

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Tina Splann, age 9, for "Gold and Silver Stars," page 31

MEMORIES AND BEGINNINGS

The new piano teacher can't take the place of Maggie's grandma, can she?

KATIE'S LEAGUE

In the 1940s girls were not allowed to play baseball

Also: A story about skydiving

MARCH/APRIL 2013

\$6.50 US \$6.50 CANADA

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 4
MARCH / APRIL 2013

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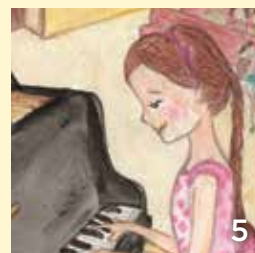
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Stone Soup (ISSN 0094 579X) is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November, by the Children's Art Foundation, 765 Cedar Street, Suite 201, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Copyright © 2013 by the Children's Art Foundation. All rights reserved. Subscribe to *Stone Soup* at stonesoup.com, or call 800-447-4569. In the U.S. a one-year subscription is \$37, two years \$60, three years \$82. Canada add \$6 per year for postage; other countries add \$12 per year for postage. U.S. funds only.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Stone Soup, PO Box 567, Selmer, TN 38375. Periodicals postage paid at Santa Cruz, CA, and additional offices.

Printed in Canada by Hemlock Printers on FSC-certified paper.

Stone Soup is available from the Library of Congress in braille for visually handicapped readers. To request the braille edition, call 800-424-8567. *Stone Soup* is indexed in the *Children's Magazine Guide*.

Editor's Note

The relationship between grandparent and grandchild can be very loving. Grandparents tell us stories about our family history and about the times they grew up in. They help us build memories that will stay with us all our lives. This issue has several stories about grandparents. In "Memories and Beginnings," Maggie remembers cookies, dandelions, and piano lessons. Brooke reminisces about a special day at a train station in "Remembering." Jess's grandmother helps her patch up a friendship in "Gold and Silver Stars." In "Dream of Dancing," Lavender decides to follow in her grandfather's footsteps and devote herself to ballet. If you're lucky enough to have grandparents in your life, think about what they mean to you, and about some of your shared experiences. Is there a family story you'd like to share with *Stone Soup*?

— Gerry Mandel

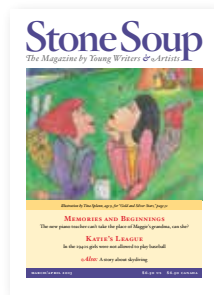
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ON THE COVER Tina Splann loves to draw. She began drawing on the walls when she was just a baby, and her mom gave her the nickname "Li'l Picasso." Tina also loves animals, especially puppies, and wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up. She has a brother, Yogi, and a dog, Zhuk ("bug" in Russian).



The Mailbox



I think *Stone Soup* is great! I love how it is children (some of my own age) that write and illustrate the stories. It somehow makes it more interesting to read and look at! I got a subscription to *Stone Soup* at

Christmas from my grandpa and ever since my first issue I have loved it. I can't wait to get my next issue!

Rebekah McKean, 10
Aberdeenshire, Scotland

I want to congratulate Leigh McNeil-Taboika on her illustrations for "The Three Wishes," by Alison Lanza [May/June 2012]. Leigh, you are truly gifted and I see great things in store for you as an artist! Alison, you are a real storyteller; I can't wait to see your name on the best sellers' list! Each and every contributor to *Stone Soup* has a certain talent. I hope everyone will keep following their dreams and be inspired for bigger things!

Grace Llewellyn, 12
Wellsboro, Pennsylvania

I'm the mother of two daughters, aged seven and nine, in Melbourne, Australia. I've also been a newspaper journalist since 1986. I stumbled across your magazine at a friend's house the other day and immediately subscribed. The dearth of good reading material for young people has always been a concern to me. Your publication not only provides fantastic content but encourages kids to write as well, which is fantastic. Both of my girls are working on stories to submit.

Wendy Hargreaves
Melbourne, Australia

Stone Soup is unique because you help young authors share their stories with one another and readers from all over the United States. I enjoy reading the stories in your magazine about animals. I liked listening on your website to Hannah Culver's story, "Finding a Friend" [September/October 2010], about how a dog helped her find a friend. I would be proud to have my story published in *Stone Soup*. I have always dreamed about reading one of my stories in a magazine or book, but until now I have never tried.

Danica Chen, 11
San Diego, California

I would like to thank you personally for giving young writers a chance to show their talent. Giving opportunities to young children to make their own money while using their talent at young ages is the best thing a magazine could be doing.

Ann Marie Horn, 13
Terrebonne, Oregon

I really appreciate that you let blooming young authors and illustrators share their works of art and stories. Every story you pick is unique, original, and enjoyable. The art is wonderful, beautiful, and magnificent. I'm glad that there are so many young people who are willing to submit their work to a wonderful organization.

Vicky Stockinger, 11
Hales Corners, Wisconsin

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.



"Maggie, this is Miss Tania, your new piano teacher"

Memories and Beginnings

By **Melissa Birchfield**

Illustrated by **Jessica Birchfield**

THE DOORBELL'S RING still echoed in my head. I stood on the third step of the stairs that led up to the bedrooms and leaned my body all the way out. That way I could see the mirror that hung in the foyer next to the front door. I heard Mom wheel the rolling chair back from the computer and walk to the door. My older sister, Alexa Kate, ran from the den to join her, her sandy hair flying. Through the mirror, I saw Mom open the door and smile as a young lady stepped briskly in.

From the open window in the kitchen, the fragrant scent of honeysuckle and lilac drifted across the house and tickled my nose. Memories came flooding back. Grandma's sweet, laughing face creased with wrinkles, her wispy white hair framing her face perfectly. The way she threw back her head and laughed, as she, Alexa Kate, and I made cookies, or picked dandelions and sent our wishes to the wind. The way she would scold us, shaking her finger and looking stern, but the merry twinkle in her eyes always betrayed her. The way her body swayed as she sat on the piano bench and played her whole heart out. Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, she played them all. She had taught Alexa Kate and me to play, too. We would sit in the living room and laugh and play and laugh some more. Whenever we couldn't get a piece right, she would always say, "Learn to like the music, and the music will learn to like you. Music only plays right for happy fingers. So have fun, and it will come!"

But now Grandma was gone, and Mom had found another



Melissa Birchfield, 13
Clemson, South Carolina



Jessica Birchfield, 13
Clemson, South Carolina

piano teacher to take her place.

"Maggie!" Mom's voice drew me reluctantly to the foyer, where I stood behind Alexa Kate, trying to hide. The lady smiled at me, her short brown hair bobbing. With her flowery skirt and blouse, she seemed right at home.

Mom continued. "Maggie, this is Miss Tania, your new piano teacher." She turned to Miss Tania. "Well, I guess I should let you get started? Which one of you girls wants to go first?"

I did not raise my hand. Let Alexa Kate go first. She and I were only eighteen months apart, but we were completely different. She was not scared of anything. Why did I have to get the timid genes?

The living room was just to the right of the front door, marked off by the couches. The old upright piano that Grandma had brought with her stood in the corner, crowned by an antique lamp and a photograph of Grandma, Alexa Kate, and me.

Alexa Kate skipped over to the piano. Miss Tania followed, with a large, bulging bag. She dropped promptly onto the chair next to the bench. The chair that Grandma had always sat in.

"Alexa Kate," she said it with a lilting accent, "what have you been working on?"

My sister picked up one of the faded yellow books that had been Grandma's. "I just started practicing Heller's 'Study in A Minor, op. 47, no. 3.'"

"Ah," Miss Tania nodded knowingly. "Why don't you play it for me?"

Alexa Kate seated herself on the piano bench as comfortably as ever. Soon a lilt-

ing melody wafted through the house, Miss Tania humming along with a funny tone. I swallowed and raced upstairs to my room. Thirty minutes passed, and I lay on my bed, dreading my lesson.

"MAAA-GGIE!" It was Alexa Kate. "It's your turn!" I forced my feet to tread down the stairs, into the living room. Alexa Kate breezily passed me, whispering, "She's fun." Even more fun than Grandma? I sat stiffly down on the piano bench and managed a lousy smile.

Miss Tania smiled her sweetest grin. "Hello, Maggie. What are you playing?"

I pulled out another music book that was falling apart. "Rameau, 'Minuet in G minor.'"

The teacher nodded in approval. I set the book up on the stand. My fingers found the keys. Slowly, I began to play, her eyes boring into me.

Before I knew it, I was done. Miss Tania applauded me heartily. "Well done, Maggie! You are doing everything very well: the dynamics, the rhythm, the technique. Only the tempo needs to be faster. And—*relax*." She reached over and gave my shoulders a little massage. It tickled. "You need to be completely comfortable. It doesn't work if you can play the music perfectly; you have to have *feeling*, yet. Feel the music, Maggie."

I bit my lip. How could I enjoy myself when Grandma was gone and Miss Tania was watching me instead?

Miss Tania reached down and retrieved a glossy new music book. "Here," she said,

flipping it open and giving it to me, “I want you to play this.”

I stared at the swarming sea of black dots. Sharps, flats, cadenzas, trills: this piece was fraught with danger. I looked at the title of the piece. “Summer Memories, Part One.” More like Summer Horrors.

“I’ve never played this kind of music before,” I stammered. “Only these.” I gestured to the pile of worn-out books on the table beside us.

“Only classical? Well, it’s time you start trying other styles of music. Variety is good for you. This is modern music. It looks intimidating, I know, but once you get the hang of it, it will be fun! Come on, try it.”

I set “Summer Memories” on the stand on top of Rameau. “Very slowly now, just to get a feel,” Miss Tania advised. Hesitantly, I placed my hands on the keyboard and dived into the world of unknown.

It was a nightmare. I had to stop after almost every note, find the next one, make sure I had them all correct, then carefully press down the keys. Worst of all, the piece was six pages long! The longest I’ve ever played was three. Note after painful note I trekked. Worst of all, there was no melody.

After I reached the middle of page four and the key signature changed for the third time, Miss Tania stopped me. “Good. That’s enough for today. Here, let me play it for you, so you know what it is supposed to sound like.”

We traded places. Miss Tania began

with a flourish. She swayed with the rhythm and swept effortlessly through measure after measure, turning the pages flawlessly every time. She never stopped once. And there was a melody! It was beautiful to watch. And yet, while I listened in awe, the thought never left my mind: How am I supposed to play it like this?

The last note rang in the air, and Miss Tania lifted her foot off the pedal and her hands off her keys. “So, there. You try again. You need to find the tune, bring it out, and play the rest softer.”

Reluctantly, I gave another halfhearted attempt. To my surprise, the cacophony of notes was beginning to take shape. I began to recognize patterns in the rhythm. The melody began to sing.

By the time my lesson was over, I still wasn’t sure if I liked this new kind of music. All my life I had played good old classical music, the kind that had structure: A-B-A. “Summer Memories” was definitely different. Sharps were thrown in without any warning. Instead of the sturdy, steady beat, this composer had specifically written that you were supposed to speed up or slow down whenever you felt like it. But, I decided, it wasn’t the worst thing in the world.

THE WEEKS PASSED, and I grew more used to Miss Tania and her music. In fact, I even started to look forward to my lessons with her. The sea of musical notes finally materialized into familiar ground, and at last I was able to

forget the technical aspects and focus on feeling the music, like Miss Tania said. But one day, disaster struck.

At our lesson, Miss Tania announced, "I'm planning an end-of-the-summer recital on August 21. Do you know what you want to play for it?"

Alexa Kate squealed with excitement and immediately exclaimed, "'Twilight, Starlight.' It's my absolute favorite!"

Miss Tania jotted it down in her green notebook, then turned to me. "Maggie?"

"Umm..." I pulled at my braid. I had never played in a recital. In fact, I had never played for anybody outside my family until Miss Tania came. I was always nervous around people, and performing for them? I'd probably pass out unconscious just as it was my turn.

"How about 'Summer Memories, Part One'?" my teacher suggested.

I agreed glumly. "OK."

Miss Tania wrote it down. She had over fifty students, so she had to write everything down. Me, performing for more than fifty people?

"And it'll just be some of my students, the younger ones. My older students' recital is on August 14. You're welcome to come to listen, though."

No, thank you. I'd be too nervous thinking about my own recital coming up.

THE ROOM WAS filled with chattering people. I was squashed between Alexa Kate and the end of the pew. We were in the church that Miss Tania had rented for the recital. Even if I turned my

head all the way, I could barely make out my parents sitting farther back. This is it, I thought. Nervously, I studied the program that was creased and damp from my sweaty hands. Three-quarters down the list of names, I read: Alexa Kate Sullivan—"Twilight, Starlight," by Thompkins. The next words might as well have been my death sentence: Magnolia Sullivan—"Summer Memories, Part One," by Fitler.

"Look, you're almost near the end, just enough time to gather your nerves," Alexa Kate pointed out.

"Yeah," I grumbled unenthusiastically, "or just enough time to lose them."

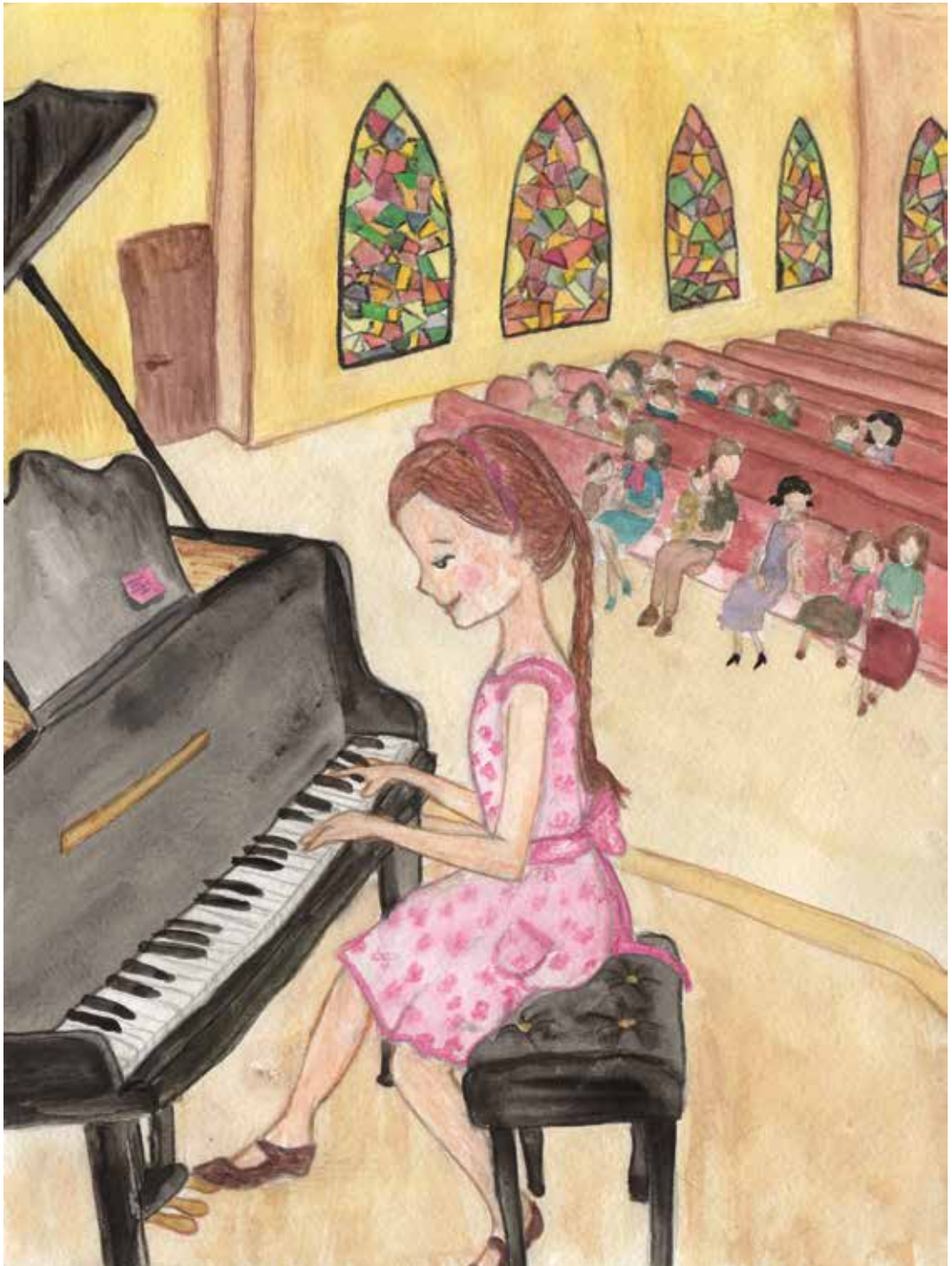
"Relax, Mag, it's not the end of the world." Her words didn't convince me.

The audience settled down, expectant. Brimming with pride, Miss Tania strode up to the front and made a little opening speech. Then the recital began.

I barely noticed the people who played before me. My head was swimming with panicky thoughts. Butterflies flew in frantic frenzies in my stomach. My hands were clammy and shaking. No one so far had messed up a single note—I guess I would set a first.

One by one, my turn drew closer and closer. Too soon, Alexa Kate walked confidently up to the giant, sprawling grand piano. Which meant that I was next.

Alexa Kate gave her prettiest smile and sat down. She brought her hands up smartly to the keys. As I had heard her practice countless times, the familiar glissando transported the audience into starry worlds beyond. She played it perfectly;



I forgot about all the people watching me. I lost myself in the music

she even looked like she enjoyed it. She caressed the last note like a loving mother, then bounced off the bench, bobbed a cute little curtsy, and started back to her seat, all the while smiling as happily as ever. Cheerful, smart, pretty Alexa Kate.


By the time Alexa Kate plopped breathlessly beside me in the pew, eyes shining, my stomach had completely flipped. My legs felt like the jiggly red Jell-O Grandma used to make with us. Slowly, I progressed to the piano, all eyes on me. I sat down, adjusted the bench, placed my foot on the pedal, and found the right keys to start. I knew they were the right keys, but suddenly, the keyboard became totally unfamiliar! No longer was it the familiar territory I had played on for five years, just a jumble of stark black and white. There was no comforting broken D, no stain on middle C to help me navigate my way. No hopelessly stuck sticker on B-flat, an ever helpful mile marker. This keyboard was different.

Time stood still. The keys blurred through my sudden rush of tears, and I would have run through the room and out the door if a flash of bright pink had not caught my eye. I looked up to the music stand. Scrawled in Alexa Kate's curlicue letters with a glittery purple gel pen, the pink Post-it note hung like a lighthouse in a storm. I scanned the words: "Have fun, and it will come! Remember: I'll still love

you, even if you scramble the whole thing."

Good old Alexa Kate. I placed my fingers on the keys again and poured my whole heart into the music. I forgot about all the people watching me. I lost myself in the music. My thoughts wandered to the times when Grandma was alive, when we would lie in the clover and watch clouds scud by, when we would take a picnic down to the creek and trail our toes in the water, when we would skip home from the Fourth of July parade with sticky faces and starry eyes. Those blissful summer days were without a care in the world. Our hearts were full to the brim. I knew I could never bring Grandma back, but I had my memories, and I would hold onto them forever.

I stumbled on the cadenza, and I missed a couple of notes, but I kept going. Now that I look back on it, I don't think the audience even noticed.

Before I realized it, I had played the last chord. I held onto it for as long as I could, relishing the rainbow of colorful tones. In a dream, I lifted my hands gracefully from the keyboard, stood up, bowed, and made my way back to Alexa Kate amidst all the applause. She squeezed my hand and smiled. I smiled back, and in the pocket of my sundress I felt the pink piece of paper and the program tickle my leg through the fabric. I couldn't wait to learn Part Two. 

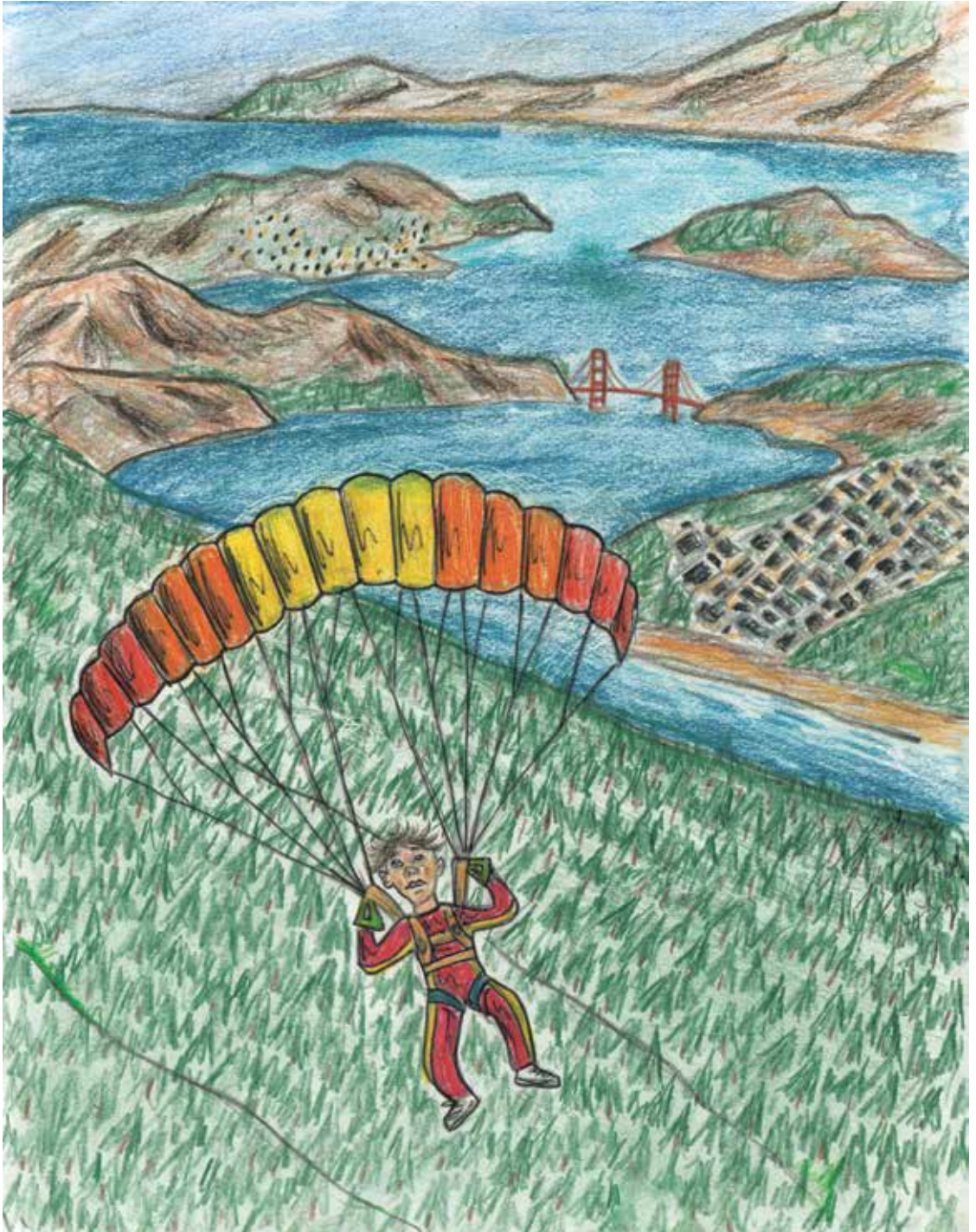
Running

By Astrid May Steiner-Manning

We run until it hurts too much to take in another breath
My breath is a thin jet of smoke, in the cold winter
morning
Drifting from my lips
The sound of our footsteps beating the hard-packed
snow is inviting
And then, all at once, we all fall
We fold into one another
Every joint in our bodies collapsing
Like a folding chair,
My knees, my waist, my elbows, until I'm down
Till my ankles are her ankles
And her calf is mine
And we laugh
A pile of marionettes,
Waiting for strings to be pulled up again,
In a happy dance



Astrid May Steiner-Manning, 12
St. Paul, Minnesota



Suddenly, his falling speed changed

Jump

By **Melissa Louie**

Illustrated by **Charlie Fox**

GARY EVANS STARED down at the tiny world below as the plane soared over the lush Californian Redwood Forest. The trees had climbed upward noticeably more since the last time Gary had been in a plane on the same journey before, only three months ago. Only last time, he hadn't found the courage to jump.

He pulled away from the grimy window and looked straight ahead of him, counting the minutes until the jump. You can do it, man, he thought. You can do it this time. Gary squirmed around, partially from nerves and partially from excitement. It was sweaty and uncomfortable in the hot plane, and Gary thought he might wet his pants. The silk light cloth that he was wearing for his dive was not doing a thing to absorb the perspiration pouring from his pores.

"How you doing, Gary?" a voice boomed over the speaker. It was the captain, Gary's father's friend, who had been instructing Gary in skydiving for just under a year now.

"G-g-good, I think." Gary's voice was barely a squeak.

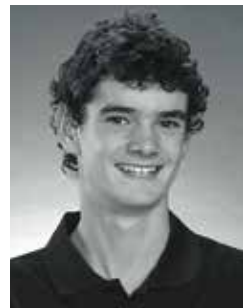
"Ready? I'm going to come back here and have Lewis here drive for me." Lewis was the copilot. "I'm going to come back here and help you."

"I'll need it," muttered Gary. The speaker shut off abruptly with a sharp click.

Minutes later, Captain Lopez entered the small cabin, his swarthy body filling up most of the space between the captain's cabin and the passenger cabin. He held up his hand in a thumbs-



Melissa Louie, 12
Belle Mead, New Jersey



Charlie Fox, 13
Honolulu, Hawaii

up sign, and Gary returned the signal, having no excuse not to. I'm ready... I suppose, he thought.

The boy followed Captain Lopez to the hatch opening at the rear of the tiny plane. There, they geared up. Gary already had his jumpsuit on, the eccentric green grips for him to hold onto during the dive flashing at him. The captain secured a folded parachute to Gary's back and placed an altimeter on Gary's wrist like a watch. A few seconds into the dive, Gary was to look at the altimeter to see when he had to eject his parachute. But just in case he didn't eject the main parachute in time, Captain Lopez gave him an AAD, or an automatic activation device, to activate the backup parachute.

Gary gulped. He hoped he wouldn't panic if he forgot to activate the parachute.

Finally, the captain strapped a spinal protector to Gary's back. Although it was bulky and uncomfortable to wear, the boy didn't complain. He didn't want to have back injuries for the rest of his life if something went wrong.

The captain's huge frame shook as the plane vibrated. "Gary, are you ready? Hey, man, it's OK. It'll be fine."

Gary remembered the fall, the exultation, the freedom he had felt on his first fall on tandem with Captain Lopez. He hadn't felt out of control or even like he was falling. He felt as if he could do anything. Well, there wasn't much he could do being strapped to Captain Lopez's back, but he still felt it.

Gary nodded slowly, feeling as though he might urinate in his pants. He forced his legs forward and felt himself moving toward the hatch, listening numbly to the captain's instructions.

"I'm going to open the hatch, OK? The wind'll be whistlin' in your ears, maybe even blow you around a bit, but just hold onto this handle and you'll be fine. Then, when I tell you it's time to jump, you'll slip down the hatch head first—with your arms in front of you—and you'll jump. Big X shape, arms and legs out like we discussed, yeah? Body straight and level to the ground. Le-vel. Got it?"

Gary managed to speak this time. "Y-yes, got it," he replied shakily. "Big X." To show that he understood, he stretched out his four limbs as widely as he could.

Giving another thumbs up, Captain Lopez started for the hatch. He unlatched the three bolts that lined the opening and threw open the metal door, which banged outward with a dull thud on the bottom of the plane. Wind reached up through the door and slashed at Gary's face, his exposed cheeks, and the skin around his goggles. Frantically, he grabbed onto the handle that the captain had indicated and hung on.

"Gary!" Captain Lopez roared over the din. "Get ready for your big X! It's time!"

Gary's mind was in turmoil. OK, this is it. Big X, remember. Big X.

He stepped toward the hatch, the wind whipping his hair and grabbing his clothes, teasing his jumpsuit. He lay on the floor and used his feet to push himself

forward. He could barely see outside, with the wind right in his face, but he could spot the red-and-green treetops of the Muir Woods and, beyond that, the sparkling glitter of the San Francisco Bay. He felt the rush of air as he hit the howling air head on. He felt a boost from behind as Captain Lopez gave him an extra hoist, and he was off.

Gary Evans was skydiving.

The downward surge didn't come for a few seconds. He was riding on the wind, gliding gracefully down away from the plane.

Oh my gosh, am I flying or skydiving? Gary thought as he whooped with glee. Then came the plunge.

Gary banked sharply, his hands splicing through the air and not doing a thing to slow his descent. He began to fall, and he upturned his X so that his hands and feet were tapered upward. Then he thought better of it and held onto the green grips on his jumpsuit. He had no control, and he was falling fast. It was hard to keep his legs straight out—his instinct was to curl up. The wind forced him down toward the treetops, but he angled himself toward the San Francisco Bay.

Gary's arm got caught underneath his

body, and something hard smacked into his arm. The altimeter! He read it quickly, and he could see that he was dropping fast. Taking hold of the cord that would eject the parachute, he counted down.

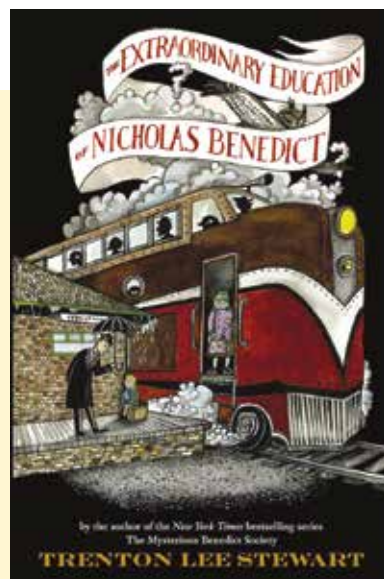
Five... gritting his teeth... four... biting his lips... three... eyes blinking frantically... two... screaming bloody murder... one. He yanked the cord with all his might and felt... nothing. The cord was stuck! Gary cried out in despair as he pulled out the severed cord from its connection to the parachute. He watched as it flimsily was carried away into the wind, and Gary thought that he was probably just as flimsy as that cord flying away. Hanging onto the grips with all his might, Gary tried to catch his breath and pretend he was just on a long roller coaster.

Suddenly, his falling speed changed. He felt as though he were being caught in the air, and he found it was easier to catch his breath because his chest wasn't being pushed on anymore. Slowly, Gary craned his neck up to see a silky parachute billowing serenely above him, hanging onto him safely. The backup parachute had saved his life! Gary Evans relaxed and hung onto his electric green grips as he floated down by the San Francisco Bay. ❀

Book Review

By Marina Dauer

The Extraordinary Education of Nicholas Benedict,
by Trenton Lee Stewart; Little, Brown and
Company: New York, 2012; \$17.99



Marina Dauer, 12
Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE FIRST THING I noticed about this book was that it is the newest installment of *The Mysterious Benedict Society* series, one of my favorites. I inwardly groaned because, in my opinion, the series had come to a conclusion in the previous book. I did not look forward to reading a book with a dull, over-stretched plot. However, upon reading the back cover, I discovered that it was a prequel about the childhood of Nicholas Benedict, an important yet minor character in the other books. I think it was very wise of Trenton Lee Stewart to elaborate upon Nicholas's life, as knowing more about him really enhances the plot of the other books.


In this prequel, youthful Nicholas is an orphan, traveling to a new orphanage under the supervision of Mrs. Ferrier, a "plump old woman with enormous spectacles." Nicholas himself is an undersized nine-year-old genius with a huge nose. And, most importantly of all, he has narcolepsy, a sleeping disorder that makes him see terrifying figures in the dark of night and nod off to sleep at the most ridiculous times. In the opening scene, this odd twosome is traveling by train to meet Mr. Collum, the director of "Child's End" (really "Rothschild's End," named

after its founders, also “The Manor”). Here, Nicholas is to live. Nicholas finds that the orphanage is a rough place to live, but he will soon find a few friends and one immense, old, and deliciously tempting mystery—but it looks like he might not be the only one trying to crack *this* puzzle!

One reason I loved this book so much is that I could relate to some of the situations, making the story more personal. Nicholas’s constant moving reminded me of how, in the past three years, I have moved twice. Of course, moving with my family is nothing like being an orphan, going from one horrible orphanage to another, but I felt a connection nevertheless.

I also identify with some of the characters. For instance, Nicholas and I share an immense love of books. I would have reacted exactly as he did when he first saw the library (he almost fell asleep from the shock!). I also read relatively fast, but nowhere as fast as Nicholas, who reads hundred-page volumes in minutes! From the story, I learned quite a bit about narcolepsy. I think that it was very clever of the author to weave so many facts into this story.

Although I really enjoyed this book, I think that if the book were written in a diary format, it would be possible to convey more of the characters’ feelings and thoughts than with the third-person-narrator style of the book. I also found this series to be very similar to *The Secret Series* (*The Name of This Book Is Secret*, etc.).

Overall, this book is a well-written, fast-paced novel with a suspenseful plot that works like superglue—you just can’t put this book down! I especially liked how it combines real-life issues with pleasure to create a fun but also very *meaningful* book that I’m sure, in days to come, will be enjoyed by many mystery-loving children and adults alike! 



Kelsey raised her binoculars and magnified the kingly bird

The Right Wing

By **Anika Joshi**

Illustrated by **Julianna Pereira**

KELSEY CROUCHED LOWER in the grass. A beautiful quail (*coturnix octumix japonica*) strutted pompously around her pond. Kelsey raised her binoculars and magnified the kingly bird. She could see all its tail feathers, from the soft browns to the deep whites. She carefully crept closer. The bird was like a mini-peacock. She pictured it in the store.

Peacock—now travel size! She giggled, and the bird, alarmed, took flight and sailed for a short while over her pond.

Kelsey sighed. Quails were very rare this time of year, and she probably wouldn't see another one. She gazed through the chicken wire at the tree's red leaves, sadly drifting down to the ground.

Kelsey had set up a sort of institution for the birds when winter came. She and her mom had worked together to bend chicken wire around and above their backyard. They planted lots of plants, bushes, and they even managed to get their hands on a palm tree. Heaters were placed around the bushes and pond, so that it was always warm.

In the distance, a warm and motherly voice called out.

"Kelsey! Kelsey, it's lunchtime."

She sighed and packed up her stuff. Her birder's notebook, binoculars, and the *Guide to Puget Sound Birds* went into her backpack. She hung her pouch full of birdseed around her neck.

The gravel under her feet made a pleasing *crunch* as she walked. Crows flew up when she passed them, like the ripples



Anika Joshi, 10
Seattle, Washington



Julianna Pereira, 12
Pleasanton, California

when you drag your fingers in the water. She was used to random birds, like crows and magpies, appearing in her sanctuary. It happened all the time. Kelsey's half-frozen fingers fumbled at the latch to open the gate. She walked all the way down the side yard path to the front door of her yellow-and-white house. A cheery orange mailbox at the front walk read 8281. Kelsey pushed down the red flag and flipped through the letters that they had. Bills... more bills... an issue of *The New York Times*. The cover of *The New York Times* had an owl on it. Kelsey was intrigued. She put down the bills and opened the magazine. "Birders' Contest for Kids," it read. "Two hundred dollars to whoever can spot the most birds in one day."

Kelsey's heart leaped. A birders' contest! She would do great at that... and two hundred dollars! That was enough to buy that sweet little puppy she saw in the pet store the other day. (She may be a bird-watcher, but Kelsey also had a thing for dogs.) She raced into the house.

"Mom!" she yelled, carelessly throwing her stuff on the floor. "Mom! There's a birders' contest for kids and the winner gets two hundred dollars which would be enough to buy..."

"Whoa, whoa, slow down," said her mom, looking up from *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë. "A birders' contest? Two hundred dollars to the winner? My, my, Kelsey. When is this contest?"

Kelsey flipped open the magazine again.

"Tomorrow!" she yelped. "At Sunset

Park! Please, Mom, can we go?" Her mom smiled.

"All right, Kelsey. We can go."

"Ow, ow, ow!" It was the day of the big birding contest, and Kelsey's mom was brushing back her long, caramel hair. Her face was screwed in pain as the pink brush practically tugged her hair out of her head.

"There we go, all done," said her mother, leaning back to survey the braid she had made. Kelsey got up and called to her mom. "C'mon, Mom, we're going to be late!"

"Dear, did you remember your birder's notebook?" asked her mom as they were rushing out the door.

"Did you remember your binoculars?" she asked as they pulled out of the driveway.

"Do you have your field guide?" she asked as they got onto the highway.

"Got your bird feed?" she asked as they pulled into the parking lot of Sunset Park.

"Yes, Mom, I've got everything." A large banner was hung by the entrance that stated "Birding Contest." Kelsey ran over to it. A lady was standing under it with a clipboard. Kelsey jogged over to her.

"Hello," she said. "Are you here to watch the birding contest or participate in it?"

"Participate in it!" answered Kelsey.

"Name?" asked the lady.

"Kelsey Redburn."

The lady scribbled something on her clipboard. "All right, you're all checked

in. The contest is over there. You're number three. You'd better hurry, it's about to begin."

So Kelsey ran over to the stands. There were four big blocks, each numbered from one to four. Kelsey determinedly stepped up onto the one that read "three."

A voice boomed out on a hidden loud-speaker.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the contestants! Contestant number one is Ricky Delvosia!"

There was clapping.

"Contestant number two is Lily Michaels!"

More clapping.

"Contestant number three is Kelsey Redburn!"

Everybody clapped for her. It felt great, hearing all that clapping.

"And contestant number four is David Roberns!"

More clapping.

"All right, contestants, when the buzzer sounds, go into the woods. Whenever you see a bird, press your buzzer. You'll find them on your pedestals."

Kelsey looked down. A buzzer with a button was at her feet.

"Ready? Three... Two... One..." *BEEP!*

Kelsey snatched up her buzzer and ran into the forest.

At once she spotted a crow perched on a branch. *Beep!* Her buzzer wasn't quite as loud as the other one, but she already had one bird. Aha! A starling and a robin flew above her. Already she had three birds on her list. She was off to a good start!

Kelsey scampered over to a pond and saw a duck and a swan. *Beep, beep.*

From here she could see the scoreboard.

Ricky had seen four, Lily had seen seven, and Kelsey had seen five... But David... David had seen twenty-six! Even as she watched, the number went up. Twenty-seven... twenty-eight...

Six geese took flight. She beeped her buzzer six times. Her number went up to eleven.

Kelsey raced off into the forest, determined to find the most birds. That David wasn't going to beat her, no sir!

She rummaged in her bag for a few minutes and finally pulled out the packet of birdseed. She spread it around, crouched down in the bushes, and waited.

Kelsey was very patient; she waited like this for birds almost every day. While everybody else was tramping around, scaring off all the birds, she would be sitting pretty with the grand prize.

Six blue jays arrived and tucked in. A pair of starlings sat down to a quiet dinner for two. A mother robin and her five chicks found a spot for a fun family night. So many birds were arriving!

Suddenly, another announcement boomed out.

Kelsey jumped. Her buzzer went flying out of her hand and landed somewhere under a bush.

"One more minute until the contest is over! One more minute."

What? Kelsey dived for her buzzer. Her hand groped around and finally hit some-

thing.

“Three... Two... One...” *BEEP!*

Kelsey sighed. She was in fourth place, she knew it. She sadly moseyed back to the stands.

“All right, contestants. We’ve gathered up the total number of birds you saw. In fourth place, with eleven birds, Ricky Delvosia!”

What? Kelsey was not in last place? She perked up a little.

“In third place, with twenty birds, Lily Michaels!”

But if she was not in third or fourth place, she would have to be in either second or...

“In second place, with thirty-three birds, David Roberns!”

What? Then that means...

“And in first place, with thirty-seven birds, Kelsey Redburn!”

There was massive applause, but Kelsey didn’t hear it. A friendly arm was put around her back and walked her to the front. Tears of happiness were in her eyes.

The crowd had started a chant: “Kelsey! Kelsey! Kelsey!”

Her arms were too weak to hold the huge trophy, but she did it anyway. And as the Golden Eagle trophy flashed in the sun, Kelsey felt as if she was a bird, flying as high as the clouds. ❀



Dream of Dancing

By **Greta Kvitem**

Illustrated by **Emily Considine**

I HAD NEVER EVEN thought about what I could do with ballet in my life. It was always just there. A little part of my life, one small piece of the pie of my world; twice a week, five o'clock to seven o'clock, barre to center. I wasn't on pointe shoes yet, either. Ballet was just a hobby.

I SLOUCH DOWN in my white shag lounge chair and sigh. I lie there for a moment before grabbing my book and curling up to read. It's just starting to feel like spring outside. There is new mud and water on the crowded streets below and the trees in front of the apartment are beginning to bud. My favorite time of year. Especially because of my eleventh birthday, in May!

"Lavender?" Mom calls. I look up to see her standing in my doorway. Mom sits down on my quilted bedspread and smiles.

"It's Grandma Lilly's birthday tomorrow," she starts. Snap! I think to myself. I forgot! Trying not to look guilty, I nod.

"We are inviting her to see the New York City Ballet perform *Swan Lake* at the David H. Koch Theater tomorrow evening. What do you think?"

My mind races with thoughts of the New York City Ballet. I have never seen them dance in person before, and I am instantly excited. My grandpa's favorite ballet to dance when he was a professional dancer was *Swan Lake*. He loved the blue-and-lavender backdrop of the lake scene. Sadly, he passed away the day before Azure was born. It's also Grandma's favorite ballet, though she never danced. It has always reminded her of



Greta Kvitem, 12
Prior Lake, Minnesota



Emily Considine, 13
Half Moon Bay, California

Grandpa.

"Great!" I say, and go back to my reading. The ballet is forgotten for the rest of the day. I don't even think about it when I make Grandma Lilly a birthday card and wrap the pink vase I painted for her at Pretty Paints.

AS I LIE IN BED for a few minutes after Mom and Dad say goodnight, this is when I finally remember *Swan Lake*. But it is forgotten moments later as I drift off to sleep.

I dream I am a ballerina, floating across the large stage on delicate pointe shoes. I'm wearing a gauzy swan costume and a feather headpiece royally frames my face. My feet move like a swan's should, gracefully, each step like a string of precious gems. Then I fall. My feet slide out and I lie still on the black stage. But it wasn't an accident, I know. It was mystifying choreography.

My eyes shoot open and I find myself staring straight into the eyes of a pretty girl with a long thin ponytail and blue-framed glasses. Sunlight streams in from the pillow-sized window above my dresser and I can see her clearly.

"Good morning, Lavender!" the girl excitedly says in a soft voice. A police siren outside suddenly jolts my memory.

"Azure!" I cry, and wrap my arms tightly around her neck. I can feel her heart glowing as I hug her. "Is Dad already off on his business trip?"

She reluctantly nods. "But I'm here, right?"

My older sister, Azure, is nineteen and in her first year of college in Florida. She usually never comes home because she always goes to my Aunt Kate's house (she lives near her) during short breaks. Plus, we're faaaaaar away in NYC! We only get to see her on occasional short breaks and always on long ones.

I slide out of bed and slip on my soft penguin slippers.

"Want breakfast?" Azure offers. She has a sly glint in her eye that her glasses can't hide.

"What did you do?!" I whisper excitedly. Azure is the Queen of Tricksters. Butter on my ballet shoes (my dance teacher got so mad!), Jell-O smoothies, you name it, she's done it. But I was surprised this time.

"French toast on cinnamon bread! Bought it myself on the drive home from the airport!" she cries. My eyes get wide. That's my all-time favorite food, except for the New-York-style pizza the vendor outside the apartment sells!

I rush around the corner to the kitchen and settle in the light wooden chair closest to my room. Mmmmmm... I can smell the cinnamon as Azure pops six slices on a platter. I jump up, do an arabesque, and grab both of us tableware and sit back down. The two of us whisper until Mom stumbles into the kitchen wearing her blue bathrobe, disheveled hair, and still looking half asleep.

"Azure, you're home!" Mom cries. She hugs my big sister tightly.

"I know! I needed to be here for



"Lovely," Azure compliments me, "but just remember to turn out your standing leg!"

Grandma's birthday, and to see *Swan Lake!*" Azure replies excitedly. Two years

ago, Azure was an amazing dancer, the star of our studio. But sadly, she quit due

to an ankle injury and never really wanted to try ballet again. She's majoring in art and fixes to be a high school art teacher someday.

I join the hug enthusiastically, and we stand like this for almost a full minute.

THE DAY ROLLS by like a puff of a cloud on a breezy day, what with Azure here. Before I know it, it's time to get ready for *Swan Lake*.

I select from my closet a ruffled navy-blue skirt that goes well with my eyes. Then I add a sky-blue tank top and a white half-sweater with a delicate blue rose. Perfect. I stand in front of my floor-length mirror and do a pirouette.

"Lovely," Azure compliments me. She is sitting on my floor. "But just remember to turn out your standing leg!"

"Well then, Ms. Prima Ballerina!" I answer, hands on hips. We laugh and I sit down on my bed while Azure does a French braid in my hair.

"I wish Dad was here," I whisper. Behind me, I can sense Azure's frown.

"Me too. Business trips just take up a lot of time," she replies sadly. I nod. I have to remember every detail for him.

THIRTY MINUTES later, I am standing, staring, all starry-eyed, at the David H. Koch Theater building. This is where the New York City Ballet dances. It's overwhelming! Azure's eyes show she is in heaven on Earth. Grandma's eyes are welling with tears as she thinks of Grandpa, how they met after he danced

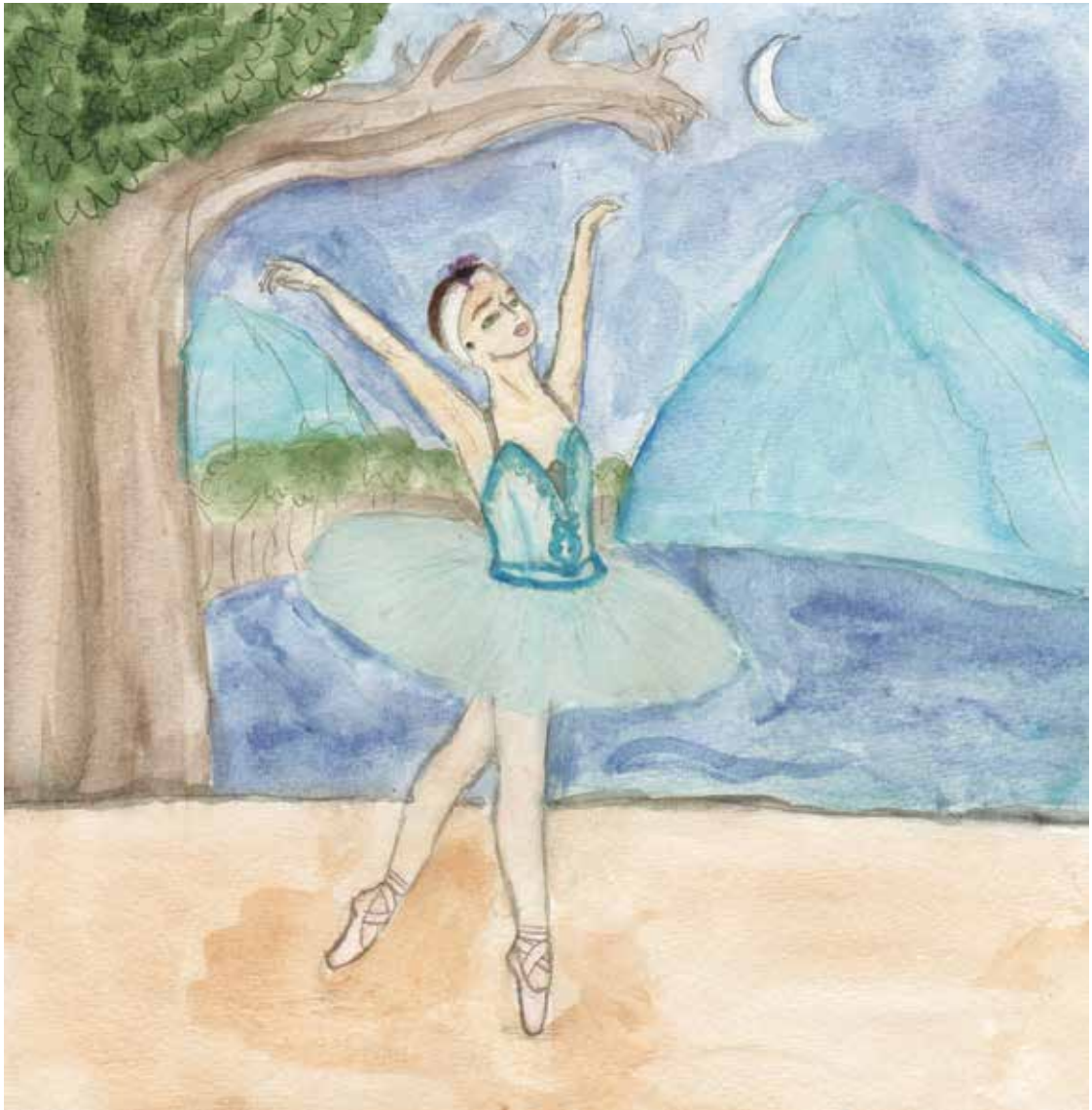
in this ballet many years ago. As we are about to enter the theater, I pick a flower from the bushes and tuck it in the end of my braid. Then I follow my family inside.

"Isn't this just beautiful, Grandma?" I ask as we take our seats. I am in between her and Azure, in this massive space. A gigantic ball-shaped chandelier adorns the ceiling, and balconies grace the sides of the theater. But I can't take my eyes off the curtain.

"Sure is," she replies. Suddenly, the light goes dim and the audience hushes in bubbling anticipation.

Within moments, the dancers on the stage intrigue me. I watch the World's Best Dancer, Ebonie Estel, as Odette, whirl across the stage. The way her arms move, how her tutu floats, the way the feathers frame her face and ebony black hair—my eyes are glued on her. I believe she's a swan. The ballerinas enchant me. I'm lost in their world, helpless, yet in heaven. In the prince's place, I see Grandpa. I feel connected to the dance and a strange but warm feeling comes over me. All I know now is ballet. I'm not aware of Mom and Azure whispering, or even of Grandma blowing her nose. But I can see the way that the swan's arms are crossed over her outstretched leg as she is dying. Before I know it, the curtain falls. I applaud frantically, louder than anyone in my earshot.

"Let's go before it gets crazy," says Mom. We file out in a straight line like soldiers.



All I know now is ballet

“Amazing, wasn’t it, Lavender?” Azure asks. I nod, lost deep in thought.

“Is something wrong, honey?” Mom queries. I look up at her with deep long-

ing in my eyes.

“No, Mom. I was just thinking... I know now.” I pause.

“I need to be a ballerina.”



Frights

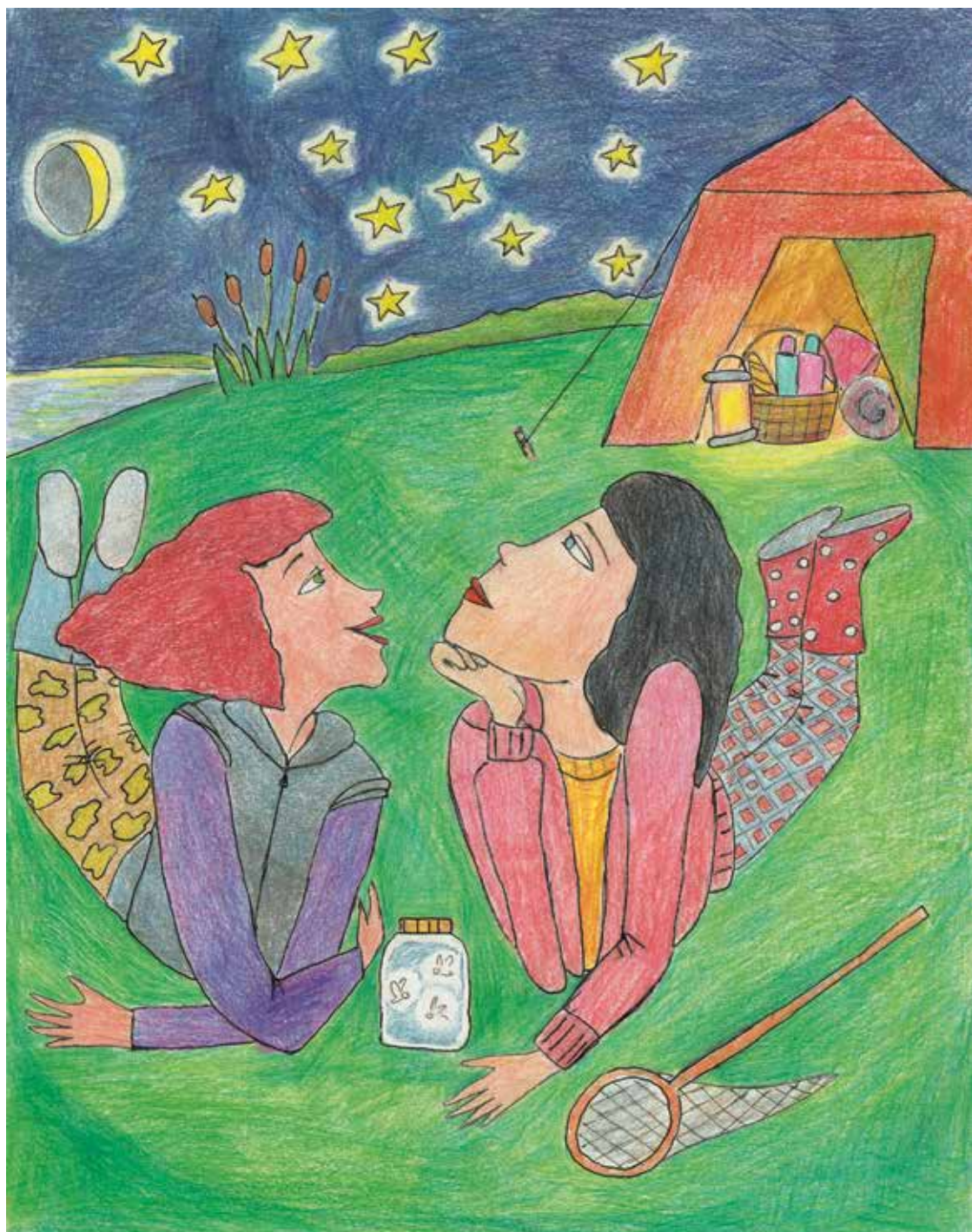
By Sam Laskin



Sam Laskin, 10
Westport, Connecticut

What lies in the darkest corner
in the mind of a boy?
His greatest fears.
Dark, looming, ominous
shadows of everyday objects
Turn into alarming frights.
Howls, creaks, booms, blasts, blares,
Sneak into the mind of a boy
Creep into his thoughts,
Eliminating his ability to sleep.
The thought of a monster lurking under the bed
Shoots goosebumps up the arms and legs
Of your average boy,
Making him stay up in bed,
Panting.
His heart races,
Practically beating out of his chest.
He forces his eyes closed,
Willing himself to a rest
That won't come.

Fists clenched,
Palms sweaty,
Brow moist,
Breathing fast,
The house creaking,
Trees striking the window
With a slow, eerie beat.
Tears sliding down his cheek,
He engulfs himself in his blanket.
His brain pounding in his head
To the rhythm of the trees
Cracking and snapping
Against the window like
Baseball bats.
Trying to calm himself,
Slowly inhaling and exhaling,
Heart slowing down,
Sleep.



"I was thinking—don't you think those stars resemble us?"

Gold and Silver Stars

By **Alice Ford**

Illustrated by **Tina Splann**

“SO I’M DOING my science project on contraptions or robots,” Jess said smoothly. She was talking to Bailey, who was on the other end of the phone.

“Yeah. Can I do it with you?”

Jess stopped. Uh-oh, she thought, better tell her now.

“Bailey, I’m really sorry, but... I totally forgot to ask you, and I’ve already chosen my teammates, Cassidy and Stewart. Can I make it up to you? Like having you over for dinner?”

There was a pause on the other end.

“No,” she said flatly, “just leave me alone. What was I thinking? Having a friend who lives with her grandma and on a farm? No way. Oh. And by the way, that was totally rude!” And Bailey hung up.

Jess’s feelings were hurt as she walked into the kitchen.

“Friends, isn’t it?” her grandmother asked, seeing her unhappy face as she chopped some onions. “Ah, yes. I remember when I was friends with Nora.”

“Nora?”

“Yes, my friend back in high school. If you want them back, you’ll either let them wait it out or apologize after a week or so and make it up with a present or something. You’re perfect—I bet you’ll fix things up.”

“How? How am I perfect?”

“Oh, let’s see—you’re wonderful in a gazillion ways, Jess. You’ve got the prettiest silky-black hair and creamy skin with dazzling blue eyes, the most splendid abilities at music, art, and



Alice Ford, 9
Bloomington, Indiana



Tina Splann, 9
Providence Village, Texas

cooking—sweetie, I can't name them all!"

"Was my mother like that?" Jess asked quietly after a few seconds.

Her grandmother paused as she was pressing the dough of the wonton strips together and hugged Jess close to her.

"Yes. Come with me."

They walked up the rickety old stairs and into the attic. There were dusty old trunks, some a rustic tan, some with gold bolting, and some only half-closed, like the eye of a person trying to get more sleep.

"How come you never told me about this place, Grandma Fiona?"

"I wanted to wait until the time was right," she replied, bending over a dusty brown trunk with cobwebs creeping all over it. It creaked and groaned resentfully as she opened it, and to Jess's surprise it was filled with notebooks.

"Whose are these?" Jess asked, picking up a navy-blue one with a crimson bookmark.

"Your mother's," the elderly woman replied, picking up one herself. "Some of them are written in Italian, but you know this is because our family immigrated from Italy."

"Yeah," Jess said. She remembered how coming from one country to another was hard, especially since they had been very poor and they had barely any money when they arrived in America.

"Look at these awhile, and dinner should be ready in a bit. By the way, we're having wonton soup for dinner."

Jess carried up one of the journals to

her room and opened it up to the first page. This journal was a light ivory color with a turquoise bookmark, the ribbonish kind that all the journals had. An envelope was stuck in it, and Jess decided to read the entry first, then the note.

Dear Diary,

I was so upset today when Sally read the note that now lies in the hands of this journal. She mocked me afterwards and said I was "an immigrant flirting with another Italian." How dare she? I guess that's her way of life, being like that. But still.

When I got back to the dorm, Francesca, my roommate, was still at her geography class, so I nestled down in the cozy featherbed with flannel sheets St. Claire's college provides.

Pretty soon, Francesca came in and plopped onto her bed. Apparently, Rebecca invited her to join her on her trip to Barbados or Jamaica or somewhere like that, but I'm working at the farm this summer for a bit of money. As soon as I finish college, I'm going back to Italy.

Yours Truly,
Assunta

Jess stared at the entry for a while and then opened the letter.

Dear Assunta,

You are certainly one of a kind! When I read your last note, I cracked up with laughter. It is lovely here in Italy. The sun shines with great gusto, and the deep, rolling hills shimmer with life when the moon shines.

Giovanni, my cousin, has opened a small shop on the corner of Main Street. It sells

hand creams of all sorts, like violet or lemon or lavender—and they certainly are splendid! There are also things like watches, bolts of silks, and so much more.

When you come back to Italy, we must pore over it!

I miss you much, my love.

Love Forever,

Peppe

Jess folded up the letter carefully and put it back in its envelope, smiling. She missed her parents, now that they were dead, but they felt so alive when she read the letter and the entry.

“Dinner!” called Jess’s grandmother from the dining room.

Over dinner, they talked about Bailey, and about what to do.

“I have an idea,” put in Jess, through a mouthful of wonton strips, onions, and shrimp. Grandma Fiona liked to cook foods from all cultures.

“What is it, dear?”

“I could take Bailey out camping one night near the farm, you know, in the meadow. Wouldn’t it be wonderful?”

Her grandmother looked thoughtful.

“That’s a good idea. I could send you two with some food, some blankets and sleeping bags, a tent—Jess, you truly are perfect!”

TWO WEEKS LATER

“BAILEY?” JESS SAID into the phone, “Are you there?”

“Yeah,” Bailey grumbled, “I’m here.”

“Look. I’m really sorry for what I did, so to make up for it, do you want to come

over for a sleepover in the meadow?”

There was a hesitation on the other end.

“Sure. I forgive you. I’ll come.”

Jess realized she was holding her breath and let out a deep sigh of relief as Bailey said goodbye and hung up.

THE NEXT DAY, Bailey came over with her sleeping bags, blankets and the bag of things she always brought with her on sleepovers. For the first time in a long time, she was actually smiling.

“Hi, J,” she said, grinning at Jess when she answered the door, then putting on an apologetic face. “Look, I’m really sorry for blowing up at you. I...”

“Hey, let’s not ruin this. Have fun!” interrupted Jess, who was also smiling.

When they finished setting up the tent and putting out the sleeping bags and blankets, they had a delicious dinner. Bailey and Jess were so excited that they were bubbling over with grins and smiles.

“I’m going to send you two girls off with a basket of food for tomorrow’s breakfast,” Grandma Fiona said, putting a basket filled with breakfast food in front of them, along with a two thermoses of rich, milky hot chocolate with two mugs and a jar of farm-made butter, the thick and creamy kind.

WHEN IT WAS just about midnight, Bailey crept out from under the covers and poked and prodded Jess until she woke up.

“Come on!” she whispered enthusiastically.

cally. "Let's catch some fireflies."

Jess quickly pulled on some clothes over her pajamas and, taking an empty jar, clambered out of the tent. Lying on their stomachs in the dewdrop-filled grass, Jess remembered what her father, Peppe, had said in his letter. "The sun shines with great gusto, and the deep, rolling hills shimmer with life when the moon shines." This was almost like Italy.

"You see those stars up there?" Bailey murmured happily.

Jess tilted her head back as the cool night air bathed her locks of black hair. The dragonflies dipped their crystal wings in the pond they had decided to camp by, making little plopping noises as Jess and Bailey spoke. The crickets chirped too, and all together, it was like a quiet melody ringing throughout the night.

"Yeah?"

"I was thinking—don't you think those stars resemble us?"

Jess paused, and then nodded. "Kind of," she replied, "but in what way?"

"Well, they're golden and silver, but—oh, I hope this makes sense—they're not separated. You see, we're totally different—you're Italian and I'm American, you like silk and I like velvet, you live with your grandmother on a farm and I live in the city with my parents—but the thing is, we're not separated. The stars combine, Jess—they don't separate, even if they're two completely different things! If I had chosen to be stupid and not your friend, then it would have been like if the sky ripped apart or if the sun disappeared, and it would be horrible!"

"Yeah," said Jess after a moment. "Yeah, it would." 🌸



My Chicken

By Abigail D'Agosta

With curious eyes
The inquisitive bird
Struts slowly towards its new discovery.
What could it be,
That strange creature,
with fur; and nose placed so queerly?

It just jumped down from my lap,
And is now rounding the coop.
Its tail twists all around,
Like a long, coily snake.
But it's fuzzy, not smooth,
And has long hairs on its face.

The fowl now stretches its feathered neck,
Blinking as she cautiously reaches.
And quick as a wink,
My young chicken's beak
Is through the wire—
And pecks the cat's left ear.



Abigail D'Agosta, 12
Waxahachie, Texas

Remembering

By **Brooke Fallows**

Illustrated by **Jo DeWaal**

INTRODUCTION



Brooke Fallows, 11
Scottsdale, Arizona

THE IMPORTANT PEOPLE in my story are my grandparents. They have greatly impacted my life. My grandfather and I were very close and he taught me many things. He loved writing, music, and trains, the same as I do. He died November 8, 2011, on my brother's birthday. One of the last times I spent with him was when we went to a train station. That place is very important to me. I found, after he died, a story that was one of his many pieces of writing. It was a story about a soldier leaving out of that train station. I believe my grandfather took the train to heaven.

TRAIN STATION



Jo DeWaal, 13
Greenwich, Connecticut

WIND RUSHED OUT as I walked into the station. It was relieving. I looked around to gather my surroundings. There was an endless supply overhead of stained-glass windows. The vibrant colors changed the mood of the place depending on the changes in the sky. The floor was marble, untouched, unharmed.

People were rushing from place to place. Even when people were waiting and sitting, their thoughts took up their eyes. Everyone seemed to be blind to the marvelous surroundings, blind to the fact that they were at Union Station. People made mindless chatter. Most of their questions were rhetorical too. They were always just trying to be polite.

There was a smoke-filled room just left of the entrance. It



My grandma and papa told me many things

was locked and vacant. But I pictured how it probably used to be with men in their suits walking out with a trail of smoke to follow them. I looked back at my grandmother and grandfather. I let out a smile. My grandma and papa told me many things. Papa pointed to the chairs and told me, "At least one famous person has sat in all of those chairs, and many people had their weddings here." I turned to the right and saw a big woven wall,

more like a separator. I peered through the cracks to see many people with dresses and suits on. There was a camera crew. It was a celebration. Papa told me a lot of times they will rent a part of the station for movies and commercials.

I kept walking till I was on the other side. The back led to a garden. There were lilies, bottlebrush, honeysuckle, and many other flowers. The colors made me incapable of frowning. I saw a fountain

with clear water bursting at the top of the highest tier. It sent refreshing droplets up in the air. I closed my eyes and thought about how I will remember this forever.

OLVERA STREET

OLVERA STREET is a famous Mexican street in California across from the train station. I got to see it with my grandparents that same day that I visited the station. Smells filled the air, so I was soon breathing in tortillas and beans. Singers were singing on the street with their Spanish guitars. Many signs hung overhead. To my left, flamenco dancers, with bright colored dresses, tapped their feet on stage. The men swung the women high up in the air while the women held the corners of their dresses. After a while of watching, we decided to eat. We saw a big restaurant that had a Spanish name. When we sat down, we had an immediate conversation. Grandpa told me that my great-great-grandfather worked on a railroad track in China. Later, he moved to Mexico where he owned a restaurant. He got married there. I loved hearing about my heritage. That time I spent at Olvera Street and Union Station, I will remember forever.

GRANDFATHER'S DEATH

IAM SITTING in my living room. All my senses are amplified. The air conditioning turns on. I can see the dust on the back of my piano. The stillness, quietness of the room, and of myself, make me realize and notice things that I usually

don't. I begin thinking about how great it's going to be when I see my grandfather again. I have learned a song for him. But now, I only hear one sound, silence... sometimes the prettiest sound. It is like that right now as I write this. Whenever I sang with the radio, Grandpa always used to say, "Your mama taught you to harmonize." I'm thinking about those memories that will never be lost.

Scott, my stepdad, walks in and carefully sits down next to me, trying not to disturb me in my thoughts. He hands me a phone and my mom is on the line. Her voice is shaky. She talks, but it is hard to pay attention, until she says, "He isn't going to make it."

All I can think about is the horror of losing him. I had thought about it a lot, but never thought it would be so soon. He is leaving when I need him the most. All I can say to her is, "When can I see him?"

She replies, "I don't want you to remember him this way."

I just want to see my grandpa. Anger takes over for my sadness. But then she tells me that I can go to California where he is.

For the next week I act fine. The drive feels longer than usual. When I get to my grandma's, as usual she has food waiting for us. When I see my mom, it seems that stress takes over for her grief. She hugs me. I had missed her.

Sometimes when she puts me to bed, I tell her, "Don't leave."


She hugs me and says, "I'm not going anywhere."

The next day, I go to the hospital early. The place is huge, not welcoming, and it smells like rubber gloves. For two days, I can't see him. The third day, they take every tube off of him and he is ready to pass on. So, I go into the room and my cousin Natalie comes with me. Grandpa is breathing hard but looks peaceful. It is relieving. The doctor tells my mom that, though he is asleep, he can hear everything we say. So, my mother and I sing for him. The song is the one I wanted to show him. His mouth looks dry so we put a wet sponge to his mouth and we hold his hand.

He always had dark warm beautiful hands.

I hope he fulfilled his life the way he wanted to. I hope he still dreams. He had the most creative mind. He loved writing so much, as I do. He loved many things, but most of all he loved his family. His family loved him too.

REFLECTION

LIVE LIFE and cherish time, because there is a limit to time. But there is no limit to what you can do with it. I have learned many things that will forever be remembered. 



Book Review

By Nick Ehrhardt

Otherworld Chronicles: The Invisible Tower,
by Nils Johnson-Shelton; HarperCollins:
New York, 2012; \$16.99



Nick Ehrhardt, 12
Winchester, Virginia

NILS JOHNSON-SHELTON's *The Invisible Tower* brings the legend of King Arthur and his sorcerer, Merlin, into the modern world through fantasy adventure. This book has all the connections necessary to keep the interest of its readers: video games, dragon slaying, acts of valor, a great relationship between a brother and sister, and mystical creatures.


The main characters, Arty and his sister, Kay, embark on adventures in a video-game world called the Otherworld. The Xbox games Arty and Kay play make an easy connection for those readers who are gamers themselves. If *Otherworld* were a real video game, I'd love to try its full 3D version, and I'm sure it would be a top seller as it's packed with adventure. It might even top my favorites, *Ghost Recon* and *Call of Duty*.

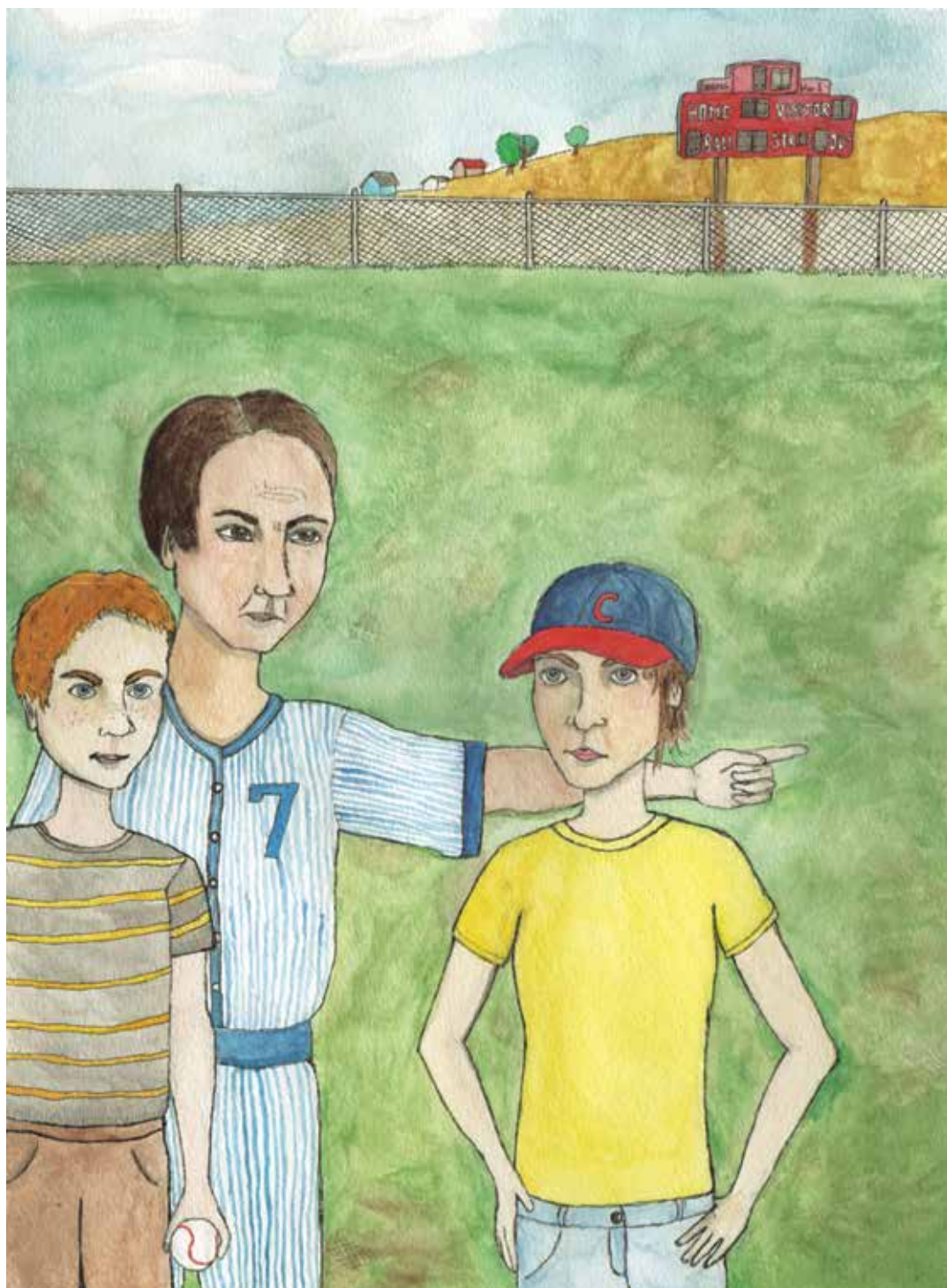
In the adventures, Arty learns his fate is intertwined with that of Merlin, King Arthur, and the Otherworld. When faced with the challenge to free Merlin and the Otherworld, Arty and Kay hesitate, only to be warned by Merlin that their denial will result in Merlin remaining imprisoned, Earth and the Otherworld would be destroyed, and both Arty and Kay never knowing their true destiny. Arty and Kay are scared because of the intensity of the challenge but bravely accept it. In that sit-

uation, I would be scared also but I would like to think that I would willingly accept the call.

Arty and Kay have the kind of relationship every brother and sister should have. They are always willing to help each other out in any situation and share an uncanny connection. For example, Kay tries to sneak up on Arty and Arty always knows she is there before she can scare him. I have a similar but different connection with my sister. I love to scare her. The difference is that she never knows I'm there! My sister and I do have that bond though. Even though we have our differences, we'd do anything for one another. Arty and Kay's bond reminded me of that of the Knights of the Round Table. Their bond is necessary for their success as they come up against the numerous monsters of the Otherworld.

The author's use of unique characters helps keep the reader's interest. Unusual creatures, such as mini-dragons, as well as a girl who appears young but is actually very old, appear in Arty's quests throughout the Otherworld. Some of the characters assist Arty in his adventures. Mr. Thumb, a thumb-sized man who is one of Merlin's good friends and servants, is a constant companion for Arty on his adventures, serving as a guide to the Otherworld. A large green dragon with red ruby teeth, curled golden horns, and black eyes with rainbow-colored pupils shaped like a cat's plays the role of Arty's greatest combatant, awakening in him abilities he didn't realize he had.

This book is comparable to Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series in that it uses mythological monsters who fight for good and evil. However, in my opinion, the Percy Jackson series was more interesting because the action and mysteries were more intense and detailed, making it harder to set down. That said, I would still recommend *The Invisible Tower* as it was easy to read and an interesting story. It also creates a desire to learn more about King Arthur for those readers who might not be familiar with the legend. 



"This is no place for a girl," he said. "Go home and play with your dollies"

Katie's League

By **Emily Worrell**

Illustrated by **Ava Blum-Carr**

I STOOD IN MY BACKYARD, wearing the clothes that I hid from my mama. A T-shirt and jeans, with a baseball cap atop my head. Boy, would Mama scream if she saw me wearing this. But I hate itchy blouses, skirts that are impossible to run in, and dresses that are like both of those combined. I threw my baseball up and caught it in my mitt—both of which I didn't bother to hide from Mama because she would find out I had them, anyway. My late daddy gave me my baseball. I miss him. He knew about my jeans and T-shirt, but he didn't tell Mama. He kept all my secrets. I looked at the writing on the baseball, so lovingly and carefully written on. It read:

For my Katie. Love you forever.

Daddy, 1940

Those few words made this my most prized possession. I was winding up to throw the pitch, when I heard from a few feet away:

"Hey Parker, you throw like a girl!"

I whirled around to see Billy Archer. Billy Archer had his arms folded across his chest with, I noticed, his baseball mitt on. I didn't panic when he saw me wearing my clothes I kept secret from Mama. He already knew, but he didn't tell because he knew I could beat him up.

I crossed my arms. "Is that supposed to be an insult?" I asked.

"Does it sound like one?" Archer asked.

"No," I told him honestly.



Emily Worrell, 12
Carmel, Indiana



Ava Blum-Carr, 13
Hadley, Massachusetts

"Well, it is one, Parker. I'm heading to baseball tryouts. I would bring you along but they don't let girls in the league!" Archer teased.

"Shut up, Archer. You better get out of here before I give you a bloody nose," I said.

"Oh, all right... but what is that?!" Archer exclaimed, pointing at something behind me.

"What?" I asked, turning around. As I turned, I made the foolish mistake of letting my hand with my baseball in it fall to my side.

Archer grabbed the ball from my exposed hand. He looked at the inscription. "Aw... you miss your daddy?" he teased.

My cheeks burned. "Give it back, you jerk," I said.

"No," he said, "I'll take it to the baseball tryouts." He sprinted off.

"Billy Archer, you get back here!" I hopped onto my bike and pedaled after him as fast as I could. He ran a long time, then finally arrived at the shabby baseball field. He ran in. I hopped off my bike and ran after him. I tackled him the minute I got the chance.

"Billy Archer, you give me my baseball right now..." I looked up. All the boys trying out for the league were staring at us. The coach, who was in the dugout, watching the boys try out, looked at us. He walked over to us very slowly. It seemed like an hour passed before he got over to us. He took no notice of Archer.

He said, "What is a girl"—he scoffed out the word girl, like girls were the most

repulsive things he had ever heard of—"doing here?"

The way he said girl made me want to spit on his over-shined shoes, but I controlled myself. I stood up with a hand on my hip. I lowered the brim of my baseball cap. "I, sir," I said, "am here to try out for the baseball team." While I was here, I figured, why not?

The coach laughed as if it was a joke. "I'm serious." I snapped. That was enough to stop him from laughing, but it couldn't wipe the stupid grin from his face.

"This is no place for a girl," he said. "Go home and play with your dollies."

Now that crossed the line. I grabbed my ball out of Billy Archer's limp hand, then stepped on the coach's toe. Hard. As he reached for his toe, I walked away to my bike. "By the way, I hate dolls," I informed him, "and this won't be the last you'll be hearing from me."

I mounted my bike and rode home. Then I took off my baseball cap and changed into a dress before Mama got home from work at five. She's a saleswoman at Big Al's Convenience Store, two blocks from here. It makes a meager salary, but at least we're still eating three meals a day and keeping all our old luxuries, that's what Mama says.

Mama has blond hair frayed with stress, and blue eyes that aren't as happy as they used to be when Daddy was alive. "Hi, honey," said Mama, bending over to kiss me as she walked in.

I stood up. "Hi, Mama," I said, "how was work today?"

Mama hesitated, then slowly said, "It was all right."

But I know Mama too well. "Mrs. Archer came to shop today, didn't she?" I asked.

"Yes," Mama admitted. Mrs. Archer thinks that she is the best person in the world, except maybe her son, Billy. "She came and talked about how *her* son was going to do great at baseball tryouts, and how *she* would come to every one of his games because, apparently, she had decided that he had already made it onto the baseball team," Mama said.

"I'm sorry," I said, "Mrs. Archer's just... just..." I tried to think of the right insult to describe Mrs. Archer, but I decided that no words could express what she was like.

"Just horrible, terrible, and self-centered!" Mama raged. Mama was usually calm, but if one thing could make her mad, it was Jane Archer.

"Exactly," I said, "but the good news is that she probably won't come to shop again for at least a week."

Mama smiled. "You're right," she said, giving me a hug. "Where would I be without you?"

The next day, after school, I walked down to the baseball field and looked at the team list for the league. Oh, no. There it was, in print, the name that I'd hoped wouldn't appear on this list, but of course, it did: Billy Archer. The practice schedule was also posted. Weekdays from four o'clock to five o'clock, Saturdays from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M. I made note of this.

The day after that, I couldn't stop squirming in my seat during class. When school was finally out, I bicycled home, changed into my T-shirt and jeans, and rode my bike to the baseball field, arriving at 4:10.

As soon as I stepped onto the field, all eyes were on me. The batter lowered his bat. The pitcher stopped winding up his pitch. It was deadly silent. The coach walked over to me, even slower than he did last time I saw him. "What are you doing here?" he said. He had a way of emphasizing every word that made it obvious that I wasn't welcome here. Not that I cared.

"I've told you, I want to try out for the baseball team," I said with my chin jutted out confidently.

He chuckled. "You know what? I don't care," he said.

I smiled. "Well, I'll just show up at all the practices until you let me be on the team."

The coach was no longer grinning. "Get out," he said.

"No," I replied defiantly.

"Get out," he repeated.

"No," I said again.

Suddenly a man walked in. "Sorry I'm late, Phil, I lost track of time." He paused as he saw me. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Her? She was just leaving!" said the coach.

I glared at him. "No," I said, "I'm trying out for the baseball team."

The man looked at me as if I was a miracle. "I like it," he said.

"What?" the coach asked, alarmed. I smirked at him.

"Phil, think about the publicity. Everyone will like this team," he said, then turned to me. "I'm Carl, manager of the league. We'd love you to be on the team!" He shook my hand.

"We would?" the coach asked, bewildered.

"Of course. What do you say?" asked Carl.

"Shouldn't you see if I'm any good first?" I asked.

"I'm sure you're great. Do you want to be on?" said Carl.

I knew they just wanted me for publicity now, but later, that might change. "Sure, Carl," I said.

He chuckled. "Great," he said, "you can start now."

He left after that. Things were awkward at that practice. I could tell nobody wanted me there. But they couldn't kick me out. And I loved it.

I hopped onto my bike after practice. I biked home slowly. "You're only on the team for publicity!" I heard a voice say. I didn't even need to look to know that it was Archer.

I smiled at him. "I know," I said, "but I'm on! Thanks for your congratulations, Archer."

I pulled my bike up to the front of the house at 5:15. I swung the door open and immediately wished I hadn't. Mama got back from work at five o'clock—how could I forget?

"Katie, where were you? I was so wor-

ried!" Mama said before turning around. I closed my eyes. Mama turned around and screamed.

"Katie," said Mama, only slightly recovered, "why are you wearing that?"

I thought about everything Mama did for me, and how I had been keeping secrets from her, and guilt flooded me. I burst into tears and slid down the wall, in a miserable heap on the floor. "I wanted to tell you," I sobbed as Mama ran to comfort me, "but I didn't know what you would say. I didn't want you to take away these clothes."

"Katie," Mama said, "it's OK. Just explain this to me over dinner, OK, honey?"

"Of course, Mama," I said, calming down. Then I looked at her, and I knew I couldn't possibly keep the baseball team secret, and I didn't want to keep it secret, either. "Mama," I began hesitantly, "I've got to tell you something."

"What is it?" Mama asked.

"I'm on the baseball team." I forced the words to come out.

Mama looked shocked, but the shock faded. I looked down. "Katie," Mama said gently, "look at me."

I lifted my tear-stained face. There was understanding in her eyes. "It's OK. You love baseball, and I want you to do what you love," she said.

"You mean you'll let me stay on the team?" I asked.

"Honey," she said, "if you didn't play baseball, you wouldn't be my Katie."

The next day at practice, Coach told us our first game would be Saturday against



"It's OK. You love baseball, and I want you to do what you love"

the Daleville Eagles.

"How are we supposed to win with a girl on the team?" Billy asked.

"I don't know, Billy," said the coach, looking right at me. "If it was up to me, there wouldn't be a girl on our team." It didn't matter. They would be glad they

had me on Saturday.

It seemed to me that the week couldn't possibly have gone slower, but finally, Saturday came. Mama drove me to the game, then found a seat to watch. Everyone laughed when they saw me, but I didn't care. The coach gave us a pep talk

in the dugout that ended with, "We'll all try our best today, that's what matters." Then, looking at me, he added, "*All* of us."

Our team was first at bat. Billy Archer, the coach's favorite, was the first to bat. The pitcher threw the ball hard, but Archer hit it. Archer ran to first base and stayed there. The next boy went up holding his bat so high his elbow hardly bent, and his legs were far apart. He struck out, as did the next person.

As the third person struck out, I walked over to the coach and said, "You aren't ever going to let me bat, are you?"

"Not unless it's my only choice," he replied.

I looked at him with annoyance as he turned to the team and said, "Now that we're the outfielders, I can only send nine of you out there right now, and there are ten players on the team."

"Coach, there are eleven players on the team," I pointed out.

"No," said the coach, "there are ten players and one publicity manager."

Archer snickered. "Archer, you're pitching," said coach. Then he called out eight other names that weren't mine.

Archer struck the first and second batters out. Then the third batter actually hit the ball, far. He ran very fast, and our outfielders ran very slow. The batter got a home run, and by the end of the first inning, the score was six to zero. Then we were up to bat again. I didn't get to bat, and by the end of that inning, it was

twelve to one.

The third inning, I watched two people strike out. The coach turned to us, looking annoyed. "Parker," he said, "you're up." I shrieked with excitement and ran to the bat, then looked at Mama to see the beautiful smile on her face. Her eyes sparkled with happiness, like they did when Daddy was alive. And I knew that I couldn't mess this up, not only for the team, and for my pride, but for her, too.

The pitcher threw the ball. "Strike one!" called the umpire. Archer put his head in his hands. I bit my lip and adjusted my stance. The pitcher threw the ball again. "Strike two!" called the umpire. I had to do this. I took a deep breath and got ready. The pitcher threw the ball. I swung the bat, and it collided with the ball, which went soaring through the air. I dropped the bat and ran. The whole team was screaming my name, except for Archer and the coach. I ran, and an outfielder had the ball by the time I reached third, but I had to reach home, I had to keep running! "And it's a home run!" shouted the umpire. Mama jumped up and screamed. I smiled. I was so happy!

That inning changed things. My teammates didn't make fun of me, except for Archer and the coach, but I didn't mind them. We won that game, but I wouldn't have cared if we had lost, because what mattered was that I was part of the team now. I even became pitcher at the next game. I was finally accepted just the way I was!



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