a filly."

"Nope. It's a colt. Definitely."

"Oh, stop bickering, you two," our dad reprimanded us.

Suddenly Daniel's phone started ringing. "Hang on." Daniel fumbled for his phone.

He answered it and his face lit up like a child's on Christmas.

"Really? That's great! Be right there!"

He hung up.

"That was my boss. He said they have a tip on those mustangers."

"Really? Awesome! I hope you catch them!"

"Me too, cowgirl."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MARE

THE LEAD MARE suddenly called out a shrill cry of warning, and we had a split second of knowledge before the mustangers whipped us and lashed us into a tiny pen. All of a sudden, we were blinded by blue and red lights, and more men came. They moved the mustangers into a waiting car, and we snorted with anticipation. Then a man moved forward. He started talking to us, and his voice was soothing. We calmed down (minimally). He started to move to the gate. He put his hand down and fiddled with the latch until *Pop!* We were free! The herd galloped past me and my foal. But my foal refused to get up. Instead she just lay there, ignoring my pleading whinnies. The man closed the gate and said, "I'm very sorry." Then he took something out of his pocket and took aim. Suddenly, everything was black.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RACHEL

I RACED TOWARD the cars parked outside. I had to know what was going on, I had to. When I opened the door and

raced to the trailer, what I saw nearly took my breath away. It was the mare and her filly. It *was* a filly. Just then I saw Daniel and raced over to him, bombarding him with questions.

"How come you have them here? Did you catch the mustangers? What's wrong with the filly?"

"Later, cowgirl!" said Daniel. "Look, why don't you take the mare to a stall?"

"OK!" I said, eager to be part of the excitement.

I grabbed a rope halter and went over to the stirring mare. Gently, I put on the halter, worried she would fight it. But all she did was sigh, as if she knew there was no way to resist.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MARE

I KNEW THERE was no way to fight. I didn't particularly feel the need to anyhow. The girl was gentle and I was tired. There was something missing though, something I needed. My foal! I started whinnying worriedly. Had the man done something to her?

CHAPTER TEN

RACHEL

THE MARE suddenly started whinnying crazily. I soothed her. "Don't worry, we won't hurt your baby," I said. Then I put her in her stall and went to see what happened to the filly. The filly had been injured by the mustangers. We had to keep her here for a few days.

"Honey, can you take this little girl

back to her momma?" my mom asked.

"Sure can!" I said.

As I walked back, I had a thought. Maybe Mom and Dad will let me keep them. Now *that* I had to see. I put the filly back with her mother and raced down the aisle.

"Hey, Mom, I was wondering if..." I trailed off.

"Let me see. You want to keep the mare and her filly," my dad guessed shrewdly.

"Yes, I do," I answered defiantly.

"Well, your father and I were thinking it was about time you had your own horse. You've been asking us for pretty much your whole life. We were thinking of going to a ranch to buy one for you."

"Can't I have this one?" I asked.

"Honey," my dad said gently, "this is a horse that has been wild her whole life. It would be cruel to keep her locked in a barn. Plus, she has a foal. That's more than we are willing to get into, for the time being."

My mom nodded her head in agreement.

"But I really want her. Who knows, more mustangers could come and round her and her foal up. Then they would be lost forever!" I held back a sob.

"You know, she has a point," said Daniel, "and she has been working very hard with all the other horses. I wouldn't be at all surprised if she could handle the mother and the foal and train them at the same time. It would take some hard work and effort, but she's more than up to the task."

I *almost* ran up to Daniel and hugged him.

"I suppose Rachel can have them," said my dad slowly and hesitantly, "if Daniel helps her and supervises her when she takes them out."

"I will, I will, don't worry, cowgirl!" exclaimed Daniel as I looked at him fiercely.

"YES!" I shouted for the whole world to hear.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MARE

THE GIRL RAN up to us. She let herself in the wooden box and ran over to me. She threw her arms around my neck. A small part of me said, "Yipes, run!" but I didn't listen to it. I trusted this girl. She said, "You're mine. You're really mine." I nickered softly in her ear and she giggled.

CHAPTER TWELVE

RACHEL

I NAMED THE MARE in my head. Sweet Prairie Rose. I said it over and over again to myself. Finally, I had to try it out on her.

"Here girl. Here Rose."

She came! Now I had to think of a name for her filly. Ingy. I don't know why, but that is what I thought of, and that was her name from then on.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RACHEL

AS THE WEEKS went on, I noticed Rose sometimes staring out onto

the prairie. One day, I made a decision. Although it was going to be hard saying goodbye, I just couldn't stand her being so depressed. So one day, early in the morning, I got up and let them out. I did it without telling anyone; they would just try to talk me out of it, and that I could not stand. But my mom was always telling me that if you let something go and it comes back, it's yours. If you let it go and you never see it again, it was never yours. So now was the moment of truth. Rose looked back once, and then she took her foal and galloped off into the distance.

"That was the right thing to do." I whirled around and found Daniel leaning on the fence.

"When'd *you* get here?" I shot at him.

"I heard someone outside and had to see what was going on."

"Oh. Don't tell Mom and Dad."

"Don't worry, I won't," he reassured me.

I went inside slowly, secretly hoping that Rose and Ingy would come back, even though I knew in my heart that they belonged out there.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MARE

I GALLOPED AWAY with my foal. I would miss the girl, but I didn't miss her enough to give up the prairies to go live in what they called a barn. Now we had to find the herd.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RACHEL, SIX MONTHS LATER

I LOOK OUT my window, thinking about Rose and Ingy. Suddenly, two figures appear next to our pasture. Rose and Ingy! I race down the stairs and outside. There they are! I reach over and hug Rose.

"You came back! You came back!"



You Can Reach the Horizon

By **Lucy Lu**

Illustrated by **Kian Kafaie**



Lucy Lu, 12
Newton, Massachusetts



Kian Kafaie, 11
San Francisco, California

THE BAM OF THE GUN and the final wail of his mother—his entire world had fallen apart. The frail windows nearly shattered from the heat of his burning tears streaming down his face, loosening the tight grip of the dust and sand that clotted his eyelashes. The young boy ran through the torn but precious shelter that for years had guarded them from any danger. But now, as he wove through the collapsed door that once stood proud and protective, the young boy realized how alone he was when he faced the vast, open, and finally silent battlefield.

Immediately he shielded his eyes from the brightness. But how could that be true if there were no sun in the sky? The young boy realized that it was not the brightness from the beautiful sun, but the glaring gray fog that towered over all of the young boy's hopes and dreams. Now, the young boy did not want to thrust himself onto the forlorn and desperate battlefield, so he stood on the steps of his home, trying to find his father. Several years ago, when the boy was just a baby, his father had left for war, promising to return and bring wealth to take care of his family. Just before his father disappeared into the cold that lay outside of the warm home, he looked deeply into his father's eyes—blue and promising. A resolute color he would never forget. Nowhere else in the world that color could be found—neither could the meaning that it held. But then the boy remembered what his mother once lovingly said. "There are only two pairs of eyes that are each other's reflection—two



For that one moment, he suddenly felt all the complex twists and turns of life

blues blending perfectly together. Now that is a true bond.” The young boy relived his overflowing hope at that moment, years before, and wished he could have that same amount of hope now. As he searched, the tall weeds rustled and slithered over the expressionless faces from the people of his neighborhood, whose once friendly and hopeful voices rang too clear in his mind.

For that one moment, he suddenly felt all the complex twists and turns of life; all the hardships and successes; enduring or achieving, life is a tangled maze

of dreams, hopes, and experiences. The young boy came up with this sophisticated thought when he was standing on the doorstep of home, in fact the only one standing, because all others had fallen down. Every part of the young boy’s body ached, his eyes were sore, his throat was tight, his stomach was starving for food, but his legs especially ached, not only because of standing but also because it hurt to be the only one still there when all others had given up on their feet, and in their hearts, too. It hurt because there was no purpose to still be living. It hurt


to be alone.

The boy wanted desperately for someone to comfort him, for someone to erase his memories of all the times of war. He wanted to fly away to a new land, a new life. But who would he be if he ran away? A coward. A traitor. Someone who never cared about his family. Someone who would dump all the difficulties into the hands of someone they love. The young boy had to stay in the places of hardship. He knew he could not flee. He knew he needed to conquer his troubles. So the young but brave boy stayed.

Every day, the young boy gave each collapsed body a flower. He roamed the fields, giving time and appreciation to every soldier. The land was vast and forsaken. It seemed to go on forever. The young boy walked through places where the grass was cut sharp, and places where the cold sliced his skin like knives. He could never reach the horizon, no matter how he tried. The boy walked on, still, the wind slashing at his face, his body becoming numb until his eyes were the only things alive. His blue, but now gray, eyes, reflecting his dirt-filled tears and the infinite sky.

Many suns had set before the young boy came to a river. It was a wide one, with ragged waves that reflected its touch-me-not appearance. The young boy dipped his finger into a biting ripple. The water was as cold as his frozen heart, not

that he was unforgiving, but that his heart was lost of love. However, he was still alive because his heart urged him to find love. And that's why he battled across the river. He dove head first into the steel-cold water because the last bit of life in his heart told him that he could not survive without love.

The young boy burst out on the other side of the river, his only pair of clothing soaked, and barely able to see. He lumbered up the rocky banks and collapsed on the dry grass. The young boy closed his eyes, thinking about when his journey would end. In a few hours? Maybe he would die from the cold, or the hunger, or the loneliness. Who knows? Suddenly a warm hand laid itself on the young boy's shoulder. The boy jerked. He hadn't felt anything warm in a long time. He cautiously turned up his head. Firmness held the young boy's eyes instantly. Reassurance and calmness swept through his wandering mind. For this one moment, two pairs of eyes were tied in a bond of understanding, gratefulness, and love. Memories from when his father left hovered clear and real. Only, that was when his father left, this was different. It was a finding. It was a color and reflection that defined the boy's journey. It was so deep, it seemed like the trail was infinite. And his smile was deep, too—one as wide as the horizon—one as true as the color of blue. 

The First Morning of Winter

By Cammie Keel

It is silent.

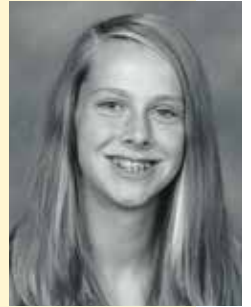
Skeletons of trees.
A lonely crow shrieks.
And is gone in a black smudge,
Erased from the sky.

The air is cold melted silver,
Each breath freezes and falls,
Then shatters on the ground.

Blades of grass cocooned in frost,
Crackle when you step on them.

The last leaf falls,
A drop of orange on the white sheet.

Winter is here.



Cammie Keel, 13
Boulder, Colorado



She only stayed in one place for about a month or two before moving on

Belonging

By **Hazel Thurston**

Illustrated by **Juliette Bazurto**

THE JOYFUL MELODY rang out loudly, reaching into the corners of the wide room and even under the covers where a girl lay. Her hand moved slowly, then sprang like a viper and hit the off button on her alarm clock. Violet Burns sat up sleepily, still lost in her world of dreams. Her black hair hung down low over her shoulders, creating a barrier between her and the rest of the world. Violet shook off her sleep and pushed her hair out of the way, revealing brown eyes and tanned skin. Violet rubbed her eyes, then looked up at the opposite wall of her room. There was the familiar mural of two pandas, one eating bamboo, while the other looked on interestedly. The mural had been painted when Violet had moved to this house, because pandas were her favorite animals. The sight of the lifelike mural almost made her smile. Almost.

Violet slunk out of bed and headed to her closet, averting her eyes from the giant pandas. She slowly opened the doors, still half asleep, not eager to face the day.

What do we have here? Violet thought to herself. A rainbow of colors met her eyes, but Violet pushed them aside and instead pulled out a suitcase, worn out because of constant use. Violet traveled a lot. She only stayed in one place for about a month or two before moving on to another family, always being turned away...

No! Don't think about it! Violet shouted inside her head. She opened the suitcase forlornly and pulled out netted tights, with a black miniskirt and a black shirt, frayed with age. All black.



Hazel Thurston, 11
Arlington, Virginia



Juliette Bazurto, 13
Santa Clara, California

Perfect. Vivian hated it when Violet wore black, instead of the hand-picked colorful array of clothes. Vivian was Violet's foster mom. After finding out that she and her husband, Rick, couldn't have children of their own, the couple had started to take in foster children, who were either abandoned, or ran away, or, in Violet's case, were abused at a very young age.

Violet walked downstairs, making as much noise as possible. She entered the kitchen.

"Morning, honey!" greeted Vivian warmly. Violet said nothing. She walked over to the counter and poured a bowl of cereal.

"How's my pumpkin?" asked Rick, coming into the kitchen.

"Don't call me that," answered Violet. She moved to the table and sat down, far away from Vivian. Her foster mother scooted closer around the circular table.

"Got any plans for today?" Vivian asked sweetly.

"No," replied Violet flatly. She picked up her half-full cereal bowl and dumped it in the sink. Vivian grimaced. She hated food to be wasted. A tiny smile played at Violet's lips.

"I'm just going to the park," said Violet, turning abruptly.

"All right, but be back by five. Rick and I... er... we, um, need to tell you something," said Vivian nervously.

"OK," said Violet faintly. As though she were possessed, Violet flew from the room and out the front door, banging it shut.

No, *no!* Violet screamed inside her head. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and Violet didn't bother to wipe them away. No matter how many times this happened, she could never get over the feeling of a missed opportunity. Of love. She was being sent back to her social worker, Karen, and Violet knew it. It had happened five times before, and each time the excuse was different. The worst time had been when Mrs. Peterson had told her they were "going out for ice cream," then dumped Violet back at Karen's office, saying she wanted to return her. Return her. Like a jacket that didn't fit. Violet picked up her speed and ran. Soon, without knowing it, she was at the park. Violet sniffled, then sat under what she thought was an apple tree. Not having bothered to bring a coat, Violet hugged herself and wiped her nose with her arm. Violet hugged her knees to her chest and just sat there, slowly drifting off into a daydream. A daydream where she belonged.

"Hey, could you move? Hey, hey!" said a voice. Violet looked up. There was a boy with sandy hair and freckles dotting his face, looking down at her with an ugly look.

"We're trying to play here. Could you move?" he asked coolly. Violet looked up and slowly stood. She looked down at her watch. It had only been half an hour. She wiped her nose again.

"Ewww," said a girl behind the boy.

"Quiet, Natalie," the boy said to the girl behind him.

"You're not the boss of me, Drake," retorted Natalie.

"Yeah I am. Mom said," argued Drake. A few kids came up to the pair.

"Has she moved yet?"

"She's standing up..."

"Yeah, but she hasn't moved aside yet."

"What a weirdo."

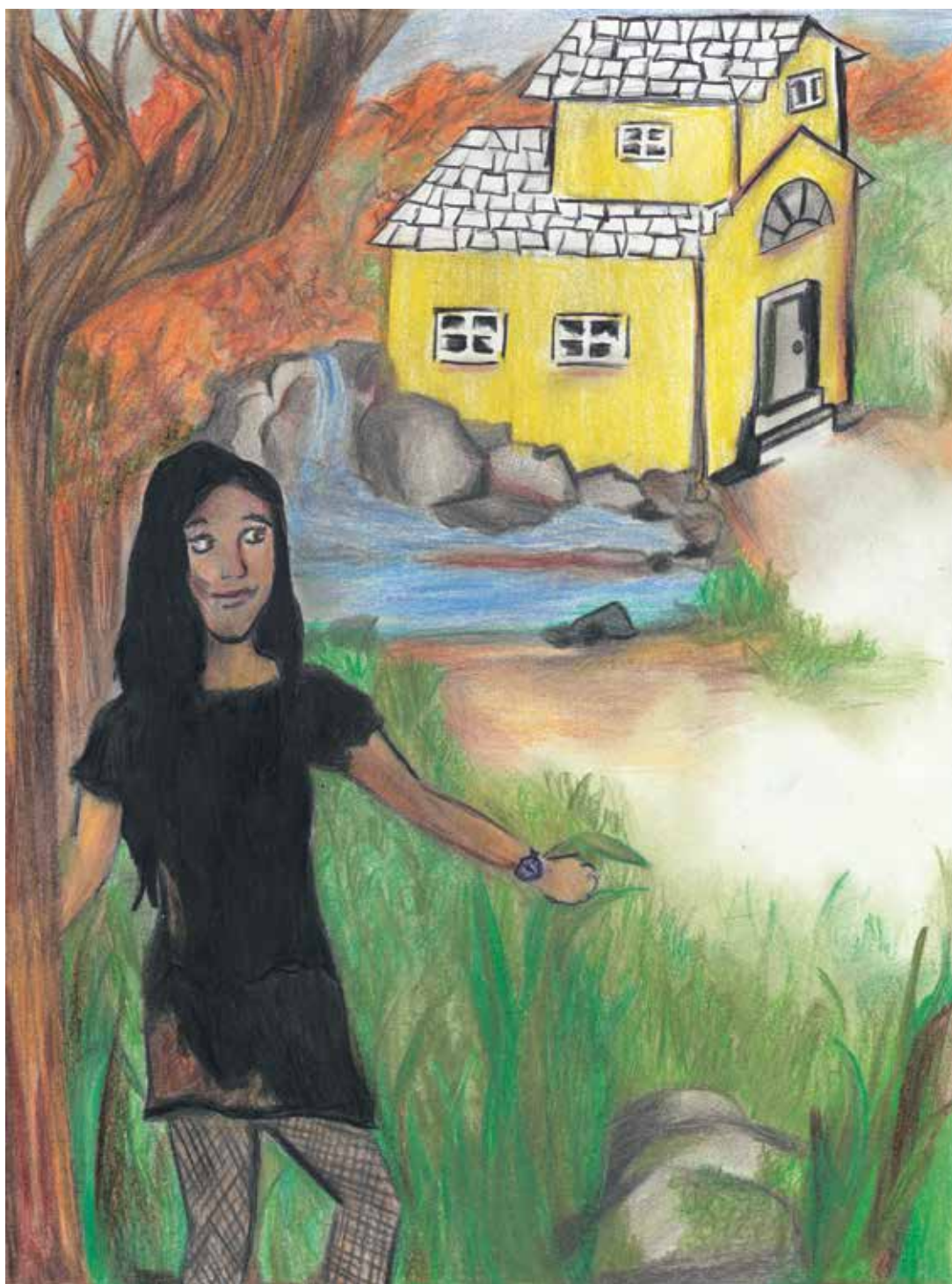
"Hey, isn't she that foster kid or something at the McCoys?" Voices mingled around Violet, who was close to tears again. That foster kid? Weirdo? Who were these kids? Violet took a step back and fell against the apple tree.

"Move!" yelled a voice behind Natalie and Drake. Violet obliged. She bolted. Through the crowd of kids, down the soccer field, and into the woods. There she fell, this time because of some thorns in the path. This had been a horrible day so far. Violet got up and pulled a thorn from her skirt. This was not the way she wanted to spend her Saturday. Violet jumped over the prickly bush and headed farther into the forest. She could still hear the kids' voices ringing in her head. She didn't know anyone in the neighborhood, yet everyone knew her! Violet started to pant. She could feel the tears coming. Violet ran. She passed under trees, not feeling the autumn wind on her skin, penetrating her every bone. She didn't feel it when she slipped and fell in the mud. Or when she stumbled to the ground and fell against a rock. Pain sliced through her body, but Violet didn't feel it. She was muddy and sore, and her heart felt ripped in two. Violet sat down on a lichen-covered rock

and began to sob hysterically. She couldn't even see her watch through her thick tears. Suddenly, Violet was mad. Angry at herself for crying. She wiped away her tears, creating a fresh streak of mud. Violet stood and looked at her purple watch. It had been one hour since she had seen the group of kids. Only an hour and a half, and she wanted to go home. Violet held her breath, willing herself not to cry.

Violet waited a moment to assure herself she wouldn't cry, then looked around her. Violet gasped as she realized she had no idea where she was. Violet looked up. The pale rays of sun through the trees seemed to be almost taunting. The path through the woods was nowhere in sight. Violet's breathing became heavy and panicked. She couldn't be lost! Not after all that happened today! Violet looked around bewildered. She ran forward, then returned to her rock, frightened. Violet ran uphill but couldn't see any familiar landmarks. All she knew was the lichen-covered rock. Violet turned around in shock, tearing her shirtsleeve on a low tree branch in the process.

As if on cue, her ears picked up a sound in the distance. Like rushing water. Violet's heart lifted as she ran downhill, certain that she was saved. Violet's assumption was correct. The creek that ran through the woods was there. Violet had only been to the woods three times, but from this she had learned that the McCoys' house was upstream, right in front of a little waterfall. In the mornings you could hear the water dancing over



There was the house!

rocks and sticks. Violet set off at a trot.

Soon, she reached the little waterfall, and Violet scrambled up the bank. There was the house! Never had its little white shingles and yellow complexion looked more welcoming. Violet ran up to it and burst through the door.

“Vivian! Vivian!” Violet yelled. Vivian came into the room from the kitchen. Violet collapsed in her arms.

“What happened?” cried Vivian in shock. Violet relayed the whole story.

“Oh you poor thing! Go up and run a bath! Then come back down, Rick and I have a surprise for you,” crooned Vivian. Violet ran upstairs, too tired to think about the fact that she was about to be returned to Karen. After a warm bath, Violet was ready to face the world again. She walked slowly downstairs to the kitchen where she could hear Vivian bustling about, only now realizing her fate.

You had it coming. Don’t blame Vivian, Violet told herself. As much as she wanted to, Violet couldn’t bring herself to blame Vivian. Vivian had been the sweetest foster mother yet. Violet lingered outside the kitchen door, wanting a few moments more, before she packed up her things.

You can’t avoid it forever, a little voice said inside her head. Violet couldn’t ignore it. She knew she had to. Violet held her breath and forced her feet to move, shuffling ever closer to her doom.

Violet stepped into the room, prepared for the worst, then stopped short in sur-

prise. In front of her was a collection of toys and presents so big that she was sure it could cover her easily with room to spare. It covered the kitchen table, the counter, and part of the floor.

“What’s all this?” Violet cried.

“Why don’t you sit down, Violet?” suggested Rick, pointing to a dining-room chair. Violet sat.

“Violet,” began Vivian, “Rick and I have always taken in foster children, but none of them seemed to suit us.”

“Like a jacket that never quite fits,” Violet choked out.


“Exactly!” Vivian smiled.

“But then we found you. You’re the jacket that fits,” Vivian covered her mouth, tears brimming her eyes, with a look full of hope.

“And we’d like to keep you,” added Rick.

“These presents are yours, if you decide to stay with us,” finished Vivian. She looked at Violet with pleading eyes.

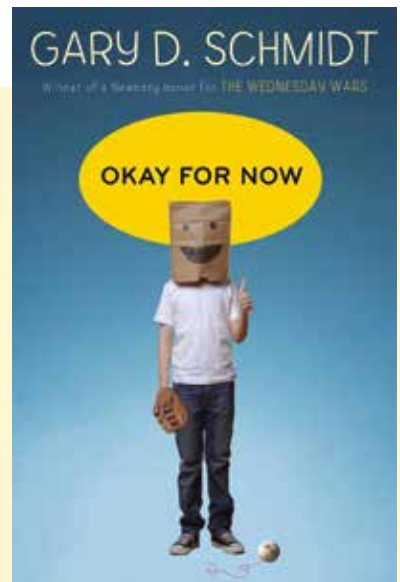
Violet looked at the presents in front of her, then at Vivian and Rick who were standing beside her. Vivian was on two knees holding Violet’s hand. Slowly Violet nodded. Then she nodded more vigorously.

“Yes. Yes I’ll stay,” nodded Violet. The tears came and she nodded while she cried on Vivian’s shoulder. Rick clapped his hands. He smiled widely, then he and Vivian hugged Violet together. Violet smiled and cried happily. She belonged. She finally belonged. 

Book Review

By Ryan Traynor

Okay for Now, by Gary D. Schmidt; Clarion Books: New York, 2011; \$16.99



Ryan Traynor, 12
Emerald Hills, California


I LOOKED FORWARD to reading this book about a thirteen-year-old boy, thinking that I'd be able to relate to him right away. I couldn't have been more wrong because his life was so different from mine. However, the author, Gary Schmidt, brings you right into the story, sharing the character's inner thoughts so you feel you are living the scenes with him. He wrote about the main character, Doug Swieteck, looking at an Audubon bird painting, saying, "But Audubon knew something about composition: he kept the top of the bird's back as straight as the horizon, right smack in the middle of the scene, with a beak held up just as flat and just as straight, and an eye that said, 'I know where I belong.' You couldn't help but be a little jealous of this bird." I knew then that my journey through the book would be watching Doug find out where he belonged.

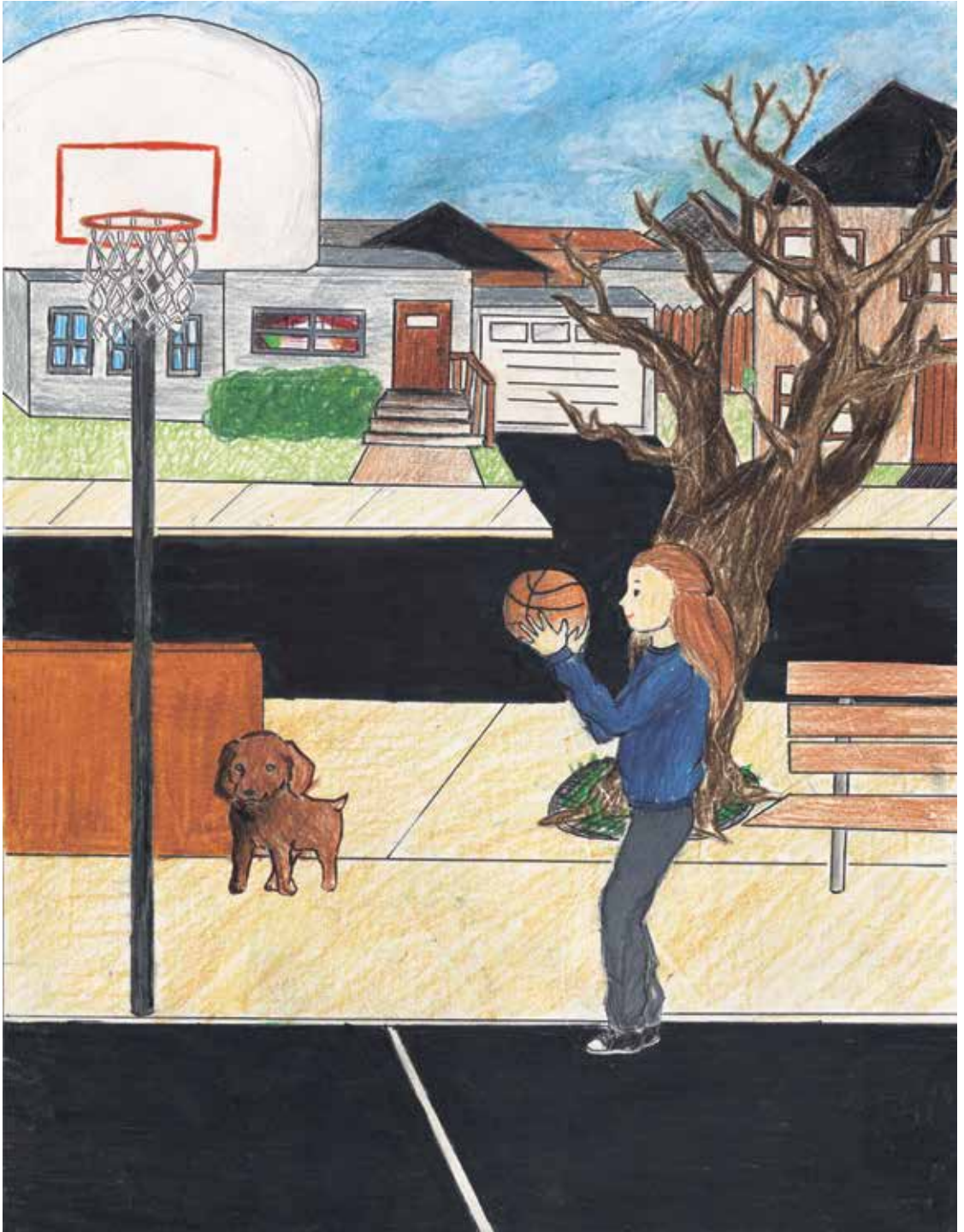
Doug is an eighth-grader whose abusive father loses his job in the big city. He moves his whole family to a small town to work at a mill. Doug isn't excited about the move, and when his bullying brother is blamed for a series of thefts in town, people start looking down on him. The only thing Doug likes about this small town is the book of Audubon's bird prints in the library. Unfortunately, the town has hit a financial rough patch and is selling off the prints, one by one. Doug is distraught and, with

the assistance of the kind librarian, Mr. Powell, finds himself learning the drawing style of Audubon and bringing the original prints back together. This leads Doug and his new friend, Lil, on an interesting series of adventures with different characters around town. The plot is further complicated because Doug's oldest brother comes home from Vietnam in a wheelchair and has to fit into this new town and family as well.

There are many plots woven throughout the book, but the main themes center on family relationships, bullies, illiteracy, and, most of all, the hope to rise above these things. Doug is an outsider in a new town where he must adapt to relationships, old and new. His only positive relationships come from unusual places—his powerless mother, who manages to hang onto hope in spite of it all, a spitfire girl named Lil Spencer (his love interest), whose zest for life inspires him to see the good in the world, and a teacher and librarian who try to pull the best out of him. This was an emotional roller-coaster ride for me, swinging from humor to heartbreak, from hope to despair, sometimes in the same paragraph. It takes place in the late 1960s, during Vietnam and the preparation for the Apollo flight, which gives an interesting backdrop for the story since I wasn't alive then and I was able to learn about life during this era.

The Audubon prints, pictured at the start of each chapter, seem to mirror what is happening in Doug's life. As he comes up with ways to reconstruct the Audubon book, he is also making sense of his own life and future.

I grew right along with Doug throughout the story. At the end, when Lil said they could move together somewhere else and he said he wanted to stay in Marysville, it shocked me. I guess everybody had grown on him. Finishing the book, I wish they would have used a different cover. The paper bag over a boy's head doesn't reflect the complexity and impact of the book. This is a book that will affect you to the core and I highly recommend reading it. 



Reina took a step back, aimed carefully, and fired the basketball

A Fortunate Soul

By Isabel Folger

Illustrated by Madeleine Gates

REINA TOOK A STEP BACK, aimed carefully, and fired the basketball. It was the middle of winter. Her thermometer informed her that it was only forty-five degrees outside, so she had on sweatpants and a sweatshirt. She was alone, for it was only eight o'clock in the morning. She always shot baskets in the morning because she didn't want to be at the basketball court, caught up in the afternoon crowd.

The ball hit the rim with a clang and, bouncing off of the backboard, circled into the net and out the bottom. Reina remembered when she had gotten it. She had received the ball last year as a Christmas present from her Uncle Troy. He had taught her how to use it, and she had loved the game ever since.

She recognized the bark of a dog and froze.

The dog bounded up to her. He was small, with long floppy ears and short brown fur. He sniffed her feet and jumped up on his hind legs. Reina screamed. She looked around, trying to find his owner, but could see no one. She gave up finally and determined to scare the dog away.

"Stop it!" she snapped harshly. "You leave me alone, you worthless fur ball!"

Surprised, the dog yelped and fled.

Reina took a deep breath and pursed her lips. She was afraid of dogs, as she had been since she was four years old, when a dog had bounded up to her. The dog was so large that she could have ridden it. It had knocked her over, and she had lain there, stunned, until the owner's call had beckoned the beast away



Isabel Folger, 10
Santa Cruz, California



Madeleine Gates, 13
La Jolla, California

from her. Now she froze whenever a dog barked and, even though she knew that the large dog hadn't meant to scare her, her troublesome fear could not be helped.

Panting, she sat down on a bench to catch her breath. When she looked at her watch, which revealed that it was nine o'clock, she jumped. Her breakfast would likely be cold by the time she walked across the street to her house and showered. Hastily, she grabbed her worn basketball and strolled along the path that led to the street, which was the only obstacle that stood between her house and the basketball court.

The rain came in a light sprinkle, so she walked faster. She thought about Christmas. It was coming up soon, in a couple of days. Reina didn't know which she liked better, Christmas Eve or the holiday itself. On Christmas Eve, her family would huddle around the Christmas tree and sing carols, hugging and laughing. Then they would decide to help an "unfortunate soul."

They helped someone in need every year. Whether it was sending cookies to the homeless shelter or making cards for sick children, they always had fun with their projects. They had a warm feeling, knowing that they were helping people who couldn't help themselves.

As soon as she reached her front door, Reina kicked off her shoes and tore off her clothes, racing to the bathroom. After her shower, she dried and dressed herself before following her nose into the kitchen where she smelled bacon frying.

"Good morning, Papa," Reina greeted her father, who sat at the table, his nose in the morning newspaper.

He glanced up. "Oh, good morning," he returned with a nod.

She sat down and devoured her bacon and eggs, washing it down with a glass of orange juice. Because it was winter break, she didn't have to go to school, so she read in her bedroom awhile before her friend Allison came over. She ate a meatball sandwich for lunch and baked Christmas cookies for her neighbors. After dinner, she was overcome with exhaustion, so she curled up in her comfortable bed and fell asleep.

She applied a similar schedule for the next few days. Reina saw the same short brown dog almost every day, and the sight of him somehow eased her fears. She was never open to him, although by then she'd realized that his owner, if he had one at all, wasn't coming back anytime soon. He got dirtier and dirtier, and it was soon obvious that he didn't have a home.

Christmas Eve finally arrived. Reina and her seven-year-old brother, Evan, hung up stockings, and then they all settled comfortably around the Christmas tree. They sang carols while their father strummed his guitar, producing cheerful music. Then they opened a few presents, and the conversation turned to their annual charity project of helping an "unfortunate soul."

Everybody was into it except Reina, whose thoughts wandered. However, when she heard the sound of a familiar



"Can we keep him?" Evan asked

whimper waft through the open window, an idea snapped her head out of the clouds.

Evan was just saying, "Maybe we should collect old books for the homeless shelter..."

"No! I want to do something different

this year. We'll still do something for an unfortunate soul, but who says that soul can't be an animal?"

"Hmmm..." their mother said, "that's not a bad idea."

"We could raise money for the animal shelter," their father suggested.

Reina stood up and cleared her throat. "I know how we can help an unfortunate animal," she proclaimed, "without leaving this house."

Questioning looks were cast her way.

"Wait right here," she instructed, dashing out the door.

She followed the sound of a panting dog out to the trash bins. "Here, boy," she called.

When the dog saw her, he crouched down low.

"Come on, boy." Reina slowly came towards him, her arms outstretched. He cowered into the corner of the wooden fence. She sighed, wishing she hadn't acted so mean the first time he had come up to her. What does he want? she wondered.

Then he looked up at her with big, round eyes, and she suddenly knew. He only wanted one thing. He wanted to be loved. Reina's face softened. "Don't worry," she soothed, "you come with me now." She walked to the door, and he followed.

When Reina swung open the door, her family had forgotten her departure, and they were talking amongst themselves. But they looked up. The dog leaped out from behind her.

"Well, you see," she began, "I found him a couple days ago. He was all dirty, and... I kept waiting for his owner to

come and take him home. But he didn't have an owner or a home, and I couldn't stand for him to be all alone... so... I thought he could live with us."

Silence filled the room. Then Evan blurted out, "I thought you were afraid of dogs, Reina."

"No!" Reina cried loudly. "Well... maybe," she admitted, "but not anymore."

"Can we keep him?" Evan asked.

"I think that's for your mother to decide," their father announced.

All eyes turned to her. Even the dog, who had been wagging his tail excitedly, became still, as if he sensed the importance of the moment to come. Reina's mother looked first at her family, then at the dog. Finally, she said, "Well, if you two are willing to take care of him, I don't see any harm in it." She grinned. "Besides, that would be a nice way to change the future of this unfortunate soul, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah!" Reina and Evan exclaimed in unison, while the dog jumped onto their mother's lap, spreading mud all over her new dress.

"Oh my..." she said. "Well, it can come out." She laughed, and soon the rest of the family joined in.

"We'll call him Lucky," Reina proposed, "because of how lucky he is to come all this way and find the home he yearned for."

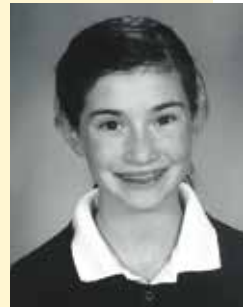
Everyone agreed.



Winter

By Aliya Schenck

Winter
Carrying
the crimson
toboggan up the
mountain of snow and
ice. An extreme amount of
work only for the thriller one
second slide of joy, spraying snow up
in the air behind you, screaming with delight
or terror, you don't know which and you unexpectedly
are slowing down. Your ride runs out, and it is soon over.



Aliya Schenck, 12
Mercer Island, Washington

The Power of the Swan

By Alexandra Langley

Illustrated by Dominic Nedzelskyi



Alexandra Langley, 12
Sebastopol, California



Dominic Nedzelskyi, 13
Keller, Texas

JAY PEDALED HIS BIKE around and around the block. There was nothing else to do. Everyone from school was either not available or was taking a trip. Jay was thinking very hard about one particular thing. Not a thing, actually, it was a person. He was thinking about his mother.

His mother had died only one year ago, when Jay was twelve. Now he was thirteen. Jay parked his bike in front of his house and sat on the curb. Something had been puzzling him for a long time. A few weeks before he had turned thirteen, he started having a dream. The same dream over and over again, and it was still coming to him. In the dream there was a beautiful woman with wavy auburn hair and kind, calm blue eyes. Jay's mother. Then she would say three words, "Listen to it," as if she was answering a question that Jay had asked. Listen to what? That was what had been bothering him.

"You OK?" Jay whirled around. His father had come out of the house. Jay realized his cheeks were wet. He hadn't noticed he was crying.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he answered.

"All right." His father disappeared into the open garage. He was used to Jay being sad a lot. Outside, Jay stood up. He mounted his bike and took off up the street.

LISTEN TO IT." Again. The same dream. His mother smiled, then faded away. Jay woke up. He looked at his alarm clock. It was 12:45. He



The swan glided closer and as Jay looked into its eyes, he saw a woman

closed his eyes but didn't fall asleep.
He couldn't.

JAY PEDALED DOWN to the end of his street, turned left up the street, right up another street, then left again. He was at the park. Jay rode his bike up to

the bench that he usually sat on by the big pond, but it was occupied, so he walked his bike further down to the very edge of the pond. He propped his bike up with the kickstand and flopped down onto the hard dirt. He looked out over the pond. It was expansive, and it got pretty deep

in the middle. Jay's mother had loved this pond. She would go there whenever she could. She had told Jay that it calmed her to look out over the water and see the big white swans swimming around and around.

There were also ducks at the pond, but compared to the swans, they looked like little toys. As Jay sat there at the edge of the water, he had the same feeling his mother had described to him. It was wonderful. Jay looked again at the swans. He noticed one in particular. It was bigger than the other ones. More beautiful, too. It held its elegant white head high and swam gracefully and slowly around the pond as if it were showing its elegance off just for him.

Jay suddenly had an urge to name it. Something important. Sasha. It was his mother's name. Perfect. Swans had been his mother's favorite animal. Sasha turned and looked at Jay.

"Are you Jay?" Jay turned around. No one was there. The swan was staring straight at him. He gasped. Sasha was talking to him. The silent way, where you don't talk out loud. The words just come to you.


"Uh... yeah, I'm Jay."

"Of course you are. My son." Jay was not confused at all. Now he understood. His dream. "Listen to it, Jay." Listen to the swan. He just knew it. The swan glided closer and as Jay looked into its eyes, he saw a woman. Auburn hair, blue eyes, nice smile. His mother nodded.

JAY STOOD UP and took a step closer to the water. The swan was still coming closer, but it wasn't a swan anymore. Not to Jay, at least. It was his mother. The other people in the park (which was only four or five other people) saw only a swan. Jay didn't even notice any other people, though. He was somewhere else. Somewhere with his mother. It was like all his favorite things mixed into one, but much, much more powerful. His mother was right there. The picture was so vivid and clear, he could almost touch her. He was reaching, reaching...

Jay fell hard on the ground. He tried to lift his head up, but he was way too dizzy. He lay back down. Finally, the dizziness subsided and Jay looked around. He was back at the park. The same ordinary park. A swan glided up and stopped. Jay looked at it and smiled. His mother waved from the swan's eyes. "I'll be here, Jay, whenever you need me." Jay waved back and the swan swam off onto the pond.

JAY NEVER FORGOT that feeling and the picture of his mom waving from the swan's eyes as long as he lived, though he could never quite describe it. He had really needed his mother, and she had made him feel stronger. He had many more dreams about his mother, but never any "Listen to it" dreams. Always nice dreams, where she would give him advice or just plain talk to him.

In some ways, Sasha could still be alive. 

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