

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*Illustration by Isabella Xie, age 13, for "This Summer," page 23*

## STICKS AND STONES

Nisha is bullied by a group of mean girls at summer camp

## IF MONEY GREW ON TREES

Twenty dollars stands between Jack and the BMX he wants to buy

*Also:* A poem about playing the trombone

JULY/AUGUST 2013

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 6  
JULY / AUGUST 2013

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# Editor's Note

**Ah, the carefree days of summer.** Well, maybe not always. It's part of life to have problems, and to think of ways to solve them. A story that deals with a problem can be fun to read. Will the problem be resolved? What can we learn from the way the main character handles the problem? In "Sticks and Stones," Nisha has to spend a month at camp with girls who are mean to her. Jack has just one day to earn twenty dollars in "If Money Grew on Trees." Rachel has to leave her best friend behind when her dad loses his job in "This Summer." Each of these stories has a problem at the center of it. What will the characters do? We keep reading to find out. The next time you sit down to write a story, think about a problem you had to overcome. Maybe the solution was not simple. How can you create suspense around your problem to engage the reader?

— 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** Isabella Xie has won many awards for her artwork, including first place in the Massachusetts Junior Duck Stamp contest. She draws everything from animals to landscapes to clothing. When she grows up, she wants to be a fashion designer and an artist who will change history like Leonardo da Vinci.



# The Mailbox



**I was looking** over past book reviews, and I wanted to thank you very much for doing book reviews in your magazine. I think book reviews are important because I think that a couple bad books can change a person's perspective on reading. One thing I love about all the books you review is that they are what I call "dark chocolate" books. They are both full and rich with great details and plots and characters and morals, but they are funny, sweet, and entertaining. Often when I read a book review I end up reading the book myself. I would not have found these books if you had not published these reviews.

**Emma Maze, 12**

Charleston, South Carolina

**I love Stone Soup** with a passion, but my favorite thing about your magazine is that there is such a range of stories! I've read stories about music, dancing, sports, and just plain old bravery! My favorite story I have read in your magazine was "The Three Wishes," by Alison Lanza, from the May/June 2012 issue. I also found the illustrations to be, frankly, out of this world! It was so sweet! However, the first story I read from *Stone Soup* also holds dear memories. It was about a girl who found simple pleasure in noodles ["Mung Bean Noodles and French Bread," by Madelyne Xiao, May/June 2010].

**Posy Putnam, 13**

Oxford, England

*Posy's illustration appears on page 10 of this issue.*

**I have always** loved art and drawing and storytelling, ever since I can remember! My parents have told me that before I was three years old I told myself stories while I drew pictures of those stories. I have many books my parents made of my drawings when I was very young and they would write down what I said. They are very funny. I really like *Stone Soup*. I love to read the stories and look at the pictures. Whenever I do, I think, I could do that! I would be so excited to be a paid and published illustrator and/or author.

**Flora Elliott Zuckerman, 11**

Claremont, California

**I just wanted** to congratulate Jessica Birchfield on her awesome drawings [March/April 2013]. I'm compiling my own collection of *Stone Soup* stories and art, and I added hers as soon as I read the story. Also, good job Emily Considine on her *great* ballet shoes, which I can't draw at all.

**Anna Haverly, 13**

Mancos, Colorado

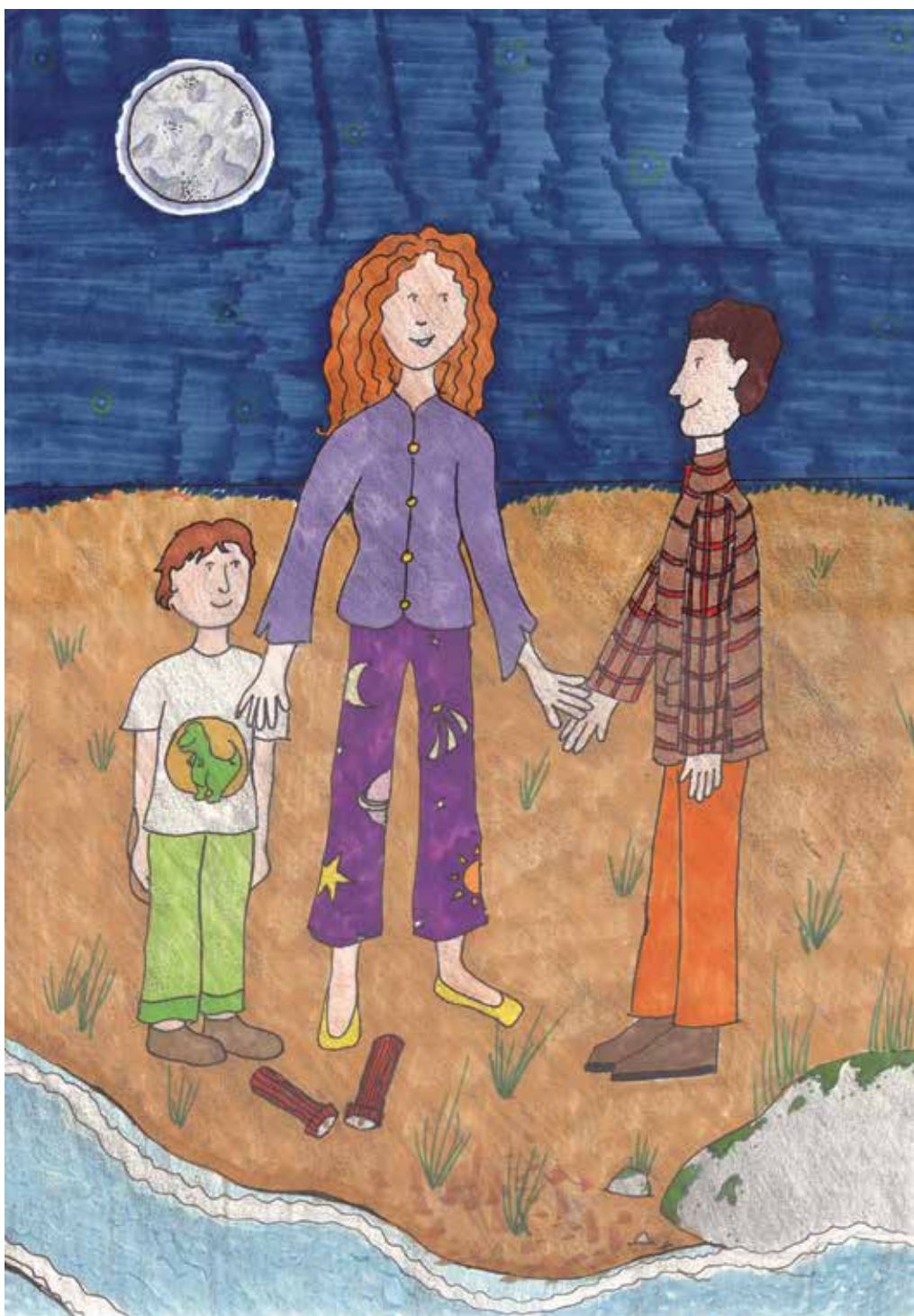
*Stone Soup* is a magazine full of great works of students of all ages. Since the only time students get to read their peers' writing is at school, there isn't much variety in the compositions they read. Making a collection of writing from a huge group of exceptional young writers provides a great opportunity for other kids to get inspiration. It certainly gave me a lot of ideas for my writing.

**Patrick Huang, 12**

San Diego, California

*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).





*"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance"*

# Once in a Blue Moon

By **Eva Rodrigues**

*Illustrated by* **Miranda Adelman**

I USED TO THINK that you only met surprising people in grand theaters, comic book stores, and cathedrals, but now I know that you could meet the most different of all on top of an ordinary rock. August was drawing to a close, and the blue moon was due to appear. We were at the cottage, a cramped building sandwiched so tightly between road and lake that the noise reduced sleep to a potential four hours a night. My parents strongly believed that we should continue going there every summer, as a kind of tribute to my late grandparents who had spent all their money on the place when they had first immigrated to Canada. When I was three and four, it hadn't been all that bad, maybe even fun. By ten I looked forward to the trip until the first night, when I suddenly dreaded the hours ahead. Now, at fourteen, I dreaded the whole thing for the whole year. It was not a place that a teenager wanted to spend her summers.

My brother, Joey, only eight, still had that eagerness about the cottage that died merely when faced with the prospect of sleeping. He dragged our father outside all day and the two of them frolicked in the woods while our mum went into the lake for a three-hour marathon swim. I honestly had no idea what possessed any of them. I was happy for the quiet, though, and spent several hours with my astronomy charts laid out on the dining room table. I examined the positioning of the planets in relation to ours and then decided it wasn't really worth it and looked in my almanac for the next time two full moons were set



Eva Rodrigues, 13  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada



Miranda Adelman, 13  
Arlington Heights, Illinois

to show during one month. It wasn't until July, 2015. Much as I regretted being at the cottage, I couldn't deny the fact that it provided a remarkable opportunity to see the moon without light pollution.

I knew that blue moons were nothing especially amazing, of course, just a coincidence between our calendar and the lunar cycle. Still, the concept had intrigued me since I became interested in astronomy, and I was looking forward to going out that night and staring up at the stars. I was still poring over my charts when Joey bounded in and looked over my shoulder. I didn't have time to swat him away before he asked with irritating cheerfulness, "Is the moon really going to be blue tonight, Clara?"

"Of course not. They just call it that because all of the other moons have names, and this one happens to be relatively rare so they refer to it as the blue moon. They could just as well have called it the green cheese moon."

He laughed at this thought. "Do you think I could see it with you, anyway?"

There was no chance I was going to let Joey intrude on my stargazing. Sure, it would look like any other moon, but astronomy was a passion that I used to remove myself from the confusion of everyday life. I was about to tell him so when Mum came back in from her swim.

"Oh, that would be wonderful. After dark, Clara, you and Joey can go out and look at the moon and Dad and I will set up some board games. When you're done you two can come in and we'll have

a family games night. What do you say, Andrew?"

Dad nodded, of course. Well, that was it. My blue moon was ruined, and there wouldn't be an opportunity for a better one for nearly three more years. I went out on the dock and stared into the distance in anger for the rest of the afternoon.

Dad made a special dinner that night. He called it the "green cheese" dinner, much to Joey's delight, but I could tell by the way he glanced over at me that it was really the "make Clara happy before she spits" dinner. Perhaps the evening wouldn't turn out too terribly. After we finished up the dishes, Mum made us both change into our pajamas before unleashing us into the night. She outfitted us with flashlights, two apiece, and walkie-talkies before deeming our safety up to her standards. Standing in the door as she watched us go down to the shoreline, her shadow looked like an elongated monster's. I wouldn't let Dad's fancy recipe make up for the fact that I had to deal with a pesky younger brother tonight, of all nights.

We reached the waves and Joey reached his hand up to mine. We switched off our flashlights. "It's so dark," he whispered into the blackness. Millions of specks glittered above us, completely different from what you see in the city. I wanted to go back five steps and lie in the grass to watch them, but Joey's wonder was quickly replaced by that irksome bubblyness of his.



"Look, Clara," he said as his eyes adjusted to the night. "That rock isn't very far from shore. I bet we could get to it and Mum wouldn't mind *too* much."

His eagerness trounced my reluctance and we set off in the ankle-deep water. Our fingers were still interlocked as we climbed onto the rock a bit further down the shore. I was surprised that I had never seen it before; after so many dreary cottage summers I had spent hours staring at the lake. I was even more surprised to find that it had a plushness to it, as softly tousled grass had somehow grown upon the rock. We stood with our arms outstretched up at the moon and were giggling madly at the moon when a figure I hadn't noticed turned around. I jumped back in shock, nearly falling back on the grass.

"Hello." He looked no older than me, but somehow more faded. His hair was a rich brown and his eyes, a glimmering green, glistened along with the stars. In sharp contrast to my planet pj's, he was wearing a long tweed suit jacket that covered half of his orange suit pants. He extended a hand with bitten fingernails. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Mark Davis."

"Uh, yeah." I ignored the hand. "Listen, if you wouldn't mind, how old are you?"

He seemed puzzled. "Fourteen. I go to Island Lakes Community School, if you're wondering. But you haven't told me your name."

Well, that eliminated time travel. "Right. Patricia. This is my brother, um,

Jacob."

Joey wrinkled his nose. "She's Clara, I'm Joey. Hey Mark, are you looking at the moon tonight too?"

He grinned. "Yeah, I am. Do you know why they call it a blue moon?"

"Clara told me. I would've liked it better if they called it a green cheese moon."

"You know, sometimes the moon actually looks blue, even if it isn't really a blue moon. It's from volcanoes."

Joey considered this for a moment. "I like it just fine white," he announced.

The two of them continued dithering in conversation as I watched the night sky. He could lose the mismatched suit and stop biting his nails, but if you ignored that Mark almost seemed like a normal person. Plus which, he was keeping Joey occupied. I eliminated zombie, vampire, and ghost.

"May I ask you something?" I interrupted.

They both stared. "Sure," Mark answered.

"What's with the suit?"

He toyed with a smile for a half a second. "The jacket was my uncle's, and the pants are from a school play last year. Uncle Sean died last year, but we used to watch the stars together. I like wearing his jacket to remind me of him when I look at the sky. It smells of his tobacco. It didn't feel right wearing it with just some plain old pants, so I dug these up."

I had no idea what to say. He was faded, maybe, and anxious (fingernails), and his speech was more than a little antiquated,

but he wasn't anything else but a normal boy. "I'm sorry."

Mark shrugged. "It wasn't his fault. Of course I'd prefer it if he had still been alive, but at least it wasn't something I knew could have been prevented."

I didn't dig any deeper. I lay down, flipped onto my back, and looked upwards.

It was well past midnight when Joey and I walked into the cottage, and Mum was beside herself with worry. "Where have you two been?" The house smelled of dish soap, and the way she had a spatula raised in her hand made me duck away from fear of being hit. She waved it madly around and stopped suddenly when she caught sight of a silhouette in the yard. "OK, you two get inside. There's a man on our prop-

erty and we need to bolt all doors."


Joey shook his head. "No, Mama, that's Clara's and my new friend, Mark."

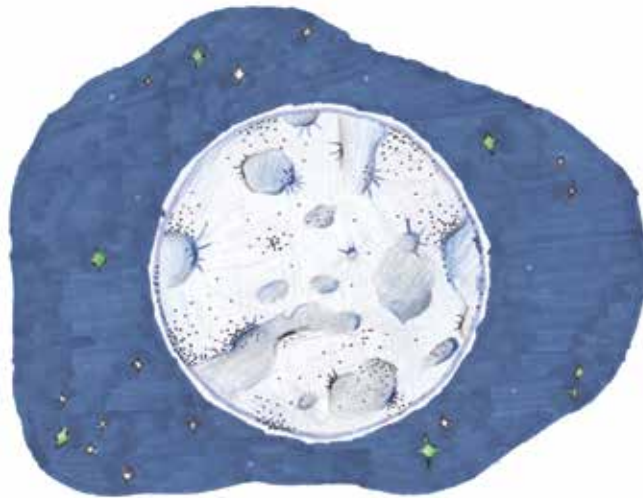
I whirled around to face him. There was no way I wanted to be drawn into this.

"We found him on top of a rock. He told me about the volcanoes and when the moon really does turn blue. Do you think we could have him over for supper tomorrow night?"

Mum didn't look pleased at this thought. "No, we could not. I'm going to tell him to leave the premises and never return. I thought I could trust the two of you more than this—Clara, I thought I told you not to talk to strangers."

"He's not *strange*," said Joey in protest.

Oh yes, I thought. Oh yes he is. 



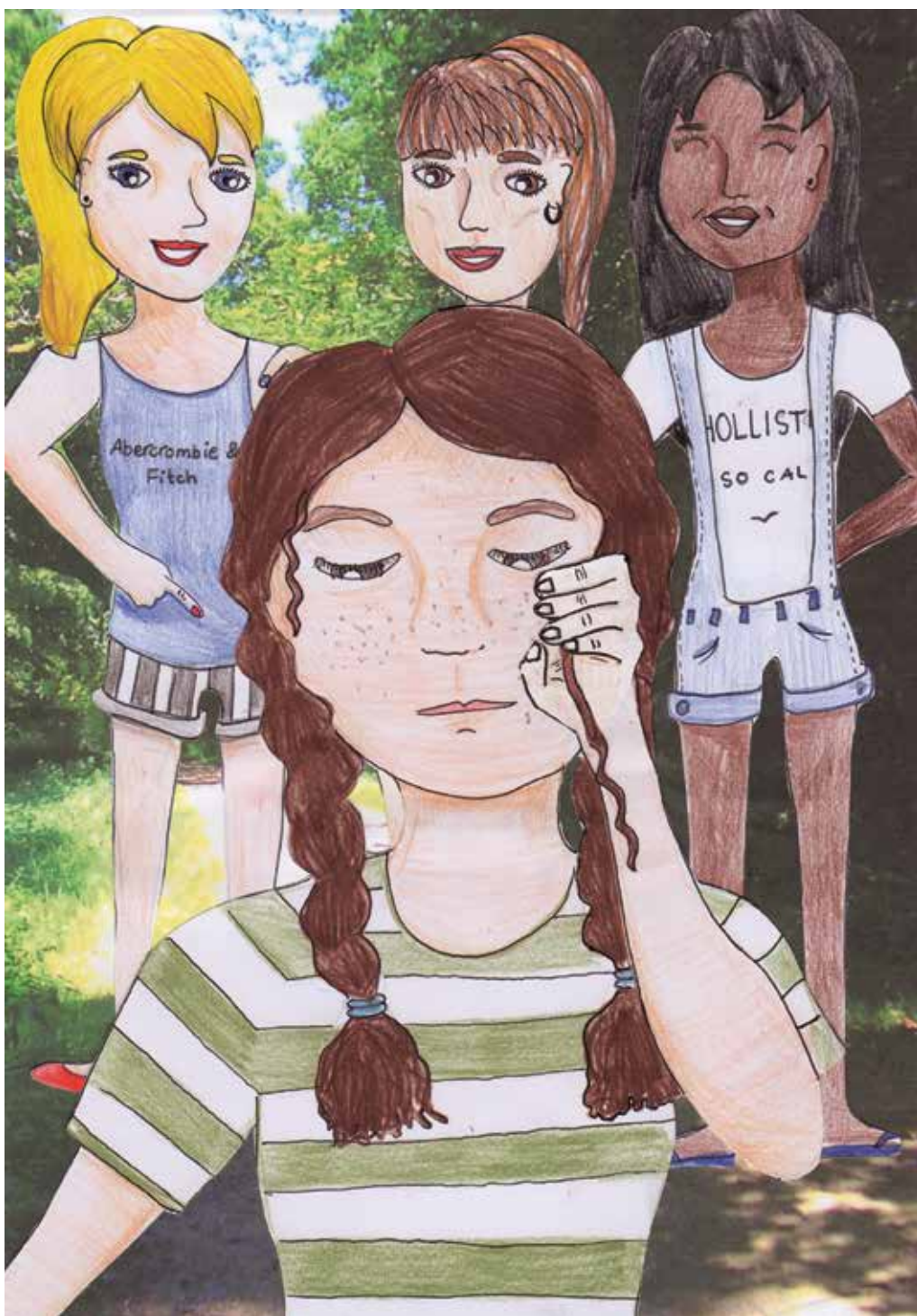
# Bass Clef

By Elliott McCloskey

A curiously-shaped case, elongated ebony  
Buckles, that when opened reveal gleaming gold  
Nestled in velvet, radiant brass glints in twists and turns  
Narrow pipes widen to a vast bell  
Pieced together with knobs and screws  
What will this clanky contraption do?  
Blowing begins, a sound like an old man coughing  
Spit settling in the pipes, clogging and choking  
Frustration, tantrums, dismantling is in sight  
Walk around, wait a while, at last it calls me back  
With pursed lips and perseverance  
An astounding melodious sound echoes, ringing through  
the room  
Note after note, the slide swings  
My hands and mouth laboring in unity  
At last I feel connected to this once awkward hunk of brass  
It's no longer just an instrument, but a portal  
To my joy of music



Elliott McCloskey, 13  
Eagle, Idaho



*I was that one M&M that you have only one of, among a million others, trying to blend in*

# Sticks and Stones

By Nisha Klein

Illustrated by Posy Putnam

THE BLUE CAR rolled down the dusty road, coming to an abrupt stop in an empty lot. I jumped out and twirled around to face the camp. The sweet smell of pine trees circled around my head and I inhaled. The head counselor came out to meet me and showed me to my bunk. As I approached the wooden cabin, my feet slowed, and I closed my eyes ever so slightly, listening to the sound of gravel beneath my black Converse. Later in the month I would bound up the stairs and slam the screen door, but right now I was quiet, tiptoeing up the creaky steps and slipping through the door.

“Hi,” one of the counselors said, smiling. There were about ten people sitting in a circle on the floor.

“Hi...”

“What’s your name?”

“Nisha,” I muttered, looking at the ground.

Starting with the counselor to my right, everyone said their name, everyone with the same expression, like dolls in a department store, staring at you with fake smiles and stating their name in a perfunctory manner.

They asked me what I was most looking forward to. I told them that I was looking forward to wearing the new pajamas I had gotten (the words printed on the T-shirt read *Ice cream for breakfast, cupcakes for lunch*), and they laughed. As the new kid, I was worried about making friends, but I was feeling confident. Within the first few days, I noticed two girls whispering to each other. I ignored it; I didn’t really care if they had secrets



Nisha Klein, 13  
Webster Groves, Missouri



Posy Putnam, 13  
Oxford, England



between them. Throughout the day, I saw them talking to other girls in our bunk, laughing and flipping their high ponytails in the air like a fish on land. Later that night, they walked up to another girl and continued to whisper something in her ear. She smiled, and said the much expected, "Oh my God, really?"

"What? What's so funny?" I asked, curiously.

"Um, it's nothing. You, like, you wouldn't get it," one of them said, rolling her eyes, and they walked away.

"But you told everyone else," I murmured under my breath after the girls were too far away to hear.

It started out small, but soon people didn't want to sit next to me, and many of the girls didn't talk to me when they passed by me during the day, or when we were sitting in the bunk at night. Walking to activities, the other girls would sprint until they were far away from me, and then they would slow down. If I got too close, they would sprint again. I got used to hearing the quiet crackling sound of pebbles flying in every direction as feet hit the ground.

While rehearsing for the upper-camp play, I asked one of the girls (who was playing Le Fou, Gaston's sidekick, in *Beauty and the Beast*) if her character died in the end. I couldn't quite remember, and I knew in some versions, Gaston did. She replied, "*You* should die in the end." I looked away, and lightly tapped on the broken piano's keys.

At night, I lay under my sheets, curled

into a ball against the cold, and wondered, What was wrong with me? I fingered the boards protecting me from the floor, and waited for sleep to take a wrong turn and fall through my window.

I began to notice more and more how excluded I was. All seven girls hung out together and ran away when I would try to join, like trying to catch your shadow, or dance with your reflection. I wondered if I was exaggerating; was I really being excluded, or was I just not making myself heard? Was I even being excluded? I wondered if maybe it was something I'd done... Was I too talkative? Too quiet? Too hyper? Too calm? I was that one M&M that you have only one of, among a million others, trying to blend in.

Towards the end of the month, the girls began to act a little more friendly to me, including me in conversations, but all the conversations were about another girl in our bunk, whom everyone had turned on. While I wanted to be included and thought of as a friend, I didn't want to participate in the awful things they said about her. Every time one of the girls said something bad about the girl, Carly, it seemed to hang in the air for a second, twirl in circles around each of our heads, mocking us, and run away into the forest, never to be found or taken back. I didn't want to be searching for it with the other girls, trying to hide it so the object of their bullying never found out. I wanted to ask, Why do you suddenly like me, now that you hate someone else? But I also wanted them to continue to like me.

One day, as I was heading to my next activity, I suddenly was overcome by a feeling of hopelessness. I slowly climbed up the small hill and picked up a bow. I shot the arrow, and it landed in the woods. Feeling like I could never do anything right, I went to retrieve it. I closed my eyes and tried to relax. I focused entirely on the bull's-eye, and I raised my left arm. I straightened my right arm and pulled the string back as far as I could. This is it, I thought. I let the string go... and the arrow fell in front of the target. I picked it up. This is why no one likes you, I told myself. And I shot the arrow. It hit red. I smiled, for the first time that day. I realized that I was OK, that the world hadn't ended.

Once everyone forgave Carly, it was back to ignoring me. The last night of camp, the night I expected to be the best night, the one I was hoping I would spend with my new best friends, talking about the next year, I spent listening to them talk about writing each other letters, but not me. We put our mattresses on the floor, positioned so that everyone could sit together, but I found myself looking at the backs of heads, saying their names over and over again to get their attention and still not getting it. I moved up so I could be a part of the conversation, but


was told there was no room for another person. I didn't mind, though; I was going home the next day, and I knew I would be happier if I didn't talk to them. I sat quietly, listening to their voices, landing on the silence, like acrobats in a circus, coming down from the ceiling to bow and jumping back up again. I could hear the scratching of hands, searching inside backpacks for pictures to show, and I wondered why I even cared what they thought of me. The whole month, I had been trying to get their approval, and would it even make a difference once I did? I still didn't have it, and yet, I couldn't really care less. It was as if I had been climbing a tree, and I was climbing higher and higher, trying to get to the top, needing to get to the top, and then, I decided I had gone as far as I wanted, and I climbed back down.

When I returned to my house and saw my friends, I thought again of how badly I had wanted them to like me.

"How was camp?" one friend asked me.

"It was OK," I replied with a shrug.

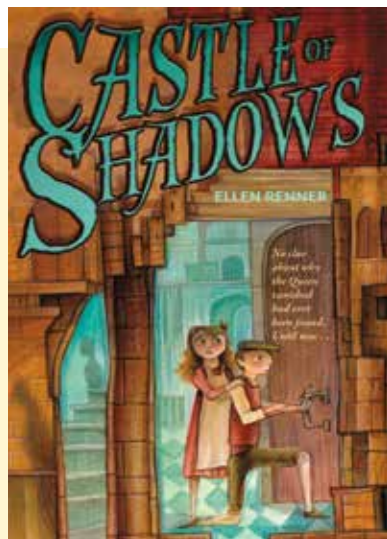
"Did you do anything fun?"

Again, I shrugged, and we began talking about something else, leaving that subject tucked away somewhere in the attic, to be opened and looked through someday in the future. 

# Book Review

By Olivia Zeiner-Morrish

*Castle of Shadows*, by Ellen Renner; Houghton Mifflin Books for Children: New York, 2012; \$15.99



Olivia Zeiner-Morrish, 12  
Washington, New Jersey

CHARLIE IS THE PRINCESS of Quale. Yes, she lives in a castle, with gardens and servants that cook and clean. But ever since her mother disappeared five years ago, Charlie has been all alone. Her father the king has gone mad and Charlie is surrounded by people who don't care about her. She has to fend for herself, and that doesn't always bring out the best in people. In the beginning of this book, I wasn't quite sure what to think of Charlie. We didn't really have any similarities, and quite frankly I thought she was a little bit of a brat.


Charlie has grown up hearing rumors about her mother's disappearance. Some say her mother ran away, abandoning her husband and young child. Even worse, others say her father murdered her mother. As far as Charlie knows, her family is horrible. So why shouldn't *she* be? Think about the stories your parents tell over and over again. My parents gave me a spoonful of honey when I cried. Maybe you always laughed at the dog. Those stories are part of who we are today. What if the only stories you ever heard were about your horrible temper tantrums, and the time your parents lost you at the park?

Everyone seems to hate the king and queen. Imagine going to a party and walking into a big room filled with strangers. There's

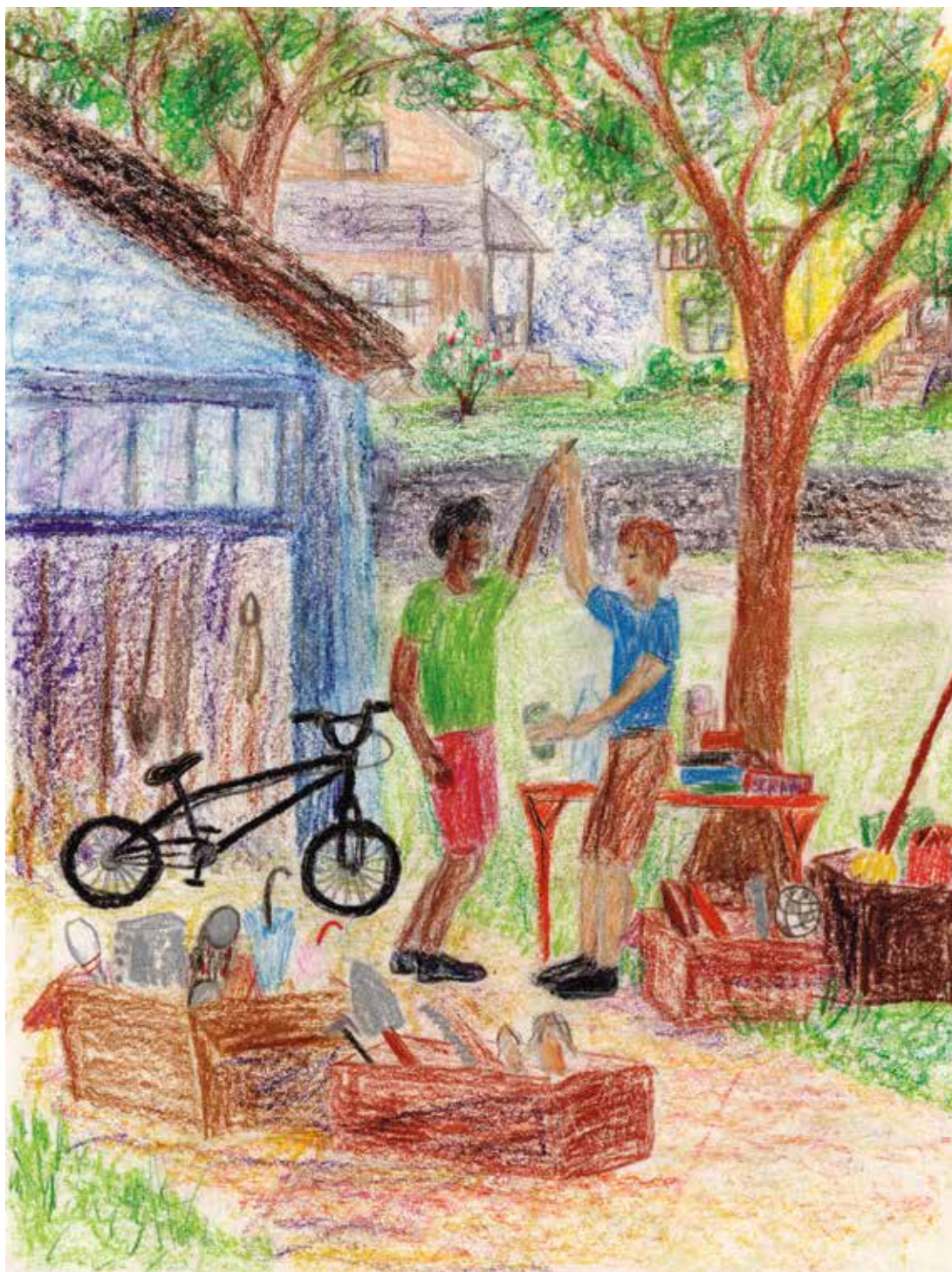
no one to talk to. In fact, no one likes you at all. The host of this party despises you. If you can imagine that, it's pretty close to how Charlie feels, except she's not at a party. This is her home. And if you were convinced everyone hated you, you might hate them a little too. If someone doesn't like me, I find it awfully hard to be nice to them, and gradually I get to dislike them more and more. And so Charlie just hates. Charlie has pretty much raised herself; she's rude, and wild, and doesn't always know right from wrong.

But when Charlie finds a clue to her mother's disappearance, an unfinished letter which speaks of some unknown danger, Charlie finds a spark of hope. Her mother speaks of Charlie and her husband the king as her two greatest joys. Her joys. The queen paints a picture with her words, a picture Charlie never had before, of a loving family, an adoring father and mother, and a younger, happier Charlie. Then terrible danger tears their family apart.

Charlie is willing to do whatever it takes to find her mother. She befriends her mother's old butler and makes an unlikely ally, Tobias Petch, the gardener's boy and her biggest rival. As Charlie and Tobias uncover more clues, their friendship grows. Charlie also changes as a person. She realizes that some people do care about her and she cares about them as well. Charlie has a wonderful transformation. The wild and adventurous spirit that used to get her into trouble makes her brave enough for the many difficult and frightening things she has to do to find her mother. Charlie is willing to risk everything. But wouldn't you?

I thought this book was very entertaining. The plot was exciting and moved quickly. When I was reading this my cousin started reading over my shoulder and didn't stop for four chapters! I definitely recommend you read *Castle of Shadows*. I really enjoyed it. 





*We started high-fiving each other every time we sold an item*



# If Money Grew on Trees

By Alan Tu

*Illustrated by* Gaelen Kilburn

I COULD SEE THE BIKE in the display window of the Park Ave Bicycle Shop. A black BMX with a fire design on the frame. Every day since third grade I had gazed at it on my walk home. Now, looking at it for the umpteenth time, I knew about every nook and cranny of the two-wheeler. It felt like it was mine. But there was still a quarter-inch window of glass and the \$100 price tag that made all the difference.

The day that I got my first A-plus on my final report card of the school year was the day that Park Ave put up a sign that made me forget all about my exceptional achievements. It read:

Park Ave Bicycle Shop will be moving  
on the first day of fall.  
We apologize for any inconvenience.

That was only a couple of months away! I knew I had to do something, or else my biggest wish would disappear right in front of my eyes. The genius plan: earn \$100 in a summer. I mean, how hard could it be? But soon I learned that earning money is not easy. Green bills don't grow on trees. I really wish they did. Because on the last day of summer, I was \$20 short.

I had done just about everything I could to earn those \$80, and I wasn't going to give up anytime soon. I had walked my neighbors' dogs, tried a paper route, done some babysitting, set up a lemonade stand, given kids algebra lessons, and much more. Even after all that, I was still stuck on the number line, twenty marks short of the finish.



Alan Tu, 11  
Pittsford, New York



Gaelen Kilburn, 12  
Burlington, Vermont

“Well, good morning, Jack! It’s the last day of summer, and I’m going to make the best out of it!” my dad proclaimed. “What are you going to do, buddy?”

“Not much I can do, seeing that I have to earn \$20 on a day like this!” I replied. In the background we heard the weatherman say, “Today’s high is a whopping ninety-five degrees...”

“Oh right,” my dad said slowly, “isn’t it about that bike or something?”

“Dad,” I remarked, “it’s not just a bike. It’s a BMX. And it costs \$100!”

“Oh,” was all he said back. Suddenly the phone rang. I sprinted to pick it up. On the other side of the line was my best friend, Marcus, the one with all the crazy inventive ideas.

When I first met him, we did all sorts of weird things. We once surveyed our whole neighborhood on which team they thought was going to win the Super Bowl and sent a certificate to everyone that guessed right! Last summer, we reinforced Marcus’s trampoline and we bounced all the way up to his roof! Another time, Marcus picked up a box of cereal that had high iron on the nutrition facts and we waved a giant magnet over it. I must say, after all my years together with Marcus, I had learned a lot of nonsensical information that may come to use one day. This time, though, the “adventure” was a simple garage sale. Right thing. Right time. Marcus strikes again.

I quickly ran into my house looking for things to sell. Once I realized how stuffed my basement was, I called Marcus back.

“Marcus, I’ve got so many things in my house! How about you come over and we’ll do the sale here?” I asked. I heard Marcus breathe a sigh of relief. I could tell that he was having some trouble hunting down garage sale material.

“OK! Meet you in an hour!”

Mission status: still on track. I started tearing boxes apart in the basement, and soon enough I had a decent-sized heap of various junk. The pile itself seemed pretty neat, but when I turned around, the place had been trashed into a wasteland. It would be another half hour of cleaning up until I could admire my mountain of odds and ends once more.

Soon Marcus was turning into my driveway on his shiny new bike he got a few weeks ago. He told me that I also needed to get one so we could race and ride together. I explained to him that I had to earn it myself, and Marcus knew that.

“Hey, Marcus! Are you ready?!” I asked as we high-fived.

“Yeah! Let’s start selling!” he said, running toward the garage.

“Marcus!” I called. “Do you see anything we can sell yet?”

“Oops,” Marcus said. “I always skip the setup.” Maybe that’s why his model airplanes always nosedived into his carpet.

In the beginning, I felt like setting up was a piece of cake. But soon, the sun was shining brighter, and the boxes got heavier. I shouldn’t have packed so many. Marcus and I needed several water breaks to complete the job. When, at last, we fin-

ished, our arms felt like jelly. But we were ready “for launch,” according to Marcus.

We felt so accomplished after selling our first item. We treated the crumpled dollar bill as if it were gold. After that, we had to wait in the intense heat for more business. Marcus and I were being fried alive.

After a while, Marcus went inside and came out holding a slim red box. I grinned. America’s favorite word game. What could be better than playing Scrabble to pass the time? “So, Jack, ready for a rematch of a rematch of a rematch of a rematch...?”

“Stop,” I interfered. “Just start the game!” On the first draw, I drew seven excellent letters and put down a fifty-point word. Then a sixty-point word. Marcus looked frustrated, but then his frown transformed into a smile. He then put down all of his tiles to make a word which I had never heard of. I challenged it, and it was a word! I was flabbergasted!

“Hahaha!” Marcus said in a maniacal laugh. He tallied up the point total, which was a whopping 120 points!

“Lunchtime, boys! We’re having macaroni and cheese!” my mom announced. At lunch, we talked about some ideas that would actually work for our garage sale mess. Our conversation kept on going to my amazing Scrabble comeback triumph. I edged out Marcus with my last word, dollar, to beat him by a point. Who knew that the winning word would decide the outcome of my hardest task of the summer?

“This garage sale is a total failure!” I

said, a few hours after lunch.

“Yeah,” Marcus said, “I mean, we have so many great things, but just about only two and a half people have shown up!” I laughed at typical Marcus humor. “Maybe we should just end it early. We’ve only earned...” he counted the money, “three dollars and seventy-five cents!” he stated.

“Well,” I said, without thinking, “remember that book in school we read when money falls from the sky at four o’clock? What if our neighborhood was the special place on earth?!”

“You must be out of your mind today, Jack!” laughed Marcus. “Our neighborhood is just a road with green grass and big houses in some random place in the universe! It’s not the headquarters of the lottery!” He had a point. We started packing up the items.

Suddenly, I heard my little brother yell out, “Invaders are coming! Ahhhhhhhh!” and he stormed into the house to grab his plastic sword. We started laughing until tears came to our eyes.

Then, we heard my mom say, “You’ve got customers.”

A minute later we were back in business. This was what Marcus and I were hoping for all day long. I was cashier, and Marcus was treasurer. We started high-fiving each other every time we sold an item. Marcus was starting to seem like his old self, saying comical quotes to our customers, or playing with all the little kids. Every so often, he would count up the bills and whisper to me how much money we had made. When we were getting close

to our target, I started cheering with joy. Then it started raining.

Our customers quickly ran back into their cars, and, soon enough, my driveway was deserted. We had to scramble to move all our boxes inside. And I was sitting on one, with a sad look on my face. It wasn't going to happen. I wasn't going to get that bike. Marcus slowly helped me bring the stuff back into my basement. "What's the matter, Jack?" Marcus asked. I didn't answer. I just got up from my seat and went into my room. Maybe Marcus's ideas don't always work. Nevertheless, this amount of money was more than I ever thought I'd earn in a year. And with my best friend's help, I

had done it in a summer.

As I rolled onto my bed, I counted the money in my hand. Ten ones, and thirty-six quarters. It sure was close, but not quite enough. I could see the bike before my eyes, but it still felt so far. I had to come up with an ingenious, brilliant plan to earn one more dollar before tomorrow morning when I "planned" to get my BMX. I was slowly heading to my sister's room to borrow a dollar when I heard the doorbell ring. I ran downstairs, opened the door, and saw Marcus, drenched, but with a grin on his face. "You dropped something."

In his hand he was holding a soaking wet one-dollar bill. ❄️



# The Soundtrack of Summer

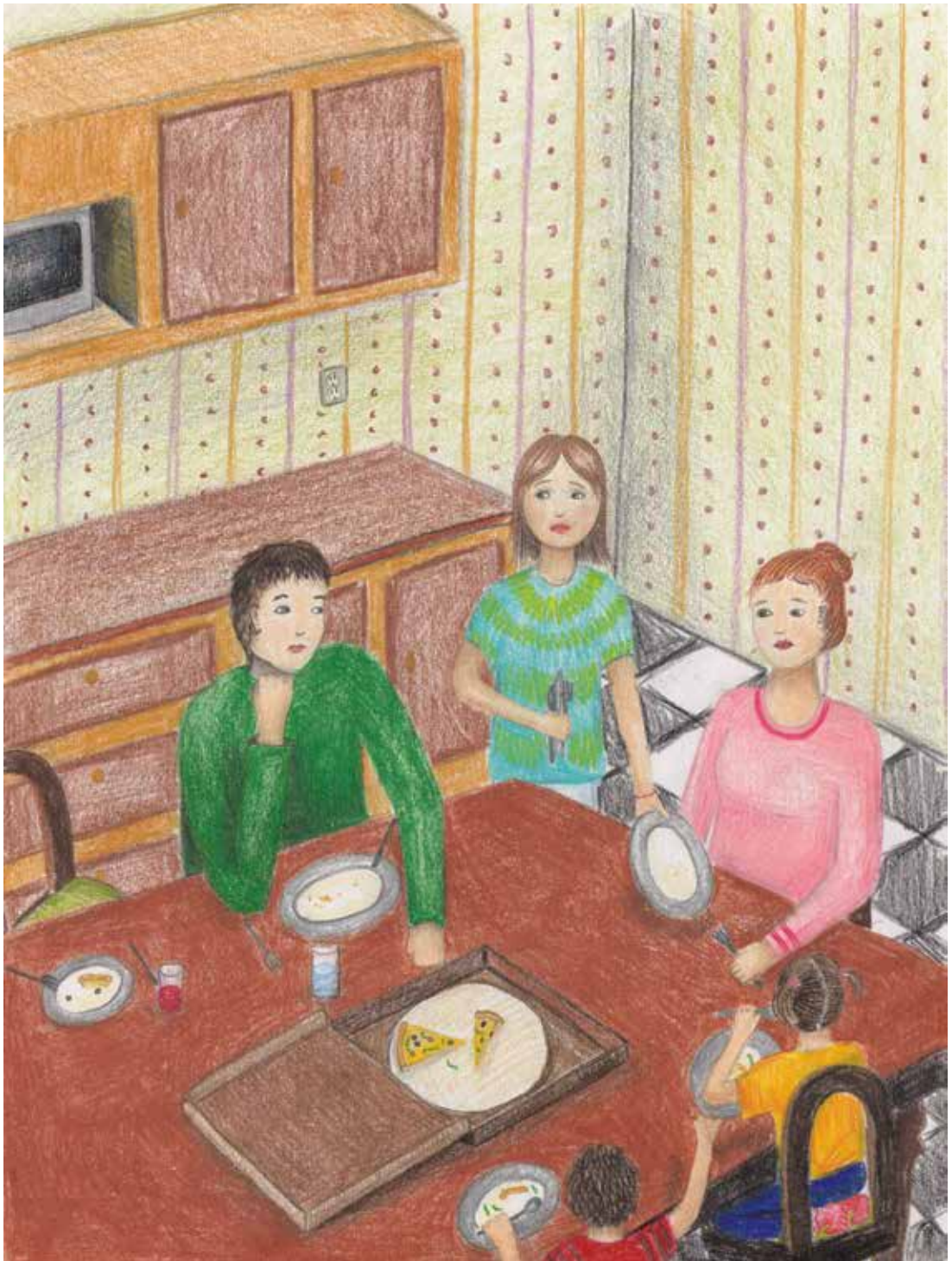
By Rebecca Kilroy

The breeze sweeps through my hair  
and pulls aside the curtain of leaves above me  
allowing sunshine to fall, gracefully onto my face.  
I close my eyes and listen as the hammock sways me gently.  
With a bold *splash* someone dives  
into the relieving cool of a backyard pool.  
An insect hums and chirps while lounging on a leaf.  
A lawn mower putters and roars as it begins to hack away  
at a mighty forest that's been allowed to grow  
far too long.  
My dog beneath the hammock pants contentedly.  
Somewhere near a happy laugh celebrates freedom  
from school for many weeks to come.  
And then I hear a tinkling like the music at a fairy ball.  
For ages that very sound has attracted kids  
like moths to a flame.  
I jump to my feet and set out at a sprint  
towards the iconic ice cream truck.  
With every step my flip-flops snap  
as my feet pound against the asphalt.  
Although the peaceful trance is broken I still love no song more  
than the soundtrack of summer in full swing.



Rebecca Kilroy, 11  
Basking Ridge, New Jersey





*"Dad? Where will we move?" I ask, taking the liberty of cleaning the table*

# This Summer

By **Abigail D'Agosta** and **Kendra Sommers**

*Illustrated by* **Isabella Xie**

## CHAPTER ONE DISASTER FALLS

“**I** CALL THIS ROOM!” I yell so everyone knows which room I had claimed for myself. My brothers and sister run up the stairs so that they too could declare their rooms. I look out my window, seeing the big moving truck pulling into our driveway. I love our new house. There’s a pool in the back and still room for a nice big backyard. The front yard has a rose bush that gives the entryway that perfect look. I can’t wait for our new life to begin in this new house.

The next day as we wait for our dad to come back with the dinner, I start going through my things. I take a picture out of a box labeled “Fragile: Handle with Care” and look at myself with my best friend. Then, I had just gotten my braces and my smile was a little awkward, but I love this picture anyway. And besides, Ashley, my best friend, only lives a block away now.

“Rachel! Your father’s home!” Mom calls.

I race downstairs, my stomach growling for food.

“Yes, finally!” my older brother Jeremy says. We all eat our dinner happily. This is our first meal in our new house!

*Ring! Ring! Ring! Ring!*

“I’ll get that,” Dad says. He walks into the other room and picks up the phone. I can tell just by his face that something is wrong.

He walks back into the dining room slowly with a frown on his face.



Abigail D'Agosta, 13  
Waxahachie, Texas



Kendra Sommers, 13  
Jakarta, Indonesia



Isabella Xie, 13  
Newton, Massachusetts

"What's wrong, dear?" Mom asks, concerned.

He doesn't speak for a moment; he just stares at his pizza. He finally says, "I'm sorry kids, but..." He doesn't know how to say it. "I was just laid off," he says slowly. Now the little ones don't understand, but Jeremy, Mom, and I know what it means. It means we can't live in our new house, the house that I had already grown to love, the house that was close to my best friend's house, the house with a swimming pool in the back yard, the house where I had hoped to make many memories...

## CHAPTER TWO MOVING OUT

"WHY?" I MANAGE, trying not to choke on my orange juice. Mom is too shocked to say anything. Jeremy abruptly leaves the table and goes to his room. My food churns. I am bubbling with questions, though I know I should give Dad some respectful silence.

"The company was bought by another, bigger company."

The twins, Monica and Michael, stop fighting with their forks. "What's de matter, Mommy?" they chorus, looking concernedly at Mom, her eyes red, trying to hold back tears.

Seeing Mom not being up to answering, I say quietly, "Dad got fired. He can't go to work anymore, and he... doesn't get paid."

"So? Now he can play with us!" shouts Michael happily.

I shake my head. "It's not like that. He

won't get paid, and he can't pay for the house expenses."

The twins begin to get it. Monica breaks into tears. "Where we gonna go, then, Rachel?" she sniffs. Dad and Mom are talking quietly now. I usher the twins to their rooms.

"Dad? Where will we move?" I ask, taking the liberty of cleaning the table.

He sighs. "I don't know any more than you, sweetie. For sure not back to our old house." My heart sinks to my stomach. "So we'll probably move to the cheapest place we can find. Renting. Maybe in the country." My heart finishes the drop to my toes.

I burst into my room, sobbing. Reaching for the phone, I dial the number I know so well. "Ashley? Yes, it's me. Hi. I know I said we were... Yes, but something's come up... Oh, Ashley! My dad got fired... No, I don't know why! No, it's nothing he did! Wait!" But I am talking to no one. She hung up on me.

I weep until my eyes are so puffy I can hardly see. The next week is spent repacking everything and selling most of it at garage sales. The neighbors look at us weirdly as we sell our stuff. It is really obvious that we are moving. I bet some of the neighbors think we're leaving the country after attempted bank robbery or something.

Once I see Ashley peddling by on her bike. I am about to wave, but then I see she is with another girl, Megan. I stare wistfully after them as they round the corner. How could she do this to me?

### CHAPTER THREE GREETINGS!

“MOM, ARE WE there yet?” Monica asks for the fifth time.

“No, dear, we still have half an hour left,” Mom answers, a little annoyed.

“OK,” Monica says, a little disappointed.

“Mom, are we there *now?*” Michael asks.

I can tell that Mom is really getting aggravated. She doesn’t respond so Michael just goes back to playing with his action figures.

I look out my car window and see literally nothing. There is just sand and road and a few tumbleweeds and the occasional farm. Mom said we were lucky that our closest neighbor was right next door, since most likely we would have had to go at least a couple of miles from any neighbors. I’m not looking forward to living on a farm with a tiny house. Dad had shown me pictures of our new home, and once I saw them, I *really* wasn’t looking forward to living there.

I fall asleep until we get there. Then Jeremy wakes me up and I quickly get up to see my new house. I stare at it in disbelief.

“Mom, seriously. This is where we have to live?” I moan, raising my eyebrows.

The house itself isn’t that bad, OK, yeah, it *is* that bad. It has one bathroom, three tiny little bedrooms (and that includes the master bedroom), the kitchen is smaller than our old bathroom, the living room is in sad shape, as well as all the

other rooms, and the barn outside is at least three times bigger than our house.

*Ding dong...*

I run to the door and open it. An older couple stands there, along with a younger couple and six children.

“Hello there, darling. Aren’t you the cutest thing! We’re your new neighbors!” the older lady says.

“*All* of you live next door?” I ask, looking at their house which is no bigger than ours.

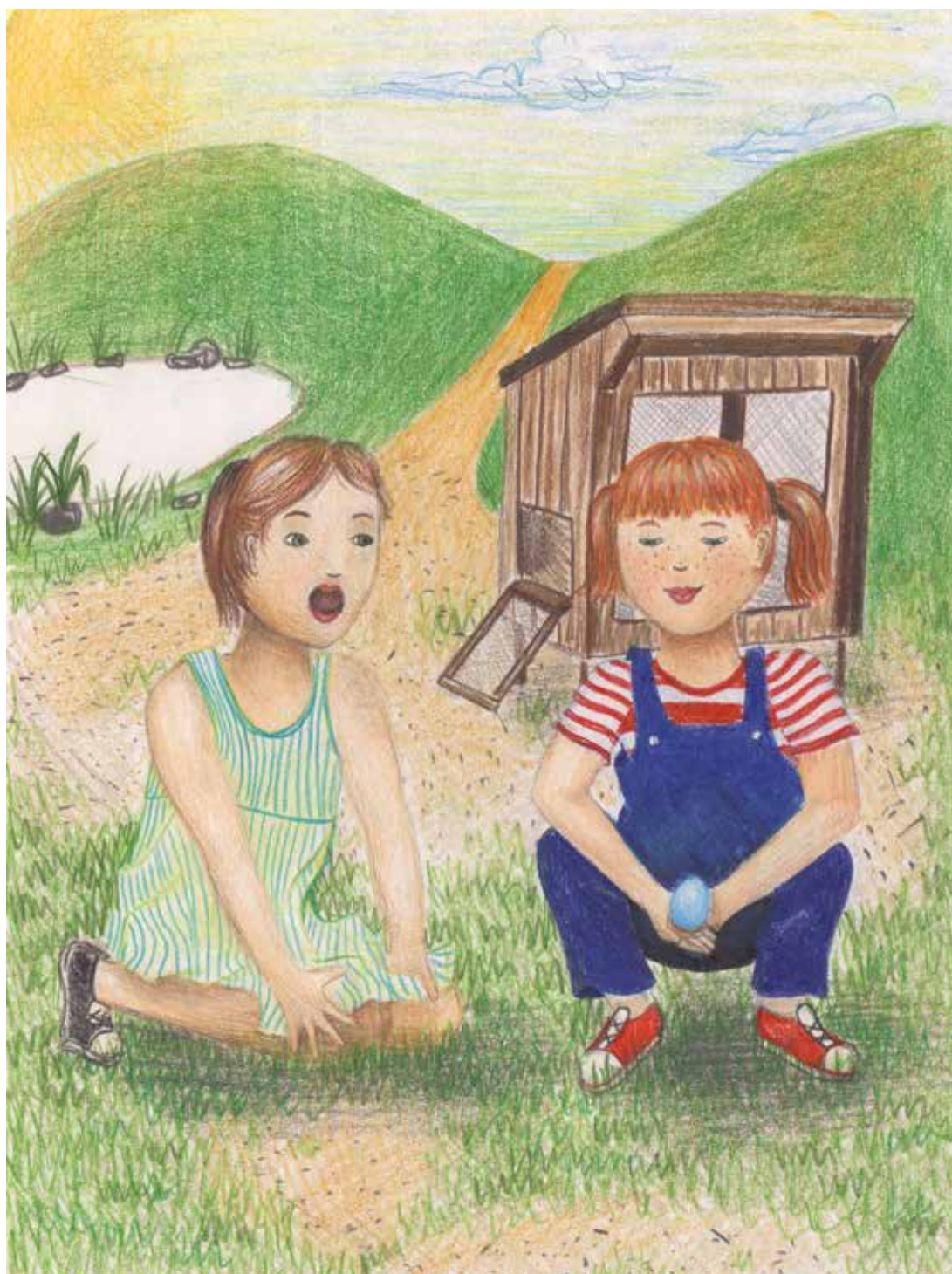
“Well of course, dear, what’d you expect?” the older lady replies. “Oh, and we brought you all a gift—to start out your new farm good.” She gives me a box. Expecting to find brownies or cookies or something, I open it and there sit three young chickens in the box, two hens and one rooster.

I stare at the lady with the kind of look that says, What’s wrong with you people?! and I put the lid back on. I am not looking forward to living here at all. I have a tiny room that I have to share with Monica, a tiny bathroom that I have to share with everyone, a tiny house, and to top it all off weird neighbors who give chickens as gifts!!!

### CHAPTER FOUR A FRIEND?

AFTER MOM discovers that we have guests, she smiles her how-nice-to-see-you-but-this-is-not-exactly-the-best-time smile and leads them outside with the chickens. I can tell she is surprised at this new gift. No one could conceal the





*"See, now you have to admit you don't know much about farm life"*



shock of finding three chickens in a box!

After Mom comes in she wipes her forehead tiredly. “What nice folks,” she comments, and begins to unpack the dishes.

After a moment of awkward silence I ask, “Well... what do you think of their gift? Pretty crazy, huh?”

Mom looks at me and sighs. “Dear, I don’t see why you seem to think their gift is so stupid. We were eventually going to get chickens, you know—but the expense. That was a very kind favor they did.”

I shrug, not quite getting it. “So, like, can I name them?” Mom looks up from her doings.

“Only one. Let Michael and Monica name the others.” I groan, knowing they’d name them crazy stuff, like from some comic strip. Sometimes Monica could be convinced of a good name. But not Michael. The chickens end up being named Ms. Clucks (mine), Rosy-Posy (Monica’s), and Dino Rock (guess whose).

At least I’m not totally cut off from civilization. One of the neighbor kids is my age, her name’s Willamina (everyone calls her Willa, thankfully). One day, I’m out scowling at our little pond, which has barely any water in it.

She comes up so suddenly I jump when she begins talking. “You think we’re weird, don’t you?”

I know I can’t hide the truth. “Yes, I do.”

She smiles and sits down beside me. “Then we’re even.”

“What?”

“For instance, what color eggs will your chickens lay?”

“Uh—white? But what does this have to do wi...?”

“See, that’s something *everyone* knows around here. And to answer that question...” Willa hops up and runs over to the coop. After opening the side door, she displays a roundish-oval egg that’s... *blue*?

“It’s not the right shape,” I frown, “and I never heard of an egg that wasn’t white or brown.”

“See, now you have to admit you don’t know much about farm life.”

“No.”

“So I have a deal, you teach me, I teach you.” I look into her soft, hazel eyes. They mean it. I reach out my hand and grasp hers.

We shake.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FIRST LESSON

“SO YOU’RE SAYING that this is the latest laptop... which is like a travel computer?” Willa asks as she looks at her desktop computer sitting on the desk.

“Yeah, your computer is like ancient compared to mine,” I say, surprised that desktops still even exist.

“OK, now time for your lesson... I’m gonna teach you the art of plucking a chicken,” Willa says jokingly.

“Um... can we learn something else first? I don’t think I need to know that right now,” I say, my eyes going big. When will I ever need to know that? I think to myself.

“OK then, I’ll teach you how to milk a cow,” Willa suggests.

“How about something more practical?” I say, since we didn’t even have a cow yet. “How about you teach me how to pick up a chicken?”

Willa kind of stares at me for a second, probably thinking, She doesn’t even know how to pick up a chicken? My three-year-old sister can do that! Then she says, “OK... let’s get started.”

At first the chickens just run away from me and I can never get a good grip on the chicken, but after an hour I become an expert at picking up chickens the right way.

During dinner, Monica can’t stop playing with her spaghetti. “Hey, Mommy, watch! I can throw this meatball really far!” Monica says.

“Dear, the only thing I want to watch right now is you eating your food,” Mom says, not really wanting to deal with a mess.

“Rachel, how was your day?” Dad says in a low husky voice which means that he didn’t have enough coffee this morning.

“Willa taught me how to pick up a chicken the correct way,” I laugh, remembering how bad I was at it at first.

“Jeremy, what’d you do today?” Dad asks.

“I went back into town and hung out with Sam and Jon,” he answers. Jeremy, Sam, and Jon could never be split. They were always together. I just wondered how long their friendship would last now that we live two hours away. I was afraid

that Jeremy would lose his friends like I lost Ashley. In a way I kind of wanted him to lose his friends so that he knew what it felt like to lose your best friend. I didn’t even know why Ashley left me. I mean, just because we were gonna live farther away didn’t mean we couldn’t be friends. Right?

## CHAPTER SIX

### PERIWINKLE POND

I SNIFF, TRYING to keep tears back. We’ve been living in our new house for a month now, and I feel like a piece of string being pulled so tightly I am about to snap.

I look at my reflection in the muddy puddle called the pond. My eyes are so blurry I don’t see Willa come up behind me.

She sits down beside me. “What’s wrong?” she asks. I pour out my troubles to her, which she takes so kindly and understandingly I feel she knows exactly what I mean, especially as school is starting; I would be again in a new environment—without Willa, who I had begun to accept as a friend. She is homeschooled. Maybe Willa isn’t Ashley; maybe she is better.

She hugs me, and I wipe away my tears. We gaze at the pond for a moment and Willa smiles. “That’s Periwinkle Pond all right; forgot it even existed.”

I look at her, curious. “Periwinkle? It looks mud-brown to me,” I snort, trying to make a joke, but failing utterly. I look at my once new designer-brand shoes.

Now they are caked with mud and dirt from the care of the animals, which we had eventually gotten—including a goat; (cows were too expensive), and Willa had taught me how to milk it, too.

“You’ll see—this autumn.” We grin, and then head home.


Weeks pass, and it begins to rain—oh rain! I never appreciated it before! I feel... *happy*, when I come home through the rain from school.

Willa leads me to the spot where the pond used to be, and I am overjoyed to find it is full with crystal-clear water. But no sign of the periwinkle.

The next day we go again, to find the place covered with millions of dainty little blossoms, blue with a slight tint of whitish purple. I pick a handful and breathe them in. The dusty countryside has changed in one day—from sandy slopes to hills covered in vegetation.

If the land could wait so patiently to change—for the better—maybe I could, too. For all I knew, Dad could get a new, better job (he’d currently not been working much—just selling vegetables, etc.) and then we could move back—not to the old-new house, but somewhere near Ashley, and... and...

I suddenly feel sick to my stomach as I gaze at Willa, her back turned, picking the wildflowers. And... leave this place... and Willa. Not until now do I realize how much I appreciate her. This hollow feeling of just *imagining* my life without her is way worse than when Ashley hung up on me that fateful day.

A tear rolls down my cheek, but I quickly brush it away. And then—something happens, that I will always remember: I find I do not *want* to move away. I want to stay here, out in the middle of nowhere, forever—with Willa. 



# How to Fail

By Henry Allan

*Illustrated by* Andrew Cao



Henry Allan, 11  
New York, New York



Andrew Cao, 12  
Freehold, New Jersey

**D**EEP BREATH, DEEP BREATH. I look straight into the mirror. “Hello,” I say to the fake audience.

“My name is Henry,” I sigh, shaking my head.

“Hello, my name is Henry and I am going to show you what would now be called a modern miracle.” About three hours every day are dedicated to magic practice.

I drop to the floor and pull open my magic drawer. The sides are lined with tons of decks of cards. In the middle to the right I keep all my sponge balls. Then on the wall closest to me rests my set of linking rings. I pick out two decks of cards and five sponge balls and place them in my inside jacket pocket, then I join my parents in the living room.

**A**S WE RIDE in the taxi I talk to my mom about my plans to perform tonight.

“I think I’m going to perform tonight,” I tell my mom.

“Really, for who?” she asks.

“Uncle Doug,” I say, looking at my feet. “Remember last time, when I failed every trick I did for him?”

She looks at me and I bring my head up.

“I know you’re going to be fine and he will like it whether the trick works or not,” she says. I nod my head slightly, but inside I am having my doubts.

**A**S I STEP into my cousins’ apartment a waft of chicken, brisket, and mashed potatoes washes over me. I walk into



*"Now please pick a card"*

the apartment and take off my shoes. My aunt starts walking towards us with a large smile on her face. She comes up and hugs me and I relax a little, but then when I see my uncle my hand tightens around my box of cards. I walk up to my uncle and give him a high five.

"Hi!" he says loudly. "How are you doin'?"

"OK," I say, a little halfheartedly.

"How is school?"

"Pretty good, it's a little hard in a new school, but I'm adjusting to the new standards."

"Awesome! Walking between classes, right?"

"Yeah."

"Soccer?"

"Definitely! I scored a hat trick in my last game and we won five to two!"

"Whoa!! You remember my story about my coaching years?"

We both laugh, remembering his crazy stories. I relax and wander back to my dad, who is talking with my cousin Scott.

We all move into the living room and everyone starts to chat. I see my chance to walk up to Doug and perform my trick,



but then I falter. My past flashes in front of my eyes, seeing the cards drop and all the failures that have happened in the past. I tell myself that I will be fine, but my mind tells me different. Against my will I start walking towards him and I engage in conversation. Soon, before I know it, I've brought my deck of cards out and he is waiting. I snap out of it.

"Sorry," I say, "now please pick a card." As he pulls it out of the deck my hands start to tremble, but I force them to be steady. He looks at his card and I instruct him to put it back anywhere he desires.

"Now," I say, beginning to recall the steps, "you had a free choice to pick any card you wanted." He nods.

"Then you replaced it anywhere you desired." He nods again. I breathe in and out. Out of the corner of my eye I see one of my cousins flick on a light. The orange bright light pierces my eyes, burning down on me as if putting me on the spot. I go on about how I need to find his card. I gasp and my uncle gives me a strange look. I force a smile and continue.

But it's not the same. Now I'm feeling an overwhelming terror. There was a specific order of the cards that could not be disturbed, and I had missed one final step in the order. Now the cards sitting on the table are glaring at me as if another person lived inside them, telling me I was a failure. I shift my weight and

continue with my patter until the first reveal. I throw the cards concealed in my hand onto the table. I point to the letter and suit on the two cards that match up to make his card and a look of surprise appears on his face.

I go through the rest and I wince when he lands on the card that should be his. I close my eyes, my face burning, and gather up my cards. I completely ignore my uncle. I imagine my him shaking his head, his expression annoyed. I imagine him asking what should've happened—a magician's nightmare. I start to walk away when I hear him try to speak. I interrupt him.

"I know it was bad, I'm sorry I wasted your time." A questioning look appears on his face.

"What are you talking about, that was great!" My eyes get wide with surprise. Tons of questions race through my head.

"What? But I messed up. Your card wasn't the one I threw down."

"It doesn't matter if you messed up. I loved the performance, and it was pretty cool when you made those two cards appear that matched mine. How did you do that anyway?"

FROM THEN ON I performed for my uncle countless times in a breeze. Now I can talk to him about anything calmly because I know that I don't have to be perfect. Progress not perfection. ❁



# Goodbye

By **Caroline Thompson**

Did I do something wrong?  
Did I say something I wasn't supposed to?  
Why did you leave me like a child crying at school,  
pleading for their parents to come back?  
Only they come back, and I know you will not.

You weren't supposed to leave.  
I never saw you go.  
You didn't leave a letter.  
Can I come with you? We could run away up to the clouds  
and hide there forever.

Are you really gone forever?  
Can I save you, or is it too late?  
I heard your voice, you whispered in my ear, but it sounded  
like a scream.  
"I'm sorry."

Sometimes I wonder what I would be like if you were  
still here.  
Would I be happier?  
Would I cry less?  
I miss you.



Caroline Thompson, 12  
Pound Ridge, New York

# College Day

By Ada King

Illustrated by Lana Parke-Reimer



Ada King, 11  
New York, New York



Lana Parke-Reimer, 13  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

IT WAS 7:32 A.M., my hair was getting frizzy, the fog outside my car window was limiting my vision to a few scrawny bushes, and my stomach was churning.

“Hey,” my dad called from the front seat, “you OK, Pade?”

“Yup,” I lied, because it wasn’t really a question, but conversation. He was satisfied and turned around. I turned up the volume of the song I was listening to on my iPod and turned around too. I stared out the window, making out the faint silhouette of pine trees in the distance. Distracting myself from the thoughts building up in my mind, I nibbled my ham-and-cheese sandwich. I wasn’t hungry.

Suddenly, *snap!* The thought in the back of my mind popped out at me. All I could think about was, what would happen next? It was like in a cartoon when someone opens a closet full of junk and everything falls on the character. Suddenly I was drowning in questions. The only problem was that there was no way to gasp for air. My mind was spinning and the new plastic smell of the car made me nauseous. In the distance I could see a Hogwarts-type campus approaching. It was my sister’s. She was entering her first year of college at Vassar College. Emma (my sister) smiled at me from the front seat but I could tell it was a fake smile.

“You OK?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she replied, with the same tone I had lied to my dad with. We both knew she was thinking about something, but I didn’t know what it was.



*"Oh I remember that day!" Emma reminisced*

"Can I help you with something?" I said. I was trying to sound helpful, but I ended up sounding like that obnoxious teenager who works at Duane Reade right before you ask her where the Band-Aids are.

Emma clearly didn't notice and just replied with, "Nope, why?"

She didn't expect an answer (even though it was a question) so I just said, "Nothing."

Emma turned her head towards the window and so did I, but my eyes widened when I realized that Vassar was right in front of us! The car slowed and I paused my song. I could hear college girls scream-

ing, "Honk if you love Vassar!"

There was an old brick building glaring at me through the car window. Surrounding it were small bushes and skinny sidewalks that seemed to twist and curve in unnecessary ways. The sky was the color of a slimy unwashed windshield. Cold droplets of dew clung to blades of grass and mist floated through the air aimlessly.

I took my time getting out of the car, slowly stretching, making sure not to go too fast. My dad seemed happy but his eyes were anxious. This is it, I thought to myself while I exited the car. Rain dribbled onto my shoulder and I pouted. Bearing a smile I suggested we go unpack Emma's stuff. I didn't know that I would need to carry anything.

I ended up unpacking some of Emma's pictures, and I found a picture of us in the rain when I was five and she was twelve. We both had brightly colored jackets on, left over from past visitors who had probably forgotten their jackets and my mom was making use of them.

"Oh I remember that day!" Emma reminisced. She was sitting on her bed now, observing her room. I almost giggled, remembering playing in the rain and dirt that day. When it rained, worms would come up to the surface of the ground and you could find them and play with them anywhere. Emma taught me that. The weather in the picture was exactly the same as it was outside, but my face showed a totally different emotion than in the picture. I despised and loved that pic-

ture. Obviously I was happy then, I had nothing to worry about. I was naive but I guess in a good way because I was happy. I wished I was still naive and that's what got under my skin. I knew about life and change.

Later during lunch I sat down, being hungry for the first time since we had gotten to Vassar. As icy wet September air lingered through the blue-gray cafeteria a couple of unhappy college kids sulked around the cafeteria. A few lone professors sat together and nibbled salads but didn't speak.

I had gotten a pastry earlier and now had it out on my plate. It had French-vanilla buttercream frosting that tasted almost like perfume. It had chocolate sprinkles on top which were done so artfully that each sprinkle looked like it was meant to be there. Emma eyed me warily, hoping I wouldn't notice. I felt a tinge of satisfaction knowing this. I caught a glimpse of her phone and I suggested an idea of mine.

"Hey, Em?" I asked.

"Yeah?" she replied.

"So I was wondering if we could do this thing I just thought of," and I explained to her what it was. "So we make a list of promises we'll never break as sisters." The minute I said it I realized how dumb it sounded. "You don't have to agree to it, it was just an idea," I added with caution. I didn't want to get into an argument on our last day together just because we were all anxious.

"Mm... OK, let's do it!" Emma nodded

approvingly and started to type our silly ideas.

“How about, ‘Stay on top of your homework.’” I was going into fourth grade and nervous about it. Then we got into more “emotional” ideas. In just a few minutes we were laughing and shouting like monkeys.

“Oo! Oo! How about... ‘Stick together!’” I stuck out two thumbs up to fake enthusiasm at my idea. We giggled stupidly and then, noticing people were staring, Emma stopped. So did I.

I felt uncomfortable for the rest of the day. When we finally got in the car to go back home, and after we said our good-byes, I noticed that the box next to me in the back seat had the same picture that I had found when I was unpacking Emma’s stuff. My dad had put the heat on and I could feel the artificial heat seeping in through my chest. It smelled dry and leathery. My thighs (still cold) stuck to the plastic seat and my knuckles were white from the cold. Strangely enough though, it felt good. I looked at the picture with the jackets and umbrella and almost sobbed. I chewed on some Cracker Jacks and stared out the window, only to see Emma waving goodbye. I smiled and waved. Our Subaru revved up and that was it.

Later, when we all got home, I walked into my room and brushed against a corner. My room was silent and now there

was a tiny pile of chipped paint where I had bumped. I was holding the picture of Emma and me in my hand; my palms were sweaty from holding it the whole way. I pinned the picture up on my blue pin-up board, which was now hard with age. I stepped back into my empty room to observe my placing of the picture. Content, I flopped down onto my bed and closed my eyes. I could feel the emptiness but I didn’t mind it. I needed it.

I thought about my day, how weird it had been. My mind was so full I didn’t know what I was thinking about. I fluttered my eyes open and looked at the picture. In it I was smiling at the ground and Emma was crouching down over me with an umbrella in her hand. The leftover brightly colored rain jackets filled up the frame. The rain still dribbled in the picture and outside, but it was warming up.

Then I remembered before, when I first noticed the picture, Emma had said, “Oh yeah, I love that picture.” I knew from the way she said it that it brought back good memories for her, and I knew she wished for more memories. I realized that I thought I knew about change but I didn’t. If I had, I would have known that these things pass and I didn’t need to worry. Now I knew we’d always stick together, be there for each other, and always own that five-year-old-and-twelve-year-old-together-in-the-rain relationship. 🌸



# Book Review

By Rachel Harris

*My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer*,  
by Jennifer Gennari; Houghton Mifflin Books  
for Children: New York, 2012; \$15.99




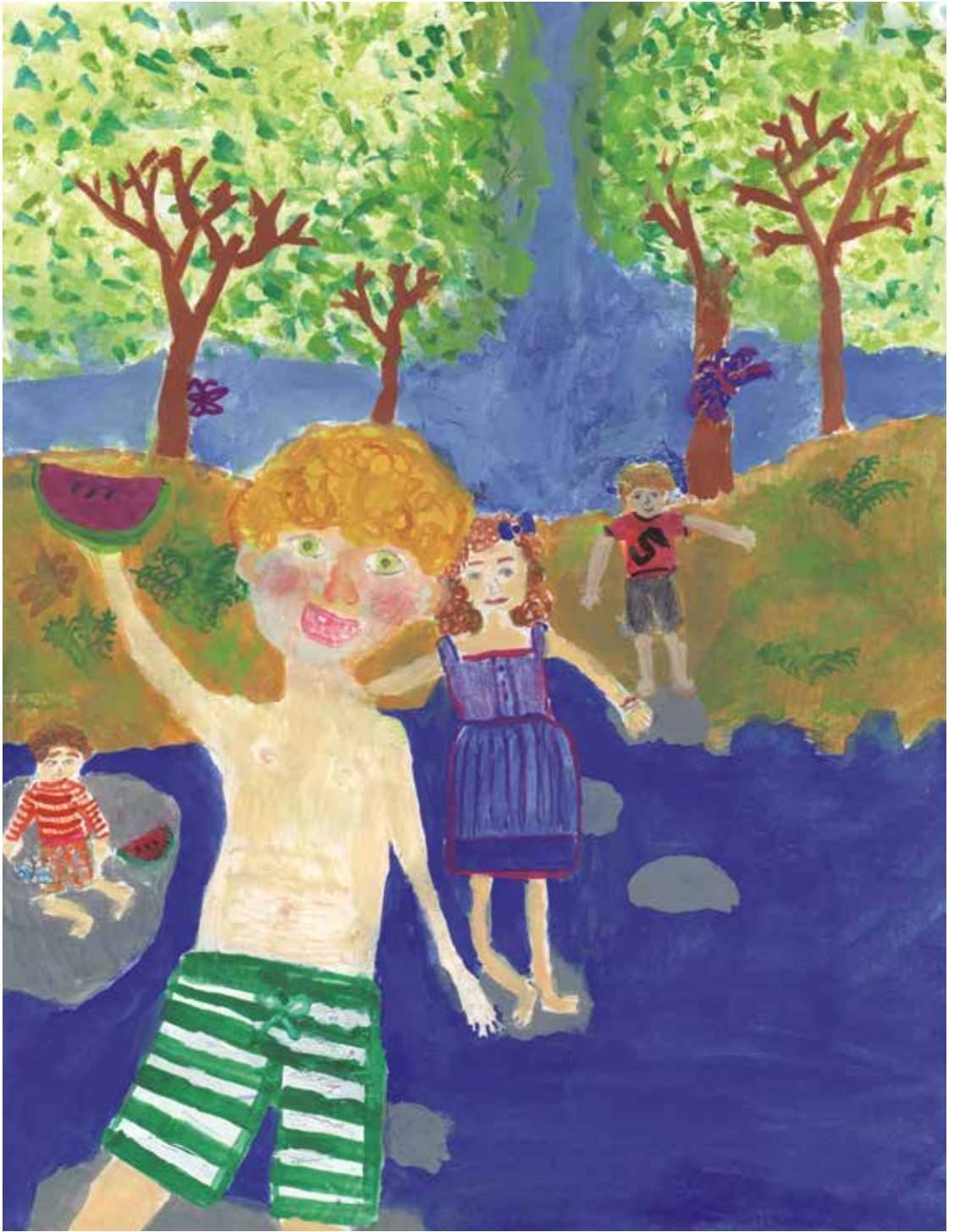
Rachel Harris, 11  
Pasadena, California

**M**Y MIXED-UP BERRY BLUE SUMMER is a book about politics and pie. June Farrell is a twelve-year-old girl living in Vermont whose talent is making delicious pies. All she wanted to do over summer vacation was go swimming in Lake Champlain and enter the Champlain Valley Fair Pie Competition. But everything changes when Eva, her mom's girlfriend, moves in. Under Vermont's new civil law homosexuals can get married, and June's mom and Eva plan to do just that. But when people get mad about the law and start boycotting her family's business, June must save not only the shop but also her family's rights. And it all starts with baking a pie.

I can relate to June in that sometimes I am different, but it is our differences that make us interesting. *My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer* is also very political. It talks a lot about homosexual marriage rights. I think that if two people love each other, age, race, or gender shouldn't matter. It should just be about what the heart wants. I also think that people should mind their own business about this subject. In *My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer*, people put up signs that say things like,

“Take Back Vermont,” “Boycott Gay Businesses,” and “Lesbians Shouldn’t Have Children.” I think that things like that are very, very wrong. It is one thing to disagree with homosexuality in your mind, but to try to get a law passed against it is unthinkable, at least to me. Many people today are uncomfortable with or even afraid of homosexuality. Just like in the book when Eva says, “We won’t keep quiet about homophobia,” I think that people shouldn’t be afraid of homosexuality, and if they are they should talk about it so they aren’t so uncomfortable with it. I think that homosexuals should get the same rights as everyone else, the right to be in the military, the right to get married, and the right to have children.

One part of the book that I particularly like is June’s mom and Eva’s wedding. I liked how they were brave and did what they knew was right, even though some people disagreed. In the wedding, more people came than June thought would come to a homosexual wedding. At the beginning of the book, June feels like she only has one mom. All she cares about is winning the pie contest. At the end of the book she wins first place, but she discovers more important things. She no longer thinks of Eva as uptight. She isn’t embarrassed like she thought she would be when her mom and Eva’s wedding announcement is in the newspaper. She no longer wants a dad because she has a family, and Eva is part of that. Other people change, too. For example, the Costas, their neighbors, were against homosexual marriage at the start, but at the end they come to the wedding, not to protest but because they are happy for Ms. Farrell and Eva. The same thing is true with many other people. I think this proves that people can change and all they need is some hope, inspiration, and mixed-up berry blue pie. 



*"If I ran away, I would go here to live"*

# As a Family

By Shyla DeLand

*Illustrated by Sunny Eiseman*

IT WAS JUST a typical day, a nightmare of an “as a family” picnic; my brothers following me around, me trying to get away and be alone for five short minutes. I’m sort of a loner sometimes, though when I say that, I don’t mean I’m a recluse, or that I’m not a people person, because I am. What I mean is that sometimes, or actually most of the time, I like to be just a little bit apart from everyone else, near to, but apart from, which makes sense to me but not really anyone else. It’s just that feeling, when you want to be alone, and if you could be alone, with no problem, whenever you wanted, the feeling would probably subside almost entirely. But when you have three little brothers pestering you, the feeling tends to get stronger, until you’re on the verge of running away. Which I was. Some kids, the stupid ones, probably would’ve gone away right off the bat, no thoughts whatsoever, gone to the most obvious place and gotten found within an hour. Not me. I had a plan, and the whole plan had one purpose, to go and live by myself, for a day or so, and then come back, smoothly and perfectly, with no mishaps, which of course I knew was unlikely and almost impossible, but I didn’t care. It would work. Almost everything that is planned well and done carefully works out in the end; I had done things like this enough to be sure of myself.

My bag had been packed—an extra set of clothes and some bandages—and put under my bed next to my neatly rolled-up sleeping bag. When my survivalist dad started squirreling away canned beans by the dozen in preparation for Armageddon, or



Shyla DeLand, 11  
Remsen, New York



Sunny Eiseman, 13  
Cummington, Massachusetts

a tornado, whichever came first, I snuck one or two cans out every week until I had enough to feed myself for, at the most, three days. Beans were a pretty boring diet, but it was the only thing I could think of that would keep and wouldn't be too gross if I ate them cold. So after a month, I had enough food, which left only one unresolved problem—water. I definitely wasn't carrying close to twenty pounds of water for six miles in the middle of the night, which was when I planned to make my escape. And as the days passed and the date I had planned to leave on grew closer, that problem grew bigger and bigger. I *would* be staying near a creek, but the water there wasn't pure. What I needed was a water filter or a clean, fresh, cold spring or a magic unicorn that shot water out of its horn or some other wonderful thing that either didn't exist or that I just didn't have. That settled it. I would carry the water.

But on this particular day, when we had taken the truck to the creek, which was right below my hideout, for yet another “as a family” picnic that I was sure would end, as they all did, in someone crying and someone else with a scraped elbow; on this day, I was so full of two still-cold-in-the-middle hot dogs and countless burnt marshmallows, and happy in my family's oblivion to my scheme, that somehow it just slipped out.

“If I ran away, I would go here to live,” I sang out to my brother Max, who is two years younger than me and the biggest tattletale in the world.

“You're gonna run away?” He turned his wide-eyed face towards me and I saw that devilish, gotta-tell-no-matter-what glint come into his eyes. Then he turned to Adam and Nathan and yelled, “Let's go tell Ma!”

“Tell what?” Nathan asked. He was the youngest—five years old and had been too absorbed in playing with a dry, crinkly butterfly wing and three skins from some kind of creepy bug to hear what I had been saying.

“Kelly's gonna run away!” Adam yelled, jumping up and down. At seven, he was the most energetic of us all. Which could get annoying. I ignored them, caught up in the problem that was mainly my fault.

My brothers skipped over the rocks and for a moment. I bit my lip, afraid they would fall. The creek here was all rocks and rushing water, which was fun for me, and Max, now that he was getting bigger and wasn't afraid to “rock hop.” But I worried about Nathan and Adam, who were still little and not as agile and long-legged as Max and I. Then, I decided that if they fell, that was their problem. I turned and jumped into the creek. I was sick and tired of my parents' unorganized, supposedly fun “as a family” picnics, camp-outs, and other generally boring activities.

That night, I was lying in bed, trying desperately to read my favorite book, *Shiloh*, without anyone finding out, when suddenly Mom peeked her head in. “Max told me you said you wanted to run away and live in a zoo.”



"The zoo?" I closed my book with a sigh. Marty would have to save Shiloh on his own. "Max also told me that to start growing, babies have to eat snails. And that wedding rings have lasers in them."

"He probably saw that in a movie."

"Not the snails. Mom, I'm not gonna run away. To a zoo." I added the last bit so it wouldn't be a lie.

"But are you going to run away?" Mothers have the ability to read minds, I swear.

I fiddled with my book, looked away. "Max has a wild imagination. I said I thought it'd be fun to *live* at the creek." I grinned. "No clue where he got the zoo." The really bad thing about me is that I'm the best liar I know, so I can get away with practically anything. But Mom usually knows what I'm thinking, so I was surprised when this time, she didn't. Or maybe she did. I dunno. Maybe I'll never know, but Mom just brushed my hair back off my forehead and gave me a quick kiss.

"Well, I'm glad you're not running away to the zoo."

"Yeah, that would be awful." I faked a giggle and inwardly cringed. "Night, Mom."

"Night, hon." Mom switched off my light and tiptoed into my brother's room.

I sprang into action—pulled my clothes out from under my bed, my six cans of beans out of my closet, grabbed a pen and notepad and started writing a note to make sure nobody freaked out or called 911. At first, I thought about writing in rhyme, but that sounded stupid:

Don't get upset,  
I just ran away,  
I won't be gone long,  
just for a day.

Then I decided to write a suicide note, just to scare them:

Dear Mom, Dad,  
Tell the boys I love them, and tell Tom that I forgive him for ignoring me this past year, and you can have all my money...

But I crumpled that one up, too, because then they would call the cops, and I *really* didn't want that to happen. Besides, Mom would kill me for faking a suicide note. So finally, I ended up with just a simple note:

Dear Mom, Dad, and boys,  
Don't worry, I won't be gone long—just a day or so. I want to see what it feels like to be Huck Finn for a little while. I won't do anything dangerous, I promise. Don't call 911.

Love, Kelly

It was good. I tore it off the pad as quietly as I could, then snuck out to the kitchen with my things and put them outside. I stuck my note on the fridge but ended up taping it to Mom's coffee cup, her first stop every morning. Then I was gone.

I biked almost the whole way, then hid my bicycle in the woods and carried my things to the tiny, dusty camp with the falling-off door. But just as I got there, headlights pulled into the trees as far as possible and two guys about seventeen or eighteen jumped out of a filthy truck.

"Dude, I can't believe your dad's gonna let us hang here!" the skinny one yelped.

"Shhh... Who says he's gonna 'let' us?" the taller, bulkier guy said. "I do what I want around here. I'm tougher than he is."

I watched with shock as my perfect hideout was invaded by two obnoxious teenagers with long hair and bad attitudes. Something crashed in the trees and the door slammed. For all their toughness, that door slammed awful quick.

Well, that did it. I suddenly started to question my own intelligence. I mean, what kind of eleven-year-old leaves her home at 4:30 in the morning to go to some cold, broken-down camp that is being stolen by two guys that are probably involved in underage drinking or illegal drugs or whatever it was that I was sure they were doing? An insane eleven-year-old, who has just been brought back to her senses and is riding her bicycle in a mad rush to get home.

I swear, I've never biked half a mile as quickly as I rode those six miles home. I heard squirrels and bears and dragons chasing me, and as my overactive imagi-

nation and bursts of adrenaline kicked in, I went into hyperdrive and, even now, I can't remember anything after I started pedaling.

When I got home, Mom was sitting in her baby-blue bathrobe, drinking a cup of black coffee and reading my note. She looked up as I stomped tiredly up the steps.

"What's this—your idea of a joke?" she asked in a groggy voice, holding up my note. I grabbed it and tossed it into the garbage.

"No..." I started, but the interrogation continued.

"What's all this?" Mom waved her hand at my clothes and food.

"Uh..." I looked down and then back up at Mom. "I thought we could go camping. Later. So I started packing."

"Well, OK," Mom smiled. "I'll tell the boys when they wake up. It'll be a fun thing to do—as a family. Good idea, Kelly."

I headed for my room, grinning. For the first time in a while, I felt really happy about those three words that usually meant endless boredom. As a family. I couldn't wait. ❁



# The Creek

By **Bethany Rayfield**

I stare into the crystal clear water and watch  
My life flow by in only a way nature can make it.  
My eyes wander to the trees  
and notice the pattern of the shadow  
the tree casts upon the rough black rocks.  
It is then I realize every aspect of the creek—  
the fish, the sun flowers and morning flowers,  
and a patch of purple lilies.  
My world—  
with its plants and animals,  
loud green frogs and slithery, scaly snakes.  
There is so much space  
yearning to be discovered,  
and I feel the need to explore it.  
I look up at the sky  
and realize just how lucky I am to be here—  
a place just behind my house, a place I can be alone  
and let my thoughts run wild.  
So, tell me now,  
where do you feel at peace?  
Where, is your world?



Bethany Rayfield, 12  
Rolla, Missouri

# Whisper of Night

By Jenna Fields

*Illustrated by* Madeleine Alexander



Jenna Fields, 12  
Coyote, California



Madeleine Alexander, 10  
Keller, Texas

THE MUSTY, DAMP SMELL of earth engulfs me, blocking the sharp, acute smells of night from outside my den. My bushy tail, tipped with white, flicks, causing the leaves and moss that make up my nest to rustle and scatter. It does not matter. I shall see to it come daylight, for now it is my time to prowl. The moon is full and the time is right, I must emerge.

I crawl on my belly up through the narrow tunnel, into the night. The night air bites at my nose but is not flagrant, only thrilling, as if promising a successful hunt. As I enter the outside, I am cautious but not fearful, for these woods are mine, at least for now. The silver luminous moon tosses shafts of light through the pine boughs, casting eerie shadows across my path. I pick up a casual lope through the trees, the moon putting a silvery luster on my coat. I know where I am headed, the meadow.

After crossing a stream, I reach my ultimate destination, a field cloaked in moonlight, crawling with prey. I stop at the edge, testing the air, listening for the pumping of a minute heart. The grass rustles beneath my paws as I enter the field. I sit and wait, head low, cupped ears ready to detect any small sound, tail still as stone. No sound comes to my ears and all smells are stale. Where is the prey that has been subject to my hunt innumerable times? Perhaps if I follow the field down further, prey will once again be plentiful. Disheartened, I rise and set off again, hoping my efforts don't prove fruitless.

At last the warm, tangy smell of rabbit finds my nose. Almost



*The rabbit bobs and weaves, barely eluding my teeth*

at once, I spot the long-eared prey, nibbling on a grass stalk, without any inkling of my presence. Crouched low, I slide through the grass, nose twitching. Like a coiled spring, I crouch, and then launch my lithe body at the hare, limbs uncoiling, teeth bared. However, at the last minute, the rabbit shuffles to the

right of where it was, leaving me to land awkwardly, just missing by inches. The startled rabbit leaps in alarm and bounds off across the field. I dart after it, tail whipping behind me. The rabbit bobs and weaves, barely eluding my teeth. After what seems like eons, the rabbit shoots down its hole, leaving me empty-




pawed above. I growl in frustration, having come so close to snaring my first catch of the night, but moonlight is waning and I must continue.

I lift my head, only to find that I'm in a part of the field that I have never been in before. During my chase with the hare, I had not noticed the unnatural glow that obscured the moonlight and bathed the grass in its sickly luster. Curious, I slink forward, keeping low and silent. There, hidden by the trees, looms a huge shape, like none I have ever seen. As I approach the shape (which by now I have assumed is a human's house), a deep bark originates from an enclosure, adjacent to the house. A dog. I should have known.

All of a sudden, the light in the house flashes on and a loud voice roars from the structure. Though I don't know what it means, it's probable that this is my cue to flee, which I do. I turn in the darkness and run, run with all I have. The night blurs around me. A *bang* and a roar rip through the woods, causing the ground beneath me to explode. Startled, I forget to watch my feet and I tumble nose over tail through the grass, landing hard on my side. I glance back; long enough to see the gopher hole that snared my leg. My chest heaves, my breathing is ragged, and a throbbing pain begins to grow in my front leg. For once I fear for my life. If I move now, I will draw attention to myself, and the pain in my leg is so immense, a quick getaway would be near impossible.

However, if I stay here, my presence may be prominent, if the human saw me go down. Panicked, I turn the choices over in my head. I will wait. I lie on my side, watching the moon move across the sky. No one comes. I test the air. The coast is clear, at least for now. Painstakingly, I raise one foot after the other but cannot bear any weight on my injured foot. Knowing not how far it is back to my den, I set out, hoping to make it home before daylight spreads its rosy arms and engulfs the land once again.

After limping my way to the end of the field, it feels as if my foot has been engulfed in flames, and all of my other paws are sore. By the time I reach the stream, I almost topple into it, but I quench my immense thirst and soak my throbbing foot in the icy, cool depths. It relieves some of the pain and helps eradicate the swelling, but the pain is still present and I still cannot bear any weight upon my lame foot. My tail droops and my head is hung low, yet my den is only a short ways from here. After much toil, I at last reach my den, just as I had left it.

I limp to the entrance and wiggle down the tunnel, the damp air a shocking change from the dry night air. Without even fixing my nest, I collapse, exhausted, into a much deserved deep sleep. However, I will return to the meadow tomorrow, for I am the silent one, the one that stalks on light paws, the whisper of night. 



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