

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Gordon Su, age 11, for "Heights," page 39

CLIMBING HIGHER

Some of the girls on the swim team are dangerously thin

HEIGHTS

Addie helps Conner overcome his fear of heights

Also: A Christmas story by Isabel Folger

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2013

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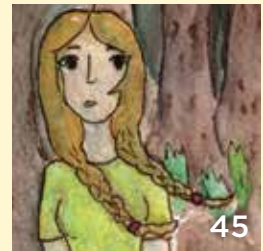
Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 42, NUMBER 2
NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2013

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Editor's Note

The holiday season is nearly here. Sure, that means parties, presents, and time off from school or work. It can also be a time to look back on the year and reflect. Were we good people this year? Can we be better? Twelve-year-old Isabel Folger—who happens to live near our office in Santa Cruz, California, and recently stopped by to meet us—has written two stories about the spirit of the holidays. Her first, “A Fortunate Soul,” appeared in our January/February 2013 issue. In Isabel’s new story, “A Special Present” (page 23), a girl named Florence realizes that making her sister happy is the best way to find happiness for herself. She gives her sister the one gift she herself wanted most. Maybe the old adage is true: It’s better to give than to receive. Think about Florence’s act of kindness when you go shopping this holiday season. You may just find that your own life could be a little happier if you follow her example.

— *Gerry Mandel*

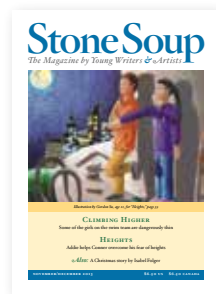
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ON THE COVER Gordon won first prize in the AAA Safety Poster Contest in 2011 and first place in the U.S. Kids Magazine Cover Contest in 2012. He especially likes to draw and paint landscapes. Gordon also enjoys reading, sports, and playing the trumpet. He wants to be an architect when he grows up.



The Mailbox



I've been subscribing to *Stone Soup* for years!! My whole family loves reading your publication. In fact, my younger brother is submitting three poems which reflect all of our experiences/feelings regarding Hurricane Sandy. My five-year-old sister is already mesmerized by the beautiful illustrations.

Michael Kelly, 11

Belle Harbor, Rockaway, Queens, New York

I would like to congratulate you on your fantastic magazine. It has really inspired me to write through seeing what others can achieve. I particularly enjoyed reading "Arachne," by Victoria Boyden [January/February 2012]. I felt that she had totally captured the sense of "Gods among mortals" that the myth tells.

Annabelle Brand, 12

Bristol, United Kingdom

I love your magazine! I've been receiving *Stone Soup* for years now and still enjoy opening each new issue. It's such a great idea to have a writing magazine *by* kids—I always like seeing the writing and illustrations by kids my age from around the world. I've submitted some of my writing to *Stone Soup* in the past, but it unfortunately has not been published. I'm not giving up, though! A few of my other poems have been published in other magazines/books like *Creative Kids* magazine and *The Anthology of Poetry*. Thanks for making such an awesome magazine! I'm excited to see the stories that will appear in the next issue!

Madeleine Gaidimas, 13

Ridgewood, New Jersey

I came across a book review by a girl named Rachel Harris in the July/August 2013 issue that I really liked. It was about a book called *My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer*, by Jennifer Gennari. I actually liked the review so much that I checked out the book at the library, and loved it. Even my *Dad* liked it. Good job, Rachel!

Ruthie Weinbaum, 9

Amherst, Massachusetts

Thank you for publishing *Stone Soup* magazine. I have enjoyed reading the stories to my students. My students have thoroughly loved listening to the variety of stories in the publication. It has fueled their fires to write well. They have been able to hear what great young authors do to connect with readers. The illustrations are inspiring as well.

Jennifer Miller

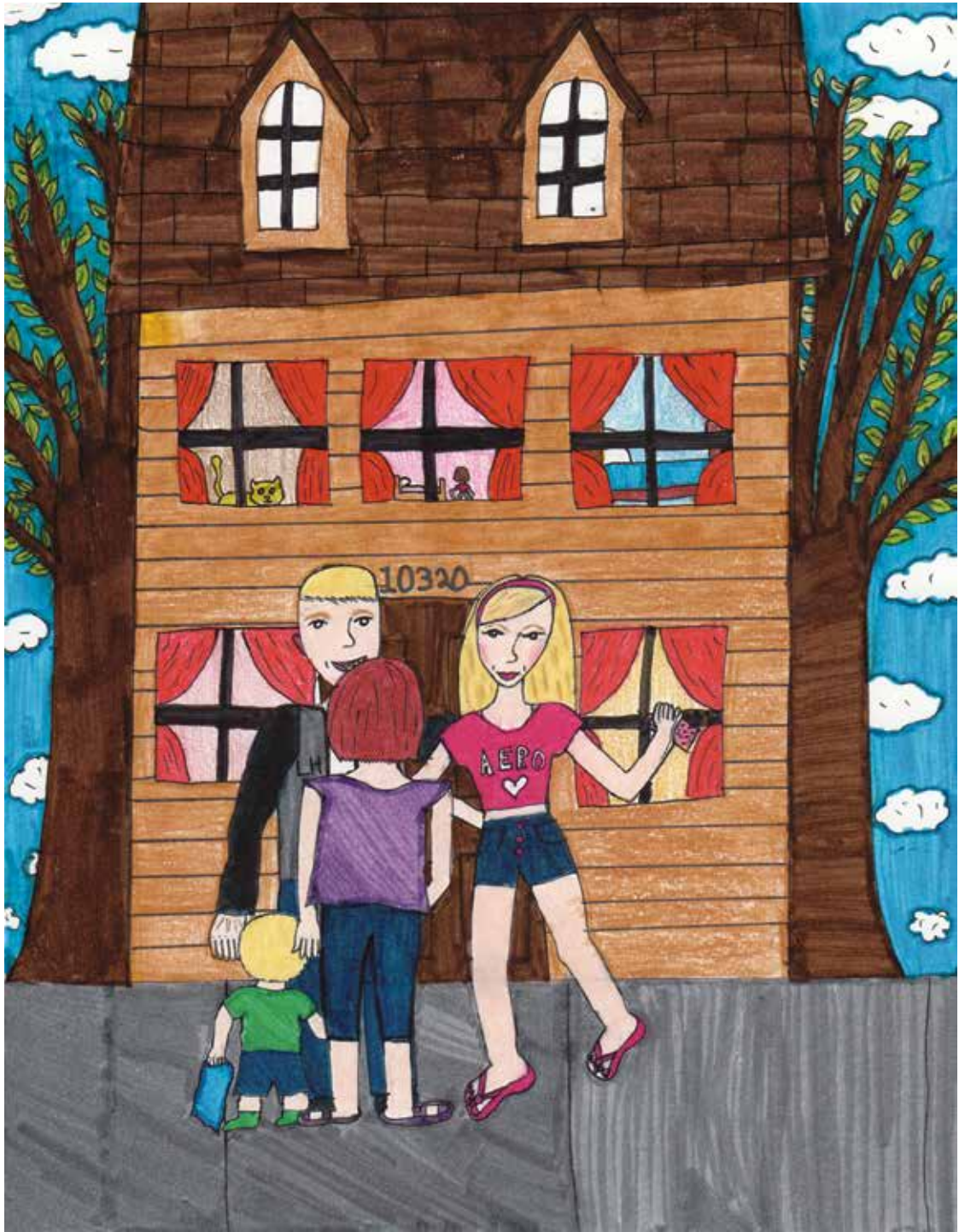
Fourth-grade teacher
Indianapolis, Indiana

I'm a sixth-grade boy who would like to submit one of my personal narratives to your magazine. I have read your magazine a few times and found that many of the winning pieces were very well written. I enjoyed all of them and thought that I could try as well. When I read poems, I like when they are written by kids, so that I can see what they are thinking about. It seems more interesting when somebody my age is writing something.

Minwoo Kwon, 12

Irvine, 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.



"What are you going to do? Tell on us?"

Sisters

By **Elenia Henry**

Illustrated by the author

“**H** EY, JESSIE, want to play something?” Alice Dunwell offered. Her sister looked up from her phone briefly, rolled her eyes, and continued texting.

“Don’t call me Jessie, and what do you think?” she said, flopping down on the sofa. Alice sighed. Why was she always acting that way, ever since she turned thirteen?

There was a knock on the door, and Jessie swatted away her sister’s attempts at opening it.

“I’ll get it!” she said, and then opened the door. Waiting outside was a tall blond boy, wearing a loose jacket and leaning against the doorway.

“Hey, beautiful,” he said. Jessie giggled.

“Hi, Parker,” she replied.

“You ready?” Parker asked. “And who’s the redhead?”

“Yeah, I am, and she’s just my sister. Let’s go before she pulls me into some sort of preschool game,” Jessie said. Now it was Alice’s turn to roll her eyes—she was in fifth grade!

“Wait, where are you going? You’re not allowed to date!” Alice said, as the couple started to walk away.

“What are you going to do? Tell on us? Sheesh, Ally, nobody likes a snitch!” Jessie laughed, and she and Parker went on. Frustrated, Alice slammed the door shut and, cross-armed and fuming, sat down hard on an armchair. She’s only fourteen! she thought. Her baby brother, Finn, toddled up to her and patted her knee with a chubby little hand, as if to comfort her. She laughed, and picked him up. What’s it to me? Just forget it, Alice.



Elenia Henry, 10
Bel Aire, Kansas

Two hours later, Jessie and Parker entered.

"Bye, Parker," Jessie said, batting her eyelashes at him.

"Bye, Jessica," he said, and then left.

"For one, your name doesn't even stand for Jessica, it's just Jessie, and two, where did you go? Neither of you can even drive!" Alice said, as Jessie started texting someone.

"Jessica is better, and who are you, Dad? We went to the park, it's not like we took a plane to L.A.," she said, not looking up from her sparkly cell phone.

Alice groaned, and then took her little brother to the next room. At least here I don't have to witness all the giggling and holding hands, she thought.

A FEW HOURS LATER, their mother called for dinner.

"Eat now or forever hold your peace!" she said. Alice and Finn entered the kitchen and sat down at the table.

"Smells great, Mom!" Alice said. "Nothing like your homemade deep-dish pizza." She had given up being angry about Jessie and Parker two hours ago, and she was determined to forget the whole thing and be sweet. A few minutes later, after her dad had entered and complimented the chef, Jessie stalked in, texting.

Mrs. Dunwell held out her hand.

"Phone," she said. "No texting at the dinner table. Ever."

Jessie rolled her eyes, groaned, and passed her phone into her mother's hands.

"When did you get so strict?" she said.

"When did *you* get permission to act snotty? Fix your mood, young lady," Mrs. Dunwell said, giving Jessie the you-better-do-what-I-say look. For a minute, the scowl on Jessie's face disappeared, but then, upon seeing Alice, it returned.

"Hey, Dad Junior," she said.

"Dad what now?" Mr. Dunwell said.

"She thinks I'm being too 'nosy' by wondering where she went on her date with a senior!" Alice blurted. Despite her determination to keep Jessie's secret, she finally lost it.

"Date? Senior? What's going on, Jessie?" Mrs. Dunwell exclaimed.

"Alice is overreacting, that's all," Jessie grumbled.

"Not true!" Alice protested.

"Jesssssiiieee!" Mr. Dunwell roared. The commotion of voices stopped, and Jessie sighed.

"Fine, I went to the park with Parker Rogers, the cutest boy at Elk High. Yeah, he's a senior, but he likes me and I like him. There, you happy now?"

There was a silence.

"You think you can just go on a date with a boy I don't know and not expect to get in trouble?" Mr. Dunwell said, low and obviously angrily.

"Sorry," Jessie mumbled.

"Let's eat before the food gets cold," Mrs. Dunwell mumbled back. The entire meal was silent except for the sound of forks scraping on plates.

THAT NIGHT, as Alice lay in bed, she heard muffled whimpering; it

seemed to be coming from Jessie's room. She sat up and leaned close to the wall.

Sure enough, it was her sister.

She slid out of bed and into her sock-monkey slippers, then crept out into the hallway. She leaned close to her sister's door for a minute, wondering if she should enter, and then finally did.

Jessie was sprawled out on her bed, her abundance of long blond hair covering her head, shoulders, arms, and most of her back. She didn't see Alice, and so one sister watched the other sobbing wretchedly.

After a few minutes, Alice approached the bed and gently patted Jessie's back. Jessie gasped.

"Alice?" she sobbed. "What are you doing here?"

"I just heard you crying, and, well, why are you crying?" Alice sat down and Jessie sat up.

"Well, it's that... Parker broke up with me," she said, sniffing.

"But why?" Alice asked.

"He said I'm too young and immature," she said. "And that I-I-I need to get a grip!" Jessie broke into a fresh batch of tears all over again. Alice hugged her, and Jessie continued crying.

"I just feel like I'm always disappoint-

ing you all!" Jessie said. Alice hugged her tighter, and then, to her own surprise, started sobbing as well.

"You don't disappoint me, you're just not the same anymore," Alice said, amid sobs. The sisters held their embrace for a minute, and then Jessie pulled away.

"Well, I'll try. But in high school, everybody is always acting perfect, with their cell phones and their boyfriends, and I guess I just feel like I need to rise up to their standards," she said. Alice smiled.

"I know; elementary school is no picnic either."

They both laughed, and then hugged again.


THE NEXT DAY after church, Jessie and Alice lay sprawled out on the floor, Jessie doing Alice's nails.

"This is an easy way to do little hearts on your nails. I really think pink is your color!"

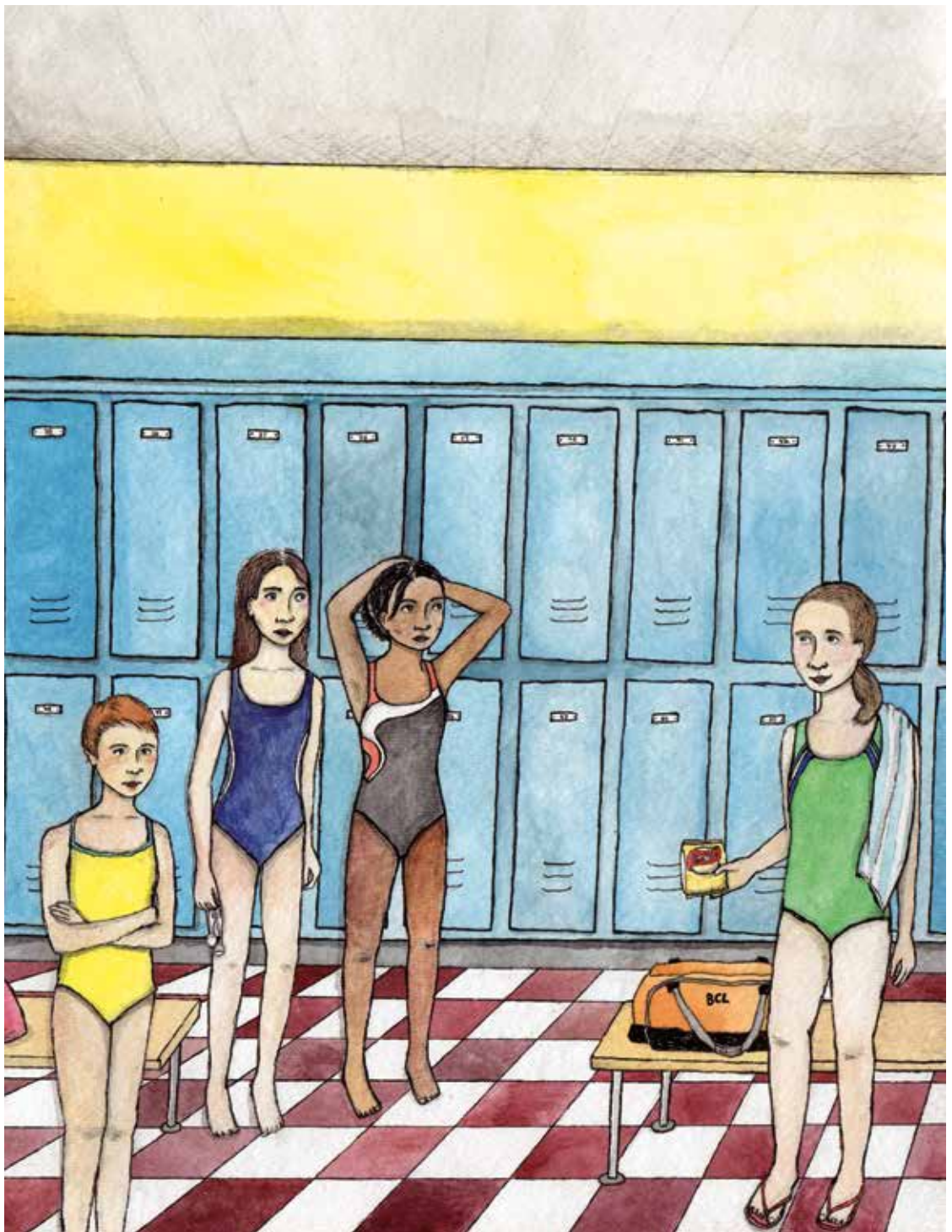
"Well, it is my favorite. Hey, how do you do that fishtail braid?" Alice replied.

Mrs. Dunwell opened the door and peeked in and smiled.

"That's my girls," she said to herself, and then left.

"I'm so glad you're back!" Alice said, and then gently hugged Jessie so she wouldn't smudge her new manicure. 

Despite her
determination to keep
Jessie's secret,
she finally lost it.



"Hey! Does anybody want some chips?"

Climbing Higher

By **Natalia F. Lanzoni**

Illustrated by **Ava Blum-Carr**

“**A**LL RIGHT, GIRLS. You did a good job in practice today, although I would like a little less talking between laps. Now, don’t forget that we have a big meet this Saturday, so I’d like you all to get a good night’s rest before then. Be at the Westwood indoor pool on Main Street at nine-thirty, and the meet will start at eleven. We need lots of time to warm up and practice before it starts. I posted a list of who will be swimming what, so be sure to check it on your way out. See you tomorrow at nine-thirty.”

Coach finished his speech and began packing up all the swim boards and weights. Becca rushed to her feet. “Thanks, Coach!” she called on her way to the locker room. A rush of girls followed her, chatting and giggling. The locker room was warm, damp, and smelled of chlorine. Becca quickly walked across the checkered wet floor, aiming for her locker, but slid a little and grazed Alicia’s arm. “Sorry,” she said.

Alicia responded halfheartedly, “That’s all right.” Alicia’s eyes looked dull and lifeless, and her body hung on its thin frame. She must have been sick, Becca concluded.

After sliding towards, and luckily reaching, her own locker, Becca began digging through her bag. She found a bag of potato chips sitting there, only slightly squished. “Hey!” she exclaimed loudly. “Does anybody want some chips?”

“No thanks,” Silver said, looking at her scornfully. Quieter, Silver spoke to Kayla. “All I’ve had today was a cup of tea, and that’s how I’m going to keep it.” Kayla nodded and whispered



Natalia F. Lanzoni, 13
Cambridge, Massachusetts



Ava Blum-Carr, 13
Hadley, Massachusetts

something back that Becca couldn't quite pick up.

"Oh, OK." Becca turned, a little confused and hurt, and put the chips back in her bag, to be discovered again another day. As the girls changed back into their clothing, Becca thought about what Silver had said. Instinctively, she thought back to her waffle for breakfast and her bowl of mac and cheese for lunch. A feeling of self-consciousness and regret seeped through her veins, a feeling she had been experiencing when she happened to catch a sentence or phrase spoken from the girls who usually stood in the corner of the locker room. She hugged her arms around her damp body, trying to hide herself from the rest of the girls in the locker room. She hated this feeling that pulsed through her body and made her heart beat quickly. She hated this feeling of... Becca gulped, unwilling to admit it, even just to herself.

Becca packed her swim bag, changed back into her original clothes, and left the locker room without another word, for her thoughts were enough to keep her occupied all the way home, and for many days to come.

THE SIDEWALK WAS a gray streak that seemed to go on forever. The sky was just as gray, and the leaves hung on the trees. Becca walked slowly down the sidewalk, her thoughts as gray as the world around her. "All I've had today is a cup of tea," kept ringing through her mind. Did those girls have eating prob-

lems? The thought had occurred to her before, but she always pushed it to the back of her mind. Eating disorders were dangerous, even Becca knew that. Becca had heard of kids and teenagers being hospitalized for long periods of time, sometimes even dying. It was too awful. What if Ashley and Silver and...

"Becky!" Becca looked around, startled. She had been too focused on her thoughts to pay attention to the world around her. Her friend Katelyn from the swim team hopped down the sidewalk, awkwardly trying to run with her giant swim bag draped over her shoulder. Becca snapped out of her thoughts, dug deep inside her, and plastered a fake grin on her face. It was the best she could do.

"Hey, Becca! What's up?"

"Oh, nothing much. Where are you going?"

"I'm just going to my friend Jennifer's house. She lives pretty close to you." Katelyn switched her bag from one shoulder to the other. "So what stroke and length are you doing?"

Stroke and length? Becca frowned and crumpled her brow, sifting through her thoughts and memories. Stroke and length? "Ohhhh," she realized, her brow unfolding. "Oh no!" she exclaimed. "I completely forgot to check the sheet!"

"Oh," Katelyn said sympathetically. "Well, I guess you'll find out at nine-thirty on Saturday. I'm doing the 100-meter butterfly."

"The 100-meter butterfly?" Becca was impressed, very impressed. That was the

hardest stroke. "Wow, impressive."

"Yeah," Katelyn shrugged. "To be honest with you, I'm a little nervous about it."

"I'm sure you'll do fine. You're a great swimmer."

Katelyn smiled. "Thanks, Becky. I'll see you soon, OK? Jennifer's house is right here."

Becca waved goodbye, then continued her walk. Her damp hair swung in its ponytail as she walked with renewed confidence down the sidewalk.

Katelyn always had a way of cheering her up, whether she realized it or not. However, her confidence lasted barely a minute, for as the sun peeked out from behind a cloud it glared off a billboard, right into Becca's eyes. Blinking, Becca looked at the billboard. A model was posed on it, and her eyes seemed to sear through Becca. Her glare seemed mocking, as she was dressed in a bikini, showing off her tan legs, which were about as thin as Becca's wrists. Her long hair flowed under the words, "Try the newest Super Diet from Michelle Miracle! You'll look better than ever in that new swimsuit!"

"**B**ECKY!"

Becca trudged through her front gate. "Hi Susie," she said dispiritedly.

Susie, a ball full of energy and Becca's six-year-old sister, bounced around Becca, grabbed her hand, and gleefully shouted, "Can you play with me?"

Becca looked at the front door longing-

ly, desperate to sink into her bed, plug her headphones into her iPod, and tune out the rest of her world. But she knew that if she did that, Susie would never cease to constantly demand, "Can we play? Can we play? Can we play?" over and over and over.

"Fine," she grumbled, "but not for long."

Susie sprung two feet into the air. "Yayyyy! I want to climb that big tree!"

"That tree? It looks a little big for you."

"I can do it! You can help me, Becky."

"Fine," Becca grumbled again. "Just please don't kill yourself." Susie bounced over to the tree with Becca following, dragging her worn sneakers across the dry dirt. Susie, standing on her tippy toes, struggled to reach even the first branch. With a little boost from Becca, she was perched precariously on it. Groaning, Becca followed in her footsteps. Susie was already trying to scramble onto another branch that clearly wouldn't hold half her weight.

"Susie! What are you doing? That branch won't hold you up!" Becca hauled her off and onto the branch she was standing on. "Although that branch may look nice, it's much too thin! It wouldn't even hold your pinky toe!" Pointing to a much fatter branch, she lectured, "Now look at that one. It may not look as perfect." Sighing, she continued, "But it will hold you up."

**Eating disorders
were dangerous, even
Becca knew that.**

A short while later, or a very long while later as it seemed to Becca, they were as high up the tree as they could get. Becca took a breath of fresh air, relieved at the stress-free environment of the smooth pine, bright sun, and blue skies. "Look!" Susie squealed. "It's Maizie's house!" Maizie was one of Susie's best friends.

Becca nodded. "All right, Susie. We climbed your tree. Now let's go." After helping her down the tree, Becca felt a rush of worry as her feet touched the ground again. "Come on, Susie." Leading her sister into the house, Becca still couldn't shake off the memory of what happened at her swim practice today. Her mind raced. What if I'm fat too, and everyone talks about me behind my back? What if... What if... Becca couldn't let this happen, even if it meant not eating at all.

BEEEEEP. BEEEEEP. BEEEEEP. The devastating sound of Becca's alarm clock blared in her ear. *Beep. Beeeeep. Beeeeep.* Groaning, Becca rolled over, pulled her covers off, and slapped her hand down on the snooze button. "Why does Coach have to make us get there so early? It's eight o'clock in the morning on a weekend!" Still grumbling, she rolled off her bed, blankets wrapped around her, and sat on her soft carpet. Yawning, she tugged on her clothes and put her swimsuit in her swim bag. Her stomach growled with hunger as she tumbled down the stairs, still half asleep. Her mom greeted her at the bottom of the steps.

"Hi, honey. Did you sleep well?" A grumble that was not understandable followed this question. "That's nice, sweetie. Do you want some yummy blueberry pancakes that Dad made?" Becca couldn't understand how her parents could get up so early. It was ridiculous to her. However, blueberry pancakes did sound very good, and her stomach rumbled in agreement.

Her lips moved to form the words "Yes, please," but no sound came out. She was suddenly struck with the memory of the past day and that dreaded feeling that she had to hide herself from the rest of the world. "No thanks, Mom."

"Really?" Becca's mom looked at her strangely. "You need energy for your big meet."

"Nah. I'm not hungry," she said, as her belly growled again in disagreement. "No thanks. I'll... I'll just grab a bar to eat before the meet." Becca doubted she would eat it, but she didn't want to make her mom worried. "I'll be fine. Are you, Dad, and Susie coming to the meet?"

"Of course! Susie wouldn't miss it for the world." Becca's mom smiled at her. "What stroke are you going to swim for your team?"

Shrugging, Becca walked toward the pantry. She snatched up the smallest bar she could find and grabbed a juice box for good measure. Shoving them into her swim bag, she ran upstairs to brush her teeth and grab a hoodie. She stopped for a minute and stared at herself in the mirror, imagining her looking like that model she saw on the billboard. Flat stomach,

super-thin legs, and an even smaller waist. Nobody would be able to call her fat then. Smiling to herself, she grabbed her swim bag and hopped into the car with her mother.

PULLING HER green swimsuit out of the bag, Becca glanced around the locker room. Katelyn and Becca's friends weren't here yet, but Silver, Kayla, and their whole crowd was here, gossiping in the corner. She slipped into her bathing suit as fast as she could. Becca grabbed her towel and walked to the bathroom. She glanced at herself in the mirror, again

imagining that tiny figure with Barbie legs and waist. Although her stomach growled, for probably the fifth time this morning, she didn't care. Bending over the sink, she splashed a bit of cold water on her face to help stop the butterflies fluttering through her empty stomach. Grabbing her towel, she strolled out of the locker room.

Coach was standing by the side of the pool, watching as the opposing teams warmed up. Becca saw the gears in his mind turning quickly. Sometimes, Coach's genius was the only thing that kept them from not finishing in last place. He knew exactly who should swim what and how. "Hi, Coach," Becca greeted him brightly. "How are you today?"

"Good," Coach grunted in reply. He never spoke more than he had to.

"So what stroke am I going to swim today?"

With his eyes still riveted on the swimmers in the pool he pointed to a corner of the humid room, without turning his head a smidge. "Thanks, Coach."

Becca walked slowly toward the corner as the butterflies pounded once more on the sides of her empty stomach. Soon she

was in sight of the sheet and scanned the names. "Jennifer, Silver, Ashley, Kayla, Sydney, Josie, Becca!" she mumbled to herself. She moved her eyes to the right of her name and read quietly to herself, "200-meter breaststroke. Darn." Becca

preferred swimming quickly, and for a short period of time. Her favorite strokes were the freestyle and butterfly. Breaststroke wasn't bad, it was just boring. Well, it is what it is, she thought.

Turning, she saw that her team had begun filing out of the locker room. Katelyn and Sydney, her two best friends on her team, were also there. They walked out in a straight line and sat on the cold metal bleachers. Becca rushed over and took a seat next to Sydney. "Becky!" Sydney greeted her. "I didn't see you in the locker room."

"I had to go out early to see what stroke and length I was swimming."

"Ooh," Sydney laughed. "You forgot to check?"

"Yes," Becca muttered sheepishly but

**What if I'm fat too,
and everyone
talks about me
behind my back?**

began laughing with Sydney after a second. They began chatting, and after a minute Katelyn joined the conversation too. After the conversation had turned to the latest school gossip, a shrill scream split the air. Everything was silent. There were no whistles screeching, kids chatting, or swimmers splashing, then came a rush of movement.

"What happened?" Katelyn whispered. Becca and Sydney shrugged. A crowd had begun to form around where Ashley and Kayla were. Becca could just pick up on what they were saying.

"Oh my God."

"Is she OK?"

"What happened?" Coach rushed over, and the crowd parted. Becca, her eyes full of worry, snuck a glance at the commotion. Silver was lying on the floor, her eyes shut. She looked like a ghost, her face pale and sallow. Becca gasped. Coach ran over, scooped up Silver, and began to gently shake her, his face ashen. After what seemed like decades, Silver began to stir. Gasps of relief echoed throughout the room. Coach carried her outside, probably to get medical help. Becca, Sydney, and Katelyn all exchanged worried and confused glances.

"Oh my God," Katelyn whispered.

"Why did she faint?" Sydney asked, her face worried.

Becca didn't respond but was sucked back into a memory from the day before.

Becca had been digging through her bag and found a package of chips. "Hey!" she shouted. "Anybody want some chips?"

"No thanks," Silver had responded. "All I've had today is a cup of tea, and I intend to keep it that way."

Back in the present, Becca gasped. "Oh my God," she whispered. "Oh my..." She couldn't even finish her sentence, because another memory was pounding through her brain. This time, it was from just this morning.

"No thanks, Mom."

"Really?" Becca's mom had cocked her head to one side. "You need energy for your big meet."

"I'm not hungry," she had said, as her belly grumbled in hunger.

Becca felt sick to her stomach. She saw Coach walk back into the swimming pool room, his arms empty, but she barely noticed when he began walking toward her.

"Becca," he said in his low, quiet voice. Startled, Becca looked up. "Can you swim Silver's stroke? She was supposed to do the 100-meter freestyle."

Becca nodded, trying hard to keep herself from throwing up. Her head spun. She got up and walked as quickly as she could toward the locker room, which seemed to get further and further away with every step she took.

STANDING IN FRONT of the bathroom mirror, Becca splashed some cold water on her face. She stared at herself in the mirror, remembering how just half an hour ago, she had imagined herself as thin as Silver. Now the thin shape she had imagined seemed like the face of death. She remembered Silver passed out on the floor, her face pale and lifeless. A shiver



She looked like a ghost, her face pale and sallow

passed through Becca, like a wind chill on a bright and warm summer day. A wave of dizziness shook her body, and she sought out a hard wooden bench.

Now I have to swim two strokes and I don't know if I can even do one, she thought. Well, you wanted to do the freestyle, and you got it. Why aren't you happy? Her belly growled for the tenth time that morning in answer. Becca's

mind raced, wondering what to do. I can't let my team down, she thought. I have to do this. At that moment Ashley walked in.

"Oh, hey, Becca," she looked strangely at Becca whose head was propped up against the lockers, her eyes closed. Startled, Becca opened her eyes and pulled her head away from the lockers.

"Hey."

"Are you OK?"

"Yeah, uh, yes, I'm fine," Becca stut-tered.

"I just came in here to get my goggles. We're going to start soon, so you better come out."

"Uh, I'll be right there," Becca said weakly. A little stronger, "I'll be right there."

Ashley gave her one more look, then grabbed her goggles and hurried out of the locker room. Becca let out a long sigh and leaned her head back against the lockers. Letting her eyes close, she let herself have one minute of peace.

After a minute, Becca stood up and began walking toward the exit that led back to the pool. However, a sound that she had become accustomed to hearing stopped her in her tracks. Her stomach growled. Pursing her lips, Becca spun around, dug through her bag, and grabbed the granola bar and the juice box her mother had made her take this morning. It seemed years and years ago that she had grabbed them out of the pantry. Her mother had been right after all. She needed the energy and protein for this big meet. Throwing the wrapper into the trash, Becca walked out of the locker room, crunching away at her granola bar.

IT WAS TWO WEEKS after the big swim meet, and somehow Becca found herself in her yard at the top of the tree she and Susie had climbed. Although Becca would never admit it, she really did enjoy herself while helping Susie climb


to the top. Rubbing her hand gently on the smooth bark of the thick branch she was sitting on, she lightly touched a small spot of green. It was a new bud, almost ready to sprout and become a leaf. Becca thought back to Silver and she remembered what Coach had said.

"Now I'm sure you are all very worried about Silver. She fainted before the meet last week, and she has had some medical attention since then. She's going to be fine, it was just a mix of nerves and dehydration. She'll just have to take it easy for a few days," Coach had said in his coach-like way—quiet but firm. Becca felt a sigh of relief, although she wasn't sure it was only from dehydration that Silver had fainted. Her relief was mirrored on the faces of her teammates. After a get-well-soon card was signed by everyone, the event seemed to be no longer such a huge deal.

Becca knew she would remember it for a long time though. She had come close to traveling on the same path Silver did.

Leaning back against the tree, she closed her eyes, relief and happiness spreading through her. She didn't have to look like a Barbie, perfect but fake, to be happy.

"Becca! It's dinner time!" Becca's mom yelled, leaning her head out the window.

"Be right there!" Becca hollered back. She scrambled down the tree, choosing the branches that could easily hold her weight. She wasn't taking any chances with the thin ones. Once her feet touched solid ground, she snatched up her hoodie, tucked it under her arm, and bolted into the house. 

Waiting

By **Luke Zellman**

I sit in the lobby, on the soft yet rough sofa.
Books sit with me, waiting to be opened.
The air is sweet and soft like a fresh-washed pillow.
I want to go home.

While I flip through the yearbook of 2001,
I feel peaceful, quiet, as my sharp pencil tip
writes my history.
The square room is a quiet place.
Not noisy, no sound except for staccato clicks,
a voice talking on the phone.
I listen for a toddler playing somewhere
with small, rounded marbles.

It's cool in here.
The windows fill with light.
I become warmer.
Possibly because my mom
is standing in the doorway.



Luke Zellman, 10
Gloucester, Massachusetts

Birch Trees of the Snow

By **Pranav Parekh**

Illustrated by **Vaeya Nichols**



Pranav Parekh, 10
Santa Cruz, California



Vaeya Nichols, 10
Ozark, Missouri

*Pranav wrote this story
when he was 8.*

IS THIS A DREAM? I'm walking through the birch trees half covered in melting snow as the breaking of dawn comes closer and closer to the snow-covered forest. The swift breeze is blowing against my face, making my hair blow in the wind as the broken leaves get blown into the sky far away. The snow, as soft as fur, is giving me time to think about what's going on and it feels as if nothing in the world could ever disturb this peaceful moment in time.

I'm hearing the owls traveling back to their home and the sparrows just awakening and starting to sing their morning song. I feel this moment in time might be the most peaceful moment in my life. I feel as if I could see the whole forest right from where I'm standing. The sound of the stream flowing down the forest soothes my mind and makes it feel in a deep slumber. A pack of wolves howl together in perfect harmony like they had been for years, and a fox is protecting its family with its full concentration. A couple of fawns are playing together as if nothing bad could happen in the big world. A hawk is bringing food back to its infants. All these animals living together in absolute perfect harmony and all in the same snow-covered forest.

I climb up a birch tree half covered in snow and get to a high stable branch next to a sparrow's nest. As dawn finally breaks I remember that I have been out for two hours and maybe even more. Then I realize that there is a distant voice encouraging me to keep walking deeper in the forest. I don't know if I should, but I have a strange feeling I probably should. So I walk



I feel this moment in time might be the most peaceful moment in my life

further into the forest and as I walk the snow crunches with every step I take because of the twigs in the soft snow. But then all of a sudden my sight is drowned in a bright light! I close my eyes so the light doesn't hurt them and when I open my eyes again I find myself in my room. I hear my mom calling, "It's time to go to

school!" so I get out of my pajamas, put my clothes on, and get my backpack ready for school. As I make my way to school I remember the dream I had last night about walking through the snow-covered forest and how peaceful and vivid it was. Then I think about what it would be like if this was a dream. 🌿

Book Review

By Emma Maze

The Mighty Miss Malone, by Christopher Paul Curtis; Wendy Lamb Books: New York, 2012; \$15.99



Emma Maze, 13
Hanahan, South Carolina

USUALLY I CAN tell whether I like a book or not within the first chapter. With this book, I could tell in the first sentence. When I read, “Once upon a time...” If I could get away with it, that’s how I’d begin every essay I write,” I knew I would love it. As I kept reading, I proved myself right.

Deza Malone is a twelve-year-old girl who has “the heart of a champion... [and is] steady as a rock.” Her story brought the Great Depression and the particular hardships for African-Americans more to life than any American Girl doll book I’ve ever read. Though it reminded me in subject of the American Girl series, I thought it was much better. I think I might have a new favorite book, and a new friend: Deza.

She was so real, I looked carefully to see if it was based on a true story. Sadly, I found it wasn’t. Then again, considering what Deza goes through, I was happy to find the story did not actually happen. The one thing I want in all my books is that sense of reality, and this book brought it.

Deza Malone starts out as a smart schoolgirl and goes from that to being practically homeless. Her father is injured, her brother runs away, and she has nowhere to live but a hobo camp. There, even the hobo people are prejudiced against her because of her race. At the end of the book, Deza’s torn family is scraped


back together again, but nothing is the same.

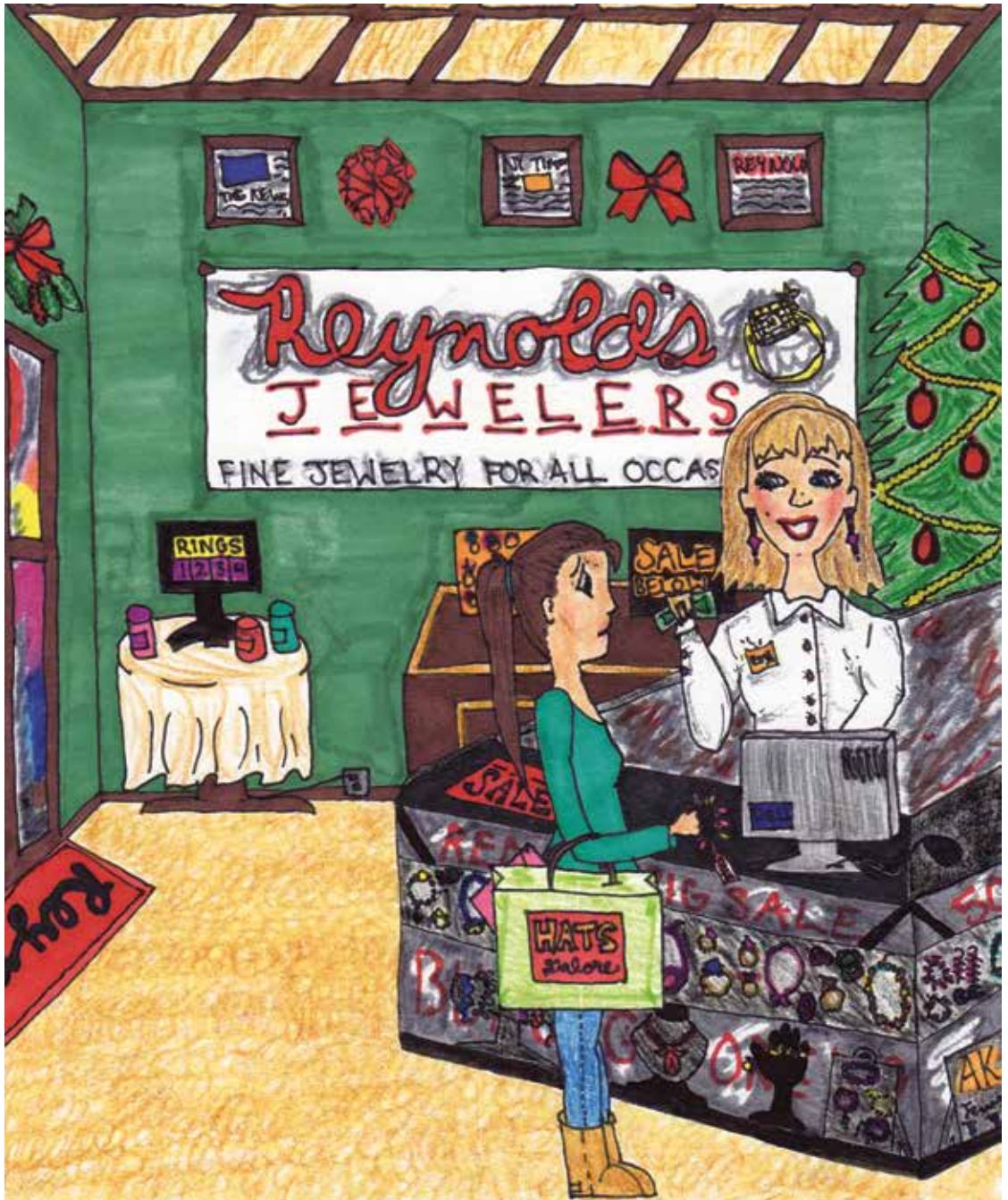
Although she doesn't get her old life back, her story still feels complete. It doesn't have a fairy-tale ending, nor is it a Shakespearean tragedy. It suggests both a sequel and a continued life for Deza. It says that her story doesn't stop there. I sat there for several minutes after I finished, thinking about what might be in store for Deza.

One part of the book I really liked was when Deza was talking about her family. They sounded like people I would love to hang out with. They all have these quirks and special qualities, just like real people. For example, Deza's dad loves to speak using alliteration. Though it can be annoying for Deza it is also a very endearing characteristic.

Another part of the book I can't stop replaying in my head is when Deza first sees her father again. He is stitched up, bloody, and bruised. I expected Deza to play the typical good heroine and immediately welcome him. I thought Deza would open her arms for her daddy, not caring about his appearance. Deza didn't do that. In fact, she didn't even recognize him at first. When she did, Deza was upset, unforgiving, and—real. It was so sad and pathetic and it made me ache to see her act the way she did. But I also found it really authentic and touching. It was unexpected but made sense.

The main thing that I think matters in a good book is whether or not it keeps you wanting more. If it is all action scenes, it gets overwhelming. If the whole book is meaningless description, it is not engaging at all. But this book was right in the middle. The descriptions gave you needed information, and the action was suspenseful and varied. And it all had a little pinch of humor.

This book is pretty close to perfect. After reading it, I realized I still was thinking and talking like Deza! Southern twang, hobo slang, and all. I will be telling all my friends about this book, and I am sure they will love it too. 



"Nice choice," said the lady behind the counter

A Special Present

By **Isabel Folger**

Illustrated by **Lauren Valli**

FLORENCE WIPED her brow with her winter mitten, plunged her shovel into a giant mound of soft snow, and leaned on it for a break. She was almost finished. Her Uncle Larry had suggested that she shovel snow to make money for Christmas presents, and he had been right; it did pay well. But he had mentioned nothing about how much work it was or how sore her muscles would be after shoveling just three driveways. She was hard at work on her fourth, Mr. Crumbino's, with only a small patch of snow to shovel.

She was charging five dollars for each driveway cleared, so when she calculated it out, she would need to shovel two more (after completing this one) to come up with the necessary shopping budget, which was thirty dollars. She needed to buy something for her mother, her father, her seven-year-old sister, Kyra, her friend Rachel, her grandmother, and her grandfather. Christmas was in four days, and she planned to go shopping on Christmas Eve.

Shoveling one driveway a day, she would make it to Christmas Eve with thirty dollars. Which means I'd better get working, she thought, glancing at her watch. It was 6:45 P.M., and to get to her house across the street in time for dinner at seven o'clock, she would need to hurry and finish her work. She ached all over but managed to shovel the last pile of snow out of the way and walk up to Mr. Crumbino's royal-blue door.

He opened it. He was dressed in a dark blue sweater with green trim that almost matched his door. A short stubble of a



Isabel Folger, 12
Santa Cruz, California



Lauren Valli, 12
Northville, Michigan

beard lined the smile he wore when he looked down his driveway. Shining eyes gazed down at Florence warmly. "You did a good job, Florence. Here's your pay." He pulled his wallet out of his back pocket, took out the money in it, and peeled a five-dollar bill off of the thin roll of bills.

"Thank you," she mumbled, folding the crisp, clean bill and neatly slipping it into her pocket. He smiled again and waved as she turned to go. She looked both ways before crossing the street. Her watch informed her that she had exactly eight minutes to change out of her snow clothes and get to dinner.

When she reached her front deck, she turned around and inspected her work. Even she had to admit she'd done a great job. Look at me, she thought, I'm working hard and making money. She felt very mature at that thought, and she straightened up as she kicked the snow from her boots and went inside.

CHRISTMAS EVE came up quickly. Like she had planned, she covered two more driveways in the following two days, so the day before Christmas, she set out to do her shopping.

The town square was buzzing with people, rushing around and trying to finish their Christmas shopping. Florence was the only one who had time to relax. She had a whole afternoon and, unlike many of the customers milling about, she didn't have a family to get back to.

Her father's gift was the easiest to decide on because he'd been talking about

the navy-blue wool hat for weeks. Many stores were sold out of it, but she miraculously found one that was on sale, and she bought the last one before it was too late.

She bought a bottle of perfume for her mother. The sweet gardenia smell was irresistible, and she knew her mother would like it. For her grandfather, she got a small wooden plaque that read, "Destiny is not the path given to you, but the path you choose." Her superstitious grandmother would receive a good-luck charm. Rachel, she knew, would be happy to get a pack of the extra-fruity bubblegum.

She had five dollars left in her pocket and just one gift left to buy. She needed to buy something for Kyra.

She was just entering a jewelry store when something sparkly caught her eye. She soon found herself gaping at the flashy bracelet that she had always wanted, but it had always been too expensive. The bracelet had shiny glass beads of orange, red, and pink. Now, a large price tag dangled from the small silver clasp. The price tag flashed four capital letters written in red: SALE.

She picked up the bracelet and turned over the tag. It would cost her five dollars. Exactly the amount she had left. Things couldn't be any better. A smile lit up her face. But the smile evaporated the moment she remembered that she still needed to get Kyra's gift.

Her mind went crazy, trying to think of a solution to the dilemma. Her intuition told her to get Kyra's present, but the bracelet might not be on sale anymore

when she had saved up enough money to buy it later. How wonderful it would feel to walk into class the day winter break ended! How perfect it would look, shimmering on her hand! Besides, she could give Kyra the doll she had at home. The doll's hair was tangled and one eye didn't open, but... Florence tried not to think of that. All she could think about was how proud she would feel when she came to school with that bracelet gleaming around her wrist.

Selfishness overcame her, and she pushed the little voice that told her the right thing to do out of her mind. She walked up to the checkout counter and placed the bracelet on top.

"Nice choice," said the lady behind the counter in her southern accent, "I think it's the last one we have."

Florence could only nod and gulp down her guilt.

ON CHRISTMAS DAY, Florence rushed over to Rachel's house, which was two blocks down from hers. When she presented the gum to her, Rachel was ecstatic with delight.

"The extra-fruity bubblegum!" she beamed. "It's perfect!" Then they lay down on her bed and each chewed a stick of gum, trying to see who could blow the biggest bubble. Their fun finally ended when a giant bubble popped all over Florence's face, and she had to go home.

**Her mind went crazy,
trying to think of
a solution
to the dilemma.**

That evening, after the bubblegum incident had been dealt with, Florence wrapped her family's presents. She covered them all in the colorful paper and ribbon, all except Kyra's gift. She just couldn't bring herself to do so. It was a big reminder of how selfish she had acted in buying the bracelet.

When her grandmother and grandfather came over it was time to open presents. Florence's parents loved their offerings so much that they applied them right away. Her grandparents also liked what they'd received.

Florence got some nice gifts, too. She got a beautiful Russian doll, with soft black hair that was pulled back from her pretty, rosy-cheeked face. She received a green-covered novel and several other things.

Finally, there was only one gift left to give. Florence's gift for Kyra. She walked up to her little sister, the old, worn doll concealed behind her back. Everyone was watching. There was no turning back now.

Suddenly, Florence heard a whisper of the past. She faded into an earlier time.

It was Christmas Eve, and Florence was eight years old. Her family was at a neighborhood holiday party. Mindy, a new girl in the neighborhood, had brought presents for everyone. They were all wonderful presents, and Florence could tell that they were definitely appreciated. She couldn't wait to open her gift.

When she tore off the brightly colored paper,

the much-anticipated surprise turned out to be an unscented candle that had almost been burned down to the bottom. Florence could not hide her disappointment. She looked up at Mindy.

Mindy shrugged. "I ran out of budget." Then she walked away.

Mindy's family moved away the next year and never came back.

Florence suddenly felt even guiltier. Yes, Mindy had been unfair. But now Florence was being even more unfair. She hadn't run out of budget. She had spent it on... the bracelet! She felt the beaded bracelet around her wrist. Suddenly, Florence knew what she had to do. She set the doll down on the lamp table beside her.

"Uh, thanks." Kyra looked at it and bit her lip. "It's really, um, nice."

"No," Florence shook her head, "it isn't. But anyway, that's not my present for you." She reached behind her back and slipped off the bracelet, the beautiful bracelet she had dreamed about for so long. She slipped it off her wrist and held it out to her sister.

Kyra's face lit up. She hugged Florence. "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" she sang, dancing around the room. She put the bracelet on her wrist and admired it. "It's really beautiful."

Florence could only smile. Why would she want that bracelet anyway? Why would she want it when it made someone else so much happier? Her smile grew bigger.

She had given up what she had thought was the best thing in the world. And it was still the best Christmas ever. ❀



Home

By Olivia Cohen

I push a drapery of vines away
And step inside what I think is simply shelter
 for the night,
But find much more.
Above my head, the canopy of autumn leaves tinkle
 and sway like mobiles
Above the soft grass, the trunks of trees rise out
 of the ground like walls, keeping me
Warm and safe.
The titter and swoosh of birds and their feathered wings
 calm me into warm, dreamless sleep.



Olivia Cohen, 10
Denver, Colorado



Whenever we found one of the ducks alone, it meant something was probably wrong

CJ

By **Nell Chidley**

Illustrated by **Julianna Pereira**

IT HAPPENED CHRISTMAS DAY. I had gone outside to check on my ducks, when Scooter, the male pompom-headed Bali duck, came out from under the porch. I figured he had been sleeping down there. I crawled under to check on the girls, Cheepers and Smiley, who would probably be under there still asleep. Ducks always stay in flocks and our three always stuck together. Whenever we found one of the ducks alone, it meant something was probably wrong. But when I looked, the girls weren't anywhere to be seen. I checked in the bushes next to the front porch, thinking maybe they were under there and I just hadn't seen them. They weren't under there either. I looked around wildly, trying to figure out where they could have gone. Scooter seemed to be just realizing that they weren't with him and began to quack, looking worried.

I ran down the boardwalk into the swampy, muddy wetland area in the woods behind the house. There in the distance I heard the faint sound of a female duck's distress call. I ran to the section of woods where the puddles start, where the ducks often went to eat the bugs that lived under the leaves and in the mud. About twenty feet away I saw a white blob in a puddle. That was one of the two. I was about to run over to her, but she seemed perfectly fine, and she wasn't the one quacking. I knew I had to find the other one.

The quacking sound seemed to be coming from the middle of the woods. I quickly started running in that direction. I had yanked off my fleece-lined Crocs and woolen socks so I wouldn't



Nell Chidley, 11
Mystic, Connecticut



Julianna Pereira, 12
Pleasanton, California

get them all wet. Luckily, there was no snow, just a thin layer of ice I could easily break through with my feet. Pretty soon I could just make out a white-and-brown wine bottle shape. Usually that's not how you describe a duck. You think of fat mallards that waddle around or swim in a pond. These, however, were Indian Runner ducks, which are tall and skinny. They run instead of waddle and they don't live in ponds. They're what you typically think of as puddle ducks. When my duck saw me, she kept on quacking but walked over in my direction. I scooped her up and saw that she was Smiley. Smiley had gotten her name from the first time I saw her, when she had just hatched and was still inside the egg incubator. Because ducks tilt their heads to look up or down, and because of the way the corners of their bills curl, it looks just like they are beaming up at you.

Still, no matter how smiley her face looked right then, I could tell she was pretty freaked out. Her eyes were wide and, although I was carrying her, she looked like she was trying to stand on her toes. I tried to calm her down, telling her that Scooter was back at the house and that I had seen Cheepers on my way over.

As we neared the puddle that Cheepers was in I noticed something odd about her. Her body looked limp and I couldn't see her head. I quickly put Smiley down and started running towards her. Tears were already streaming down my face. I crouched beside her and stroked her back. Her head was curled under her

body and her wings were spread out on either side, as if she were trying to bear the weight of something on her back.

WE BURIED HER in a clearing next to a stone wall just behind our backyard, right next to the grave of our old guinea pig, Toot. Dad dug a hole in which we lowered a model helicopter box, containing not the helicopter that my two brothers had taken out earlier but the brown-and-white, feathered body that had once been a duck named Cheepers.

That Tuesday when we went to volunteer at our local farm we borrowed an egg incubator in which we put two eggs. One of these was Cheepers' last egg. We decided that the first duckling to hatch would be named Cheepers Junior, or CJ for short.

Ducks don't have good memories. After about a week I seriously doubt Scooter and Smiley remembered Cheepers at all, though now, almost a year later, they still haven't gone back to the woods where we found her. My dad said it was probably a weasel that got her, since the body was not badly damaged; there were just puncture marks on the sides of her neck.


FOUR WEEKS LATER, one of the eggs in the incubator started to shake! We began seeing little cracks appearing on the shell. Then the other egg started to shake, and we knew that both of them were going to hatch. A few hours later a little hole appeared in the first egg, which meant it was probably going to hatch that



The little ducky looked up at us with that smiley expression that all ducks have

day. Every now and then we could see a tiny orange bill poking through the crack. We started to hear exhausted little cheeps coming from the duckling that was pushing with all its strength to get out of the egg. Then, with one last push, the top of the egg came off, and a wet, feathered head popped out and started looking around. It cheeped and kicked with its tiny feet, because its back end was still inside the egg. It kept on kicking fiercely

at the shell until finally his whole body fell out of the egg.

We took the lid off the incubator and took out the empty shell. The little ducky looked up at us with that smiley expression that all ducks have, and we all looked at him, CJ. The exhausted CJ clumsily walked over to the other side of the incubator, rested his head on the other egg holding the hatching duckling we decided to name Hermes, and fell asleep. 

Peace

By Alahna Harrison

Illustrated by Sarah Pi



Alahna Harrison, 13
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho



Sarah Pi, 13
San Jose, California

AMY MADE HER WAY through the house. It was nice being able to live out here in the country. Not having to wake up to tooting trains or honking cars as she did when she lived in Seattle. True, they now lived by the highway, but at least the cars and trucks that drove by didn't make such a racket as they would in the nearby town of Coeur d'Alene where there was traffic and stoplights.

She went to the kitchen and made herself a thermos of steaming hot cocoa with marshmallows before putting on a fuzzy hat, her coat, and boots. Finally, Amy grabbed a bag which contained a notebook and her best drawing pencil. She was anxious to get outside and quickly made a beeline for her newest favorite spot to enjoy nature.

When she came to the dry patch under the big tree, Amy ducked under the bent boughs and nestled up against the rough fir bark. She then carefully arranged her notebook, pencil, and thermos. Before she put pencil to paper she took a sip of her sticky, sweet drink and settled in to watch the cars drive by.

They resembled little ants going about their own business, not giving any thought to the dragonfly that was watching them from above. Amy imagined that once in a while a little child would look up out of her car window and wonder what lucky kid could live on that hill and have all of nature's benefits so nearby.

Amy's thoughts began to focus into a clear picture and she started drawing the calm creek, the marshy fields, the dense forests, and the rocky bluffs. When she was finished with the



It was nice being able to live out here in the country

landscape she added in the details: the ice patches on the creek edges, the A-frame house on the far mountain, and the little cars on the highway.

After she was finished with her sketch and back inside the cozy house, pulling out her colored pencils, Amy realized that not many kids have the opportunity to live outside the city where they can climb the tall dark green trees, go swimming any day

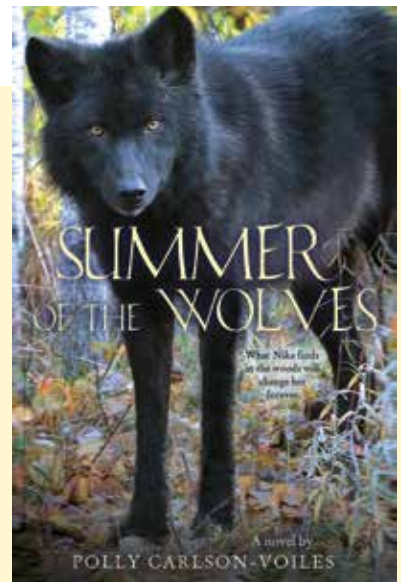
of the summer in a bright blue creek, and explore the soft grass-covered hill, looking for interesting animals.

When Amy had finished adding the final colored touches to her drawing, she thought of asking her mom if she could invite some friends over to make Christmas wreaths and introduce them to the wonderful peace that the country has to offer. ❁

Book Review

By Sarah Haynes

Summer of the Wolves, by Polly Carlson-Voiles;
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young
Readers: New York, 2012; \$15.99



Sarah Haynes, 12
Weare, New Hampshire

POLLY CARLSON-VOILES's *Summer of the Wolves* is a wonderful book about a twelve-year-old girl named Nika and her younger brother who were recently orphaned and are being sent to their long-lost uncle's house in Minnesota for the summer. Nika's uncle studies wolf migration patterns, and one day, when Nika joins her uncle to go observe a wolf in the wild, they find her dead, but they also find the dead wolf's pup. Nika and her Uncle Ian must bring the wolf pup back to their cabin and take care of it, so it won't die, since it is now motherless.


In the story, I felt that I could connect a lot with Nika, especially when Nika becomes close with Kahn, the motherless wolf pup. It reminds me of when my family got my German shepherd puppy named Bella. When Nika's uncle says they must give Kahn to the conservation center where he works, Nika is very upset; I could never imagine having to get rid of Bella.

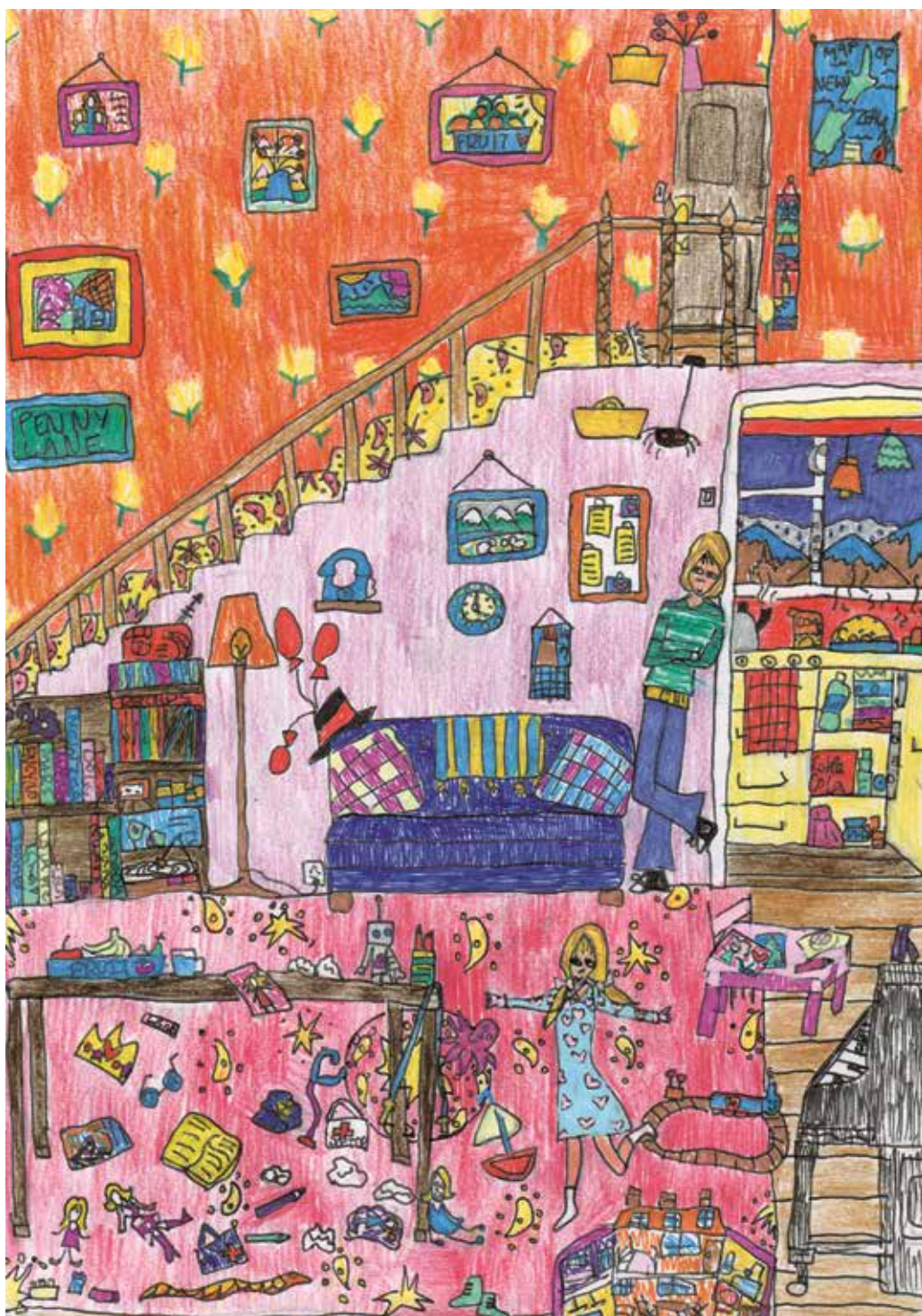
One part of the story I found particularly good was when Nika and her friend Thomas plan to let loose skunks, coyotes, and wolves that a man named Bristo was illegally keeping. When Nika and Thomas go over to Bristo's house to let all the animals loose, they also stumble upon a mountain lion. When

they try to release it, it snaps at Nika, so Thomas and Nika decide to let her be. Hearing Bristo start to open the back door, Nika and Thomas run away but drop the pair of wire cutters they brought to open the cages. Eventually, Nika and Thomas confess to the police that they were the ones who let Bristo's animals loose. In the end, they have to do community service for a couple of weeks to make up for it. While doing community service, they talk about the crime and the punishment but still agree that it was well worth it.

Throughout the book, I agreed with Nika a lot, especially when she decides she wants to release Kahn back into the wild with Luna, another wolf that Nika and Thomas discovered, instead of bringing Kahn to the conservation center. That would be such a hard decision, but in the end it would probably be the best thing. I think that animals, especially wolves, should not be kept in captivity but in the wild. As the saying goes, "If you love something, set it free." Nika decided that if she really did love Kahn, she should let him be where he is happiest, the wild. When Nika tells her Uncle Ian about her plan, he disagrees.

I always felt bad for Nika when her Uncle Ian treated her like a little kid. Uncle Ian would never trust Nika to take Kahn outside of a fenced area. When her uncle had to go to work or to conferences, he always had vet assistants and people who worked with him stay over at the cabin to take care of Kahn, even if it was only for a couple of hours. She was always trying to prove to him that she was mature enough to handle Kahn. I feel that by the end of the book, Uncle Ian finally sees that she can handle Kahn herself and is becoming a young adult.

Summer of the Wolves is one of my favorite books of all time! After the first chapter of *Summer of the Wolves*, I simply could not put this book down! I highly recommend this book to anyone who loves animals, nature, and stories of hardship. 



"Let's play airplane!" she giggled

Izzy's Gone!

By **Alexander Freed**

Illustrated by **Natasha Pettit**

CARL LOOKED OUT the window. He could barely see the park across the street because of the fog. He had to stay at his house all day today because of the fog warning. Now all he had to do was to get his baby sister to bed so he could sit back and relax. She had had her bath and was in her pj's and ready for bed. When he looked back at his living room, he groaned. The day had been a long one, and the whole living room was a wreck. Lego pieces scattered *everywhere* on the floor and white shreds of paper taped to the table. His baby sister apparently was having a blast. His parents had gone out for a meeting before the fog set in, leaving Carl to babysit his messy sister.

"One, two, three!" she said as she made a whooshing sound like an airplane and ran around the table. "I can count to three!"

"Isabelle, it's time for bed," he said in his nicest voice. Of course, Isabelle didn't want to go to bed yet.

"Let's play airplane!" she giggled.

"Isabelle, if you want to play airplane, that's fine with me!" An idea began forming in Carl's mind. He stopped her and carried her up the stairs to her room. "Whoosh!" he said as Isabelle laughed the whole way up. He opened her bedroom door and set her down. But immediately Isabelle ran out of the room and down the stairs again.

"I'll read you a story!" he yelled down the stairs as he rapidly ran down after her. He heard a door slam but couldn't tell which door it was. His four-year-old sister was small, making it hard



Alexander Freed, 12
West Des Moines, Iowa



Natasha Pettit, 12
Wellington, New Zealand

to find her if she decided to play hide-and-seek. First thing he did was open the main closet door. Just coats and muddy shoes. Next he ran down to the basement. The lights were on, so she may have run down here. He checked under the Ping-Pong table, but with no luck. Next he checked behind every Rescue Heroes toy set, but still no Isabelle. He checked behind chairs, underneath blankets, and just about every place in the house. Isabelle seemed to have disappeared.

“Isabelle!” he yelled. “Come back here right now!”

Footsteps came from the main living room, so he ran in there, just to see that it was his toy robot on the table. It automatically turned on whenever someone walked past it. If Isabelle had gone in here, she must have accidentally turned on the robot. He pushed down on the robot’s head to turn it off and then looked thoroughly through the living room. Of course, he still couldn’t find Isabelle.

Suddenly, he got an idea. He ran up to her room and dug through the pile of books on the floor and found the book entitled *Story Time for Children*. Then he ran into her walk-in closet and flipped a switch on the household intercom. Now everything he said would be amplified throughout the house. He cleared his throat and said loudly, “This sure is a good story! Too bad Izzy isn’t here to listen to it!” He flipped a switch on the intercom and listened. Footsteps were running through the house and, according to the lights on the intercom that told where the sound was coming from, were going through the rooms, up the stairs, and finally into Isabelle’s room. She sat down on the bed and got under the covers while Carl got out of the closet and sat down to read the story to her. He had finally gotten his baby sister to bed. Now he could sit back and relax. But then he remembered something. The horrible mess in the living room.



Heights

By **Jaida Johnson**

Illustrated by **Gordon Su**

“**T**HIS IS DANGEROUS,” I say. The cold wind stings my cheeks and ruffles my hair. But I keep climbing up the old rusty ladder, trying to ignore my numb hands and my pounding heart and the fact I’m over twenty feet in the air.

“Well, yeah,” Addie says, snorting sarcastically. Isn’t she the perfect, ever-supporting best friend? No. She looks down at me, like she’s trying to guess what I’m thinking.

It probably isn’t too hard. I’m shaking, and my breath is ragged. My voice is probably higher than usual. I’ll admit it—I’m scared of heights.

“Who said climbing up an abandoned thirty-foot-high water tower—at night—would not be dangerous?” she adds. I look down. Bad idea.

“Can we please go down?” I beg. Climbing up a rickety ladder to an old water tower at night was not my idea. Why do I listen to Addie? I have no clue. Sue me.

“Scared, Conner?” she smirks. Her tone is victorious, like she caught me doing something naughty. Hypocrite.

“Of falling? Actually, yes!” I snap, annoyed. Just because Addie was fearless, didn’t mean I was, too. Not *everyone* is as perfect as Addie.

The look on her face softens. “Oh.” She looks up, avoiding my eyes. “Don’t worry, we only have ten rungs left,” she says.

I look down again. Our bikes, purple and orange, look small. “Hurry up, then.”

Finally, we’re both on a platform, staring at the quiet land



Jaida Johnson, 12
Seaside, California



Gordon Su, 11
Milpitas, California

around us. Iron bars that once *might've* been railing are strewn around the small platform. Trash—wrappers, glass bottles, plastic bags—are tangled amongst the large mass of metal. Addie crinkles her nose at the trash, and if I wasn't her best friend, I'd almost say she is cute. But I am. Deal with it.

Addie's hair is always a mess, looking like she's just rolled out of bed. Even though it's in a long braid down her back, I can still see random black hairs defying every law of gravity. She has bright green eyes and, as always, a smirk that immediately vanishes when adults walk by. Addie is short, but I learned the hard way not to say that to her face.

"Wow. Isn't it brilliant?" she asks, nudging my shoulder. I nod in agreement. The view really is fantastic, but I can't really enjoy it, thanks to my fear of heights.

The city, about four miles away, glitters. I can barely make out the tall forms of skyscrapers against the dark sky. The suburbs stretch outwards. To the left, a grove of trees dominates several acres of land. The moon glows white against the sky, while small stars twinkle.

Addie points to a bent ladder leaning against the water tower. I think, *Oh God, no*. "Coming?" she asks with a wolfish grin.

"For Pete's sake, Addie..." *I really, really don't want to.*

"I didn't say you *had* to come."

"Yeah, whatever." I'm pretty sure bringing a girl to her door is polite. So, following her up a rickety ladder that may or may

not be stable is definitely gentlemanly.

My mom would be so proud. Oh, wait—I snuck out of the house past curfew, climbed up an old water tower, and was now praying it didn't fall down. I don't think she'd be too proud. Win some, lose some.

I follow her up the ladder, praying it doesn't twist the other way or something. Now we're on the top of the roof, the closest to the sky I've ever been. It's so darn big, and I feel so small and puny. I'm trying to breathe normally. Addie's perfectly calm, though.

I close my eyes. "This doesn't scare you at all?" I ask through gritted teeth.

She looks at me curiously. "The heights?"

"No," I say, sarcasm dripping from my voice. "Of course the heights!" I'm slightly hysterical. She shakes her head.

"No. Heights... have never scared me. I love heights, in fact. Airplanes, roller coasters, cliffs."

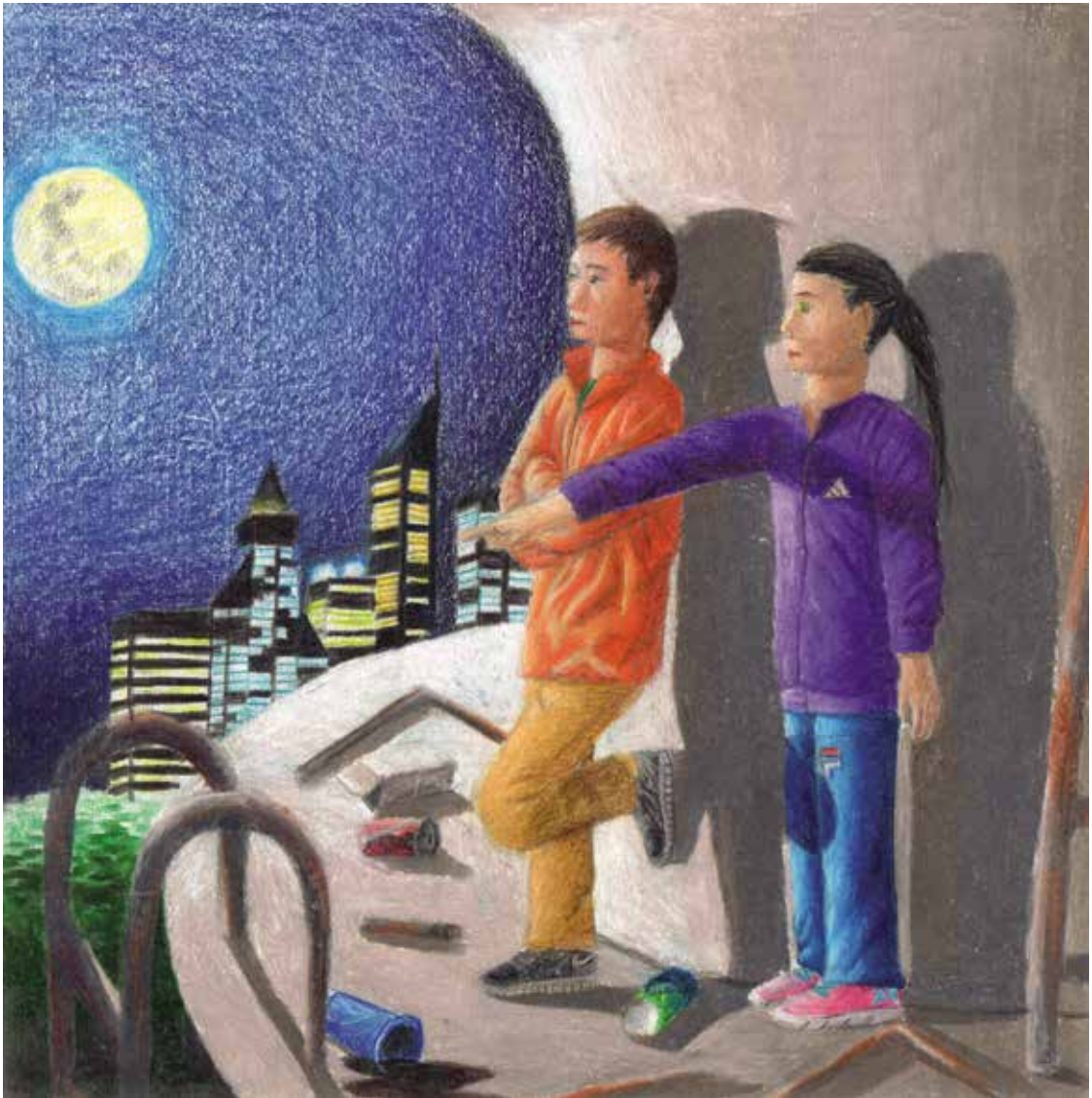
I stare at her in shock.

"Are you human, Adds? We're up, about thirty feet, in the air, and you're not scared?"

"No. It's OK, though, because I'm scared of drowning."

Addie, scared of drowning? Addie, the brave? Addie, the invincible? That didn't seem possible, but the look on her face is sincere.

She shudders. "But, I learned how to face my fear. I don't let it control me. So I swim as deep as I can go and hold my breath until I can't hold it anymore."



"Wow. Isn't it brilliant?"

I bite my lip. Then stand up and look down at the ground. My legs are shaky but I refuse to give up. I see Addie smile and stand up with me.

"This isn't so bad," I say.

"No, it isn't," Addie grins.

And I mentally thank Addie for helping me face my fear. But I still have to get back at her for teasing me earlier...

"Hey, Adds, wanna go to the pool tomorrow?"

"Oh, shut up."



My Temporary Window Art

By **Nadia Rossy**



Nadia Rossy, 12
Bedford Hills, New York

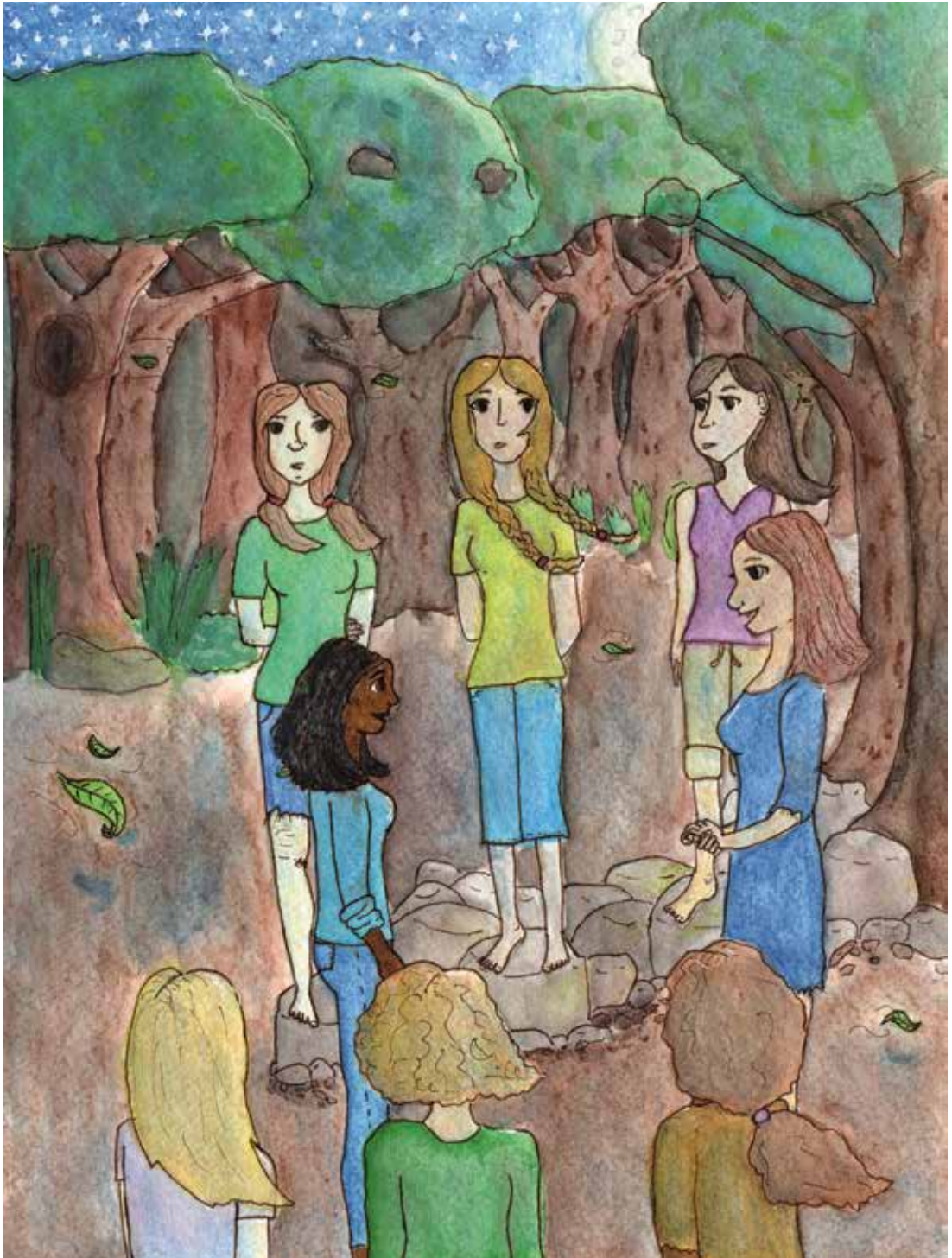
The rain steadily falls,
against the roof of my bus stop.
The air is so cold I can see my sparkling white breath.
I can already tell it's going to be a long dreary day.

When it rains, nothing goes my way.
The weather makes my spirit drop,
like the temperature when summer slips to autumn.
The sky is gray and fierce,
so the sun has a difficult time shining through,
and showing its warm face.
A cloud of darkness looms over my head.
I am stuck in its shadow.

The groaning yellow bus slowly turns the corner.
I drag myself toward the curb as it rolls down the hill.
Once I am aboard, the tired frustrated faces of the other kids
surround me.

I find my seat by a window.
The glass is as foggy as pea soup.
Nothing is visible through its moist surface,
though I wish it was,
like on a sunny day.

I take my delicate finger and slowly draw a smiley face
on the window.
In my mind I know this blissful image will eventually fade away,
but it will be my sunshine for the rest of this rainy day.



"Welcome, sister. We have long roads to run, you and I"

Daughter of Bastet

By **Sophia Chang**

Illustrated by **Freya Kargard**

HER EYES SNAPPED OPEN, instantly awake. She swung her legs over the side of the bed and jumped out, fully dressed. Lightly, she padded down the hall and through the house. Cautiously, she cracked the sliding-glass door open, wincing as it squealed across the floor. She froze, half expecting her father shouting to “get back to bed this instant or else.” Luckily, the house remained silent and she slipped out of the apartment and onto the balcony.

She halted, staring at her reflection in the glass pane. Shaggy black hair, chocolate skin, intense amber eyes... they all added up to an outsider’s face. She had never fit in at school or anywhere else. Heck, even she and her dad didn’t get along well. She had always been the outsider, the weird girl, the loner. That, she vowed, was going to be changed tonight.

Taking a deep breath, she scaled the apartment wall, finding minute hand- and footholds with ease. She swung herself over and landed lightly on her feet. Just like a real cat, she thought proudly.

She cautiously padded over to the edge of the roof and looked down. Below her, eleven stories down, lay the sleeping city; so busy by day, yet so still at night. She looked up, past the asphalt jungle, and into the forest. Its cool green depths silently beckoned to her. Soon, she promised. Soon.

It was, as she called it, a *running* night. It just made you want to move. The wind tugged at her hair, whispering *move move move*. A breezy, cool sky sparkled with thousands of stars over-



Sophia Chang, 13
North Kingstown, Rhode Island



Freya Kargard, 13
Goleta, California

head like someone threw a handful of diamonds into the sky. Silently, she watched the still, sleeping city from her lofty perch. Suddenly, she stood up from her feral crouch. Sounding from across the city, almost inaudible, rang a bell, chiming louder by the second. Almost noiselessly, with superhuman strength and agility, she darted across the rooftops of the quiet city. Dodging or leaping over obstacles, she leaped gaps and scaled chimneys with ease.

At the edge of the city, she paused again, straining her ears. From the shadowed forest came the faint sound of the bell, ringing... then silent. She grinned, took a reading on the fading sound, and leaped off of the roof and into the forest. Branches and leaves whipped her racing body and tugged at her hair. After a few minutes of breakneck racing through the forest, she halted at a small clearing. She was not, however, alone.

Green-glinting eyes shone in pairs around the clearing. She slowly, deliberately walked forward, quelling the worm of fear in her gut. She bowed. "Sisters. Well met."

"Well met." Her sensitive ears picked up the response in a chorus of quiet female voices. The glowing eyes moved forward out of the shadows and into the fickle light of the stars. A group of seven tall, lithe women stood in a circle under the stars around her.

"We gather here today," spoke-sang the tallest, most feline woman, "to welcome a sister." Keen, sharp eyes turned to her,

scrutinizing her. She could almost feel their stares, picking apart her personality and digging into her soul. Trying not to look afraid, she boldly gazed back, trying to look brave. She must've passed some unspoken test, for the eyes soon turned back to the woman talking.

The older woman smiled, displaying a small, pointed canine. "Welcome, sister. We have long roads to run, you and I."

Her throat was dry, but she managed to cough out a "Yes, if fate wills it." She wasn't sure, but she thought she caught a glimpse of sympathy in her eyes, like she knew how it felt to be the newbie in a group.

The leader stiffened, raising her head like she heard someone—*something* calling. In response, the other women tensed, turning into the wind. The breeze whipped her hair across her face, hiding her face in shadow. "Sisters!" she cried. "We hunt!"

Like a smooth river flowing together, the daughters of Bastet leaped down from their collective perches and ran. Long limbs bunched and extended tirelessly, chasing after a strange, elusive scent. She brought up the back, for the first time in her life struggling to keep up with someone. As she ran, she laughed at the sheer glory and exhilaration of the hunt. This was how it was supposed to be. Running, following people who accepted her, understood her. She grinned wryly for a moment. This felt completely normal, perfect, even, to her, but a regular mortal, seeing seemingly ordinary humans in

such an inhuman way would probably be shocked.

She noticed the pace growing faster, speeding up. A sudden gust of wind brought with it a musky, herbivore scent: a deer. She suddenly stopped, letting the others race past her. A few things had clicked in her mind. Here was the predator. There was the prey. Soon the predator would meet the prey. She looked away, abruptly feeling nauseous.

There was a snarl, a squeal, then silence. She cautiously looked up again, and then walked the few yards to where the rest of the group congregated. The leader, who apparently made the kill, looked up and saw her approach uneasily. The woman smiled at her and beckoned her to join them. She noted, with faint relief, that there was no (visible) sign of a scuffle. She wasn't *that* catlike yet.

The leader motioned her over. "Here, have some of the venison." She sat down next to her, still feeling kind of awkward, and took a bite. It was tough and gamy, not like the venison in those fancy restaurants her dad took her to. It took some chewing, but it was full of good flavor. The leader watched her adjust to the setting, smiling. "I am Siv. The others are Veria, Sharza, Aislinn, Emili, Holly, and Renee." As she named them, each woman looked up and smiled, forging bonds of support and friendship.

"What do we call you, sister?" the leader—Siv—asked. She suddenly felt relaxed, with the sweet breeze ruffling her hair and good food in her belly. The laughter of the others—her sisters—drifted to her on the gentle wind as the fire blazed before her. If she wanted a new name, a new life, now was the time to make it happen. ❁



Honor Roll

Welcome to our new feature, the Honor Roll! We receive hundreds of submissions every month by kids from all over the world. Many submissions are excellent, but, sadly, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive in *Stone Soup*. This is our way of recognizing some of the talented young writers and artists whose work we admire. We commend them and encourage them to keep creating.

— *The Editors*



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