

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*"House in the Country," by Alfredo Eloy, age 11, Santiago, Chile*

## THE OCEAN CHILD

Aqua is not like any girl Jasmine has ever met

## MY FATHER'S DOVES

If only his father were there with him, things would be easier

*Also:* Illustrations from Ireland and Korea

MAY/JUNE 2013

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 5  
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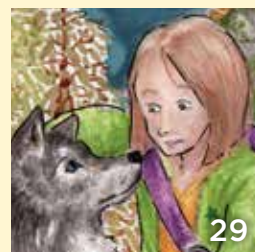
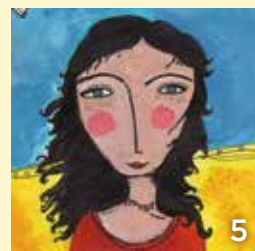
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# Editor's Note

**It's *Stone Soup*'s birthday!** Forty years ago, in May of 1973, the first issue of *Stone Soup* was published. Co-founder William Rubel and I were college students at the time. Our first offices were in our dorm rooms. A lot has changed in forty years, but we continue to love what we do, providing a place where brilliant young writers and artists can share their work with other kids around the world. A big thanks to all our readers, writers, and artists for helping us reach this milestone. As you read the current issue, take note of the four beautiful poems we selected. In "The City," Hazel and her sister invent a world of circuses, hypnotists, and magicians. Amid the crashing waves in "Ocean Beat," Ava shares an intimate moment with a tiny crab. Careful observations from Sarah and Alyssa in "Sleep" and "Dawn" show us falling asleep and waking up in a new way.

— Gerry Mandel

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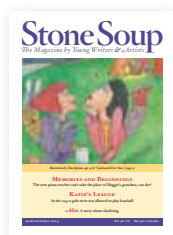
## Submissions

Please read our guidelines at [stonesoup.com](http://stonesoup.com) before sending us your work. If you have questions, call our editorial office at 831-426-5557, or email [editor@stonesoup.com](mailto:editor@stonesoup.com).

**ON THE COVER** "House in the Country" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy, an organization that promotes peace and understanding through children's art exchanges. Now housed at CSU East Bay, the Paintbrush Diplomacy collection will soon be available for viewing online at [paintbrushdiplomacy.org](http://paintbrushdiplomacy.org).



# The Mailbox



**Stone Soup** is a wonderful resource for children who are interested in maybe becoming poets one day to exercise their talents. Liberal arts are very important for making people whole. Thank you for being around!

**Rowan Belt, 11**

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**I just wanted to tell you** that I think you are making a unique and beautiful magazine. I received the September/October 2010 *Stone Soup* issue for my birthday, and I read the whole thing front to back many times. I liked all the poetry, the illustrations, and especially the story called “Owl Eyes.” I am an eleven-year-old, home-schooled girl, living on a remote island called Haida Gwaii, in the Pacific Ocean. Since we don’t have shopping malls, movie theaters, or any other big city entertainment options, I spend hours at the library, reading, or doing outdoor activities, such as hiking, canoeing, and biking. I love writing short stories, especially historical fiction, and poetry. I am excited about the possibility of sharing my creative writing with others.

**Kylie Regier, 11**

Queen Charlotte, British Columbia, Canada

**I want to be a writer** when I grow up. Super, super bad. With a voice of longing! Instead of writer’s block I have writer’s brain. So many ideas are smushed into my head that if I don’t get them out I might implode! My teacher gave me a copy of your magazine and I fell in love.

**Mia Hayney, 10**

Galveston, Texas

**Thank you so much** for all you’ve given me!

I first got your magazine when I was somewhere between nine and eleven years old and I’ve loved every issue since. You inspire me to put my work out there, and without you I probably would be at the same place in my writing “career” that I was three years ago. I sent a story to you once before, and although it was rejected I’m sending two more in before I hit the age limit. It’s going to be hard turning fourteen and realizing my chance to contribute to *Stone Soup* is over. But even if none of my work is accepted, thank you so much. It’s because of you that I’ve started entering contests and looking for places that publish teen work. It’s because of you that I will continue to grow in my writing, my artwork, and my poetry. Thank you so much, and thank you to all those wonderful authors, illustrators, and book reviewers out there! Your wonderful art is a pleasure to enjoy!

**Kinneret Katz, 13**

Valley Village, California

**I like your magazine** so much that I always dream of publishing my story there.

**Ray Huang, 10**

Vancouver, Washington



**Correction:** Here is the correct photo for Abigail D’Agosta, author of the poem “My Chicken” [Mar./Apr. 2013]. Our apologies, Abigail!

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*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](mailto:letters@stonesoup.com).





*Her voice was soft and it reminded me of wind chimes*

# The Ocean Child

By **Danielle Eagle**

*Illustrated by* **Saffron Lily Gunwhy**

**T**HE SUMMER CABIN was wonderful. We all thought so. It was white with blue trim around the windows and doors. The roof was gray like mist. I had been waiting all summer to visit this cabin, but it was the beach I was most eager to see.

My name is Jasmine, and I love the beach. I love the sound of the waves, finding empty shells on the sand, swimming. The pretty little cabin my parents, my little brother, and I were staying in was on the edge of a little forest, right near the beach. I would be able to go down every day!

When we arrived, I hauled my two bags into the cabin, helped my little brother, Cody, carry in his five, and then had to wait patiently while my parents slowly explored the cabin.

“So, Jasmine, Cody, do you want to have lunch first?” Mom asked.

“No thanks!” I said, then turned and ran out the door, onto the beach. The sand was unbelievably hot, so I leapt into the water. It was very, very cold. I stood there, shivering as I waded slightly deeper. Then I heard her voice.

“Is it cold?”

I turned around and saw a girl. She looked like she was my age, but she was really tall, at least three inches taller than me. She had light brown skin, like mine, and big gray-blue eyes. Her hair was black and really long. Wait, was there a breeze? I couldn’t feel one, but the girl’s hair was waving steadily, like the gentlest puff of wind was passing by.



Danielle Eagle, 13  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada



Saffron Lily Gunwhy, 13  
Ballina/Killaloe,  
County Tipperary, Ireland

"Is it cold?" she repeated. Her voice was soft and it reminded me of wind chimes.

"Um, yeah," I said, "it's pretty cold."

She nodded and put one foot into the waves. She kept wading in until she was farther in than I was. She was wearing jeans, but she didn't seem to mind getting them wet. She didn't bother pulling them up. She smiled. "Doesn't seem that cold to me," she said.

I stared at her. "You're kidding, right?" I asked.

The girl smiled and shook her head. We stood there for a while. I was shivering, while the girl just stared peacefully out to sea.

"Um," I said, wanting to hear the girl say something else, "so, what's your name?"

The girl cocked her head. "Does that matter?" she asked.

"Well, uh..." I stammered, unsure how to reply.

The girl shrugged and her hair slid over her shoulders. Was it shimmering? "But," the girl continued slowly, "you can call me Aqua." She nodded her head thoughtfully, like she thought her name sounded good. "Aqua..."

I saw her mouthing the word, as if she was trying it out.

"Aqua," I said, "that's a nice name. Mine is Jasmine."

The girl smiled, but didn't say anything.

I shifted my feet in the icy water. "I'm getting out of the water," I said. "Do you, um... want to look for shells with me?"

Aqua's gray-blue eyes lit up. "Yeah!" she said, and splashed to shore. "Come on." I followed Aqua out of the water. She was already holding a shell. "I found one," she said, gesturing to the shell. "Want it?"

I declined the offer, and Aqua settled the shell into her pocket.

All day we hunted for shells, smooth pebbles, beach glass, and driftwood. Aqua found the most of everything. Things just seemed to leap out at her, including a little green crab that practically jumped into her hand. It didn't pinch her or anything. It just scuttled up and down her wrist. Aqua laughed and set it back on the sand. After we were done hunting for shells and other treasures, we spread them on some big logs. Aqua started laying her stuff on the sand again, making intricate patterns.

"Maybe..." I said, "maybe you could come over and have a snack with my family? I can ask, if you want."

Aqua shrugged and smiled happily. "Sure," she said.

I stood up, brushed the sand off my knees, and started up to the cabin. "You can wait here, if you want," I said. "I'll just go and ask my parents."

Aqua nodded, trailing her fingers in the soft sand. I ran up to our little cabin and pushed the door open.

"Mom! Dad!" I called.

My mom pushed her head around the corner. "What?" she asked. "And if you're asking why we didn't come down to the beach, Cody jammed the peanut butter jar on his head. I don't know how, or why, but he did."



Yep. That sounded like my little brother. Last year, he got stuck under a bus seat.

"Um, well," I said, "I was going to ask if a girl I met could come here for a snack."

Mom nodded, "Oh sure. We almost have Cody's head free." She disappeared around the corner again.

I walked back down to the beach. "Hey, Aqua!" I called. "You can come over for a snack."

Aqua bounded over and smiled. She didn't say anything, as usual, but followed me back to the cabin. I introduced Aqua to my parents. Aqua didn't even ask about a half-empty peanut butter jar being thrown away or about a very peanut-buttery Cody, who joined us before being dismissed to wash his face.

After a while, Aqua said she had to go home. I watched her walk down the beach until she disappeared from sight. Aqua came over every day. She loved the beach even more than I did. She was nice, but I noticed even more weird things the more I got to know her. It always looked like she was in one of those weird shadows that you see underwater, and her hair was always moving, like it was being tugged by a steady current. She never talked much, and she was always ready to eat.

Things got weirder and weirder. One day, I found her with a little ring of seagulls all around her. She was talking to them, just like they were people. The seagulls cocked their heads and flapped their wings in response to everything that Aqua said. When I said, "Aqua? What are

you doing?" all of the seagulls flew away.

But Aqua was really fun. She always found pretty shells, she loved playing games, and she could swim like a seal. I'm serious. She was faster than an Olympic swimmer.

Then one day she didn't come to the beach.

"Aqua!" I yelled. "Aqua!" I was walking down the beach with Cody, shouting for Aqua.

"Why are you so frantic?" Cody asked. "She was kind of weird anyway."

"But she was fun," I protested, "and don't call anyone weird, it's not nice."

"OK, OK," Cody said, "but how about we..." Cody looked around for something to do. "How about we have a swimming competition? We're both wearing our bathing suits. Maybe one of us can actually win without Aqua around."

"Well," I looked around, "we haven't ever been swimming here..."

"Aw, please?" Cody begged. "Just one little race? I'm dying to have a fair chance at a race! Please?"

I looked out at the water. It seemed cool and inviting. "OK," I said, "but just one race."

"Yes!" Cody cheered. "Ready, set, go!"

Cody darted into the waves. I was close behind. It hadn't occurred to us to mark a spot to swim *to*, so I kept going for a while. After a while, I figured that I'd gone far enough, and I should go back. Then I felt the current tug on my legs. For a moment, nothing happened. Then I was wrenched under the water. I swam up, but

I didn't get anywhere. The current swirled me around madly. I clawed my way up. I broke the surface and gasped for breath and I heard Cody yelling from the beach. I tried to yell back, but I was yanked under again. I choked on the water. I had no more air in my lungs.

I'm going to die, I thought, I'm going to die. I closed my eyes.

For whatever reason, I started thinking about Aqua. I started seeing her blue-gray eyes in front of me. My eyes snapped open. Aqua's eyes *were* in front of me. Then I saw her body forming in front of me. Forming out of bubbles. Then she solidified. It was Aqua, right in front of me. But she was different. Her skin was tinged a greenish-blue, and her hair was a dark, dark green. She smiled at me, revealing sharp teeth. Her eyes were the same though. The exact same. But I had no more strength. Before I closed my eyes, I

saw Aqua's smile fade, and a look of concern flashed across her face. My eyes were closed, but I felt something push me up. I felt air on my face and, instinctively, I gasped for air. Something was still pushing me. No, Aqua was pushing me out of the current. She had no trouble pushing me out of the swirling water. She kept going until my feet touched the wet sand of the shallow water. I started crawling to the beach and felt Cody tugging my arm. I heard him yelling about something. As soon as I felt dry sand, I threw myself onto the ground.

"Just stay here, Jasmine!" Cody yelled. "I'll get Mom and Dad!" He ran off.

"Aqua?" I rasped. I heard the waves whisper something... What was it? I listened harder.

"You were saved by the child..." the waves said, "the Ocean Child."

Aqua... the Ocean Child.



# Ocean Beat

*By* **Ava Persinger**

I can hear waves crashing  
like drums.  
As they hit  
the strip of sand  
they leave behind a little crab.  
The tiny musician  
claps his claws together  
with such a tiny click  
that no one but I can hear it.  
Every piece of wind and sand  
dancing in rhythm to the salty spray  
of the ocean. Shells and tiny pebbles  
go clink, clink  
way down at the depths of the sea.  
No one  
can hear it  
but me.



Ava Persinger, 12  
Sebastopol, California



*Every note was a treasure, a gold flake making its way downstream*

# Moonlight Waltz

By Ella Staats

*Illustrated by Isabel Won*

“**K**ALIE, HAVE YOU PRACTICED your flute yet?” My mother’s voice squeezed under my bedroom door and rang in my ears. “Not yet...” I answered. I knew what was coming next.

“Well, do it now. Dinner’s in twenty minutes, and I know you want to watch TV before you go to bed, so you’d better get practicing or you’ll miss your program.”

I let out an exasperated sigh and slammed my book shut. I didn’t argue with her, but I wasn’t going to practice willingly either. See, both my parents are musicians. My mom’s a singer and plays a little piano. She’s been singing since she was a little girl. She had her first performance on open mike night at the Candy Bowl downtown when she was nine. Everybody loved her, and she made her first record when she was twenty-six. She met my father at the recording studio, playing guitar and mandolin for her song, “Bridge to Nowhere.” I’ve heard the story of how they fell in love so many times, I’ve memorized it by now. It always ends in the studio, with my mom telling me, “It was love at first sight, naturally. Eight years later we got married, right there in that studio on the very day my second album was released.” Then she and my dad exchange loving looks, and then she says the last line, which is the one I dread the most: “And now, here you are, going to carry on in our footsteps!”

But I think they got their hopes up a little too high. Because, to tell the truth, the one thing I hate most in the world is playing my flute. My parents decided that four was the appropriate



Ella Staats, 12  
Burlington, Vermont



Isabel Won, 13  
Belle Mead, New Jersey



age to get me started on an instrument, so they took me to a bunch of concerts with different instruments like guitars and pianos and violins and stuff. I think that the only reason I picked the flute was because that was the only concert I wasn't napping through.

It looked easy for the performers up there on stage. They just blew into their instrument and—*voilà!*—out came a chorus of beautiful, soothing tones. Unfortunately, playing the flute really isn't that easy. I couldn't get my lips into the right position, and even when I could, when I tried to blow a note, it came out sounding like, well, someone was blowing air through a piece of metal. Which is to say, incorrect.

My parents encouraged me throughout all my toil and tantrums. They never gave up hope in me, but sometimes I caught them exchanging worried glances back and forth. When I saw those glances I knew that I would never be good at the flute, no matter how hard I practiced. I would never perform on stage in front of an audience, and even if I got the chance, they would probably boo me off stage. Sorry, Mom, I thought sadly, sorry, Dad. I guess your daughter's just not turning out what you want her to be.

With a groan, I slouched off my bed and took my flute case down from the shelf. I opened it up, rubbed the red velvet lining for good luck like always, and then took out the shiny silver pieces of my flute and carefully assembled them. Then I went and stood in the corner of

my room reserved for practicing, ignoring the numerous posters of famous musicians I barely knew the names of, all of them wearing weird-looking wigs, with slogans like, "Beethoven Would Have Applauded for You!" I snorted. Fat chance.

I stood in front of my music stand and flipped through my book of tunes. I scanned the pages, reading the names off out loud. "Sweetwater Serenade," "Angel Promenade," "Fairy Ring," "The Velvet Slipper Tune." I had attempted to play them all, failing each one worse than the last. Finally, I decided on "The Velvet Slipper Tune," just to get it over with and because it looked like it had the easiest notes.

I raised the cold metal of the flute to my lips and tentatively blew the first note. It sounded too breathy and kind of high pitched. Whoops, I had gotten the fingering wrong. Frustrated, I positioned my fingers right and began to play the tune, greatly aware of the fact that I sounded a bit sharp. Who cared? Not me. Not bothering to fix the problem, I played on. The end of the piece was a little wobbly, but whatever. There. It was over with. And just in time, too.

"Ka-lie! Din-ner!" my mom called up the stairs. She rapped on the ceiling below my bedroom with the broom handle, then fell silent.

I hastily disassembled my flute and tucked it away in my case, rubbing the velvet as customary. Shoving the case back on the shelf, I clomped downstairs and into the kitchen, where my mom was



*“Would you like to give us a concert after dinner?”*

just serving my dad chicken pot pie.

I plopped down in my seat and spread out a napkin in my lap. I held out my plate expectantly, and my mom put a piece of pie on it. I stuffed my face and washed it down with milk, and had already finished my first piece by the time my parents were halfway through theirs.

“How did practicing go?” my dad asked expectantly, as he always did during dinner.

“Oh, fine, you know,” I said, serving myself another piece of pie. But it hadn’t been fine, and I had a feeling he knew it.

“Would you like to give us a concert after dinner?” my mom asked, daintily spearing a piece of chicken on her fork. It wasn’t just a question, that much I knew. It was my doom. Guiltily, I nodded. Just wait until they heard how awful I was, not that they didn’t already know. But every

time I played for them, sounding just as terrible as the last time they had heard me, their disappointed expressions made me more and more sure that I would never live up to their expectations.

I TRIED TO MAKE dinner drag on forever, but after my fourth piece of pie, I was getting pretty full. I didn't even bother trying to eat the rich and spongy chocolate cake my mom had brought home, left over from lunch at the studio. Even if I hadn't been gorged on pie, I don't think I would have had the appetite for it anyway. Finally, all the plates had been cleared and washed, and I knew it was time for me to show off the fact that I had no talent for music whatsoever.

My parents settled down on the leather couch in the living room, hands folded on their laps, while I went upstairs to get my flute and my music ready. When I came back down, arms loaded with my stand, book, and flute case, my mom had her camera out, ready to videotape my performance. The video wouldn't have much to show, that much I knew.

I set up my stand and opened my music to "The Velvet Slipper Tune," smiling nervously at my audience. Even though it was just my mom and dad, I had bullfrogs hopping around in my stomach. Imagine how awful it would be if I was in front of a whole crowd of people!

I readied my flute and took a deep breath. I glanced out at my parents one more time. They were smiling, but I knew they wouldn't be by the end of my

performance. The red light on my mom's camera was flashing, capturing the whole thing on tape. It's now or never, I told myself, and then nervously began the tune. Unfortunately, practicing it hadn't made me at all better. This time, instead of sharp, it was flat, and I lost my breath and cracked in odd places where I wasn't supposed to breathe. And I played the last four measures in a different key than the rest of the song, a major embarrassment!

I slowly set down my flute on the stand, not daring to look up at my mom and dad. But curiosity forced me to. They weren't clapping. They were just looking at me, their expressions clearly stating that I had let them down. My mom turned off her camera. Then, like they thought I couldn't see them, they exchanged glances. Not excited, happy glances, disappointed ones, like they were thinking, I can't believe this girl is our daughter. Guilt settled over me like a lead blanket that I couldn't shake off. I felt tears welling up in my eyes. I couldn't look directly at them.

"Honey, I think maybe you should go practice some more," my mom said finally.

Unable to form words, I just nodded mutely. My lower lip quivered. Then, for no reason, I grabbed my flute, my stand, and my book and turned and fled out the back door. Why, I had no idea. I just wanted to be outside with nature right now, even if it was pitch dark. Neither my mom nor my dad protested.

Outside, the spring air was warm with a dewy feel to it. I could make out the shad-

ow of the old elm tree, and the silhouettes of the tall flower stalks swaying slightly in the breeze. The calm wind rippled my auburn hair and brushed gently against my freckled face like the comforting hand of a mother on her child's cheek. There was no sound of the nighttime animals; it was completely silent. The only light came from the full, round moon and the glittering stars. The moon was more beautiful than I had ever seen in my life, shedding silver light down on the world.

I wouldn't have been able to see my music, set up on the stand in the middle of the yard, if it wasn't for the glow of the moon. I reached out and flipped to a random page of my music book I had never seen before. The tune was called "Moonlight Waltz." Perfect.

I took a calm, deep breath. I felt completely at peace, more relaxed than I had ever been before when playing music. Somehow, that reassured me as I pressed my flute to my lips. Then, without thinking, I blew the first note. To my surprise, it came out sounding clean and crisp. Encouraged, I blew a whole measure. Mesmerizing music floated into the air and was whisked away on the breeze.

I flowed through the rest of the piece like a steady, crystal river. Every note was a treasure, a gold flake making its way downstream. And this time, there was no one there to be desperately mining out those flakes, depriving the river of its true beauty.

I closed my eyes and played the piece again. It was just as good as the first


time, rich, clean musical tones overflowing from my lips. Not wanting to break the spell of awe that had fallen over me, I didn't attempt any other tunes. At least not for now. Maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day. Maybe never. But I knew now that I would always be satisfied with my playing, because this night taught me that I could. Even if the rest of my musical career went downhill, tonight would be a night that would keep me from despair.

I was smiling brighter than the full moon as I picked up my stand, music, and flute and started back towards the house. Then I stopped dead. There were my mom and dad, standing on the back porch, arm in arm. They had been watching me the whole time. I was sure they were going to have those heartbreaking looks on their faces, and I confirmed my dread when I saw tears in my mom's eyes. But... the corners of her mouth were upturned in pure happiness. My dad was grinning. They weren't mad, they were proud. They held out their arms to me, and I ran into them, overflowing with joy.

"We knew you had it in you," my dad told me, holding me tight and ruffling my hair.

"It was there the whole time. But it can't be forced out of you," my mom whispered. "It's untamable, wild. It just has to be set free."

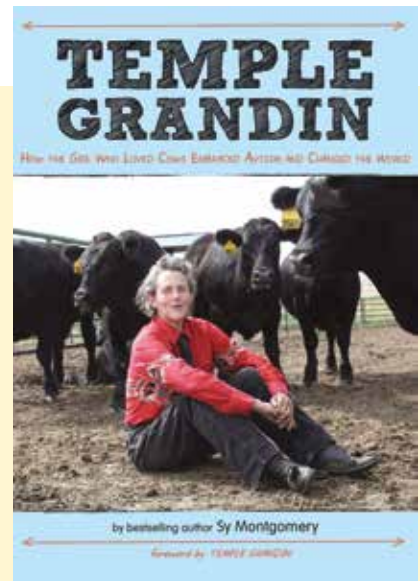
"I know," I whispered back.

I peered out back at the glowing orb in the sky. The Old Man in the Moon almost seemed to be smiling. 

# Book Review

By Richard Ma

*Temple Grandin*, by Sy Montgomery;  
Houghton Mifflin Books for Children:  
New York, 2012; \$17.99



Richard Ma, 11  
Kirksville, Missouri

THE WORLD IS not always a friendly place for people who think different. Temple Grandin thinks in pictures instead of words. She was unaware for a long time that her way of thinking was unlike that of others. As a young child she would have tantrums because she was frustrated that she could not communicate with others through words. Noises such as the ringing of the school bell were too loud for Temple, who was an autistic child. Many people thought she was retarded, including her father. Today she is a famous animal science professor and one of the most influential people in the livestock industry. *Temple Grandin*, a biography by Sy Montgomery, is about the journey of this remarkable woman from autistic child to successful professional living a great life.

As a child Temple found solace in doing what she calls “geeking out.” She did things that she enjoyed, and that’s how she found her friends. I think that’s a good way to make friends. You don’t need to worry about finding them, chasing after those that you want to be friends with. They come naturally. I remember I always followed a kid around the playground when I was in preschool. He was nice enough, but he didn’t seem to notice me.




Now, in middle school, I don't go looking for friends. I know that I can find friendship through things I enjoy.

Temple felt most at ease with animals, particularly cows. She discovered that she calmed down around cows, and the feeling was mutual. When she grew up she decided to pursue a career in improving living conditions for animals that would be used for our food. As an autistic person Temple was able to perceive what bothered the animals and, using her picture thinking, designed more comfortable accommodations for them.

Her animal-science professor vetoed her research idea for studying animal behaviors in different facilities. Instead of feeling trapped and not knowing what to do, Temple asked for help from the construction and industrial design department. She succeeded. This ability to rise from rejection and keep going impressed me. She didn't spend any time feeling stuck, and just knocked on a different door. This shows that Temple is a flexible person, and being flexible means you won't snap.

Temple was able to succeed because she had determination. She was able to focus intensely on things she was passionate about. This trait is common among great achievers throughout history. If one has the resolve, that person can surpass all obstacles, overcome impossible odds, and triumph. I think that is the key to success, even for kids. I have maintained my focus and determination to do well, and it has paid off.

Temple is a perfect example of a person who looks on the bright side of things. Instead of lamenting about her differences due to autism, she uses them to her advantage. I deeply admire that attitude. *Temple Grandin* is a great book that I hope you will read. Following Temple's journey you will feel happy for her successes and be inspired to do great things. 

# Furious Fire

By Sadie Robb

Illustrated by Sophie Uluatam



Sadie Robb, 13  
The Woodlands, Texas

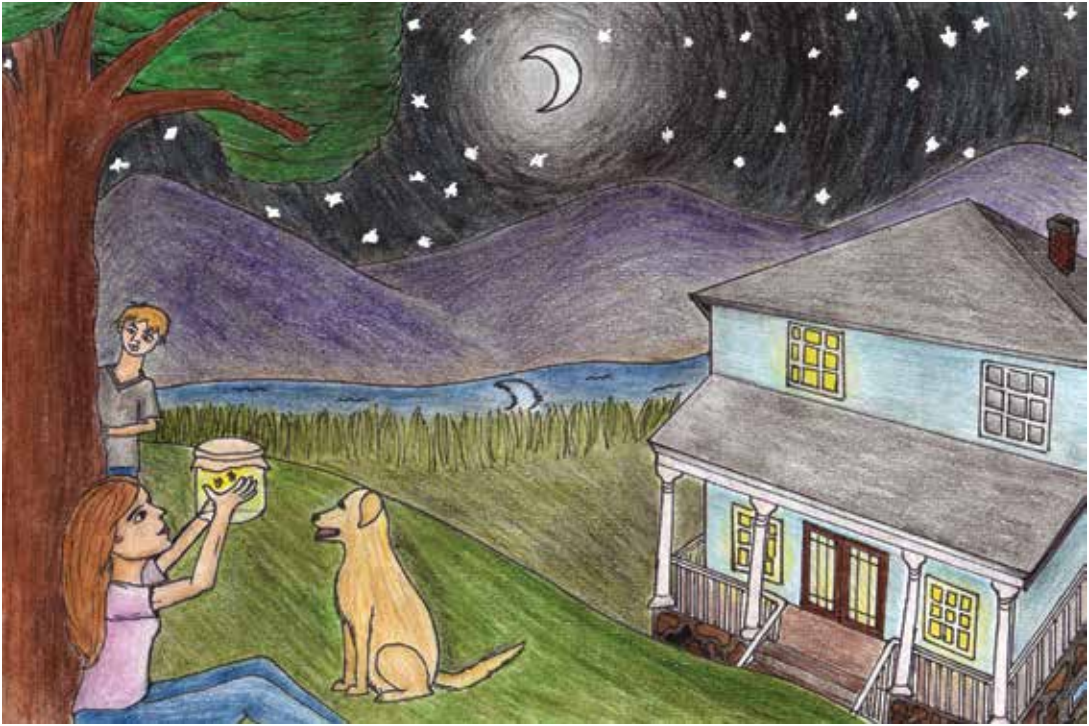


Sophie Uluatam, 13  
Andover, Massachusetts

SCARS ARE A PART of you; they never go away. All scars have a story. Whether it's funny, sad, or scary—the story's always there. My scar's story is one of pain and despair; a story in which fears are faced and lessons are learned, all from one little spark.

Our summer stays at my family's beautiful country home were always my favorite part of the year. The old house had the perfect mix of chaos and comfort. When I close my eyes, memories of summers past flood my mind. The smell of the wet grass in the morning, every single blade glistening with dew. The cheerful chirps of the birds at dawn and the sound of their peaceful coos in the evening. In the summer we ran around outside catching fireflies and fell asleep while gazing at the stars. So many traditions turned to dust that one dreadful night.

I can remember it like it was yesterday. The bright lights, the soft warm glow, the horrible burning in my throat. It was the last day of summer and the sun was beginning to go down. I had decided to go to bed early, tired from a long, glorious day. I was sound asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow. Dreams of vast green meadows surrounded me in my tranquil slumber. Then I heard the barking... the screams. I sat bolt upright, scrambling frantically out of bed. As I reached out to open my bedroom door, I jumped back and yelled in pain. *Why was my door handle burning hot?* I used the sleeve of my nightgown this time and flung open the door. Immediately, a burst of hot air and ash blew into my face. My eyes filled up with



*When I close my eyes, memories of summers past flood my mind*

tears as I took in the sight in front of me. My house, the house I had lived in my whole life, was on fire. Bursts of red, orange, and yellow swirled around me as I stumbled about, lost with no direction. At that moment, one question was repeating in my mind like a broken record. *Where was my family?* I coughed, having trouble breathing through all the smoke. Tears were cascading down my face; I felt like a piece of me had been torn away. My elbow hit something hot and I realized it was a door handle. I grabbed it and yanked it open, not caring about how much it burned. I stumbled outside into the open air and collapsed. Shouts filled the air and I heard running footsteps. A

pair of warm hands lifted me up and embraced me. I looked up into the pained face of my mother, her eyes reflecting how I felt. Hugging her back, I looked up at our house just in time to see it collapse. It was gone, and with it was a piece of my heart.

Scars don't go away. You can learn how to forget a scar and pretend it never existed, but it will still be there in the back of your mind, holding a painful memory. That night I received my first scar and, unfortunately, not my last. I learned that sometimes the most important piece of your life will be taken away, for reasons unknown. But it's not the piece you need; it's the memories. 🍀

# Sleep

By Sarah Welch



Sarah Welch, 11  
Elgin, Illinois

The air is thick  
The leaky faucet in grandma's bathtub is going drip, plop,  
drip, plop  
There is a small glimpse of light coming from the crack  
in my door  
My bed feels so big  
Like I would need one thousand me's, five-foot me's  
To fill the bed  
The air suddenly becomes thinner  
The faucet stops dripping for a second  
And I simply fall asleep.

# Dawn

*By* Alyssa Cho

Silver mist lingering in the air  
The sky streaked in warm shades  
Melting pink, yellow, orange

The sun shyly peeks  
From behind the grand mountains  
And brings back the warmth  
Stolen by the night

The stars vanish  
Like bright candles blowing out  
And Earth is brought back to life  
By the call of the waking birds

What great joy it brings  
To watch the world awaken.



Alyssa Cho, 12  
San Diego, California





*You wouldn't think that two girls who were so different could become friends*

# Magical Words

By **Elise Arancio**

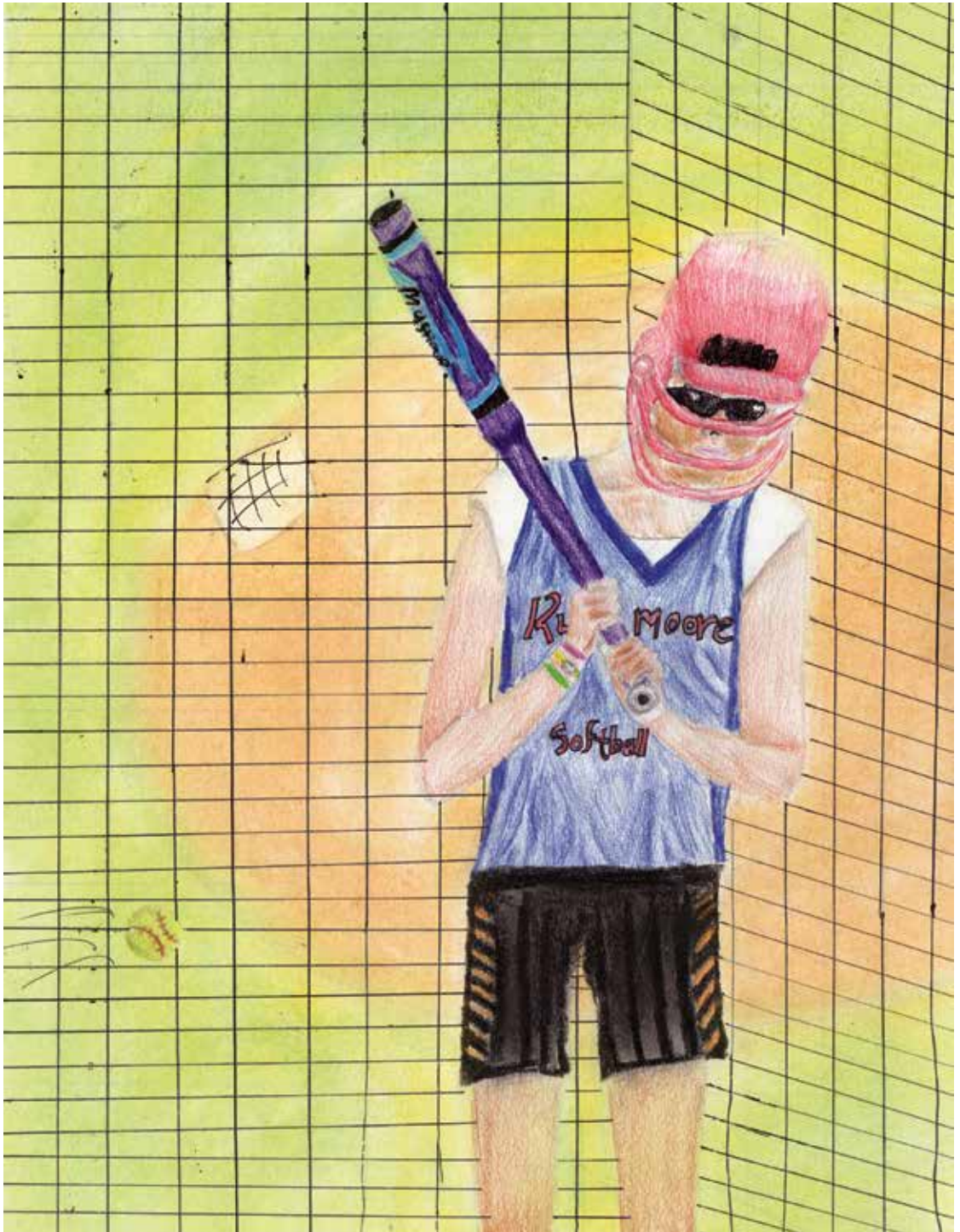
*Illustrated by the author*

**Y**OU WOULDN'T THINK that two girls who were so different could become friends, but somehow, Litzy and I did.

I rubbed my eyes with sleepy fingers as I stared into the mirror. An eleven-year-old girl with dark eyes and wild, unkempt dark hair stared dauntlessly back. I took a deep breath and braced myself for the hurricane of T-shirts, arms, cereal boxes, and chaos below, which came with my six rowdy brothers. I let another yawn slip out and stealthily tiptoed onto the stairwell. The floorboards beneath the carpet announced my arrival with an insolent groan, as six boyish faces glanced up nonchalantly and then went plunging back into their cereal bowls. My nose tingled from the spicy aroma of burnt toast and coffee wafting in the air. As I galloped down the stairs, a bright red soccer jersey greeted me unpleasantly in the face. Ignacio grabbed it off and tugged it over his wild wig of hair inside out and backwards. He grunted and shrugged while he shouldered his soccer bag. As little Tomasito clung to my leg, I staggered and clumped over to the hectic breakfast table. My brothers haphazardly stuffed themselves with their breakfast, and I challenged Juanico to the last piece of toast and grabbed a bowl and beat Antonio to the last of the Cheerios. I plopped down into my disarrayed breakfast corner and hurriedly devoured my meal. Then I raced upstairs, threw my blue softball clothes on, raked a comb through my hair, tugged it back into a ponytail, and then raced back down again to snatch up my bag and hug my mom and dad.



Elise Arancio, 11  
Tucker, Georgia



*This isn't right! my mind screamed at me as I missed the next five balls*



*“Qué tenga mucha prisa! ¿no?”\** Antonio muttered, his head turned.

“Well, I have to hurry if I don’t want to be late, don’t I?” I replied.

“I guess,” the seven-year-old sighed back.

Smiling and waving, I exited the house right after my mom called, “Have a great first practice, Ileana, sweetheart!”

I jumped out the burgundy door, my cleats clattering noisily on the brick, and closed it behind me before Tomasito could catch me. I excitedly ran down the brick steps, my cleats singing *clack, clack, clack*. Then I paused and inhaled. The warm summer breeze greeted me like an old friend and buried me in its embrace. I shut my eyes and was enveloped in the hushing softness of the leaves rustling in the wind and the melodic symphony of the birds above. Another gust of wind brought the beautiful scent of Mother Nature blossoming into my nose. I reluctantly opened my eyes and slowly mounted my red bike (of course, another hand-me-down). Contented, I rode happily on, savoring the rare bit of placidness, listening to the soft whirr of the gears and the sweet, shrill calls of the robins. I meandered off the road onto a gravelly bike path leading up to Rushmoore Park and beamed at the feeling of intimacy and friendliness I felt as I parked my bike and locked it in. I lay my red helmet on the handlebar and crunched my way down the long, sloping hill to Field Three. I took a deep breath and strapped on my soft leather batting gloves. Somewhere inside

I knew I was a born hitter—when I was little, I used to get angry and upset with my brothers, and I would step out in my backyard and beat on the dead trees with a baseball bat, letting the dam of anger break. It felt natural to me. I shook my shaggy ponytail, washing away the memory, and glanced down at some giggly blond girls wearing short shorts and tank tops, who were posing dramatically in a mirror while layering on lip gloss. A feeling of shame washed over me as I sighed and frowned. Growing up around six boys, I was a pure tomboy. I wore sleek gym shorts and hand-me-down T-shirts mostly every day at school, and I didn’t like silly, frivolous items such as lip gloss and tank tops.

I quickly emptied my head as I heaved my bright red helmet and purple (I know, I know, not so boyish) bat out of my bag and crawled through the net into the batting cage. I smiled knowingly and plopped the twelve-inch balls into the bucket one by one. I stepped into my batting position and felt right at ease as I gracefully slung my bat through the air. The first ball rocketed by. The coach barked out an instruction. No, I said in my mind, this isn’t how I do it, and he’s wrong, but I grudgingly obeyed. The second one whizzed past me. This isn’t right! my mind screamed at me as I missed the next five balls. I could feel my cheeks burning and my eyes filling, and I blinked hard and felt the heat on my shoulders

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\* “You sure are in a hurry, aren’t you?”

soak into my skin. Coach fired out more orders as sweat slid lazily down my cheek. I could hear my brothers taunting me and yelling in the background, now that they had apparently finished breakfast. Anger was slowly boiling up inside of me as a dozen more balls slipped mockingly out of my reach. A tear slipped menacingly down my cheek and I yelled, No more! inside me, until I powered a ball right over Coach's head. My heart danced a little jig and I wiped away a tear.

"Last one!" I heard him call, and it seemed to race past me like a cheetah on fire. What did the coach think of me? my mind buzzed, did he know I was the best hitter on the team in U-10? What if he doesn't think I'm good enough? I attempted fiercely to hide my humiliation, but I reluctantly picked up balls which felt as if they weighed ten pounds each. I looked away as Coach handed me my bat, which hung heavily and clumsily on the precipice of my hand, as I hid my face and he lectured to me until I gratefully stepped out into a hidden grassy area covered by a scraggly tree. I glanced around the laughing and chattering girls as I wore a look of sheer anguish. I could feel the hot and bitter tears rushing down my cheeks and over my eyelids like a waterfall as I vainly tried to steady the dam that held them in. The sun was beating down on me insistently, and my head ached and pounded as the wind gusted dirt into my face. I felt weighed down (like a rock) with emotions, but the thing that tugged on my heart the most was loneliness. I

couldn't help feeling that no one was there for me. I finally collapsed on the dry, sun-burned grass and broke the dam.

I thought I would never get up, until a comforting voice pulled me out of my puddle of sadness. I started to look up, but the taunting voices of my brothers curled me back down into a miserable ball. I distantly felt a soft touch on my shoulder and a more persistent voice call out, "Do you need a partner?"

I hesitantly raised my eyes, searching for the owner of the voice and blinking in the sunlight. I distantly heard the coach shouting for us to warm up our arms with a partner. My hollow, sorrowful eyes met cheerful blue ones and then a smiling, hopeful face. Suddenly, I felt a spark of hope light up inside of me and I could faintly feel my face magically spreading into a smile. She held out a beckoning hand and smiled invitingly. I couldn't resist and took it as she heaved me up and my wobbly legs steadied. She handed me my glove and ball and took me by the arm into the dugout. I don't think I had ever felt so wonderful and accepted in my life. We chattered and laughed like old friends and I felt a certain giddiness, unknown to me in the past. Now I gently caressed my glove, stroking and smelling the beautiful, wholesome smell of black leather, as my now sparkling eyes rested on the whirlwind-like scene of girls throwing the balls and joking with each other blissfully. The feel of the ball covered in gritty dirt in my hands as I flicked my wrist at my side to blast my pitch into Litzy's glove



exhilarated me. The smooth and graceful windup of my pitches and my release sent a thrill of joy vibrating through me. I felt the wind fly against my cheeks as I sailed from base to base, and the feeling of my bat slamming into the ball and sending it into the outfield pounded in my heart and felt as natural to me as vegetables in a garden. But the thing that I loved most was having a friend finally cheering me on from behind the mask of the clumsy catcher's gear.

At the end of practice, we played a game called Red Hot Pepper. We lined up facing our opponents, as Coach Shaft drew a line. We threw the ball as hard as we could on the ground for a powerful ground ball while we shouted out a subject or question for the person to answer about themselves. If they miss the ball, they have to answer the question about themselves. If the ball gets captured by their glove, then you have to answer your own question out loud. When the coach blows the whistle, whoever has the most information about the other team's players wins the game.

"Books!" I shouted, slamming down the ball. Aerial reached out her glove hand and the ball went whizzing past her auburn hair.


"Am-merican Girl," she stammered as her cheeks burned. I smiled at her encouragingly as the ball was sent back to Aerial.

"Food," she squeaked, giving the ball a fast ticket to my glove. I chomped down on it with ease.

"Mexican casserole," she answered, her cheeks burning as red as Ignacio's soccer jersey. Then she sent the ball to Ana, inquiring what her favorite dance was. Startled, Ana clumsily twirled and kicked the ball with her heel.

"Ballet?" Aerial and I guessed, and we all laughed.

Then she sent the ball to Litzy, who wasn't paying attention and had to merrily shout out, "Christmas!"

When the ball came to me, I answered lime green as my favorite color. During the game, I noticed how different I was from Litzy. She likes pink, is an adopted only child, loves dancing, art, and has a passion for baking, while I would take Taco Bell or Enzo's any time, playing soccer with my brothers, and doing anything with crafts or twiddling around with a ball. At the piercing sound of the whistle, my teammates cheered for victory and I saw Litzy walking over to me with a big smile on her face. I grinned back and thought, I never knew how much the words "do you need a partner" sparkled in my ears and how beautiful they made life seem. Smiling, arm in arm, we walked over to Aerial and asked her the magical question. I will never be able to describe the rich, warm feeling it gave me to see her face slowly illuminate with joy. 



*Jack looked up at me with longing eyes that shimmered in the moonlight*

# Wolf in the Woods

By Kira Householder

*Illustrated by Jungwon Choi*

MOM AND DAD were asleep. I had to wait a whole three hours after I went to my bedroom to sneak downstairs. Who knew that after kids fall asleep, parents stay up until midnight?

Sprinting down the path, my mind wandered to Jack. He would be upset that I was late but happy I had brought him the meat he requested. I got to the edge of a grove of trees and slowed my pace. Twice I looked over my shoulder to see if anybody was there, but all that was near was the glittering full moon. I looked onward. Standing before me were countless towering oak trees that looked slanted as I advanced through the forest. The night sky stood there, too, the darkest of all blacks, providing no light but that of the moon's for me to travel under. The unusually hushed evening made me jump at every little rustling I heard in the bushes, every occasional whistle of the wind. Yet I still had a sense of security knowing that Jack was near. He would never let a fly harm me after all I've done for him.

Weaving through trees and overgrown weeds, I drew closer to the cave. Sliding the steak from my messenger bag, I whistled our call. My friend crept from a shadow within his nook as soon as I summoned him. I managed a meek grin of greeting at my furry companion. Then I gave him the meat. Jack bowed his head in respect. I stood watching him scarf down the pink, juicy steak until my legs got impatient and I sat. Jack, oblivious to me, finished his meal and looked up at me with longing eyes that shimmered in the moonlight.



Kira Householder, 11  
Scottsdale, Arizona



Jungwon Choi, 12  
Seoul, Korea

"I know you want more," I told him sincerely. "I swear, I tried. But Mom would realize if I took more. I can't have that happen after last time. She got suspicious of you." But he continued to beg, so I gave him half of the crackers meant for me and kept the rest for myself. We both nibbled and stared at the ground in silence.

When we were finished, he came closer to snuggle up. That was when I realized just how frigid it was. Ice littered the ground. Jack's luscious fur provided me with warmth when we both settled down. Soon Jack was snoring in a slow rhythm. I arranged a bed of fertile grass and flower buds with a patch of soft, green moss as a pillow. Jack and I were so close that he delivered heat as well as a blanket. I stared into my wolf friend's tranquil face as he snoozed. The timber wolf had faded, thick, black fur with streaks of white. When I stroked him, layers of hair were swept off his coat. As for his facial features, his snout was slender and his teeth still razor-sharp as they'd never been used to fight, hunt, or even bite. The teeth were very misleading but made up for with those forgiving, ocean-blue eyes that stood out most of all. He was about seven years old and particularly decrepit, but whatever his disorder, whatever his looks, I loved him for who he was.

It was as if he understood English; when I talked to him, he'd nod or bow and always behaved himself properly. He was my protector. Under my breath I whispered to myself, *I, Rose Lengton, will always*

*care for and love this wolf with all my heart.*

Six years ago, when I was seven myself, I found and raised him. He had never been shown how to hunt, so I brought him food and showed him where to find water and shelter. Every day after school I'd meet him in the woods to play, sleep, and care for him. On weekends like today, I go to Jack at night without letting Mom and Dad know, of course. They'd ground me forever if they discovered I was fostering a wolf without their supervision. I had been caring for the dejected wolf ever since he had been abandoned as a pup.

Soon enough I fell soundly asleep, although I had horrific nightmares about wars and death. I was awakened by Jack's nuzzling to comfort me. I felt relieved... until he alerted me with a flash of panic in his eyes that our worst fear had been realized. It was morning, and I hadn't returned home. My parents would be worried. I snatched my bag, waved goodbye to Jack, and darted through the clearing. I got a glance of a bundle of fur that looked oddly like Jack's. The sun crept up way high into the sky from behind the horizon, I noted. Not good; my parents ought to have been awake already; I sped up. Mom and Dad were waiting for me at the dining table at home.

"Rose! There you are," cried Mom.

"We were so scared for you," my dad told me sweetly. I looked from him to my mother, unsure of what to say, and uneasy about their looks. *Did they know? They couldn't have.*

"So," she continued, "explain yourself."

She put her hands on her hips, waiting for my response.

"I-I, uh..." What should I have said? Should I've told her the truth about Jack? I had to keep him safe. On the other hand, I'd never fibbed before for no good reason. "Well, um, you see," I started, but I couldn't lie. "I've sort of been taking care of a wolf for a few years in the woods, and I was out visiting him," I blurted out. Bracing myself. Waiting for the punishment, for the lecture. But none came. All my parents did was laugh, as if I were joking. I didn't try to convince them any further.

"Whatever," I said, and went upstairs to my bedroom. They were still chuckling.

THE FOLLOWING Sunday morning everybody ate in silence. I wasn't permitted to go anywhere for two days for "running off so suddenly at night." I suppose my parents figured it was just a dramatic teenager phase of mine and I was trying to get attention. Anyway, I didn't get to see Jack at all during my punishment, the longest amount of time we've ever been apart. On Tuesday afternoon, after several monotonous hours, I was bailed out of my jail cell. I told my parents I was going into the forest to collect specimens for science class; we were studying plants and herbs.

I tore across the woods to meet Jack, who was waiting for me by the trunk of a tree.

"Hey, buddy!" I cried jubilantly, and tickled him behind his ears. He stalked

around me in circles, much like a cat. And when I squatted on the ground, somehow he wedged himself into my arms, so I caressed him while humming a soothing tune.

After a short rest, I explained to him why I hadn't been able to visit for the past few days. Jack appeared to listen contentedly. The wolf gobbled up his food and inhaled the water I brought him. We started skipping around and soon we were playing a game of tag. I shrieked giddily while Jack chased me through the trees.

Tuckered out, both of us went back to the clearing. It was about time for me to go. I put Jack's paws up on my shoulders.

"That was fun, wasn't it, boy? Well, I have to go. I'll try to come see you tomorrow," I said sorrowfully and then slunk away.

THE NEXT DAY Mr. Scott assigned us bucket loads of homework and Dad wouldn't let me go anywhere until I completed it. I sat down in the living room with my final piece of homework, a spelling worksheet. Fidgeting, I stole a glance at the clock. Four fifty. I wouldn't have time to see Jack at this rate.

*Focus, Rose. Focus.* How many syllables does "acceptable" have? *Think!* I hurried on, probably missing half of the questions. One left to finish. And... done! I shoved my work into my folder and dashed...

"Dinner," called Mom from the kitchen. I groaned but managed to get through finishing half of my supper before I no-





*She didn't look angry, in fact, she was grinning*

ticed the sun disappearing from view out the window.

“Dad, do you have the time?”

“Five forty, sport. Why? You going somewhere?”

“I...” I started, but my mother interrupted.

“You’re not going anywhere. Early bedtime tonight. Church tomorrow morning.”

*I totally forgot!* Tomorrow was Thursday, and, like every week, I had to miss the first hour of school to go to *church*. I moaned but reluctantly went upstairs and crawled into bed.

WHEN I SNUCK off to the woods after school on Thursday, something didn’t seem quite right. What was it? The fact that there was no moon? The unusual silence passing through the trees. Or was it... the scent? Then the smell of fire wafted through the air. *A forest fire!* I thought in panic. My heart nearly leaped out of my chest when my eyes wandered to Jack who, wedged under a boulder, was being crushed. He shot me a look of such helplessness. He needed me. I ran as fast as I could through the flames, but not fast enough. A wave of fire swept over Jack’s

boulder, and I fled. It was too late.

That evening after the firefighters came as I trudged home, I caught a glimpse of a constellation similar to Jack’s beautiful face. It especially caught me off guard when I saw Mom standing on the porch. She didn’t look angry, in fact, she was grinning.

When I got to the house, I told her everything—or at least started to, but I needn’t have continued. She told me that after she heard about the wildfire, a neighbor had called her up and informed her that I was safe. I told her of Jack, too, and this time, she believed me.

At dinner, Mom said she had a surprise for me. I followed her out to the barn. And you can just imagine my shock when she handed me a wolf-dog pup. And how she resembled her father; his eyes, his fur. He must have bred with one of the feral dogs in the woods. A smile spread across my face. I loved that wolf-dog. I cared for her for as long as the skies were blue and the grass grew. And the pup was as protective and loyal as her father.

That loyal wolf-dog pup will forever be known as Dani, Daughter of the Wolf in the Woods. 

# The City

By Hazel Wechsler



Hazel Wechsler, 13  
Boonsboro, Maryland

Over the drone of the fan,  
I heard something,  
a lilting chord of circus music.  
My mother continued muttering into the phone,  
but my sister heard it, too.  
Her eyes lit up with an idea.

Suddenly, the air was heavy  
with the exhaust of golden air ships.

The rusty rabbit cage  
was rising,  
spiraling into  
the steel skeleton of a skyscraper.  
The trees grew bricks  
and sprouted grimy windows.

And the lilac bush  
was a half-mad hypnotist,  
hunched into the shape  
of, yes, a bush.  
A grasshopper was no ordinary insect,  
but a mechanical spy  
of the city's tyrannical king.

The stories wormed through our heads,  
until reality had a mask  
of dusty alleyways and circuses.  
My sister's face morphed a thousand times,  
into thieves and goblins,  
magicians and merchants,  
the citizens  
of the world  
that we built,  
together.

Then our mom called for us,  
we noticed the moon overhead.  
The city shrunk back  
to its mundane foundation.

Now, as my sister texts and studies,  
I walk the empty streets of the twilight city.





*We threw back our heads and sang like the bluebirds*



# In My Own Backyard

By **Melissa Birchfield**

*Illustrated by Abby King*

**T**HE FIRST DAY of summer vacation, I made a beeline for the library. I checked out as many books as I could and trudged home with a bulging book bag. Swinging open the front door, I dove for the couch. I slung my book bag off my aching shoulder and rummaged inside it, retrieving the first book I touched. With barely a glance at the cover, I curled up on the couch and launched into the story. My eyes scanned the pages, reading a mile a minute. Occasionally, I would note a new word, jot it down in my memory, or measure the length of each chapter.

My goal for the summer was to read 200 books. It wasn't some library competition, or a summer reading list my English teacher gave me. It might sound weird, but I came up with it myself. Yep, while all the other kids were playing their summer away, I would be doing something productive for a change. It wasn't just because I had had to read so many boring history books during the school year that I didn't have time to read for fun. I did have free time. But I had used it writing stories of my own. You see, I also had a longtime goal: to be a famous novelist. And I figured that starting as a kid was as good a time as any. Actually, I had a secret goal: to be one of the *youngest* famous novelists: Nina Rupert, world-renowned novelist at age ten. I had decided a long time ago not to tell anybody about it just in case it didn't work out and I ended up not writing novels until I was older. And from the looks of things, it sure seemed that way. All the stories I had written did not have endings.



Melissa Birchfield, 13  
Clemson, South Carolina



Abby King, 13  
San Jose, California

No plots. Just characters and settings. Anyway, I had heard somewhere that one of the keys to good writing is to read a lot. So that's what I decided to do. I put away all my notebooks with beginnings of fabulous stories about people stuck at the top of a highly active volcano, or dolphins swimming happily in coral reefs, or people merrily tilling the land in a medieval kingdom. The description parts were spectacular, and everything was utterly elegant. It drew the reader in to see what happened next, but the unfortunate thing was that I had no idea what *was* going to happen. So, as I already said, I stashed all the notebooks up on my closet shelf with the resolution to read 200 books during the summer. I had a firm belief that reading all those books would help me develop satisfactory stories.

So there I was, getting a head start. The first week flew by fairly well, and I read about one book a day. My list of new vocabulary words grew minute by minute.

Then Hilary came.

She came one bright, breezy day, all breathless with the joy of being alive. Of course, I didn't really notice, because I was deep in the land of giants and dragons, and a mysterious wizard with a hidden secret.

Wind-blown strawberry-blond hair in a messy ponytail, dancing hazel eyes behind purple-rimmed glasses, and a spattering of freckles. That was Hilary. She was my cousin, two-and-a-half years younger than I.

She came to stay for the summer. Her

mother had just had twins, and her parents had decided that it would be better for both her and them if she stayed with us, the nearest relatives, for a while.

I didn't mind her being with us, as long as she did not interrupt my strict reading schedule, which was basically from waking up until breakfast, then from breakfast to lunch, and from lunch to dinner. If I had time, I squeezed in a few extra minutes before bed. In short, I read all the time.

Hilary never complained, about being homesick, or being lonely, or even not liking the squash casserole my mother made. Not once. Instead, every day, she would disappear outside. I didn't know what she was doing, but every time she skipped back in, her face was all aglow and she smelled like the grass. She had an odd, peculiar way of looking at things. I guess the best word for her would be "queer."

"The cat who lives across the street climbed into my lap today!" she would say. "His fur felt like silk and was as smooth and cool as a slice of honeydew, only not so wet."

"Did you see the clouds, Nina? They're so fluffy, like whipped cream."

"Come see the dewdrops, Nina! The whole neighborhood is sparkling like my sequined shirt, only better!"

"The crepe myrtles are blooming, so pink and wrinkled like tissue paper!"

"Look, the sky's lit up like rose petals in honey! Come on!" And she would slip back outside, laughing.

I just sat on the couch, reading. Every

time I finished a book, I would write the title down on a piece of paper. Hilary was no more than a fly to me. Pretty soon, I learned to ignore her completely.

But Hilary wouldn't give up. She kept coming inside every day, bearing news of the outside world blooming around me. To tell you the truth, I was completely oblivious to everything else, and I didn't really care. I ate my meals in a dazed silence, still stuck in the times of the Great Depression, wild Australia, or the savage jungle tribes of South America, solving a mystery or escaping danger. I spent my nights awake in bed, pondering how the authors wrote so intriguingly, so convincingly, so—so *wonderfully*. I couldn't even think of the right word.

As time went on, I became more and more reluctant to pick up a book. The couch became familiar and boring. My list of titles, which once had grown rapidly, now advanced so slowly that it was almost not growing at all.

I was at the point of despair. I was depressed, but I didn't know why. *I'll never be a novelist*, was the groaning thought that followed me day and night. Right behind the heels of that thought was the other one that said, *Why not? I've been reading books day in and day out, and I even have this list to show for it.* Why was I feeling this way? I was doing everything I was supposed to.

I was losing faith in myself, but Hilary never did. One day in the middle of summer, she came bouncing into the room with the joy and energy of life, her arms

full of dandelions and roses, and dumped them in my lap. Her eyes shining, she grabbed my arm and dragged me off the couch. "Come outside, Nina," she laughed, her voice so filled with ecstasy that it overflowed. "You need to *live!*"

Suddenly it clicked. I was wasting my summer in these books, hiding away in faraway lands. I would grow old without ever having known the carefree days of childhood. Hilary was right. There was a whole glittering world right outside, fresh and lovely and teeming with inspiration, just waiting for me. It was then that I realized the other key to good writing: I needed to *live*.

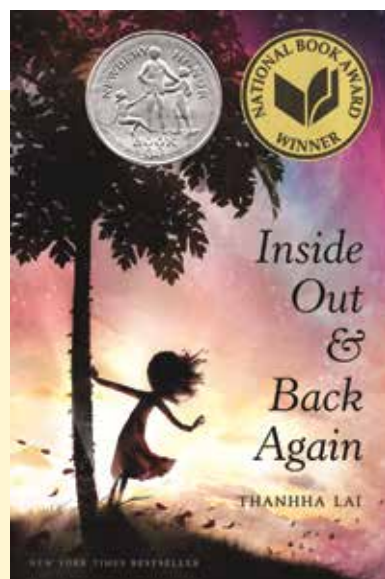
Laughing, I threw down my book and raced Hilary outside, to the wonderful world just a step from the front door. We rolled in the luxurious green grass, watched shiny ladybugs crawl up our arms, marveled as the clouds scudded across a blue dome of sky. We smelled the roses to our hearts' content, licked sweet drops off the honeysuckle, and climbed in the shady branches of the sprawling elm tree. We got bit by ants and scratched by thorns. And still we laughed. We threw back our heads and sang like the bluebirds, savoring the warm summer sun and closing our eyes against the soft welcome breeze.

By the time dusk fell, my heart was fuller than it had been all summer. And the best part was that it was all so *real*. I did not have to bury my nose in a book to find worlds that were sparkling with splendor, that were full of ideas and inspiration. They were right in my own backyard. 🌸

# Book Review

By Annie Sheehan-Dean

*Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai;  
HarperCollins Children's Books: New  
York, 2011; \$16.99




Annie Sheehan-Dean, 10  
Morgantown, West Virginia

LAST YEAR, MY FAMILY and I moved from Florida to West Virginia and it was a disaster. The movers came late, our kayak fell off our car roof while my parents were driving down a highway at about two o'clock in the morning, and we moved into our new house late so for twelve days we had to roam around staying in the houses of friends and family. My family's move was bad but it was nowhere near as awful as Hà and her family's move from Saigon, Vietnam, to Alabama in 1975, a story told in this thrilling and fascinating book.

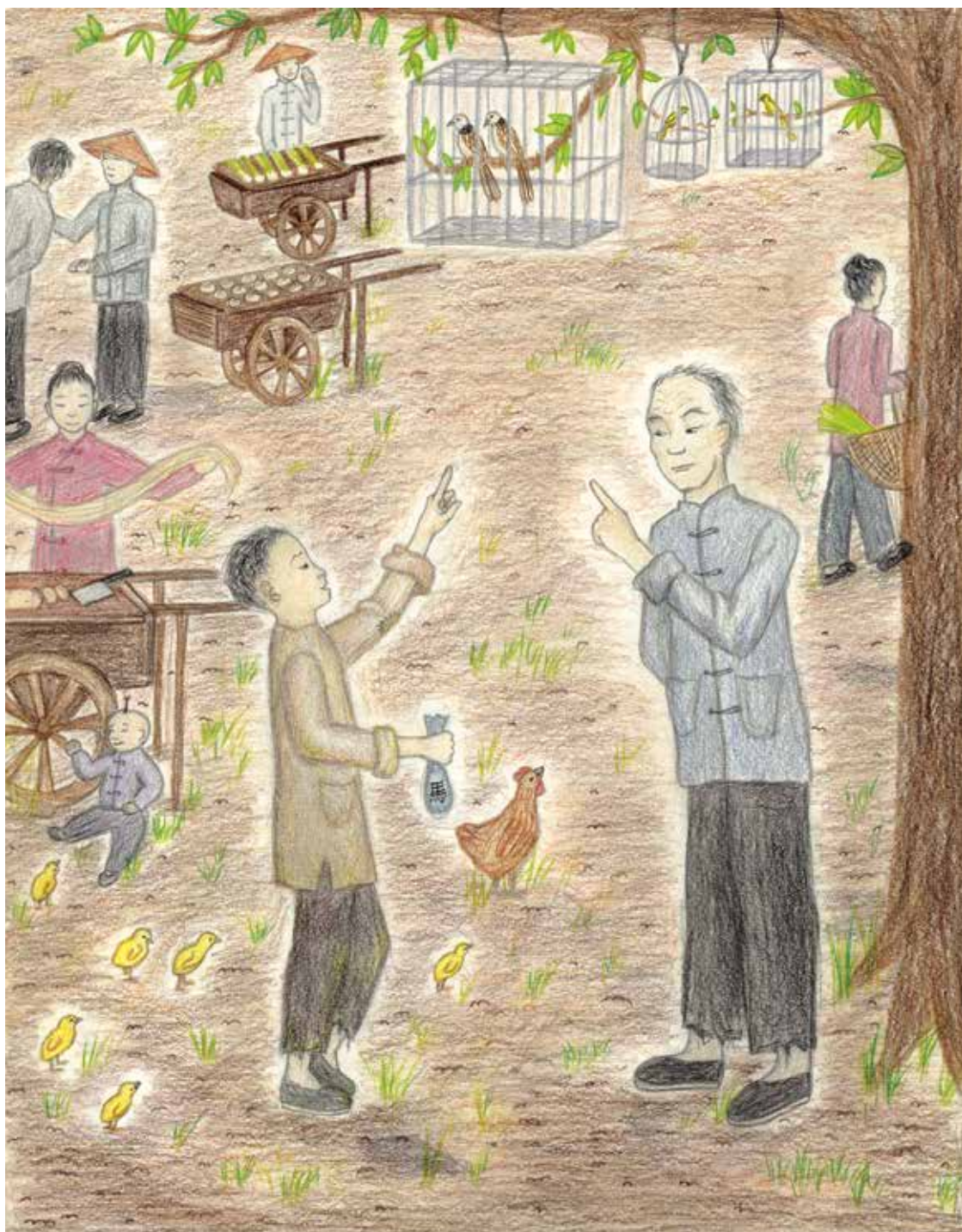
Hà and her family (her mom and three brothers; her father was missing in action) had to flee from Saigon during the Vietnam War because Saigon was being captured by the North Vietnamese Army. All Hà had ever known was Saigon. It was a very rough long trip but finally they made it. All of the people that had escaped Vietnam had to stay in "tent cities," and in order for them to leave they had to be sponsored by a person to move somewhere. Hà's family was sponsored to move to Alabama by a man Hà calls "our cowboy" because of his hat and appearance. Their sponsor worked hard to help them adjust to life in Alabama, but their neighbors were not friendly except for one helpful lady.

Hà's story includes adventure and suspense but also sadness. As a reader, I was worried when they were on the ship escaping Vietnam because they ran out of food. Once in America, her family faced a great deal of hardship because they had little money. When Hà arrived in the U.S. she spoke only a few words of English. She couldn't understand what the children who made fun of her at school said. Her oldest brother, Quang, spoke more English than the rest of them and had studied engineering in Vietnam. His skills were what attracted their sponsor in the first place.

Hà was grateful for the home they moved into but she preferred the style and design of her Saigon home. At one point she writes that life in America was so hard that she almost preferred living in war in Saigon to being in Alabama. But over time, Hà made friends, settled in more at school, and started to learn English. It took me a little while to adjust to my new home. I started school and soon I made new friends. I think that all that is necessary to make new friends and adjust is time and having a good attitude.

Hà's story taught me about the war in Vietnam and about the difficulties of changing to a whole new life. The story is written in stanzas that are like poems. They are also like journal entries because they move chronologically forward and describe different parts of her life. They cover the span of one year—1975 (the year of the Cat). The story includes fabulous details that make it even more interesting. I found the story gripping and couldn't put the book down. The author—Thanhha Lai—was born in Vietnam and moved to Alabama at the end of the war. Much of what happened to Hà in the book was based on memories of Lai's childhood. I felt sorry for the hardships in Hà's life but I'm certainly glad that the author turned them into a book. 





*"Excuse me, may I please have those two doves?"*

# My Father's Doves

By **Jenny Li**

*Illustrated by* **Olivia Zhou**

**R**UNNING TO THE MARKET, my father clutched the bagful of coins to his chest. On the leather bag was sewn “馬,” horse, in Chinese, the only gift that his father had given him before the war. He hurried across town, walking under the wood sign with the words “Tai City” etched on it and following the path, which he knew by heart. He finally arrived at the center of town, full of street vendors selling fruits and other goods, with gray-uniformed soldiers at every corner. The coins were clanking against each other inside the bag as if clamoring to break free. My father lowered his eyes from the glaring of the men and shuffled to the doves’ area. He spilled the coins onto his calloused, rough hands and spoke to the salesperson.

“Excuse me,” he said in a steady voice, “may I please have those two doves?”

My father pointed to the two slender spotted doves perched inside an angular metal cage—the doves which he had admired for so long.

The man glared suspiciously at him.

“Do you have the money?”

“Yes, sir,” replied my father, trying to look confident despite the fluttering inside his stomach, “here are the four yuan for both of them.”

The salesman quickly grabbed the money out of my father’s hands as if afraid someone would steal it and counted the coins four times. Just as quickly, the salesman shoved the two doves



Jenny Li, 11  
Irvine, California



Olivia Zhou, 12  
Roselle Park, New Jersey

into my father's arms and dismissively waved his hand for my father to be on his way.

The doves were really his now. He had imagined this moment for quite some time, though in his daydreams, his father would have been there with him, negotiating with the bird seller, cracking jokes with those he knew, and maybe even stopping for a small treat for both of them once the doves were safely in their hands.

But he was alone, and even finally being the owner of two beautiful doves did not lessen the hurt of missing his father. *Will I ever see him again?* he wondered.

As my father held the doves, he felt the anxiety disappear. He could hear the piping of the magpies fluttering from tree to tree. The sky broadened deeper blue, and the sun's rays shone among the few trees, whose shadows lightened. The city no longer smelled of failure and sweat, but now of hope and persistence.

My father reached an apartment building plastered with old advertisements and newspaper postings that had disintegrated into the walls. Though dirty flies swarmed his hair, trying to bite his skin, he paid no attention.

My grandmother came out to greet him. In my mind's eye, I can almost see her now in her ragged apron, though she was younger then and her hair was still inky and brilliant. She hugged him, with the hands that supported the family, the ones that sewed the clothes and cooked the food. My grandmother looked at him with hope and love, the smile smoothing

out premature wrinkles that had already started forming on her face.

The doves chirped around at the home, preening themselves and each other. They flew about, occasionally gulping down a fly that got in their way.

*They are so useful already,* my father thought.

My grandmother watched my father's visible admiration of the doves, and smiles settled onto their faces for the first time since his father had gone to war.

MY FATHER remembered the day. The sun shone brightly and cheerfully, and he had just been invited by the headmaster himself to write an article in the school newspaper. He wanted to tell his family right away. Though he was mocked and jeered by some of his classmates who viewed him as a teacher's pet, he felt so proud to be the first nine-year-old in the history of the school to have been given this honor. He understood that an honor like this came with a price. The neighborhood boys had teased him and refused to let him join in on their games. He hadn't asked for this, but it had happened, and he felt happy.

He had skipped up the cement steps, for once not seeing them in their true state—dirty and hard, but imagining them as black onyx gemstones leading up to his family's small apartment.

As soon as he opened the door, he recoiled in surprise. His mother was weeping, her head hunched down, her usual tightly coiled chignon now a messy bun

with strands sticking out. My father was shocked; he had never seen his mother cry before.

She glanced up with her red, swollen eyes and pointed with a trembling finger to a piece of white, clean paper printed with gold, beautiful symbols.

Even without reading the characters, my father immediately knew what it was. The paper was too bright and clean to be from anyone other than the Chinese government. His father was going to the civil war.

*He was already gone.*

MY FATHER tried to manage his usual routine. But, without his father, he would rush home after school, almost afraid of the world now and its control over him.

He had memorized the way to his apartment, and his feet could trace it without him even looking up. The truth was: he didn't want to look up and see the real world anymore. He didn't want to acknowledge what it had become. My father wanted a miracle.

He had started spending most of his time with his doves, flying them in the abandoned woods outside of town and talking to them in the dark quiet of his home.

My father had heard about amazing animals that could do things normal ones couldn't—things such as play fetch, or jump rope, or be able to find hidden people and explosive material. Because his doves were special, he saw them as being

almost magical and felt that they could do anything he could teach them to do.

My father and the doves spent a lot of time in the woods. At first, the doves didn't understand the peculiar hand signals and the funny sounds that my father was using, and my father had to lead them back and forth to the city multiple times until they started to follow his instructions. Slowly, the doves started flying the right way and comprehending what my father was saying. Each two rounds the doves made it back to the city, he would bring them farther and farther away. At first, a stray mouse could get them off course. However, the doves were getting swifter and their improvement made the harshness of war somewhat easier for my father.

One day, as my father was heading out to the forest with his doves, a harsh voice echoed through the alleyway.

"Stop!"

My father turned around in horror. No, it couldn't be. A tall, thin soldier stood, his eyes casting deep shadows on his face. My father could smell the soap particles embedded in the soldier's pores, he could see the perfectly cut and rounded fingernails of the man.

"Where are you going?" the man commanded more than asked.

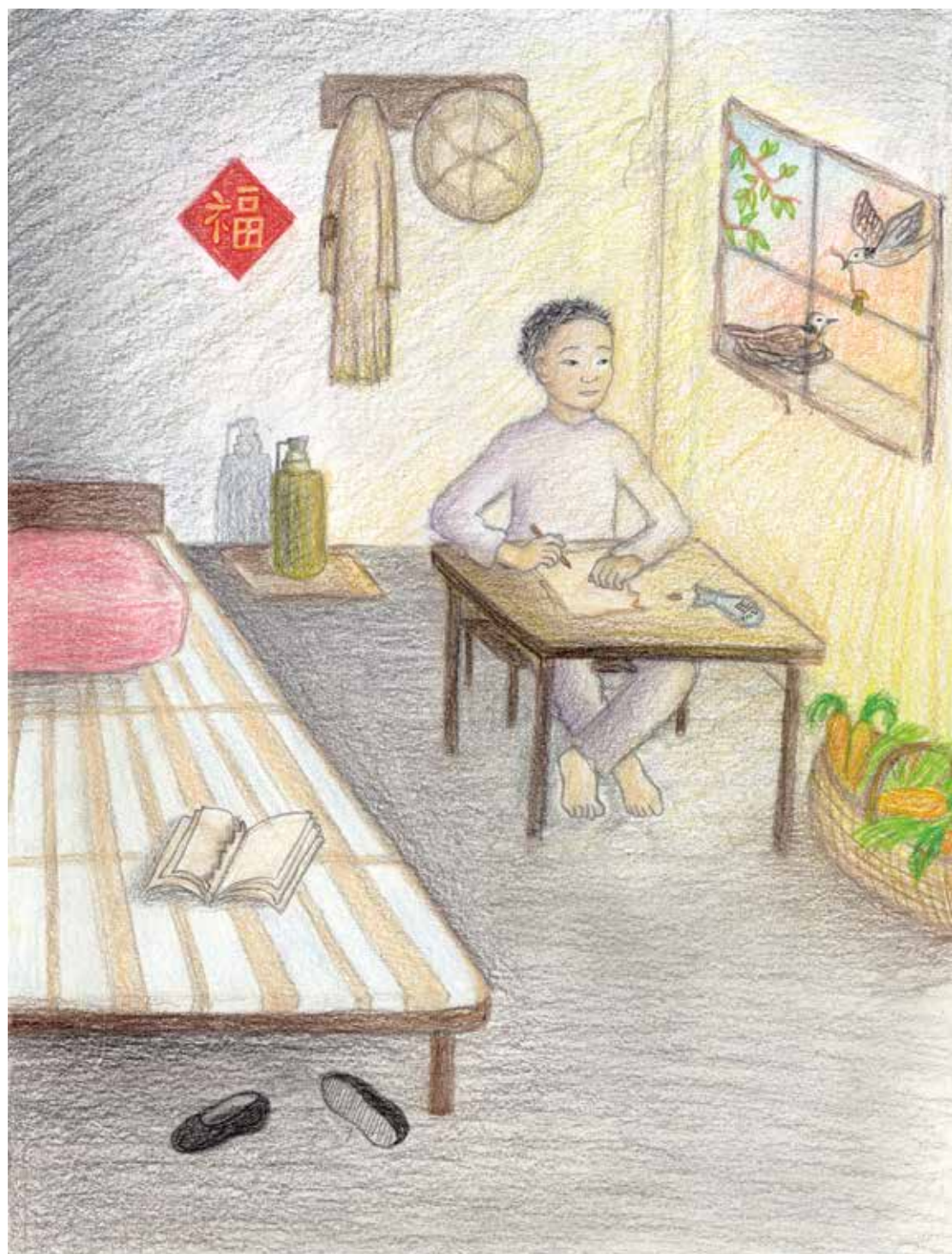
My father, stiff in his position, couldn't move.

"Answer me!"

My father cleared his throat. "I-I'm going back home... sir," he added.

"Yes, you are." The soldier laughed, his





*Maybe I could use the doves to send a note to my father*



voice cracked and abnormal. It was full of cruelty and malice, frightening my father. "Go!"

My father hurried to the apartment, sweating and breathing hard. *Will my life ever be the same?*

He spent the afternoon in the shadow of the one chipped window in the apartment, watching many of his neighbors being stopped by the soldiers.

All night long, gunshots were heard on the west side of the city. He lay on his ragged bed, trying to force himself to sleep.

He missed his father and there seemed no end to this war. If only his father were there with him, things would be easier.

*If only my father and the Tai army had stayed,* my father thought.

He looked at the doves perched in a nest that they had built out of branches. It was interesting, watching them take twigs and leaves back and forth and stuffing them together to create a nest. My father suddenly sat up on his wooden bed.

*Maybe I could use the doves to send a note to my father. If I could only know that he's all right...*

He ripped out a page of his old textbook and took out his only pencil. My father scrawled a letter to his father.

Father—

Tai City has been invaded. Please come immediately! People are dying... I have heard from Mother that you are in the North. I hope that you are all right there and have not gotten injured. I miss you and I hope you come back soon.

My father carefully signed the letter with the word “馬,” horse, on the last sheet of paper. It was a code between him and his father, meaning swiftly and quickly.

“Xiao Bai, Xiao Hua,” my father called softly the names he had given to his doves. “Go to the North and good luck!” he said, as the doves fluttered off into the wind to the direction of my father’s pointing hand.

TWO WEEKS PASSED, and my father was desperate. *What if the doves were killed, or went the wrong way? What if my father never got my message?*

However, two days later, he could see a cloud of dust rising out in the street. On the tip of a soldier’s hat were his two doves. He cried out. My father recognized the soldiers, many of whom were the men of his hometown.

“Father!” he cried out.

My grandmother stepped out of the apartment with my father in precise, careful steps. Soon, gunshots and orders were heard. The doves swooped gracefully toward my father, but there was no time for a reunion. The Tai City army and the occupiers started fighting.

My grandmother led her son back in the apartment.

“It’s not safe yet,” she whispered, her eyes moistened. “But thank you, son, for your doves that reunited the town.” In the confusion and commotion my father did not have a chance to see if his own father had returned with the army.

They hid in the closet of the small room,

but it wasn't long before their army won.

Hollers and cheers lit up the cold, dreary night like a candle, and my father rushed out of the room down to the town as fast as he could.

The first step into town was celebration. A crowd of people hung around him, clinging onto him. They asked questions, fussed over him, and thanked him. Even the boys that had once taunted him were silent, with glowing eyes of respect. The news spread from the army about my father's heroic act, but he didn't care.

My father, confused yet excited, tapped on a nearby soldier's shoulder and asked, "How did your army get the doves? I sent them to my father."

"The doves must have flown a wrong route, because they crossed our camp and got caught by our soldiers. We read the note and came over to help the town," the leader explained.

"Do you happen to know where my father is?" my father asked, knowing the answer already.

"I'm sorry, son. I don't."


Tears now streaming down his face, he looked longingly at the other families now

reunited by his act, and then back at his mother.

His mother put her arm around him, and they walked back home.

**Y**EARS LATER, with children of his own, my father eventually came back to his hometown. He looked back at the new civilization, to the new life without war. He looked for his old apartment; it was now a shopping plaza, bursting with visitors.

His father had never come back. He didn't know if he was killed in the war, or if he survived and was still looking for him, but the morning of that day where he had been asked to write in the school newspaper was the last time my father ever saw him again.

He looked at the people swarming in the streets. A sign was posted just next to the street. "Welcome to Dove Street," it read. Dove Street... his doves had long since died, but the memories of himself as a child playing with them brought back a sense of nostalgia. He sighed, looking at the new life that had created itself around the ruins of his childhood. 



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