

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Olivia Zhou, age 13, for "More or Less," page 41

JULIUS'S GIFT

In Ancient Rome, girls did not learn to read or write

MORE OR LESS

Lina envies the Barkers' riches, until...

Also: A snowy owl leaves the nest in search of food

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 42, NUMBER 3
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Editor's Note

"Nothing stays the same." Those are the last four words of Elisabeth Martin's poem, "Adjustments," on page 31. Elisabeth writes movingly about what it feels like to lose a beloved family member. Her words resonate beyond the page of her poem. Sooner or later, we must all face loss and change in our lives. How will we deal with it? Will we be able to move on? Will we find joy in new people, places, and things? The subjects of loss and change appear in other stories and poems in this issue. In "Hope," a young girl's future looks bleak when she loses her mother and ends up living on the streets. Shaqueh, the Native American girl in "Home," is excited to help her family start a new life in a new land. On a lighter note, Isaac loses his shoe in the poem "Without You, My Right Shoe." Have you ever moved, lost a loved one, lost a favorite possession? A story or poem would be a great way to express your thoughts.

— Gerry Mandel

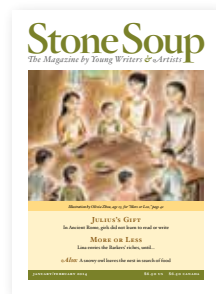
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ON THE COVER Olivia Zhou has illustrated four stories for *Stone Soup*. She is home schooled and always researches her assignments thoroughly. Portraits in pastel or colored pencil are Olivia's favorite things to draw. She wants to be a portrait artist when she grows up. She also enjoys archery, reading, and singing.



The Mailbox



I have a subscription to your magazine and I love reading the stories and poems in every issue, as well as looking at the beautiful drawings. I love to write and have submitted a poem once

before which you didn't take, but someone took the time to write me a note asking to see more of my work. So I decided to try again. Thank you so much for providing such a wonderful magazine where young writers and artists can express their work!

Luna Soley, 12
Peaks Island, Maine

The first time I saw my first issue of *Stone Soup*, I thought I wouldn't be interested. But my mom convinced me to read just the first story. I was hooked, and ended up reading the whole magazine. Now I look forward to the next issue every time I get the mail. Soon I hope to submit a story. I guess I just wanted to say, "Thank you!" for being there for young writers like me!

Cameron McCrea, 9
Snoqualmie, Washington

I would like to congratulate Jessica Birchfield on her illustrations for "Memories and Beginnings," by Melissa Birchfield [March/April 2013]. Jessica, when I looked at the drawings, I had to blink twice to make sure that they were real. The first drawing, especially, made me so jealous! (I can't draw.) I hope that you continue illustrating stories. You are so talented!

Juliana Charlebois-Berg, 12
Highland Park, Illinois

I just wanted to thank you for creating such a wonderful resource for young writers. I have recently begun subscribing to *Stone Soup* and for the first week of every other month, I run to the mailbox to check for the most recent issue. I love every page.

Jessica Bernt, 12
Brampton, Ontario, Canada

Jessica's book review is on page 36 of this issue. Read her blog at youngwriterscafe.wordpress.com.

The group of young writers I'm working with have learned about publishing (and the slush pile!) via the experience of reading your website requirements, seeing what already gets published, and watching the first of the group prep his work to submit. They are much more motivated knowing that there are outlets where they could potentially be published. I really love what you do and the opportunities that you provide for young writers.

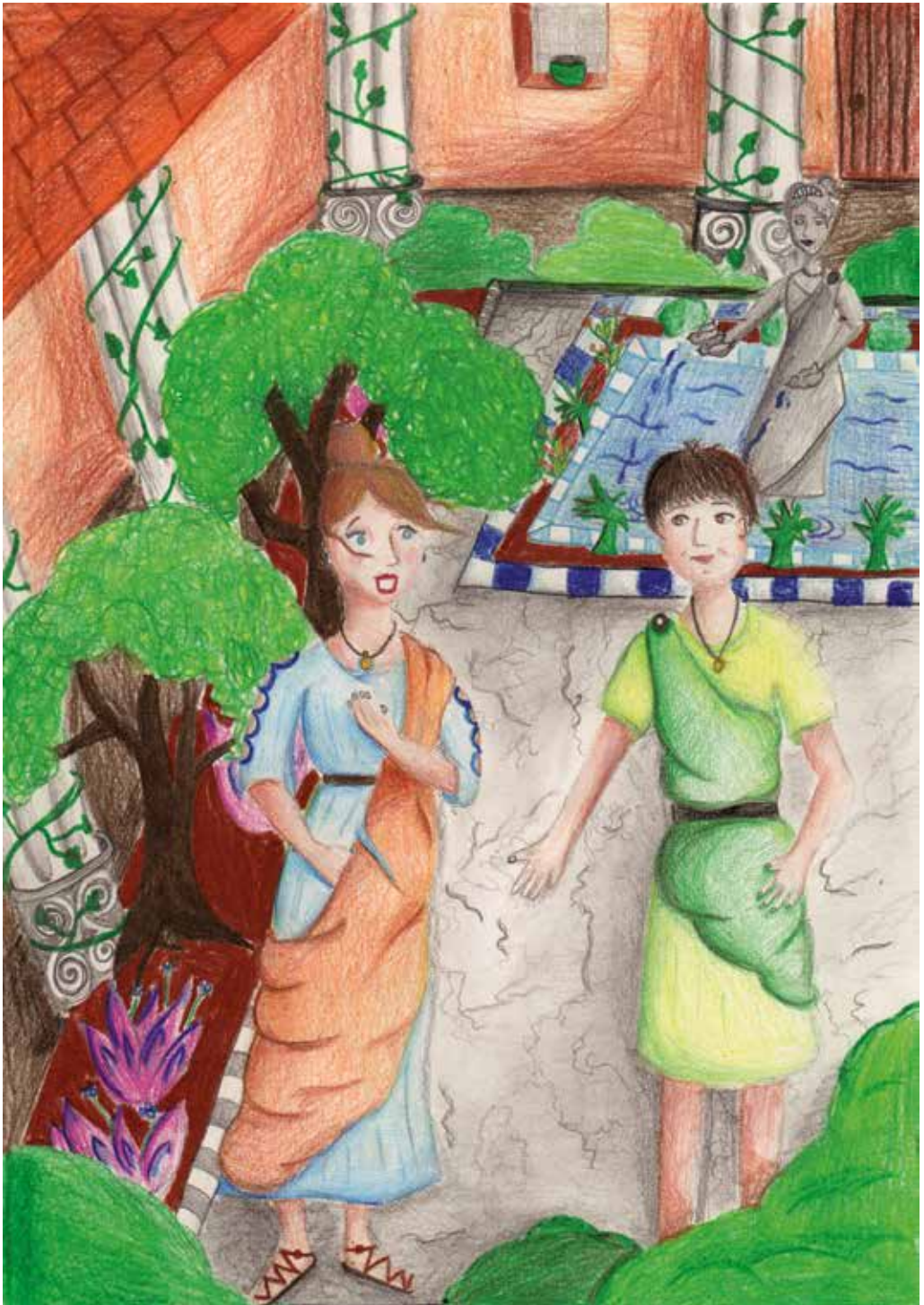
Jessica Mae Stover, author
Los Angeles, California

When my mom first told me about *Stone Soup*, I went to your website to see if I liked your stories. And guess what? I loved them! From then on, I read more of your book reviews and stories than I have plain old books!

Ananya Kodali, 11
Highland Village, Texas

Ananya's book review is recognized in this issue's Honor Roll, page 48.

Stone Soup welcomes your comments. Write to us at The Mailbox, PO Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063, or send an email to editor@stonesoup.com.



Surely he knew no girls or women were allowed to be educated in that way?

Julius's Gift

By Evelyn Chen

Illustrated by Posy Putnam

“OCTAVIA, DO NOT HOLD your threads so clumsily; you are not an animal,” Cassia said. Her young mistress frowned and then suddenly threw the ball of dyed yarn on the floor.

“Cassia, you may be my slave but I cannot weave even to a quarter of your abilities,” Octavia said with derision. “Weaving is useless; why must women get all the dull jobs?”

Cassia clucked her tongue reprovingly and handed Octavia the yarn. “Try harder,” she suggested. Octavia’s temper flared. “How *dare* you tell me to try harder! I work like a horse and weaving is so dull! How *dare* you!” Angrily she threw the ball of yarn at Cassia and stormed out of the weaving room.

Outside the breeze ruffled the olive trees and clouds raced across the blue sky. The marble courtyard was surrounded by pillars and a center fountain. A statue of the Roman goddess Venus releasing doves was the centerpiece of the fountain and water streamed from the birds’ beaks. Venus was smiling wistfully and she seemed so real, even as the centerpiece of a fountain. The courtyard was spacious and the ground was marble, with images of the Roman gods. Ivy curled around the intricately carved pillars, and plants were arranged in a pattern around the fountain. Three sides of the courtyard were edged with pillars and led to the house. The fourth side opened up into the road and forest. Birds sang and Octavia had never felt so lonely. Her mother and father were too insistent upon her marriage and the servants didn’t care the least bit about their stubborn



Evelyn Chen, 10
Bellevue, Washington



Posy Putnam, 13
Oxford, England

mistress. Octavia had always been headstrong and that itself was a lady's crime.

"*Aaa-choo!*" the loud sneeze rang across the quiet courtyard. Eyes wide, Octavia whirled around and crept towards the moving bush...

"*Aaaaakkkkk!*" Octavia screamed as a young boy her age sprung out of the bush. Octavia fell backwards, landed hard on the bricks, and promptly tore her new linen tunic.

"Shh, I'm sorry to scare you. I'm Julius and you are Octavia," the boy declared. He had an easy, commanding manner that pleased Octavia instantly.

"Where are you from?" she asked, as she shook Julius's hand. He was treating her like an ordinary boy and she was thoroughly enjoying it. No more curtsying and bowing and proper manners to clog up a good conversation.

"Oh, just next door. But I detest practicing arithmetic so I... escaped the slave," Julius admitted. He reddened a little and grinned embarrassedly.

"I love doing that!" Octavia agreed.

"But you know what I really love is poetry. It's so rhythmic and flows beautifully."

"You are fortunate you can read. I have never been taught," Octavia sighed. She had always longed to read; it seemed like such an intelligent yet exciting pastime.

"I could teach you," Julius suggested, his dark eyes twinkling mischievously. Octavia gasped. Surely he knew no girls or women were allowed to be educated in that way? "I could meet you every day

after lessons at this olive tree," the young boy continued, his voice steady. Octavia glanced across the sunny courtyard and then crept further into the shadows. Nobody was around, but the idea of defying Roman custom was frightening as well as exciting.

"So what do you say?" Julius pressured. He grinned at Octavia.

"Why do you trust me?" the girl finally asked.

Her companion's face reddened as he averted his gaze. "I've been... watching you and you don't seem like the type to just go along with whatever is expected of you," Julius muttered. He bit his lip embarrassingly and looked up at Octavia.

"You've been *watching* me? How can I trust *you* not to turn *me* in?" Octavia demanded.

"My word is the only thing you have and that should be enough," Julius said firmly.

Lowering her voice, Octavia finally whispered, "All right."

OVER THE NEXT few weeks, Octavia learned the Roman alphabet and began to read simple words. Julius scratched the symbols in the dirt and slowly Octavia began to read. "I'm going to bring you scrolls when you get good enough. Right now they're too complicated for you," Julius said eagerly. Octavia was too cheerful to be offended and agreed that scrolls would be too challenging.

So in just a simple courtyard under

a tree a boy taught a girl his age how to read. These secret lessons became little pockets of joy to Octavia, whose life had steadily gotten worse. Her parents were becoming insistent upon her marriage, and her weaving lessons were becoming more and more difficult. One day Julius managed to sneak a simple poetry scroll from his home so Octavia could truly begin to read proper material. It had been a lonely day for Octavia, and her mother had gotten truly angry at her stubbornness.

"This is your destiny, marriage and women's work, and yet you still fight against me!" her mother had yelled. But as the breeze ruffled Octavia's dark hair and she haltingly stumbled through the scroll, her worries of life faded away.

"I think you can truly read now!" Julius exclaimed after Octavia managed to read the poem twice.

"I'm not so sure... I keep mixing up my letters!" Octavia said in frustration. As she knelt in the dirt, scanning the scroll, she pounded her knee and moaned. Suddenly Julius snatched the scroll and dashed off into the small forest between their houses. Surprised, Octavia started to stand. Then she heard footsteps.

"Octavia, my daughter, what are you doing in the dirt? Get up," her mother commanded. Octavia felt dizzy with fear. Would her secret passion and friend be discovered? "My dear, you look so pale...

are you well?" Mother exclaimed. Lifting her long white dress, she leaned forward and touched Octavia's face.

"I'm fine, just getting fresh air, but I dare say I felt a spider on my back," Octavia lied. Her heart was pounding and she felt clammy as she shakily stood.

"There is nothing, but come in and lie down for you are so pale," her mother finally said after she checked her daughter. Octavia nodded, but inside anger boiled up as her fear evaporated. These moments with Julius were rare; Mother had just cut short her first

lesson with a scroll! It was all Octavia could do not to scream and cry in rage.

When Octavia was settled on a mat with wine and fruit at her side, her mother finally left. Octavia was so frustrated and furious that her hands shook as she drank the wine. The wine wasn't very strong, but after eating fruit and finishing the wine, Octavia felt drowsy and lay down to sleep.

When she woke, Octavia found someone peering down at her. She opened her mouth to scream, but a hand clapped over her mouth. "It's me, Julius. I don't think we can meet again soon, but keep this," Julius whispered. Octavia sat up and turned to thank him, but he was gone. Something hard was digging into her chest and she pulled out from under her a scroll! Gasping, she unrolled it with trembling fingers. Quietly she struggled

**"You don't seem like
the type to just go
along with whatever is
expected of you."**



Octavia had never felt so empty and alone

to read the words aloud.

Dear Octavia,

You are a good friend and reader. I thank you for your faithful companionship and our lessons together. I hope my gift—reading—comes in handy soon. To the point, I am sorry to say my family is moving away to a distant city: Rome. It is the center of the Roman Empire and a much more useful living place to my father who longs to be a senator. Rome is busy and exciting, but I will miss you. Please continue to read; it will serve you well in your later years. Maybe one day girls can freely learn to read scrolls without shame. Octavia, you are a fine companion and a rare joy to me. I treasure each moment we had together. My moving is hard for me to bear; but please do not fret. Our friendship was great but sadly short. Octavia, for me, please keep reading. I miss you greatly.

In best regards,
Julius Titus

Octavia looked up and let the tears slowly roll down her cheeks. Her only friend was gone forever now; why did he have to leave? Nothing could make up for Julius and his gift of reading. Octavia had never felt so empty and alone. As she wiped tears from her cheeks, she cradled the precious scroll. At last she hid it in her bedroom. She could not bear to read it once again now that her only friend was gone to the faraway Rome.

OCTAVIA WAS BROKEN after Julius's departure. Rome might have been on the other end of the earth; she would

never see him again. Octavia became unnaturally quiet and obedient. She ate very little and often went into her room for long periods of time. Her mother worried constantly about her and her father paid a doctor to check her. But she seemed physically fine; it was her shattered soul that pained her. The next few years in Octavia's life were the most painful and lonely. She began to work harder at her weaving; Julius's move had forced her to accept her true destiny. Without her friend Octavia had given up hope of living a different life. No, she was bound to be an ordinary Roman woman. In fact, she would have given up reading if Julius hadn't continued to write letters each week.

Desperate for her faraway acquaintance, Octavia took these letters as glimpses into Julius's new life. These windows of Rome forced her to read constantly and slowly begin to practice writing. Hope filled Octavia when a letter arrived saying Julius had a surprise for her. She hurried out into the garden and began to write in the dirt. What if Julius was visiting? Then he would see that she could also write!

Painstakingly, Octavia scratched out letters and words. Thank you. Garden. Rome. Mother. Octavia. Friend. Visit. Each word had to be carefully wiped away, but seeing her own writing made Octavia full of pleasure. Slowly her stubborn spirit flooded back, and though her parents were relieved they also sighed a little, for an obedient Octavia was a rare joy. Days flew by with every spare moment outside writing in the dirt. Soon

Octavia's mother complained that her daughter's dress was soiled every day from her bending in the dirt.

One day Octavia was on her knees alone in the courtyard, writing a pretend letter to Julius.

Dear Julius,

I have learned to write! Now I can respond to your lovely letters. Thank you for being such a good friend and faithful...

Something jumped out of a bush, startling her. Hardly daring to believe it, Octavia stood up and smiled at Julius. Looking exceedingly pleased, Julius said, "You can write?"

"I taught myself through your corresponding letters," Octavia replied. Julius's look of surprise made all the effort worth it. As he bent down, he spotted Octavia's dirt letter.

"Your handwriting is very neat. I'm so glad you learned to write yourself. Can I come into your house? My father is Senator Titus and I doubt citizens would refuse a senator's son," Julius suggested. Octavia nodded eagerly and they hurried towards the house. Motioning for him to be quiet, the young girl crept to the doorway. She heard voices.

"Senator Titus, next door!"

"Imagine..."

"Such lovely girls would make good friends for Octavia!"

Octavia spun around and beamed

at Julius. "You're moving back?" she mouthed. Julius nodded and Octavia hugged him. Then she threw open the door to the sitting room.

"Mother, Father, this is my good friend Julius. He is Senator Titus's son, perhaps you've heard of him?" Octavia inquired. The room fell quiet and Octavia realized that Julius's whole family was sitting with her own in the room. They turned to look at Octavia. She felt heat rush to her cheeks as Senator Titus chuckled softly.

"Well, it appears our children are already acquainted," Senator Titus observed. He drank some wine and smiled kindly at the two children in the doorway. "Ah, and that reminds me," said Titus as he stood up. "We present your family with a gift in thanks of your kindness and welcome. Please accept these scrolls."

Octavia felt tears of joy prick her eyes as Senator Titus's wife handed her father many scrolls. Words to read! Scrolls! Poetry, philosophy, stories, legends, essays, knowledge... something beyond happiness filled Octavia. It was ecstasy, it was elation, and it was the pure bliss of knowing that she would have material to read. Julius poked her and smiled mischievously. "I knew you'd like the idea... that's why I suggested it," he whispered.

Delighted, Octavia felt a smile crack her face and she whispered, "Thank you for your gift, Julius. Not just the scrolls, but your gift of reading." ❀

My Dog Bella

By Vincenzo Ruggiero

When I arrive home from school
she's there waiting, in the window.
She wags her tail joyfully.
Her long slobbery tongue licks me all over.
As I open the door to the backyard
Bella bolts out into the yard.
I grab a bouncy tennis ball
and throw it as far as I can.
She races across the yard
fetching the tennis ball
and bringing it back to me
covered in slob.
We go inside and I give Bella
a nice warm bath.
When she's done
she shakes, sending water
everywhere like a sprinkler!
When it's time for bed I kiss her head
and watch her drift off to sleep.
I go downstairs for a glass of milk to quench my thirst.
I end up finding Bella curled up into a little brown ball.
Always after a long stressful day at school I can look forward
to seeing Bella.



Vincenzo Ruggiero, 13
Mount Kisco, New York



Silently, I fly through the trees

Midnight's Song

By Jenna Fields

Illustrated by Isabella Xie

LEAVES RUSTLE, a twig snaps. My eyes flash open, two sulfurous spheres wide on my dish-like face. My white feathers are rumpled, awry, and misplaced on my back. I peer out of the tree, gazing out through my window, a round hole in the rough bark. Moonlight glimmers off every surface, landing in shimmering pools, splashed there. The rippling of the nearby brook, lapping at a damp and pebbled bank, singing a sweet, low lullaby, whispers through the night. My nest of twigs, leaves, and grasses fills most of the hollow, providing me and my eggs with a soft and comfortable residence. Beneath me, I feel movement, minute, miniscule movement, so small that I barely feel it. Hatch time is nearing, my chicks will soon emerge into this world, in need of life-giving sustenance, no more than ruffles of fluff. They will break free of their shells, naked of the thick protecting feathers I possess, and cry for food, shrill cries of hunger. They will need that sustenance for survival. I inch my head out of the knothole, finally emerging. The cold midnight wind slices through the air like a claw, and I spread my wings, embracing it, feeling the wind through my feathers.

The moonlight casts a pale sheen on my snow-white feathers, glistening and dancing on the stream below. Through my precise eyes, I can glimpse every pebble, pushed along by the gentle current. I glide on the wind, flapping my wings every now and then. Silently, I fly through the trees, dodging askew branches and watching ever so intently for the movement of prey. The trees thin and the undergrowth begins to fall back, replaced by sparse,



Jenna Fields, 12
Coyote, California



Isabella Xie, 13
Newton, Massachusetts

green grass. My eyes scan relentlessly, searching, ever searching, following the law put down by my ancestors, a law that has reigned above all others for millennia. Eat or be eaten, eat or die. The strongest survive. Those who are weak live for one purpose and one purpose only. To ensure that the strong survive.

I search the ground, the trees cleared out completely, so that my vision is acute and free of blemishes. There, there it is. I wheel around towards the movement, focusing in on a quivering patch of rye grass. My talons open wide, eager to grasp the warm, living prey. The small miniscule ears twitch within the grass, with no inclination that I even exist. My silent wings flap steadily, placing me in position to dive and seize my prey. Eagerly, I focus on the minute, camouflaged body shuffling below. I tuck my wings and dive, talons outstretched. The unsuspecting prey moves nary an inch as I swoop in. Talon meets flesh, claw meets fur, and I snap out my wings, catching a drift upwards. The mouse entrapped in my talons wriggles and fights, but fruitless remain its attempts, for my claws hold fast to the rodent. Its fight weakens, its life source seeping away slowly until it hangs limp. The law has been followed, and the strong live on.

I soar silently through the night, the moonlight pale and clear on the world. I pass back into the shadow of the trees, gliding back home to my soon-to-

be-hatched brood. A shrill cry echoes through the air, I can feel the vibrations, hear its tune. It is a cry of victory in finding a good meal. Its vibrant tone reawakens my mind to the concept that my clutch is never safe without my keen eye watching over them. My wings flap with

more force than before, with more urgency in each stroke. My tree appears, but there is something amiss, a feeling, a movement, a sound. A fleeting black shadow approaches the hollow I call home,

climbing slowly. Cold realization hits me, akin to a branch in mid-flight. This is no shadow, rather, a predator, with eager lust for the consumption of my brood.


Rage washes over me in a boiling hot wave, consuming me in tongues of flame. I drop my catch and streak towards the tree, my feathers catching the wind and propelling faster. Viciously, I slam into the shadow, raking and stabbing with my talons and beak, driven by a fierce, instinctive protectiveness. Midnight's song plays in my head, an inborn tune that tells me exactly every stab to make. This vicious onslaught is no fight, but a wild, dangerous dance to the song of night, danced by my ancestors. The predator scrabbles desperately on the bark, squealing in pain. Momentarily, I can see its face, two gleaming yellow eyes, framed by a deep black mask. A raccoon, bandits of the dark. Why did I ever leave my nest?

I give one last well-aimed stab and the

The law has been
followed, and the
strong live on.

bandit falls to the ground, twisting and wriggling, landing with a puff of dust on the ground below. Stunned, it lies there for a moment, before darting off into the shadows. Victory lifts me into the air, dancing on moonlight. I swoop down and snatch up the mouse I left behind on the leaves, not willing to allow a lowly bandit to ruin my catch. Concerned, I give one last flap of my mighty, speckled wings and soar into the hollow, the musty smell of leaves and bark engulfing me. My eggs are safe, unscathed and whole as ever. All at once, all is silent. In the distance, I hear the stream, singing its song. Footsteps interrupt the lull, and I look out to glimpse a scarlet fox, limping on a front leg, passing by, its tail dragging through the leaves. Beneath me, an egg twitches, stirring the mouse I have set beside me, still warm. I

shift around, turning to watch as cracks appear in the thin shells, doorways opening for life. Beaks appear as they thrust themselves into the world, tiny weak chicks, crying out shrilly. My family has arrived.

My steely gaze rolls over my chicks. Though they are minute and weak, barely consisting of several bits of fluff, they will learn. They will learn of the law, in which only the strongest among us survive. They will gain the raw power of flight, wings that will enable them to soar high. I will teach them to hunt, to spot a mouse from a hundred feet in the air. I shall teach them to protect their young, to fight bandits of the night. Ultimately, I shall teach them to dance, the practiced steps, danced for millennia, to dance to the tune of midnight's wild song. 



Book Review

By Kaylee Ayres

The Lucy Variations, by Sara Zarr; Little, Brown Books for Young Readers: New York, 2013; \$18



Kaylee Ayres, 12
Cape Coral, Florida


AN INSPIRING TALE of a young musician finding her place in this crazy world, *The Lucy Variations* is a journey about finding yourself and accomplishing your dreams no matter what giant obstacles are blocking your way. Lucy's little brother's new music teacher, Will, plays a big part. He helps Lucy find a side of herself she has long forgotten, the musical side, a side that used to bring her happiness. He helps resurrect Lucy in a sense. A major question asked time and time again in the book is, "What do you love?" For Lucy, the answer is music.

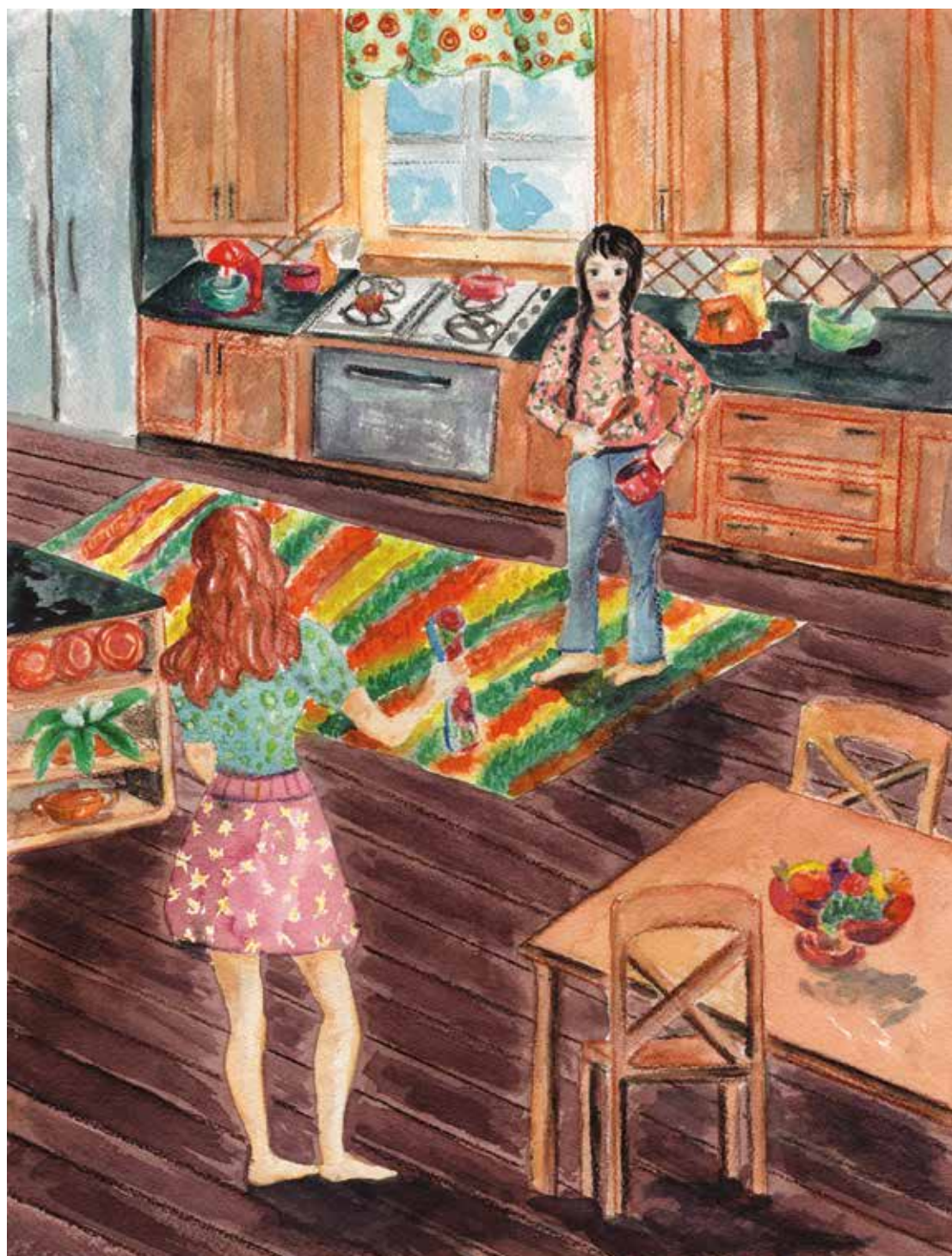
The Lucy Variations got me thinking — what do I love? Well, I love reading. I tried to narrow down what I loved about reading, like Will had Lucy do. Although narrowing down the reasons proved easy for Lucy, it was a lot harder for me. I just love everything about reading. I love how when I'm reading, I'm no longer myself. I can be anyone, do anything, go anywhere; and that is just one of the best feelings in the world. I love how within one page, a strong author can make you go from laughing to crying. In fact, I don't think there's anything I love more than the first pages of a good book. I love endings too though, because there's always more to the tale, and I'm the one who gets to write it

within the pages of my imagination. The reason I love *The Lucy Variations* so much is the novel allowed me to experience everything I adored in a good book in just 304 pages.

As I kept thinking about the question—what do I love?—more things came to mind than just reading. I thought about playing my guitar and singing, spending time with my friends and family, taking pictures on my iPod Touch, stupid funny movies, traveling to new places, and creating lasting memories. Like Lucy, realizing what I truly love opened my eyes to a whole new perspective. So often, people walk around without ever truly knowing what they love. They go through the motions as if each day is a death sentence, like they have no choice about how their day will go. *The Lucy Variations* is such a good reminder to us that there is so much to love about life. If we just choose to stop cowering away from our fears, and eliminate them like Lucy did, we can finally focus on the good things that bring us joy and peace.

One thing I particularly didn't like about the book is how things ended with Will and Lucy. In the end, we find out Will has been using Lucy to gain fame through her talent. I was a little crushed, well more than a little, because throughout the whole book Will was one of the only people Lucy truly trusted, and then he turned on her too. Although that wasn't how I anticipated things ending between them, I still think the author did the right thing. The conclusion demonstrated to Lucy that, even though people might hurt her, the good memories stored in her heart would fuel her to keep persevering. The incident made Lucy stronger and gave her the will to excel at her goals.

Overall, *The Lucy Variations* was an amazing book, one that I will read over and over again for years to come. I recommend this book to readers ages twelve and up who enjoy contemporary coming-of-age fiction. 



"You know you're not supposed to use the stove!"

Sisterhood

By **Ariana González Silas**

Illustrated by **Madeleine Alexander**

“**B**YE, GUYS!” Mom called as she shut the door behind her. I looked at my sister. “Can I watch TV?” That was one of the two questions that I asked Nava every time we were home alone.

“No,” she said.

“Can I have some ice cream?”

She looked at me with her I-can’t-believe-what-I-have-to-live-with face and said, “What do you think?”

“Humph!” I got up. Usually the answer to both the questions was no, so that didn’t surprise me. But every time, it was the same disappointment.

I walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, stared into it for a second, and shut it. That was the routine. I walked back into the living room and sat down next to my sister with a thud.

“There’s nothing to do!” I whined.

“You know what, Bella?” Nava asked me.

“What?” I asked.

“Figure something out and leave me alone!!” She walked into her room and slammed the door.

“Well, someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning,” I said to no one in particular. I sat on the couch for a while, not doing anything. “Ow!” I whispered as our cat Brownie jumped onto my lap, claws first. She rubbed her head against me and purred. We named her Brownie because every inch of her body was the luscious color of the fudgy inside of a



Ariana González Silas, 11
Oakland, California



Madeleine Alexander, 10
Keller, Texas

brownie. Looking at her, I thought about how much I loved her and how much I loved brownies when a thought went off in my head: I would make brownies.

As I got out a pot and the ingredients, I decided that I would make a double batch, which wasn't that much harder. I was melting the butter and chocolate on the stove, when Nava came out of her bedroom.

"Whatcha doin'?" she asked, not looking up from the magazine she was reading.

"Making brownies."

She looked up. "What? Bella, you didn't ask! You know you're not supposed to use the stove!"

"Well, you didn't say no."

"You didn't give me the chance!!"

"Well, if you hadn't told me I couldn't watch TV, I wouldn't have had to do anything else!"

"Oh, so now it's my fault?"

"Yeah, I had nothing to do and you didn't care, so I had to figure it out on my own and I chose this."

"Well, excuse me, I was doing the best that I could. Would you like to try having the world's most annoying person in the world as your sister?"

"Well, you don't even know my best friend's name!"

"Oh, I so do!" she yelled back.

"Really? Then what's her name?"

"Ah, uh, Lila, she has been your best friend since kindergarten."

"Wrong, guess again," I said.

"Hmm, Mattie, she has always been

one of your closest friends!"

"See, you don't even realize that the two people you just said are my two least favorite people at school! You don't pay any attention to me. It's all just you and your stupid friends. You have not hugged me since May 2010... It's been like, what? Three years?!"

"I hug you all the time. How about that time that you fell and had to get stitches on your knee, I hugged you then!"

"No you didn't, you stayed in the emergency room with me for two minutes, faking sympathy, and then you called your friends to come pick you up, and you left!"

"You're making that up."

"I am not!" I slammed my hand down on the counter, or I meant to slam it down on the counter, but instead I slammed it down on the only part of the burner that was not covered by the pot.

I screamed and screamed so loud that probably everyone in the neighborhood could hear me. My sister freaked. She grabbed me and pulled me toward the sink and poured cold water over my hand. It didn't help, it was bubbling and turning dark red.

"Stay here," Nava told me. She flew across the room, grabbing ice, turning off the stove, and pulling the plastic wrap out of a drawer. In seconds, before I knew it, she was back by the sink, dumping out all of the ice in the ice tray onto the counter. She grabbed my hand with one of hers and with the other she grabbed as much ice from the counter as she could. Putting all the ice in her hand onto mine,

she quickly cut a piece of plastic wrap and wrapped it around my hand, holding the ice in place. This soothed the pain enough for me to stop screaming.

Nava grabbed her keys and rushed me out the door. She jumped into the front seat as I slid in the back. Closing the door and quickly buckling up, she took off. She was only sixteen and wasn't supposed to be driving other people yet, but she could pass for eighteen and this was an emergency.

She drove me to the nearest children's hospital, which was only a few blocks away. She slid into the nearest parking space and jumped out, followed by me, and we ran into the emergency room.

A few hours later we came out with Mom and Dad. My hand was newly bandaged with some kind of hospital bandage that felt so good that multiple times I forgot it was even there. I thought of all the

questions I was going to get at school and what I was going to say to them. I wasn't sure if I would tell people that I had gotten into a fight with Nava or I would just say that I had put my hand on a burner. The doctor had said that Nava had done the right thing, making the ice bandage and taking me to the hospital so quickly. Mom and Dad were so proud of how we handled the situation that they were going to ease off on the punishments a little, but there was still going to be the whole no birthday parties or TV or late bedtimes and all that jazz.

Later that night, when I was going to bed, Nava came into my room.

"May I tuck you in?" she asked.

"Yes," I said and smiled.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Me too." She lay down next to me and we fell asleep just like that, and I dreamed of the ups and downs of sisterhood. ❀



Without You, My Right Shoe

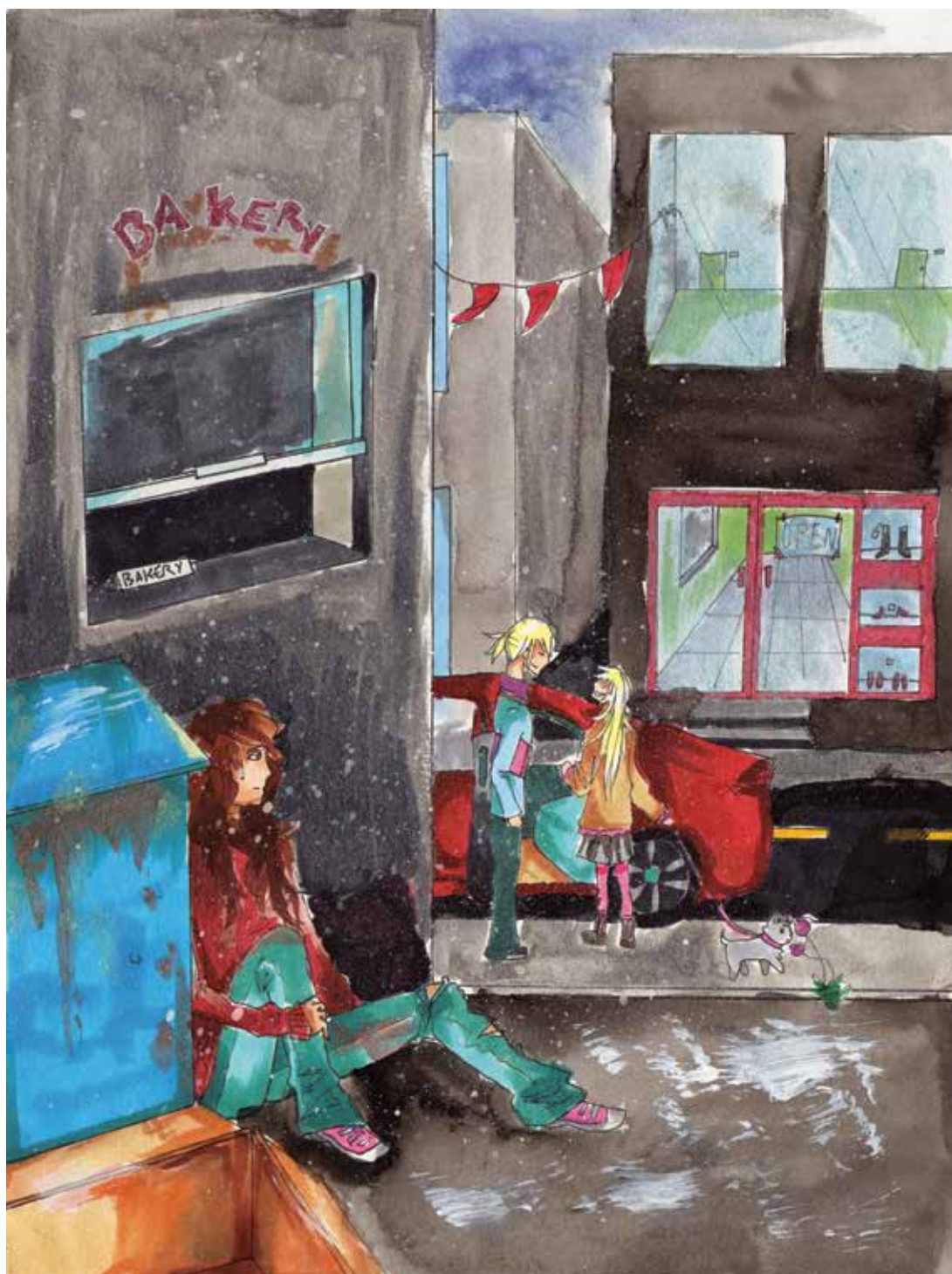
By Isaac Walsh



Isaac Walsh, 10
Minneapolis, Minnesota

I must have been only six at the time, my sister, Poppy, two.
I must have wondered why
Poppy decided to look at the *parked cars* in the parking lot
rather than walk the Stone Arch Bridge.
My mom must have stayed behind with Poppy,
leaving only my dad, my aunt, and myself to see it fall.
We must have walked for a little while,
because it happened
around the middle of the bridge.
It must have been humid that summer,
because my feet must have been a little slippery, a little sweaty.
I must have stepped up on
the brick wall below the handrail
and rested my feet between the rail and the bricks.
I must have stared up at Saint Anthony Falls in awe
and must have heard an ice cream truck calling me.

I must have stepped down from that ledge,
felt my shoe slide off,
and watched it tumble down,
an orange falling into a faucet stream,
the river.
And I must have stretched my hand out,
a “No!” from me, a sad yes lingering in my brain.
I must have looked at my feet that night,
rough and callused from a day without my right shoe.
And someone down in Louisiana
must have seen an orange Croc float by on the Mississippi,
a bucket full of mystery,
and wondered.



I realized that I'd probably never have what she had. She had hope

Hope

By **Isabel Folger**

Illustrated by **Anika Knudson**

I WRAPPED MYSELF tightly in the thin sweatshirt that was all I had. Bound in the regrettable cloak of discomfort, I felt the wind and snow swirl around me, nipping at my frozen face like an anxious puppy and slithering up my arms with the stealth of a snake.

As I stood there, a little ball of helplessness, I heard a faint laugh, like the tinkling of tiny bells. The cold was laughing at me. A small, taunting laugh that I knew would swiftly turn into a roar of mockery.

My squinted eyes caught the sight of a little girl covered in a long fur coat, being ushered into a car. How lucky she was. I was only a step away from having a home of my own, a step that I might never take. But I was a mile away from being her.

I knew what my destiny had to offer. I could almost see it before me—my fate, disguised in a hooded black robe, arms outstretched to reveal injustice, wrapped in a bundle that I was frightened to open, but I knew I had to. I had to face the truth sometime.

Turning my back on the cozy-looking car that was becoming ever smaller, I realized that I'd probably never have what she had.

She had hope.

THE SWIRL of white snow had given way to the blanket of night, and I had curled up in the ramshackle cardboard box that provided little warmth, but blocked the wind, barely.



Isabel Folger, 12
Santa Cruz, California



Anika Knudson, 13
Tumwater, Washington

With my knees tucked into my stretched sweatshirt, my thoughts shifted from my empty stomach to the little girl in the fur coat. That had been me, months ago. That had been me, clutching my mother's hand in fear and trying to ignore the dozens of dirty, homeless people begging us for food. Now I was one of them.

I sighed. My mother was gone. My home was gone. My life was gone. There was no use yearning for the past. The past had been swept away with a broom, and now it was out in the junkyard, damaged and ruined.

The holes in my shabby backpack were so big, I could have reached into them, but I preferred unzipping the zipper anyway. I pulled out the brown, leather-covered journal, frayed with age. I remembered when I'd gotten it, almost four months ago. Back then, it had been brand new and perfect, like the rest of my life.

I flipped through the pages, memories spilling from the words. I read my earliest entries, about getting the journal as a gift for my twelfth birthday. Mama was there, and so was Gran, and my baby neighbor, Bryce, looking adorable in his little jacket and booties. They and Bryce's parents were the only family I ever had.

I didn't know much about my father. The only information I had was what I'd been able to squeeze out of my mother, who'd told me that they'd never married. She'd never really loved him, she said, but

she was naïve enough to believe that he was someone else. And then they'd had me, by accident.

I remembered the first time she had told me the story, and I was utterly shocked.

"I was an accident, Mama?" my five-year-old self had wondered. "I was never meant to happen?"

I kept running,
chest burning, tears
flying out behind me,
like a windmill.

And my mother would pull me into an embrace and squeeze me tight. "Sweetie, you were the best accident that ever happened."

Then she'd continue her story of how she had realized she was pregnant, and

at the same time, that my father wasn't anything more than the roar of his motorcycle and the gleam in his eyes. She hadn't told him about me yet, and she never would. They split up, and she moved to raise me in the town she grew up in.

We'd lived happily ever since, until two weeks after my birthday, when Gran had a stroke. Mama was in the hospital with her when she died. Mama hadn't seemed like herself ever since then. She'd stare out the window, and all of a sudden her beautiful, glossy eyes would fill with tears. She was never really there, in the moment everyone else was in. Her daydreaming took its toll soon after when she veered off the road in her car and crashed. Later, in the hospital, I had held her limp hand in mine, and when her eyes had closed I thought she was really gone. But she

wasn't, yet, and my heart leaped when her eyelids peeped open and her mouth formed three words.

"I love you."

Then the pulse went out. She couldn't hold on any longer. There was nothing to hold on to. Her eyes shut. Her painful breaths came to a halt, and the reassuring beat of her heart refused to work. She was gone.

"I love you." Those three words had never meant so much, or revealed so much truth. And then, as I sat there with the open book in my hands, I wondered if those had been the last words of Gran, too.

I'LL ALWAYS remember Mama. How she could make me laugh when I was on the verge of tears, how her dark brown curls framed her face, as radiant and humble as a violet, and how she was always there for me, in school plays, in crisis, and in pride. I thought I'd have her forever, but she slipped away, and I had nothing left with which to console myself. Her legal will had left me to Gran, and a few short days weren't nearly enough time to change it. Besides, there was nobody else who would want me.

So, basically, I lived there by myself, in the house, for two days. I spent those dreadful hours weeping and sleeping. And eating. My grief could not be expressed, not even in my journal. So I ate and ate, and the house cupboards were bare by the second day. I must have gained ten pounds, because I seemed to feel a little heavier when I woke up the morning of

the third day, remarkably still hungry.

By then it was mid-August, and Mama's death seemed to be months ago, instead of only a few days. Then the government officials had knocked on the door and said that Mama owed a lot of money to the state, and that I would need to go to an orphanage.

I'd heard a lot about orphanages, the giant warehouses that worked children until midnight. It hadn't taken me half a second to realize that that was the last thing I needed right then. I skirted through the house and out the back door, springing down the street to the adjacent neighborhood. I knew they would be following me, and it took me a minute to realize that I was running from the government. The law officials. The police. I couldn't run away; they'd surely find me.

However, they somehow didn't. They let me go, as if my future didn't matter at all. I kept running, chest burning, tears flying out behind me, like a windmill. I'd ended up tripping over the curb in Skyville, a cement version of where I really belonged. It was like a maze, a world of cars, a sky, gray with smog, and towering buildings. After a while, I realized that I'd left everything behind, except my school backpack, which contained my journal, and the clothes I had on. Finally, I curled up in the filthy corner of a dark alley to sleep.

Nothing much had happened over the month that had followed. I'd found out that the open window above was connected to a bakery, and the baker would throw

out all the ruined batches of cookies or cupcakes. That and the old cardboard box I'd found were the biggest gold mines of the month and, pathetically, what I lived on. And now, there I was, shivering with cold, at what was probably ten o'clock at night.

The next day was awful. I had only been able to savor a frosting-smeared sugar cookie, and because of the oncoming winter, the wind was worse than usual. I tried to pass the time as I'd done the night before, with the memories and visions of my previous life, but I couldn't force one more tear out of my worn-out eyes.

For the first time in weeks, I staggered out of the protective darkness of the alley and into the blinding light of Skyville city. Rubbing my eyes, I stepped forward and fell onto the hard pavement of the street.

Cars honked and tires screeched. The world seemed to come to a halt, and for one beautiful moment, the reluctant sun showed through the unwilling smog. My mother was there, in front of me, arms outstretched to break my fall.

And then my tender face smashed into the street, Mama was gone, and the sun failed to shine through any longer. It gave up. My mother gave up. I gave up.

I was like my mother, falling, reaching for something that wasn't there. As I lay there, silence taking over the noisy street, I let go. I let myself release the pain and fall into the bottomless pit of blackness.

GLOOM BLURRED into the foggy sight of a woman, with dark brown curls that framed her face, as radiant and humble as a violet. She pulled me up and sat me on her lap like a baby.

"Mama," I murmured, and the woman laughed softly.

"Do you have a home, baby?" she asked kindly.

My eyes focused and I realized where I was. I was in a coffee shop, on the lap of a woman who *wasn't* my mother. Suddenly I became angry. What right did she have to ask of my personal business? She could pry all she wanted, I decided, but she wouldn't get one scrap of truth.

"I've got a home," I spat.

"You got pretty banged up, honey, but you'll be fine," she replied. "Where do you live?"

"Don't call me that." I looked out the window, trying to pick a building that should have been my home. "I live over there," I offered, pointing to a big, white building. It looked like the place a very rich person would live.

She smiled. "You live in city hall?" I felt my face turn red. I rapidly felt terrible about lying to her. She was trying to help, after all.

"I'm Hannah," she told me. "I live down the street, at the foster home."

Suddenly, my anger came rushing back. "I ain't needin' a foster home." Obviously, I had inadvertently picked up the poor grammar of the cook from the bakery. I turned my head so she wouldn't see my face, which must have looked like fire



What right did she have to ask of my personal business?

by then. “I mean, I don’t need a foster home.”

“OK,” she said, getting up and walking briskly towards the door. “I’ll see you later, then.”

As if, I thought.

Wait a minute! What was I doing? I needed a home, more than anything. So why was I turning one away?

“Wait!” I shouted. I ran out onto the sidewalk, but she had vanished into the crowd.

I ran, my heart heavy with yet another burden: a missed opportunity. Salty tears

dripped from my heavy eyelashes, stinging the slivers of cuts that creased my cheeks as I skirted down the sidewalk. My eyes and brain shut off, letting my legs take over, because I didn’t care where I went. I didn’t have a home. I didn’t live anywhere. I didn’t *belong* anywhere.

My legs took me to what most resembled a home: the dark alley with my cardboard box and my backpack. There, inside the box, was where I spent my afternoon, in a haughty, angry mood, munching on a powdered bonbon and wondering why I deserved the life I had. I’ve never

been perfect, but who ever was? I'd been good enough, I thought.

When long hours had dragged by and the light was dim, I took a deep breath and opened my journal for what I decided would be the last time. I hoped that my random opening would lead to some report from my previous life, something that would remind me that at least part of my life was worth living. Squinting my eyes closed in anticipation, I slowly opened the pages and dared a peek. As if drawn to them, my gaze fell on three words: *"I love you."*

I screamed in my head, *What?!! Why would I pick those stupid words?! I don't even know the meaning of love anymore!* I angrily thrashed at the page, ripping it out and crumpling it up.


When I'd successfully thrown the wrinkled piece of paper into the busy street, my trembling hands tore at the next page. Soon, the only remainder of the journal was the old, battered covers that were bound together with the filthy silver stitching. Fresh tears sprang out of my ripe eyes. They came in a flood, never pausing for a minute as I heaved choking sobs.

My tears blurred my vision, but I was able to make out the silhouette of a woman that stood, black against the bright lights of the city. I felt myself rising, standing up in a desperate stagger to face whoever it was. But I finally decided to stop fighting. For the second time that day, I gave up.

Dizziness swirled around me, and as more tears nourished the two rivers across my cheeks, it became more and more intense. I felt lightheaded, as if I was in a dream. I knew I would faint. As I slowly fell, two white hands—pale and perfect like Mama's—reached towards me.

I WAS IN A FRESH, clean white nightdress that reached halfway past my knees. I sat, curled up in a ball, while Mama, with her arms around me, was rocking me in a rocking chair, singing me a lullaby in her soft, angelic voice. My head lay across her chest so that I could hear her heart beating for one last time. I didn't want to wake up from this perfect dream. I would rather stay inside this dream forever. However, just as the repulsive thought crept into my mind, I felt my eyelids, my real eyelids, start to open.

I was being rocked in a rocking chair, in a fresh, clean white nightdress. A voice—beautiful, but unable to match the beauty of Mama's—was softly singing a lullaby. I knew who it was without lifting my head. Hannah's long arms were wrapped around me. I suddenly realized that Hannah would become more in my life than the nosy woman who reminded me too much of Mama.

With only a little bit of uncertainty, I wondered if maybe my life wasn't over yet. Maybe somewhere deep in my heart, I still had hope. 

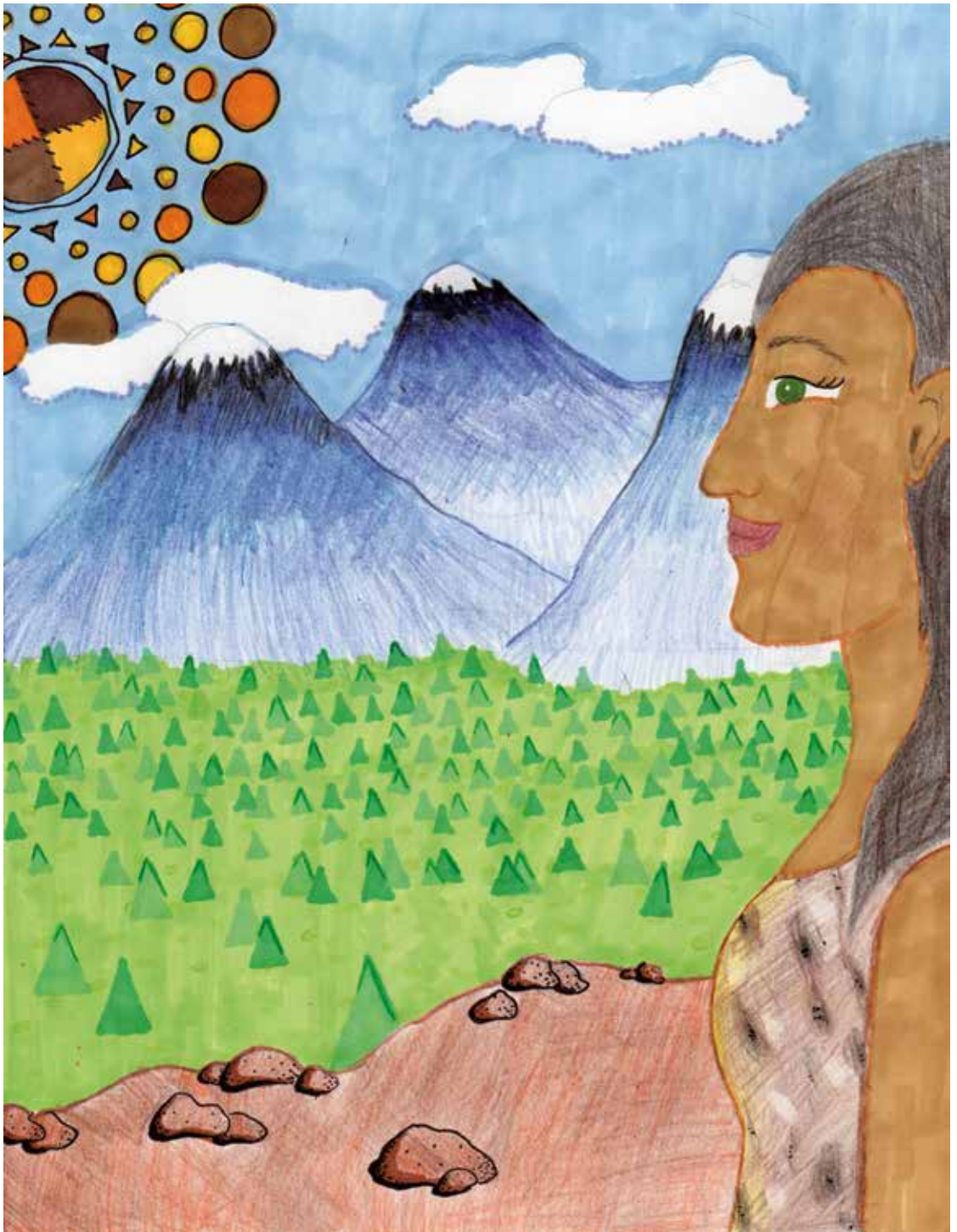
Adjustments

By Elisabeth Martin

Nothing ever stays the same
Family going,
Never coming back
Tears fall
Goodbyes made
Why won't the world stop spinning?
Sorrow, joy
Blended into one
Leaving,
For a better place
Why can't we go as well?
Tears dry
Life moves on
Events fade
Time blurs
Were they ever here at all?
A memory
A smile
A place
Smacks me hard
Like colliding with a wall.
Tears wet my pillow again,
Freed by fresh pain.
I will never forget completely,
Though nothing stays the same.



Elisabeth Martin, 13
Dunlap, Illinois



They had made a long journey, but Shaqueh was sure it was worth it

Home

By **Morgan Biagioni**

Illustrated by **Miranda Adelman**

SHAQUEH'S PINE-GREEN EYES glowed as she stared out over the forest stretching before her.

She tucked her long, thick black hair behind her ear and glanced back. Her family was moving slowly. Her younger sister, Demerza, was helping their baby brother, Histon, through the rocks, and Shaqueh's father was aiding her stumbling, pregnant mother. They had made a long journey, but Shaqueh was sure it was worth it.

"Hurry up!" she urged them, wanting them to see the spectacular view. Shaqueh's limbs, exhausted and dragging moments before, were now filled with energy at the sight of their new home.

Demerza and Histon reached her first and peered out behind the rocks toward the lands beyond. Both caught their breath.

Shaqueh grinned. Her family had walked for five moons, fleeing from a larger, hostile family. They had headed for the snowy, winter-gripped mountains, trekking through snow and ice. Shaqueh's elderly grandmother, Geela, had not made it to the end. But now they were almost there.

Shaqueh and her siblings scampered away from the view and looked for a way down the mountainside.

"Wait now, children," Malara, their mother, interrupted. Her brown eyes were weighted down with fatigue and worry as she clutched her pregnant belly.

Papama, their father, wheezed as he came up behind.

"Come *on!*" Shaqueh growled impatiently. She wanted to



Morgan Biagioni, 13
Roswell, Georgia



Miranda Adelman, 13
Arlington Heights, Illinois

be free in the forests again. Her fingers trailed lightly over her beautiful bow, carved by Geela's hand. The willow wood reminded her of the sandy riverbank, dotted with the gorgeous trees, where she and her siblings used to play. Shaqueh sagged slightly. That was all gone.

"We'll find a new willow bank, she told herself firmly, for the child in Malara's belly.

Slowly, painstakingly, they skidded along a treacherous slope toward the bottom. It grew warmer and warmer as they continued to descend. Finally Shaqueh leaped free of the rocks and spun around, breathing in the sweet springtime air.

"This is our new home, children," Papama murmured. He looked very old, as if the journey had withered him away. Shaqueh felt a rush of fear. What if Papama didn't make it?

Of course he'll make it. Shaqueh gulped. She doubted herself.

They headed into the woods, and Shaqueh relaxed. She felt the tension lift from her shoulders, the worry lines fade from her young eyes. She was at home again. She notched a feathery arrow to her bow and pulled on the taut string ever so slightly, searching for something to hunt.

"Not yet, my daughter," Papama whispered to her, leaning forward so that only her ears would hear. "Let us settle in before we catch anything."

Shaqueh nodded and reluctantly replaced the arrow in the quiver at her shoulder. She wanted to do something to

make these unfamiliar trees feel like a real home.

They found a nice clearing to stay at and went to work immediately, clearing away fallen leaves until only rich red earth remained.

Shaqueh frowned. Red earth? Earth was brown. She touched her fingers to the ground. It was soft like the earth of her former home, just a different color. She breathed a sigh of relief as she glanced around.

Histon was playing at the edge of the clearing, his resting mother keeping a watchful eye. Demerza was working on a fire with Papama.

"Papama, may I please hunt?" Shaqueh pleaded of her father, heading over to Demerza and him. "We need more skins for shelters and beds."

Papama hesitated. Then he nodded. "Be back by sundown."

That gives me plenty of time, Shaqueh thought, glancing at the late-morning sun. She turned and padded into the woods on silent buckskin-clothed feet. Her bobcat-skin dress hung limply from one shoulder.

It was time to hunt.

SHAQUEH RETURNED to the clearing with one coon, three squirrels, and a possum. The hunting was rich here; the animals did not know to fear humans and their bows. Shaqueh skinned her catches and roasted them one at a time over the now roaring fire. The family feasted that night on rodent.

They had to pitch their shelters with what little they had brought—a few buckskins, one cougar skin, one wolf skin, and a few smaller skins. Everyone slept together in a makeshift stick-and-skin propped-up shelter.

Shaqueh didn't sleep very well. The wind rustled in her ears and woke her every time she drifted off.

The next day brought distress. Malara was in labor with Papama's child. Her shrieks brought Shaqueh to a sudden waking.

"Go find a stream with snowmelt! Now!" Papama snapped at his just-awake daughter. She nodded and ran off, grabbing a water skin. Her mother needed it badly. She finally found a snowmelt stream, filled the water skin, and sprinted back. She could hear her mother's agonized wails as she drew near.

Papama took the water skin and immediately used it to cool Malara's feverish head. Shaqueh, scared for her mother, left the shelter. She curled up on the ground and cried. Her mother was doing poorly. It was a hard labor.

Finally she heard a newborn scream.

Flushed with relief, the sixteen-year-old girl peered back in.

The child was a girl, small and slender and beautiful. She took Shaqueh's breath away with her young loveliness. Malara tenderly swaddled the baby and sat up.

"What shall we name her, Hauven?" Malara whispered to Papama.

Papama smiled. "Cherokee would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"People of the fire, mother of many," translated Malara, closing her eyes, "Yes. Cherokee will be the mother of many."

Cherokee opened her eyes. They were blue, like all babies', but Shaqueh could somehow tell they were going to turn very dark brown. The child's hair was all over the place and dark, almost black. Her skin was olive, and her cheekbones were high.

Shaqueh imagined an entire family of people with dark eyes and hair, olive skin, and high cheekbones. A race of beautiful people. Shaqueh smiled. Hopefully Cherokee *was* the mother of many.

As Shaqueh backed out, she glanced around the clearing. It had been so unfamiliar yesterday. But now it felt different.

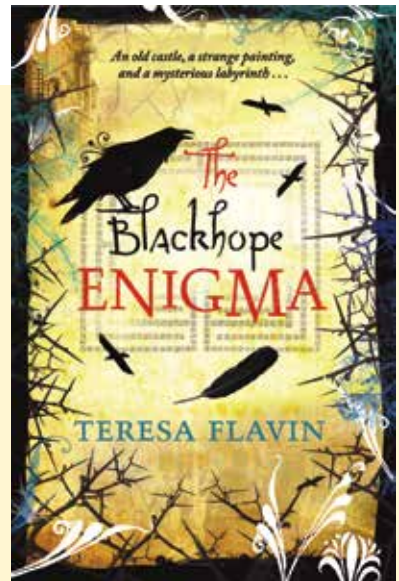
It felt like home.



Book Review

By Jessica Bernt

The Blackhope Enigma, by Teresa Flavin;
Templar Publishing: United Kingdom, 2011;
\$12.70



Jessica Bernt, 12
Brampton, Ontario, Canada

WHAT? WHEN? WHY? These were the thoughts running through my head as I flipped through *The Blackhope Enigma*. Written by Teresa Flavin, this novel is a perfect example of when reality and fantasy clash and the result is beautiful.

What is an enigma? An enigma is something that is puzzling or mystifying that just cannot be explained in any logical way. The title was perfect since enigmas play such a pivotal role in the book. How did Sunni's brother disappear into the painting? Why have skeletons appeared throughout the centuries only in the Mariner's chamber of Blackhope Tower, the same room that her brother vanished in? And who is the suspicious stranger who claims that he wants to help her?


My favorite part of this book is the fact that the characters are relatable. Sunni Forest is no child of a prophecy or royal princess. Instead, she is simply a regular thirteen-year-old girl who likes to draw. When she and Blaise see her pesky little brother disappear into a painting, she reacts the way any regular thirteen-year-old would react: with fear and wonder. I have found that having a relatable character is what drives a story

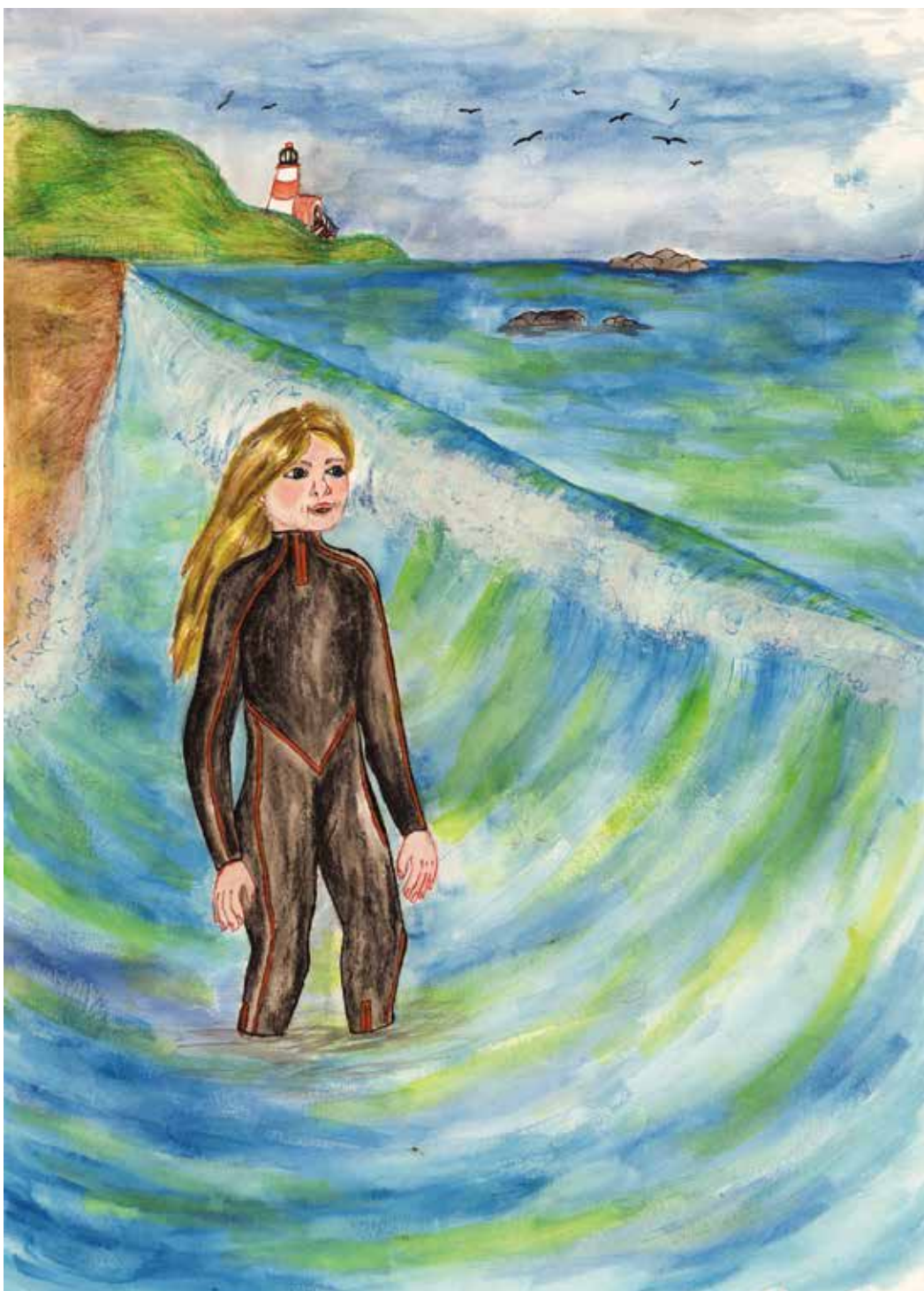
forward and makes the reader want more, and Teresa Flavin is a master of this.

I have never had much of an interest in painting, partly because I am horrible at it, but this book revealed a different side of art that interested me: the centuries of slightly insane artists and their eccentric life stories. It has made me think further than a painting when I see one and more towards who painted it.

The story is set in Blackhope Tower, a centuries-old manor in Scotland. Unlike some readers, I've been to Scotland before, and after visiting Holyrood Palace I could vividly imagine the mist and mystery surrounding Blackhope Tower. I think the setting enhanced the story because castles are often associated with inexplicable mysteries and strange events. Certainly, Blackhope Tower is no stranger to odd events. From the underground labyrinth to the ancient skeletons that appeared every few centuries, this castle might even be the strangest of all castles.

Be warned, just because I enjoyed this book doesn't mean that I am without complaints. The antagonist, Angus Bellini, felt rather clichéd and underdeveloped, as if the author hadn't taken the time to plot him out fully. I personally prefer stories in which the villains have motives other than being bent on one certain thing. Angus has only one goal: finding Corvio's lost paintings and selling them for money.

Overall though, I truly love this book. It has many of the key elements that I want in a book: mystery, intriguing and realistic characters, an interesting plot, as well as the thread of fantasy running through it. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys creative characters and unexpected plot twists in fantasy books. I certainly do. That's why I am going to pick up the second book in the series right away. 



A huge wave was looming, just cresting and about ready to break

Double Wave

By **Sophia Catalan**

Illustrated by **Bethany Pardoe**

IT WAS HOT, much too hot and stifling for my liking. My long-sleeved wetsuit wasn't helping, and the zippered ankles weren't much relief. I sighed and rolled down the window. *Sooooo* much better. The playful wind whispered in my ear, danced around my collarbone, and lifted my hair just slightly off my back. Minutes later, the harsh crying of gulls resonated through my ears, my eyes flew open, and I drew breath tainted with the salty brine smell of the ocean. It stretched out before me, gleaming and glittering in all its glory. The more daring few of the sun's rays reached out, just barely kissing the surface of the cresting, breaking water. I pulled another long, salty-sweet breath of air into my lungs and grinned. The aquamarine water shone bright, inviting me, calling me toward its glistening depths.

The car stopped with a jolt. A heartbeat after the sound of the engine fading to a low purr and finally stopping, I shoved my door open and leapt out, bare feet skimming over the hot, hard asphalt. My friend Annie raced after me, her mom's calls chasing us there.

"Leave our bags in a good spot on the shore!" she instructed. "Got it!" was yelled back to her with one voice.

I crashed down a skinny cement path, dashed through some fat green succulents, and sprinted across the burning hot beach.

The water was beautifully cold, not to mention welcome. Frothing liquid swirled around my legs as I raced farther out.

A huge wave was looming, just cresting and about ready to



Sophia Catalan, 11
Pacific Palisades, California



Bethany Pardoe, 12
Nelson, British Columbia,
Canada

break. I shook the water out of my eyes and ran to meet it. Its top curled slightly, folding in on itself. Foam gathered on the edge, and its rumbling grew louder and louder until it was all I could hear. I filled my lungs to their bursting point and drifted down to the rough, sandy bottom. I could feel the whitewater booming over my head, and when I could have sworn the last traces of its foam had receded, I straightened my knees and broke the glassy surface. The contrast of the ice-cold water around my long legs and the pleasant warmth of the sun on my upturned face was angelic. I soaked it all in, from the sounds and noises you would expect to be associated with the ocean to the cries of families and their friends, audible all across the beach.

A crashing sound was building, growing louder, but I had yet to pay attention to it. Too late. Suddenly another wave slapped me in the face and I fell over. *Whoops*, I muttered in my head. *Pay attention next time, nutso!*

Caught up in the rinse cycle, I rolled head over heels many times and occasion-

ally whacked a limb or butt against the fast-passing, sandy bottom. *Great move, Sophia*, I thought. *Do it again.*

My wave seemed to be getting smaller and thinning out. It shook me in a somersault a final time and left, depositing me at Annie's feet.

She stared at me. "Hi," I said, staring back. Annie remained quiet. *Awkward silence...* I trilled internally.


She didn't move. "Ya know, double waves are dead sneaky!" I said, slipping a crazy accent into my voice that guaranteed a laugh from Annie.

She twitched slightly. I grinned stupidly, and a smile flickered elusively across Annie's face.

I went a step further and stuck my thumb in my eye.

Annie cracked up.

I joined in and laughed until my stomach hurt and rivers streamed down my cheeks.

That night, as I drifted on drowsy waves of happy, I realized I had learned my lesson for that day: always watch for double waves. 



More or Less

By **Sammy Westfall**

Illustrated by **Olivia Zhou**

This story includes some words in Tagalog, the language of the Philippines. See the glossary at the end of the story.

TODAY, LINA DIDN'T wake up from hunger, thirst, or the heat like she usually did. Today she woke up from the sound of voices. She looked at the rusty alarm clock on the shelf above her: 4:45 A.M. It was too early for voices. *Tatay* should still be at work. Lina looked over to her little brothers and sisters who lay sleeping on the floor beside her. Standing up, she tiptoed toward the voices, the old bamboo floors creaking with every step. Lina leaned up against the thin wall and listened.

"I know, but they wouldn't listen," Lina's father said loudly, not quite shouting, but almost.

"But why you? Why did they fire you? You only missed three days! *Tatlo!*" You were sick!" her mother exclaimed, firmly holding up three fingers.

"I know it is not fair, but it's the way things are. I'll find a new job, I promise," her father assured her.

"No, Miguel. You need to rest. I will find a job." Her parents embraced each other. Her mother's eyes filled with tears.

"Mahal kita."

"Mahal kita bigit pa. I'll check on the children. I hope we didn't wake them," her mother said. Lina quickly ran back into her room and pretended to be asleep, just as her mother peered in.

Lina thought about everything she just heard. She knew



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that the next few weeks would be even tougher than usual. Her dad had lost his night job as a jeepney driver. He didn't get paid that much, especially for their family of eight. Most of the money was spent on rent, the rest on food, which usually meant a cup of rice or soup. The food was barely enough to keep them alive. Lina's family was interminably hungry, like everyone else in their village.

Lina never said it aloud, but she always thought about money. She prayed every night that their family would be rich. Then she wouldn't have to worry about anything. They could move out of the little shack, out of the slums, and into a beautiful house. They would replace all their rags with real clothes. Insufficient meals would become colossal feasts. Life would be easy.

HOURS LATER, after the sun rose, Lina heard the door open. It was their father.

"*Magandang umaga*, children. How did you sleep?"

"Fine, Tatay," all six children lied. They didn't sleep well at all. The noise from the passing jeepneys outside was too loud, it was too hot, and the floor was too hard underneath them.

"Nanay is out today. She will be back soon, but I'll stay with all of you today, OK?"

The children nodded and didn't question their father. He loved them, and Lina knew, whatever decision he made was the best for them. If he said things would get

better, they would.

Nanay arrived later that evening. "I'm home! I have so much to tell you!"

The children ran to the door to welcome their mother with big hugs. She continued, "I got a job as a house-cleaner in the middle of the city. The house is huge, like a castle!" Nanay exclaimed.

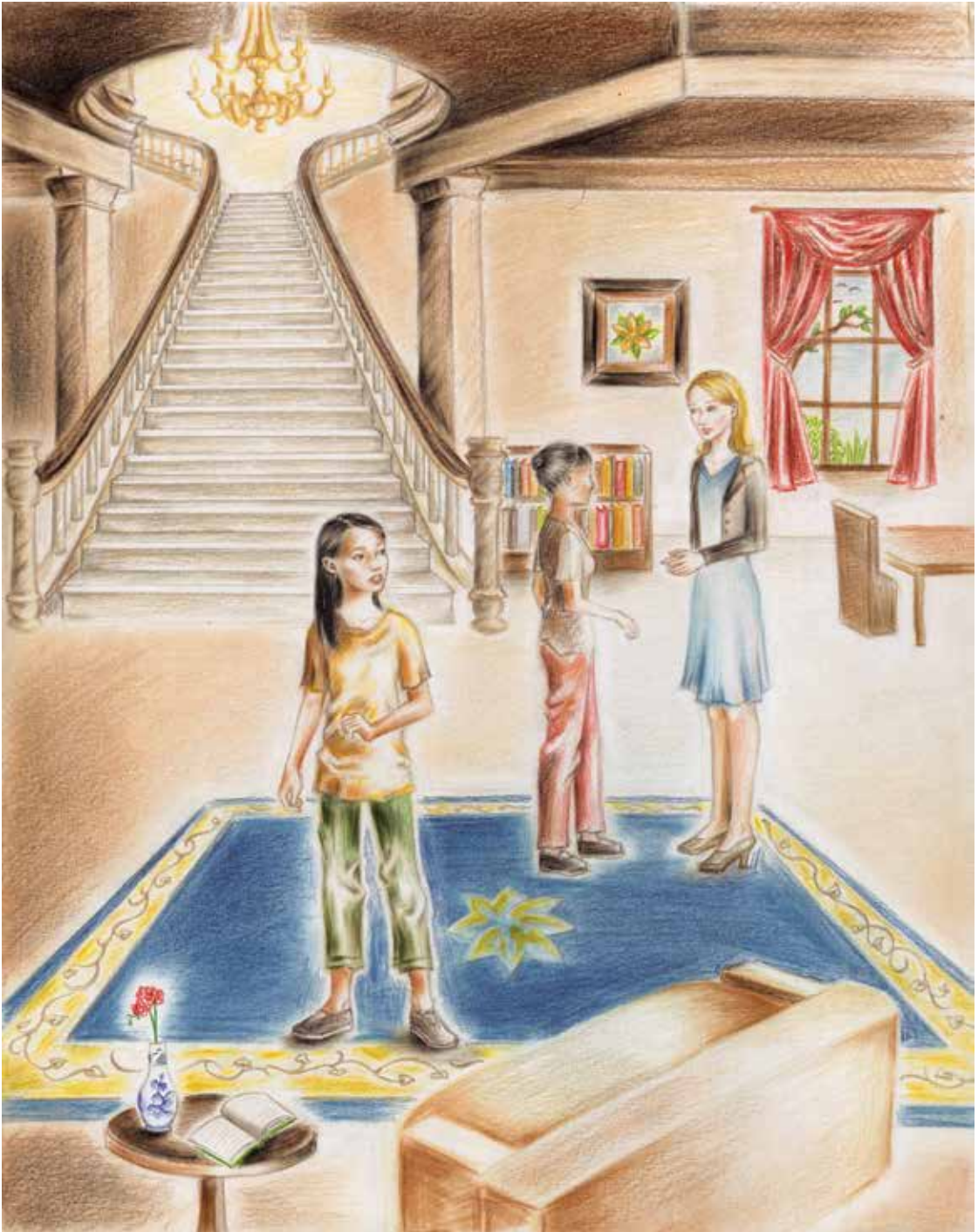
Lina's eyes opened wide. She could already imagine it, though she had seen houses like this only in her dreams.

"And guess what, Lina? You can help me clean tomorrow and you can see it for yourself!" Lina was ecstatic. She hugged her mother tight and fell asleep to dreams of the house she'd soon see.

THE NEXT MORNING, Lina woke early and joined her mother on her commute to the city. Lina looked out the window of the jeepney and caught a glimpse of the huge mansions that lined the road. Wow, Lina thought. She was no longer in her village, that was for sure. Lina and her mother walked up the smooth, paved road until they both turned the corner and found themselves facing the biggest, most beautiful house of all. Lina had to tilt her head up in order to see all of it. The awe-inspiring mansion towered over her and glistened in the sun. It looked like something from the storybooks her mother used to read her.

"Just wait until you see what's inside," her mother whispered.

They ambled down the stone pavement leading to the massive white front door, and her mother pressed a strange button



She wished her life could be like this. She envied it all

at its side. A loud ringing noise filled the house from the inside and the door swung open.

"Hello," exclaimed a woman with peculiarly light-colored hair as she extended her hand out to both Lina and her mother. She was taller than anyone Lina had seen before. Her skin was so light, not like the usual tanned skin she was so familiar with. Lina didn't realize how closely she was examining the woman until she started talking once again. "I am Ms. Barker. You must be Lina."

"Yes, ma'am," Lina replied politely. The woman smiled and led them inside.

Lina looked around and found herself in an enormous cream-colored room that seemed to glow in the light that overflowed from the large rectangular windows that dominated the walls. The floor wasn't hard and creaky like Lina had been so used to; rather this floor was covered in an ancient-looking carpet that welcomed her feet with every step she took. A grand chandelier hung from the ceiling, making the room even more imposing. The room alone was bigger than her entire house.

These people must be really rich, Lina thought to herself. She tried not to be, but she couldn't help but feel jealous. She wanted to live here and have this much money. She wished her life could be like this. She envied it all.

"I'll show you what needs cleaning," Ms. Barker said, looking over to Lina, who was busy admiring the room.

"Yes, of course," Lina said, trying her best to respond in an American accent like Ms. Barker. For some strange reason, Lina found herself trying to fit in with the

woman she just met, who was so different from her.

Ms. Barker continued, "This is the living room. To the right is the kitchen. Can you cook?" My mother nodded politely. "Great. I bought chicken for dinner. We eat at eight." She pointed to

the staircase. "Upstairs are the four bedrooms. My daughter is there." Looking to Lina, she added, "She's about your age."

"Claudia, please come downstairs!" Ms. Barker shouted up the staircase.

"No, Mom, I'm busy!" an irritated, high-pitched voice responded from upstairs.

"Claudia, come down now," Ms. Barker yelled once again.

"I don't care! Stop it. Leave me alone!" the voice from upstairs called back, sounding even more annoyed than before.

Her daughter is so rude. How dare she talk to her own mother like that, Lina thought. Ms. Barker didn't even seem to get mad at her daughter for being that inconsiderate. If Lina had spoken to her mother with those words, with that tone, she would be in big trouble. Not that she ever would though, she wouldn't even

**Lina's family was
interminably hungry,
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in their village.**

think of it.

"Sorry, my daughter can be a little impertinent sometimes," Ms. Barker said. Lina didn't know what that word meant but guessed it meant something along the lines of rude. "Sometimes it is better to leave Claudia alone. I usually do," she sighed.

"Where should we start cleaning?" Lina's mother asked, hastily changing the subject.

"You can start down here. Lina, you could help by feeding our dog, Max. His food is in the freezer." She pointed to the silver dog bowl in the corner of the room. Next to it sat a small white dog, covered in perfectly groomed hair that fell to the ground.

Lina entered the kitchen and, in a huge refrigerator, found a container labeled "For Max." It contained at least three pounds of ground meat. Lina stared at the food in confusion. Fresh meat for the dog? This tiny dog is better fed than anyone in my whole village! How can this be possible? With a hint of anger, she scooped the meat into the bowl and left the tiny dog to devour the food on his own.

I wonder what is up that staircase, Lina thought, staring at the majestic marble staircase. She quickly decided to find out. She slowly climbed up, step by step, until she reached the top. The second floor was even more beautiful than the first. In the hall, she passed a slightly ajar door. Lina

could hear faint pop music coming from inside. She peeked inside, finding a girl her age sitting on a large pink bed, talking on a cell phone. Lina couldn't help but eavesdrop.

"I know, right? My mom is so annoying. She refuses to buy me the new iPhone!

Like, seriously? I am the only one without it. I hate her. Why couldn't I have stayed with my dad when they got divorced? I can't wait to move out for college."

Lina couldn't listen any longer. It was beyond rude—it was insulting.

How could she say that about her own mom, who, Lina just found out, single-handedly raised her? She was shocked.

"Dinner time!" Ms. Barker called from the dining room, as she placed a big roast chicken on the table. Lina was surprised to see what was sitting at the side of the table. Wow, a television! Lina was bewildered by the television, as she had never seen one before. Ms. Barker and her daughter both sat down for dinner while Lina and her mother swept in the other room. Claudia switched the TV on and flipped through several channels before stopping at one she was content with. The Barkers served themselves, neither looking at nor talking to each other. Lina was so used to loud dinners with her family full of stories and laughter. Here, dinner was completely silent. The Barkers just sat there staring at the television blank-

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Lina knew she had everything she'd ever need

ly. It was foreign to Lina. The Barkers seemed to ignore each other. It was uncomfortable and almost sad to watch. This family was so broken.

When Claudia finished eating, she got up and ran back upstairs without any words. Ms. Barker sat there by herself, finishing her plate, then stood and

brought her leftovers toward the trash. Lina's mother stopped her.

"Excuse me, ma'am, can I please bring the extras home... for my dog?" my mother asked.

"Sure! There is a ziplock there," Ms. Barker replied, pointing to a drawer.

Wait, Lina realized. We don't have a dog. Lina quickly shot a puzzled look at her mother. She looked back at her, looking downcast. And at that moment, something in Lina's mind clicked. All of a sudden she knew what they would be having for dinner back home.

The whole jeepney ride home, neither of them said anything. Nanay just held Lina's hand tight. At the end of the ride, she whispered, "Lina, I love you so much, never forget it." Lina could only nod.

WHEN LINA arrived home, her house looked smaller than before. But at that moment, she really couldn't have cared less. She ran in and hugged her dad and her brothers and sisters.

"*Mahal kita*," she said to everyone, making sure all of them knew. Of course

they did.

As they gathered for dinner, Lina's mother unpacked the leftover chicken and placed it on the table. The children's eyes glowed.

"*Salamat*, Nanay!" they said cheerfully.

Their mother smiled. "Lina, can you say the prayer today before we eat?"

"*Opo*," Lina said. She bowed her head, closed her eyes, and started to pray. "Dear Lord, *salamat* for this day. Thank you for everything you have provided to us. You give us everything we need, Lord, and we thank you. But most of all, thank you for our family who I love so much. Amen."

Lina opened her eyes. She could see her mother's eyes starting to get teary. Lina smiled because she knew just what her mother was feeling. Some people can have so much yet have so little, she thought, and some people can have so little yet have so much.

Lina knew she didn't have a lot, but she looked around at all the faces around the table, joyfully talking and laughing, and knew she had everything she'd ever need.



Glossary

Jeepney = a small bus

Magandang umaga = How did you sleep?

Mahal kita = I love you

Mahal kita higit pa = I love you more

Nanay = Mom

Opo = Yes

Salamat = Thank you

Tatay = Dad

Tatlo = Three

Honor Roll

Welcome to the Stone Soup 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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