

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*"Leopards," by Katharina Macheiner, age 10, Austria*

## SWAYING IN THE BREEZE

A shy boy has a chance to make friends, but it's not easy

## THE PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER

In ancient Egypt, a young girl contemplates her future

*Also:* Illustrations by Jesyka Palmer and Leigh Marie Marshall

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2003

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VOLUME 32, NUMBER 2  
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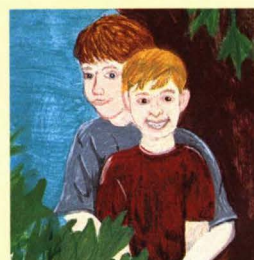
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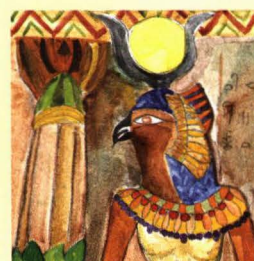
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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

**W**ELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

## Contributors' Guidelines

*Stone Soup* welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site at [www.stonesoup.com](http://www.stonesoup.com).

**Story and poem authors:** Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope

with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us in four to six weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

**Book reviewers:** If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write editor Gerry Mandel. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. Enclose an SASE for her reply.

**Artists:** If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what you like to draw most. Enclose an SASE for her reply. We need artists who can draw or paint complete scenes in color. Please send color copies of your work, not originals.

**All contributors:** Send us writing and art about the things you feel most strongly about! Whether your work is about imaginary situations or real ones, use your own experiences and observations to give your work depth and a sense of reality. Send your work to *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address and phone number.

**Cover:** "Leopards" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by The International Museum of Children's Art in Oslo, Norway. Established in 1986 by Rafael and Alla Goldin, the museum is a wonderland of floor-to-ceiling art by children from over 150 countries. Don't miss it if you are ever in Oslo! Special thanks to Angela and Alla Goldin.



# The Mailbox



LBP, 9

"Stripes" by Madeline Johnson [July/August 2003] was very touching. I lost my favorite stuffed mouse at the airport and I never got him back. Her story was the happy ending that I needed. It was a long time since I lost Mousy. I like to think that some kid like Maddy found him. The line, "She picks him up and squeezes him so hard that she doubts he is glad to see her anymore," made me laugh. It was a beautiful story.

**ELIZABETH MEALY, 11**  
*Amherst, Massachusetts*

I received my first issue of *Stone Soup* for my tenth birthday. Since then I have eagerly anticipated the arrival of each beautiful magazine. I especially appreciated the story "Star of David" by Emily E. Hogstad, illustrated by Dara Green [May/June 2003]. Because I, myself, am Jewish I feel that I can really relate to this touching story. (Two of my grandparents escaped Nazi Europe.) I also liked Dara Green's picture a lot. The pale colors gave the impression the scene was old, yet the detail was very realistic. I like how Leis's eyes were pleading, while the soldiers' were hidden. I think more children should read stories like this one.

**ARIEL M. MARTZ-OBERLANDER, 10**  
*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*

It is really neat to be given the privilege of reading some of the work of other people my age. I have really learned a lot from reading your magazine, and I especially would like to let you know how much I look forward to reading the poetry in each issue I receive.

**ROBIN JENKINS, 13**  
*St. Louis, Missouri*

I loved "The Mystery of Cats" by Marley Powell [May/June 2003]. It's the best poem I've read in a long time (and we did Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams in school this year). Marley, your poetry is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. When you publish an anthology let me know. I want a copy.

**KATE WHEELER, 16**  
*Carrboro, North Carolina*

Congratulations on your thirtieth anniversary! I think it's marvelous that you've thrived, and have provided so many children with the opportunity to see their works in print. The encouragement you've given has been a stimulus for thousands of teachers, writing programs and art courses throughout the world. As an educator, I've seen firsthand the excitement that a new issue of *Stone Soup* engenders when it arrives at the school library. I'm proud to have been there at the beginning, but can only imagine the pride you must feel now. Best of luck for the next thirty-year run!

**RICHARD HOF**  
*Assistant Head of School, St. Andrew's School  
Saratoga, California*

*Stone Soup* is a great place for kids to start getting their stories published. I've read many stories on the net, like "Nutcracker Dreams" [November/December 2002] and "Seventeen Years" [July/August 2001]. It makes me feel good and gives me inspiration to write.

**SAIRAH WAYNE, 13**  
*Decatur, Illinois*

*You can read all the stories mentioned in The Mailbox on our Web site: [www.stonesoup.com](http://www.stonesoup.com)*

**Note to our readers:** Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We'd also like to receive anecdotes (150 words or less) about interesting experiences you'd like to share with our readers. Send letters to The Mailbox, *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, address, and phone number.





*I felt Sara go whizzing past me in a whirlwind of blue velvet skating dress*



# Silver

By Alyssa Fowers

Illustrated by Leigh Marie Marshall

TENDRILS OF CLINGING FOG rose up off the ice, curling into claws, sinking into my skin, freezing my blood as it pumped through my body. Shaking, I looked around, seeking a friendly face, a familiar face, anything, something that wouldn't leave me feeling so alienated and alone. There was none. The judges' faces were blank, their mouths set in hard lines. The audience was no better. They seemed to be sneering at me from the bleachers. Even my coach, leaning over the boards, looked cold and distant.

The music came on. I pushed off on my ice skate as the first few phrases drifted down through the still air. The melody seemed right, at first, but as the program went on, it grew faster and faster, the notes harder and colder. It wasn't right. Nothing was right. My toe loop was wild and out of control. I landed it, but barely. Turning to my coach for help, I saw her shrug and mouth "go on." Trembling, I pushed forward.

The hardest jump—the double axel—loomed ahead. Quivering like a bowstring, I took off. I flew higher and higher, too high, so high that my arms flailed out of position and started pinwheeling. Yelling helplessly, legs dangling, the ice rushed toward me. I just knew I was going to die.

I SAT UP STRAIGHT in bed, eyes wide, chest ballooning in and out, gasping for breath. The room was dark and still. I jammed my glasses on my face, and glanced at the digital clock on my night table. Three o'clock in the morning. Too early to



Alyssa Fowers, 11  
Miami, Florida



Leigh Marie Marshall, 13  
San Francisco, California

be up.

Nightmares had been plaguing me for more than a week about the upcoming show. Tonight's dream had been the worst by far. My head swung around to glare at the calendar perched on the wall. Yes, it was still December 10, two weeks before the Christmas Eve ice show. Yes, I was still alive. Shaking, but alive.

I caught a glimpse of the mirror and groaned. My wiry red-brown curls stuck up almost vertically from my head, and my terror-stricken eyes had enormous bags under them. My twin, Sara, slept peacefully in the bed next to mine, her auburn hair lying in rippling waves on her pillow. She's just about as different from me as humanly possible. Graceful and elegant, Sara wows everyone on the ice with just a few cross-overs, while I have to do flips to get a little attention. Though we're both short and thin, Sara is slender, not scrawny like me. She brings to mind a willow, while I'm more like a scraggly thorn bush—prickly and ugly. Sara says I'm too hard on myself, but then, she always knows what to say.

Still, I love her. Even though she's perfect. With a sigh, I dropped back onto the pillows and waited for sleep.

**T**OE LOOP! Cally, leg straight! Back cross-overs! Sara, don't lean in so far! Scratch spin, and step out! Very good!" called Coach Vanessa from behind the boards. Her face was happy and animated, so unlike the coach in my dreams. She skated out to meet us. "All right, girls,

now you're going to have to do something difficult. I want you to go into a double axel from a curve on opposite sides of the rink, and then cross in midair. Cally, what's wrong?"

My face had gone white and I was sweating. Remembering the dream, and what my coach had urged me to do, had set my stomach churning. I ran my fingers through my bangs and mumbled, "Nothing."

"Good. For a minute there I thought you were going to fall over," said Vanessa briskly. "Now, get to it!"

Gulping, I got into the starting position and pushed off. Cross-over, cross-over, step forward, and *jump!!!* I felt Sara go whizzing past me in a whirlwind of blue velvet skating dress before my leg shot out and I landed. Breathing a sigh of relief, I waited for Vanessa's approval. I wasn't disappointed.

"Awesome! Now, do it again." We practiced all afternoon until my leg muscles felt like jelly and I was actually looking forward to homework. "Can we practice more tomorrow?" I asked. "I feel like I'm going to collapse."

"Just do that jump combo one more time," urged Vanessa.

"All right, all right. Good for you, sister?"

"Definitely. Let's do it!"

Cross-over, cross-over. I glanced over my shoulder at Sara. She was out of line. "Sara, scoot!" I called to her. Step forward. Sara was still out of line. My leg swung forward without me thinking.



Jump.

Time slowed to a crawl. We were going to crash, fast and hard. I couldn't move, couldn't stop, couldn't prevent the inevitable. The panicked look in Sara's eyes told me that she knew what I knew. Vanessa's shouting was a distant buzz in my ears. We crashed.

I flew backwards, hitting the ice with a whack that stole the breath from me. The sharp pain in my back receded to a dull ache as I slumped to the ice, stunned.

Sara hadn't been so lucky. She fell awkwardly to the ice, skidding across the rink. She was a limp pile of skater, face down on the ice.

**S**ISTER, YOU sure know how to pack a punch," said Sara with a grimace. Her leg was in a cast, and stitches inched up her hand where my skate had slashed her skin.

"I told you I'm sorry!" I said in a frenzy of guilt. "I didn't mean to do it! It just . . . happened. What can . . ."

"Stop, stop," interrupted Sara, "it was really my fault. Should have scooted when you told me to. By the way, how's your back?"

She had remembered. "The doctor said I was lucky not to have cracked a rib. Anyway, I'm going to have some interesting-shaped bruises in the morning. You're the one everybody should be worried about though. When are you getting out of that thing?"

"Three weeks. It's only a fracture, Cally."

"A bad fracture. You won't be able to be in the Christmas show!"

"Stop fussing like a mama hen. I'm getting enough of that from Mother. She's firmly convinced that 'if you hadn't kept on with this demon sport this wouldn't have happened,'" said Sara in an uncanny impersonation of Mother. "As it is, you'll be lucky if she lets you skate in the Christmas show. I'll be lucky if she ever lets me skate again."

"She can't do that!" I protested. "It was my fault. Let her make me never skate again. But don't let her punish you."

Then the first part of what she said hit me. "Sara, I can't do the show alone! I mean, you're graceful and everything, but me! I . . . I . . . I wouldn't know what to do!" I was practically in tears. Do the show alone? Impossible. There was just no way that I could survive another two weeks of nightmares—they had been bad enough when I had Sara doing it with me. How could I do it alone?

My mouth opened to cry out, but the door swung open and Vanessa bustled in. She was in a worse state than I was, and that's saying something. Her eyes were red from crying, and her hands twisted in her lap. "Oh my God, Sara! I'm so sorry! I should have listened to you, Cally. If only . . ."

Sara raised a hand. "I just pulled Cally out of hysteria. Do I have to do it again?" she asked, one eyebrow raised.

Vanessa sighed. "You're right, as usual. I guess . . . I mean, this has never happened before. I just don't know . . . Sara,





*"Oh my God, Sara! I'm so sorry!"*



can you forgive me?" The look in her eyes made me catch my breath. Desperate and pleading. I'd never seen her look that way before.

"There's nothing to forgive—stuff happens," smiled Sara. "Besides, you've got work to do." She jerked her head toward me.

"Oh! Of course! There's just enough time to change the program. We'll just cut the axels, and stick in a flip or something. All the side-by-sides can stay—we'll put some footwork in where the double spin used to be..."

Off and running, Vanessa didn't even notice my panic. I didn't have a choice. I'd have to skate. Alone.

I WAS ALONE on the ice, and it wasn't a dream. I was alone for the first time in my life—truly alone. My heart thumped so hard I shook, and I couldn't hold my hands steady. With every breath, icy daggers sliced into my lungs.

The rink was silent. The music hadn't started, and the audience was politely quiet. Vanessa glanced at me over the boards to see if I was ready.

Our eyes met, and I sent her a wild, desperate look of mingled hope and anguish.

I knew I couldn't do it. Not without Sara. I couldn't ask for her, couldn't cling

to her, couldn't hide behind her. She wasn't there, not even watching. She wasn't going to rescue me this time. Tears fought their way into my eyes as this realization plunged into my heart like a black sword.

Darkness ate into the corners of my sight. Swaying on the spot, I jerked my head about, desperately searching for a face, a face I knew, a face that would shelter me from my despair. But there was nothing, nothing but the glaring white of the ice and the dark mass of people. Nothing. No one.

I choked and breath wouldn't come. The world blurred and faded in front of my face. My eyes grew and grew as I fought the impending darkness closing in on me.

Then, a flash. A flash of silver, cutting through the black and the white, a flash of silver bright and pure. The silver of Sara's eyes.

A rush of air whooshed into my lungs as my stiff shoulders slumped in relief. Sara was there, her face pale with concern. Warmth flooded through me, and I could breathe again. I looked at her, pleading for help. She shook her head slightly. No, she was saying. No. I had to do this one on my own.

But I wasn't alone. I would never be alone. And with that inside my heart, I started to skate. ❁

# Swinging

By Nicole Guenther



Nicole Guenther, 12  
Vancouver, Washington

She's not the type that jumps off swings  
But clings to the rusty chains and  
Drags her feet in the wood chips to stop,  
Squealing when I tease her by  
Twisting close on my swing  
I watch her dismount and  
Step gingerly away.  
I pump my legs and lean  
Backwards way way  
Way back so far my long hair sweeps  
The ground and I look  
Behind me and the world's upside down  
Down down, or am I upside down  
Then swinging up-up-up again and swooping  
Downwards almost crashing  
To earth but I don't, I just swing up-up-up  
Again and I can see nothing but  
The sky above me and the chains  
Go slack and I am weightless for one  
Lifting second, not sitting in the swing but on  
Sky then forwards backwards  
Forwards it's all the same, just  
Glorious movement, twirling and  
Tumbling around and a  
Round, side side over—watch



The poles!—and  
Circling again and again. *dizzydizzydizzy* then I  
Realize the only thing preventing me  
From flying is the chains so I  
**JUMP**, leaving the unimportant  
Swing behind in one soft blurred instant,  
Jumping off swing and into sky,  
Just sky and soaring  
Off into air, only air  
Around me, lifting me *up-up-up*  
And I wonder, is this flying?  
Nothingness becomes  
Everything around me air is  
All I am  
Touching  
Then ground is here, under me,  
And I am running, one foot then  
The next, helpless to stop, can't  
Stop, just running. I  
Stagger, head still, but  
World spinning. She tells me I'm  
Crazy, but I know better,  
She is the crazy one—not jumping off swings  
Denying herself that air-feeling  
The instant when you lift off  
The swing and just lift, rise—  
You haven't fallen yet, you're  
Going *up-up-up* and being  
Dizzy doesn't matter  
You are all  
Air  
And sun in your eyes and  
Life becomes nothing but  
Simple happiness.

# A Gated Memory

By **Max Strebel**

*Illustrated by the author*



Max Strebel, 13  
San Francisco, California

**S**WISH, SWISH . . . The repetitive motion of the windshield wipers flicks the tapping droplets to the side. The fog flushes out everything as if someone poured the foam from a soda over San Francisco. Only the tops of the Golden Gate's 746-foot towers protrude out of the milky sky. Going over the bridge, I see a man. The man is barely visible through the misty window and the thick fog, but visible enough to see him slip on the concrete glazed by the shimmering water.

**T**HERE HE WAS. The radio was on. President Roosevelt was talking to the nation. He loved fireside chats and therefore paid close attention. It was our lunch break, and we were all sitting on one of the big icy-cold beams. The loudspeaker was perched above us. He stopped eating and concentrated on the fuzzy radio transmission. Once Roosevelt said "the New Deal," he kept eating. Our boss blew the horn and said, "Lunch is over." We packed up our lunches and put back on our helmets.

My brother and I picked up our tool belts, strapped them around our waists, and went back to work. His gentle face didn't fit the ominous structure looming above us. With one hand he grasped the metal ladder and started to ascend the structure that would one day span from San Francisco to Marin. His weary posture struggled to climb toward the cries of seagulls above. After listening to "The Shadow" all night, his tired body could barely





*His weary posture struggled to climb toward the cries of seagulls above*

make it. However, he maintained his high spirits and flashed me a smile.

As I looked down, I was thankful to see the safety nets protecting us from the darkened water below. The criss-crossing ropes had saved many of my friends, so I knew I had little to fear. But as my courageous brother reached for a dangling cable, his foot slipped on the steady hold, and he fell forward into those loving nets. I gasped as I saw my brother fall through the chilled wind, but nothing could have prepared me for the sight to follow. After he hit the net, he began to struggle to his feet. But before he could stand upright, a

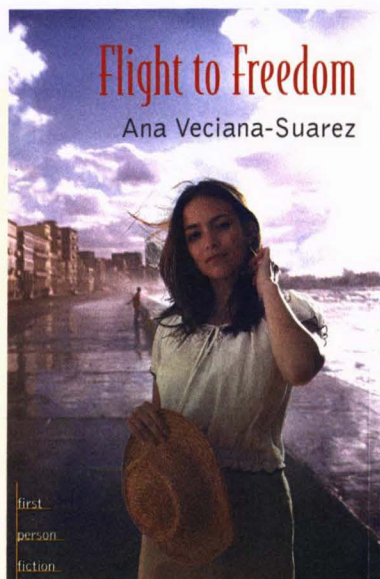
snap echoed through the hills, and I saw my brother plunge into the murderous blue below. My eyes clung to the spot where he had landed on the concrete waters, until the fog swallowed the ripples of my heart.

AS I FINISH crossing the bridge, I notice a strip of sunlight piercing through the rainy sky. I look back through my misty windshield and the man is gone. Was he the key to my buried memory? Now the stranger is gone too. Or was he just a reminder? I focus on something, but only the gray looks back. ❁

# Book Review

By Joelle Waksman

*Flight to Freedom* by Ana Veciana-Suarez;  
Orchard Books: New York, 2002; \$16.95



Joelle Waksman, 11  
Cooper City, Florida

**F**LIGHT TO FREEDOM by Ana Veciana-Suarez is amazing right from the start. It is definitely a page-turner and will keep you reading for hours. When I first received the book, I wasn't sure I would enjoy reading it. I had second thoughts about reviewing it because I usually don't like journal-style writing. I started on page one and in a flash I changed my mind.


This book is a daily journal belonging to a young lady named Yara Garcia. This book takes you through the easy, rough, happy and sad times of Yara that take place while she and her family are going through the process of exile. This "almost thirteen years old" girl tells us about her home life in Cuba and her days in La Escuela al Campo, a communist training camp. She tells us about her flight to America, her new life in America, and the different feelings and obstacles she faces every day of her new world.

This story felt so realistic to me because my dad and his family went through the same thing. They came from Cuba to America in 1961. My dad was only eighteen months old and doesn't remember much, but my aunts do and they share their stories.



My feelings toward this book are natural. At some points I was laughing, celebrating or being proud of Yara's actions, but at other times I was crying, scared, or upset. For example, when she talked about how her abuelo said, "I may never live to see my home country again," I was sad, feeling upset for him. I couldn't even imagine not being able to see my hometown or country again. Another example is when her abuelo died of a heart attack. I was crying very much because my abuelo from Cuba also died of a heart attack. I was scared thinking that it must mean something, but I just let it go. Nightmares that night? Oh yes!!

When I hear about the cruelty of Fidel Castro and the horrible times the Cuban people went through, I think how lucky I am to live in a free country. I am able to do, say, and act in whichever way I want. I feel sorry for the Cubans and hope that one day Castro will come to his senses and let them live freely!

I love this book and not only will I recommend it to my friends and family, I will read it over and over again! 





*It took Aubin's breath away, the most beautiful sight he had ever set eyes on*



# Swaying in the Breeze

By Megan M. Gannett

Illustrated by Jesyka Palmer

**I**N MANY WAYS AUBIN TUPPER was a lonely child, with no children nearby he thought of as friends. Living out in the country with his parents and little brother, he had home-schooled since grade two—it hadn't taken him long to find out that the public school nearest wasn't for him. He didn't hate learning, more the opposite of that, but so many noisy children and frustrated teachers got tiring after a while. He was a quiet, timid, scared little mouse that recoiled whenever someone approached.

Aubin had had a love of nature and animals since he was born and a tendency to take refuge in make-believe worlds. He learned to read quickly and was soon consuming thick novels at a teenager's level. He had a vivid, active imagination and often slipped into it, forgetting everything except the goings-on inside his head.

Since Mr. Tupper was a truck driver and away much of the time, the homeschooling rested in his wife's hands. She did a good job, and soon Aubin and his brother, Forrest, were academically ahead of most kids their age.

When Aubin was ten and Forrest was five, their family moved to a different acreage, this one bigger, beside a lake. In the midst of a scattered farming community, there was a school within walking distance, which the boys would hopefully attend and make friends at.

To any stranger meeting Aubin he would appear mysterious, different and would probably provoke their curiosity. It was im-



Megan M. Gannett, 13  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



Jesyka Palmer, 12  
Blissfield, Michigan

possible to forget his appearance—wavy, red-gold hair tossed about by the wind; wide, thoughtful, clear, blue eyes and a fine-boned, small, yet strong and healthy figure, which resembled a deer when he sprinted across open fields. His physical being hid his personality, which surfaced only when he was alone, in nature.

Aubin was rarely seen without Forrest, a mischievous little boy always running off and needing to be found. He was the best friend Aubin had.

That is, the best human friend. When the Tupperes moved to their new home they brought with them the rest of the family: Annie (Mrs. Tupper's horse), Jake (Forrest's pony) and Guthrie (Aubin's beloved black gelding); Whiskers—his companion of a gerbil—and Dan and Baily, two sleek, gray housecats. And of course Fifi, the family's frisky border collie.

Without those animals, Aubin would have felt as if without friends. His wanting for human friends was very small, as he didn't want to risk anything. Because he was shy, and afraid, he thought other boys would make fun of him.

AS HE AND FORREST stepped out of the van that bright day in August, one when you can just smell summer on the air, his first impression was that he'd love it there. He'd loved their old place as well, and missed it after three hours of driving, but this new home looked captivating. Raspberry bushes drooped heavily over the walk, their berries full and ripe, all the way up to a

large green farmhouse. The paint on the house was peeling but Mr. Tupper had said they'd give it a new coat once they moved in, and other than that it appeared well taken care of. It even looked as though people were already living in it; Aubin's parents had moved everything in the past week—even a flower pot on the steps sprayed cheer across the yard.

The yard itself was quite simple; a few shrubs had been planted here and there and a rickety, old toolshed overlooked a garden, bare except for a few overgrown perennials. Behind that a forest sprung up, which Aubin knew was hiding a stable with the horses already settled in, and a pasture beyond that. To the left patches of rippling blue water through the trees caught his eyes—the lake. Right away, he knew it was home.

"Why don't you two munchkins go and explore?" suggested Mr. Tupper, as his sons stared around, wide-eyed. "The stable is just down that path to the right of that shed."

Eagerly, Aubin nodded and grabbed his brother's hand. Together they raced off, Aubin's thick auburn and Forrest's wheat-colored blond hair blowing in the breeze, their feet thudding in a steady rhythm before slowing as they entered the trees.

Aubin was glad to see that the stable was in good repair and was more or less the right size for three horses; he cared deeply about the well-being of animals. Unbolting the door he stepped inside, Forrest close behind him. Three roomy stalls faced him, a horse in each.



"Guthrie," sighed Aubin contentedly, stepping toward his horse. Guthrie snorted softly as Aubin stroked his velvety black muzzle. "Good to see you again, boy. Those folks took good care of you." He spoke with ease, and kindly, his gift with animals apparent. He loved all three horses so well—tall, high-spirited Annie with the fine chestnut coat, short and round little Jake with the sweetest temperament possible, and of course his own adored Guthrie, black as night, free as the wind.

As he leaned against his horse, Aubin prayed inwardly that none of their new neighbors would take interest in the Tuppers, that the world would just leave them alone. That his life would remain separate from everyone else's.

**A**FTER EATING LUNCH in their new, bright kitchen, Aubin wanted to go for a ride right away.

"I was planning to go swimming, in the lake," said his father. "You could come."

"No, thank you." Aubin's heart was set on Guthrie.

"I wanna go!" exclaimed Forrest.

"Sounds good," smiled Mrs. Tupper, a horse-lover herself. "I'm too busy today to ride Annie, but you can take Forrest, Aubin. I've checked the trails and they seem fine."

Later, as they groomed their horses, Forrest begged to ride Guthrie with Aubin.

"Jake's *puny*," he complained.

Aubin smiled a little. "OK, but promise me you'll ride him tomorrow."

"I will," sighed Forrest. "But they'll all get exercise anyway today when Mom turns them out."

Aubin ignored him. "We'll ride to the lake," he announced, placing a large, supple Western saddle on Guthrie's back.

Five minutes later they set off, Aubin holding onto the reins in one hand and Forrest with the other. They took the trail they knew led to the lake and settled into a trot down it. Forrest held tightly onto the saddle horn and laughed as he bounced clumsily up and down.

It was beautiful there in the woods; branches stretched grandly over the path as if bowing to the newcomers, and birds chirped cheerfully. The forest was serene and peaceful yet alive with hundreds of sounds.

After a couple of bends Aubin heard laughter ahead of them and pulled Guthrie to a halt. A second later several blurs of color whizzed into sight on bikes, screeching to a stop. The blurs of color turned out to be five rosy-cheeked children, who stared, surprised, at Aubin, Forrest and Guthrie. Aubin eyed them warily.

Three of them, two boys and a girl about Forrest's age, looked very similar, all having dark, curly brown hair and tanned skin. The other two, a girl who looked about nine and a boy a couple years younger, both had light hair, freckles, and were more than a bit sunburnt, so Aubin concluded that they were the children of two different families.

"Hello," he said nervously.

"Hi. Are you the kids who just moved



*The forest was serene and peaceful yet alive with hundreds of sounds*

in down the road?" The speaker was the older girl, who was fumbling to get a bottle of water out of her daypack.

"We . . . we are."

Questions burst forth from the group.

"Are you from the city?"

"Is that your horse?"

"Why are you riding with your little brother?"

"What's your name?"

"My name's Aubin," said Aubin, trying not to stutter. "I . . . well . . ."

"I'm Dolly Scott," said the girl who had first spoken. "This is my little brother,

Lew, and those are the Carter kids—Shelby, Josh and Mamie. Lew and I are the youngest in our family, but don't worry about the rest, they've moved out. We're glad you moved in, 'cause none of us have horses anymore and we need some around here. We live just . . ."

Josh, the eldest of the Carters, perhaps eleven, broke in. "You can't talk all day, Dolly." He grinned at Aubin. "It's good to get another boy around here that's not a brat like those two. We were just going to climb our favorite tree near your house . . ."



"Dad said it was on *their property*, Josh," piped up the little girl, Mamie. "You told him we were just going for a ride."

"Well, we are, aren't we?" snarled Josh, as Shelby, who looked about eight, gave Mamie a push that nearly made her fall off her bike.

"You'll let us show it to you, though, won't you?" coaxed Dolly. "You couldn't have found it yet."

"But, Aubin, we're riding," whined Forrest, turning and speaking quietly in his ear.

"Um . . ." began Aubin. "Maybe you should show us when we're done riding." He spoke softly, unconvincingly.

"Sure," agreed Josh. "In about an hour?" "OK."

"See you then," said Dolly. "Oh, and can we use it while you're out?"

"Uh . . . use what?"

"The tree, stupid!"

As they rode off toward the lake, bewilderment kept distracting Aubin. If these kids appreciated trees and horses, they were like him . . . but they were so confident and sure of themselves that he felt even shyer than usual. Were all other kids like that?

When Aubin and Forrest arrived back at their new home Mrs. Tupper made Forrest take a nap, so Aubin waited for the Carters and Scotts by the stable on the soft, mossy ground free of bouncy five-year-olds. Fifi was there, though, chasing birds and squirrels here and there, so Aubin teased the dog, letting his fears evaporate as he communicated with the

animal better than he thought he'd ever be able to with a person.

Josh, Dolly, Shelby, Mamie and Lew surprised him by bursting from the woods behind the stable.

"C'mon, Aubin, the tree is this way!"

Slowly, Aubin got to his feet and followed them, his precious dog at his heels. He was very good at darting around trees and leaping over fallen logs, probably better than the others, so when he made up his mind to run, he did, and was close behind the kids and their laughter. Had he been alone, he would have stopped to examine the flowers or watch chipmunks skitter about energetically, but today he was being taken somewhere, dragged along by a rambunctious bunch of children. And the funny thing was, he didn't know if he could call them friends.

"There!" panted Shelby triumphantly, stopping to rest. "It's through there."

Aubin looked, and his mouth fell open in amazement.

Not far away, through a cluster of young trees, the forest ended. Through there was a meadow, with tall, gently-waving grasses in varying shades and brightly-colored flowers. Farther still were more trees, a brilliantly blue summer sky hanging over them.

But all Aubin really saw was the tree.

It was huge, a lush, majestic maple. From a tall, sturdy trunk it branched into thick arms, with many, many slender limbs sprouting from them. Even though the vision was divided by trees, Aubin could see many knots and flat spaces perfect for

climbing, sitting or even lying upon. But what made it so beautiful was the light.

Inside the woods, the sun's delicate fingers filtered through gaps in the canopy, or streamed down through larger spaces. As the trees became sparser, the patterns of light and shadow transformed into wide patches of light and thin, fork-like shadows, until the trees ended and the full impact of the light filled the meadow. The light alone made it look like paradise was waiting beyond those trees.

It took Aubin's breath away, the most beautiful sight he had ever set eyes on. Unable to think, having forgotten the others were there, joy surged within him and his body responded. Swift as a fox, agile as a deer, he sprang through the remaining forest, his heart as light as air. Wonder danced before his eyes and his heart.

Without knowing what he was doing, Aubin burst from the woods, sailing into the dazzling new light. Moments later he was there, at the tree.

And then he had found a knot to pull himself up with, and grabbed hold of a branch, quickly and smoothly climbing that tree. Racing the wind, he went from branch to branch, until they were thin and bending under his weight. The most glorious sensation overcame him as he stopped, balancing in the tree. He felt free. Now, if he wanted to, he could fly.

The sound of pounding feet below him made him remember where he was, and he started in surprise, his head jerking down. Grabbing hold of another branch to steady himself, he stared down at Fifi,

alert at the base of the tree, and at five wide-eyed children gaping up at him. He felt exposed and stupid, his heart sinking, as the glory drained from him. In the few seconds of silence that followed, Aubin bit his lip so hard it began to bleed.

"What do you think you are doing?" demanded Josh harshly, crossing his arms.

"What . . . what do you mean?" Aubin's voice wavered, and as the wind made the tree sway he shivered, suddenly cold. Hadn't they *wanted* to show him the tree?

"This is our tree!" Dolly called. "It might be on your family's new land but it's always been ours."

"It's close enough to Farmer Thorn's place, anyway," declared Shelby stoutly.

Aubin glanced through the fluttering leaves level with his face and saw a bubbling creek, bending off into the woods. "Where's . . . his . . . ?"

"That's the divider," spat Dolly sourly. "That creek. But it didn't used to be. Mr. Thorn used to own all of your place, a long time ago."

"This is our tree!" shrieked Mamie shrilly.

"Get down from our tree," bellowed Josh.

Unwillingly, Aubin sniffed, his chest tight. He wanted to bawl, but he couldn't because of the taunting faces below.

"I mustn't bend down to them," he muttered to himself through gritted teeth. "I mustn't cry."

Fifi, sensing Aubin's feelings and the threats of the other children, began to bark. Josh picked up a stone and sent it





*"Don't touch my dog!" he yelled*

spinning toward the dog.

Gasping, Aubin nearly fell out of the tree. "Don't touch my dog!" he yelled, just as Lew protested, "Don't hurt the poor puppy."

For Aubin, one thing could give him strength: fear. His terror that they'd harm his dog drowned out any other worries, lending him courage.

He was down out of that tree in three seconds, he never knew how, he just was. Lunging toward Josh, he pushed him to the ground, then stood back, horrified that he'd done that.

But he recovered quickly, pulling his

dog to his side, his eyes smoldering with a sudden fury—a sort of loathing.

"How dare you!" he shouted. "Hurt my dog! Threaten me just because you're jealous! I don't know why we ever came to this place, with such mean kids as you." He didn't realize he was crying. "You're wrong. All wrong! This isn't your tree, it's nature's, belonging to . . . to everybody. If you were nice kids I'd want you to come to it, even though I'm shy and . . . and scared of people." As he wailed those words he realized they were true. "Play in the tree, even if you're all wrong, and . . . and I'll let you be!"



He ran blindly back into the woods, tears stinging his face. He was so confused and didn't know why. He ran until he reached the stable, then flung himself at Guthrie's neck, sobbing hysterically; the horse neighed understandingly and Fifi made soft, whimpering noises of sympathy. Aubin cried with them until he was ready to face his other family. Then, because his eyes were red and his face stained, he sneaked to the bathroom and splashed his face. Moments later he joined his family for supper, and didn't speak a word of the tree or what had happened to anyone.

**T**HE NEXT FEW DAYS were the most miserable days Aubin had ever lived. Mr. Tupper left again for two weeks. It rained, or rather poured, and although he would usually enjoy this weather, nothing could make Aubin feel better. He found solace in the wind and rain, dancing wildly around on the wet grass, feeling good, cold water run down his face, which mingled with his tears.

Aubin avoided Forrest, who was usually his companion, and hardly spoke to anyone except his animal family—especially the cats, who always helped, the rain, the wind and the enormous gray sky. Though he spent lots of time in the woods in his rainboots and raincoat, he never set foot near the tree.

After three days, the rain stopped. Just like that. Heavy rainclouds were swallowed up by a bright forget-me-not sky, and the sun appeared, warming every-

thing. Finally, Aubin felt a little better. It was as if he'd been crying like the rain for the past few days, and now, like the rain, was all cried out. He was left with that fresh, open feeling that met him when he ran out of doors that morning, greeted by dripping, flowering tulips and fresh, squishy ground.

That was when he heard it: voices. Laughter, drifting through the trees. He felt a bitter anger rise within him. They were playing at the tree, where he ought to be.

"Who's that?" inquired Forrest from behind him, making Aubin jump.

"I don't know," lied Aubin, mustering his strength. "Wait here and I'll go see. Fifi, come!" The border collie loped happily across the yard to meet him.

"How come you always take Fifi, and not me?" complained Forrest, but they were gone.

Only minutes later, Aubin and his dog arrived at the meadow. Peering out from behind a tree, he could see five children in the old maple, laughing and trying to push each other down. Even little Mamie was perched high on a branch.

Suddenly, Fifi ran from the woods at the children, barking loudly. Obviously, she remembered them.

Before Aubin could do anything, he heard Josh say delightedly, "Hey, it's the crybaby's dog! What does she think she's doing here?"

"Don't touch her!" Aubin leapt from his hiding spot and dashed to the base of the tree. Grabbing hold of Fifi's collar he said,



"She'll never hurt you. She's just trying to protect me."

"Protect you!" spluttered Josh. "Is that what she's for, to protect the crybaby? Well, she doesn't look like much of a guard dog to me!"

"She could herd you all into a corner and hold you there for hours!" burst out Aubin fiercely, before he could stop himself.

"Yeah, Josh, shut up," said Dolly quietly. "You're just being mean. This is Aubin's tree and we shouldn't be here."

Josh glared at her contemptuously, but didn't say anything.

"Dolly's right," Mamie spoke up timidly. "You're being mean to him, Joshie."

"Girls," muttered Josh angrily. He looked from Shelby to Lew, as if expecting them to laugh or scorn at Dolly and Mamie. But Lew stared back solemnly and Shelby met his older brother's gaze stonily.

"Oh, for crying out loud!" yelled Josh. "The world's full of babies!" He jumped from the tree to the ground and hurried off into the forest, muttering under his breath. The remaining four Carters/Scotts stared at Aubin and Aubin looked back at them.

At last Dolly put in, "Sorry about that, and everything else."

"That's OK," answered Aubin, relieved.

Lew climbed down from his branch and approached Fifi warily. Fifi was a smart dog. She licked him square in the face.

The rest of them giggled hesitantly, looking around at each other nervously.

"Josh'll wake up sooner or later," Shelby assured Aubin confidently. "You should see him cry. You're no crybaby compared to him."

"I cry," murmured Lew for no apparent reason as he patted Fifi.

"Who doesn't?" asked Dolly lightly. She paused. "C'mon, guys, let's play a game. Who can climb this tree the fastest?"

"Aubin can," responded Shelby with certainty. "Give us something else, Dolly."

Aubin felt happiness rise like a bubble inside of him. He knew, without asking, that all five of his new acquaintances would be his friends, even Josh. They were all just people, fighting problems and shortcomings, and he knew they'd eventually get along. Although he was sensitive, although his real comrades would always be animals, it felt good to know some kids who, despite their rowdiness, were very like Aubin inside. Maybe he'd even give school another try.

"I know something we can do," he said bravely, a smile spreading across his face. "There are three horses, not far from here, eager to be ridden. I say we . . ."

Everyone's face lit up.

"Let's go!" cried Mamie.

As they leapt and sprang through the forest, laughing, the reawakening wildlife drew Aubin Tupper's attention. Birds sang, flowers reopened, and the rich, dark soil soaked up the moisture for the young maple saplings. It seemed as though all over, life was presenting Aubin with one hundred new possibilities, to last for years to come.



# The Pharaoh's Daughter

By **Cassie Lear**

*Illustrated by* **Vivien Rubin**



Cassie Lear, 12  
Seattle, Washington



Vivien Rubin, 11  
Los Angeles, California

**W**ALKING INTO MY FATHER'S mud-brick palace, I saw my brother standing in the middle of a plaza. Not stopping to think why he was surrounded by guards, I ran toward him.

"Rudiju!" I said. Rudiju was my favorite person in the palace because he always used to play games with me when we were little. He and I would spend hours playing hide-and-seek, or we would play Senet together. Sometimes he would let me win, but Rudiju was always much better at it than I was. He has a good mind for strategy games.

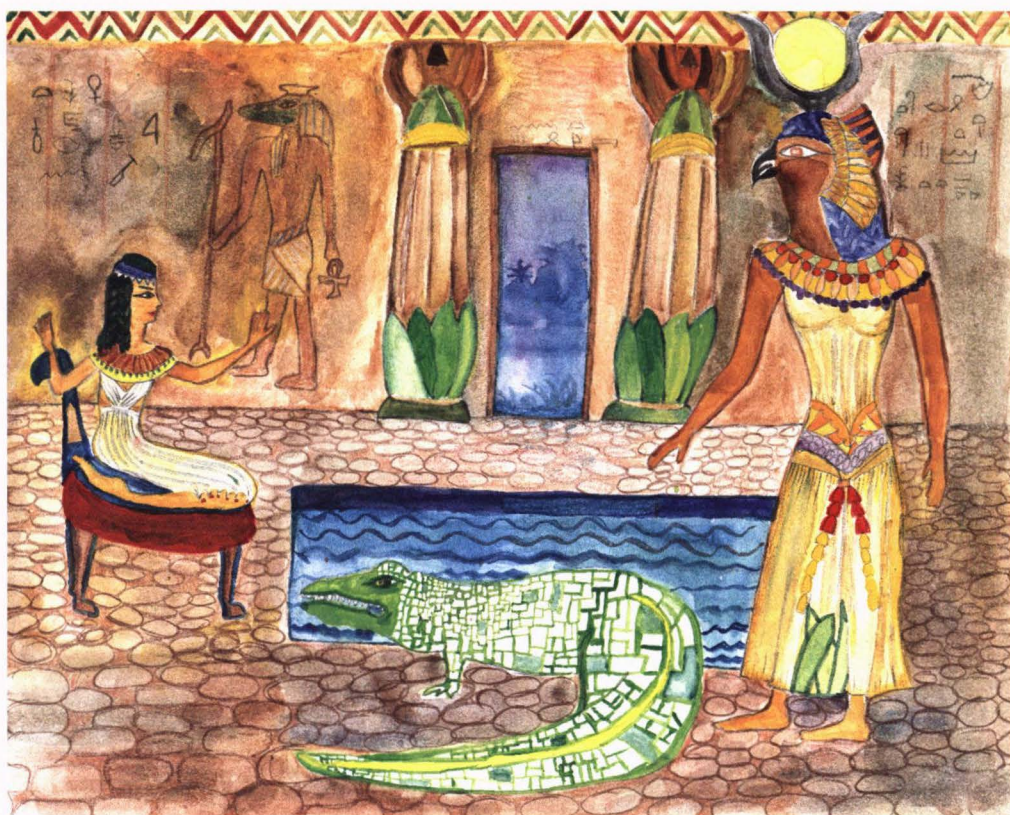
Rudiju's squinty eyes swung toward me. A worry line creased his forehead. This was surprising; my brother is usually carefree. I walked toward his open arms. We have always been very close, and show our affection openly. Because of this, no one will accuse me of being jealous about my brother being the Pharaoh's first heir or suspect me of an assassination plot. When I was three feet from my brother, a guard stopped me by taking my arm. Bowing, the guard said, "You are not to speak to him."

"What?"

"The prince Rudiju is to be held on trial. No one is to speak to him," the guard explained. Then, embarrassed at addressing a princess, he resumed his position at the door.

I was baffled. What could Rudiju, my beloved brother and future Pharaoh of the Land of Egypt, have done? I could not think of anything that might connect him with a crime. Rudiju would sooner sell himself into slavery than break the law.





*Jumping to my feet, I saw a glimmer of light, a woman with a bird's head.*

Still pondering what might have happened, I turned a corridor and entered into the women's lounge on my right. It was empty and silent, and I was thankful. I was a young girl, and not allowed in the lounge if older women were present, though I had been in it before because I was a princess.

As I sank into a chair, a deep feminine voice behind me asked, "Do you always sit in the presence of gods?" Jumping to my feet, I saw a glimmer of light, a woman with a bird's head.

"Isis," I breathed, bowing. "I am sorry, I did not see you."

"It is wise to be watchful, young princess."

I looked at my feet with embarrassment. A crocodile walked past them. With a little scream, I jumped backwards, landing on the chair with my legs beneath me. "You did not see me, either," the croc said.

"Sobek?" I asked. The large croc nodded, his reptilian eyes strangely wise.

"I am honored," I said, finally remembering my manners. "It is a great privilege to be visited by gods."

"You may get used to being visited by us," Isis said. "You are important to the future of Egypt."



I bowed my head. "I beg your pardon, great lady," I said, "but I do not see how. My brother Rudiju is my father's heir, and he is ready to become a great king."

"I believe Rudiju is ready," agreed Isis. "But being ready does not mean he will get his chance." All this time, my attention had been focused on Isis, but now Sobek spoke.

"We must take our leave now. Remember us, because we shall be prominent in your life. We are, after all, gods." With a wink and a grin from Sobek, and a nod from Isis, they disappeared. I sank into the chair for the second time, my thoughts back on Rudiju. What could my brother have done? Then, my meeting with the two gods sank in. I was left thinking, what did Isis mean, "being ready does not mean he will get his chance"?

**R**UDIJU'S TRIAL was held two days later. It took place in a giant plaza on which a stage had been erected. The vizier, my father's right-hand man, ran the trial. Because it was an important trial, Father was there to make the final judgment about the accused. I was present, as were all the nobles and some of the peasants of the capital of our dearly loved Egypt.

Before the trial, I learned that my brother was in trouble because he was caught with a wounded cat. This was a great sin in Egypt, because cats are sacred to the goddess Bastet, whom we worship. Since my brother was trying to enter the palace with a wounded cat and had not made any move to heal it or at least make

it more comfortable, Rudiju was breaking the most sacred law in the city. His excuse was that he had wanted to bring the cat to me as a gift and had not known that it was hurt. I believed him, but my father thought that if his son wasn't punished for breaking the law, Rudiju would not be a trusted Pharaoh. Since he thought that Rudiju was useless once he couldn't be a Pharaoh, my father sentenced the normal punishment for abusing a cat.

Rudiju's execution date was to be exactly a week from the trial. He chose to commit suicide rather than go through the embarrassment of an execution. I think this was partly Father's judgment, too. Rudiju, my beloved brother, was dead within three days.

For weeks after Rudiju's death, I wandered the palace aimlessly, remembering Rudiju. How he would talk to me when our parents were busy, how he would play games with me. Now he was dead, because of me. I had killed my brother. If he had not tried to get a cat for me, he would be alive to laugh at my jokes, or to sit in his favorite chair and think, or to learn to write . . . My thoughts went in circles, and I was often in tears.

One day I had another visit from Sobek. I had been crying softly for about an hour on my bed when I saw a crocodile's snout, followed by his eyes, then his back, emerge from under my bedcover.

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself, little princess," Sobek said. "The land of the Nile needs you. It will be in disarray after



your father dies, and you will need to make your decision."

"What decision?" I asked.

"Little princess," said the Nile god, "have you not thought ahead? Now that your father's heir is gone, you will either have to rule, marry to have your husband rule, or leave the throne open for any vagabond to steal. I had not thought that you were so silly! Stop weeping, get off that bed, and look around you! In your grief, you are the only person in Lower Egypt who hasn't noticed that the Pharaoh is dying!" Sobek's eyes turned green with anger, then softened to their usual yellow. "I am sorry," he said. "I am not used to talking to so small a child and have never seen one so saddened. Lighten your heart, little princess, and make your decision. The Nile needs you!" He crawled back under my bed and disappeared.

That day, I went to my father and asked him if I could take a boat ride down the Nile to get used to the thought of me being brotherless. My father looked relieved, but my mother sitting behind him raised her thin eyebrows.


"It is a silly way to get used to grief, Isri," she said.

"Nonsense, Sabah," my father replied. "You may go with my blessing, daughter. Mine and, gods willing, Ra's." As I bowed and left the room, I thought: Sobek was right, the king did look weak and sick.

**T**WO DAYS LATER I began my boat trip to view the Nile, and my future subjects. On the water there was very lit-

tle to amuse myself with. The only thing I could do was ponder the courses my life could take. I did not want to desert the throne, but I was not fond of marrying either. If I married, who would I marry anyway? I could wed a cousin, but that would mean giving the throne to him, and I wanted to rule. Also, I was sure that I could do a better job ruling than any of my relatives could. I worried about this for many days, but never came to an arrangement I liked.

During my fifth day on the boat, a messenger came from my mother. His message was brief, saying only that the Pharaoh had died and would I please come home to find my future husband. Then, I think, was the time I decided what I wanted to do with my life. When I was thinking about my options, I never remembered Sobek saying what my three options were. I had thought about two of them: marriage and surrendering the throne. I had not thought about the third: becoming a woman Pharaoh. It is rare, but it has been done, and will be done again. I will rule. A strong girl with no one at her side will take the throne.

Relieved that I had come to a decision, I walked straight-backed and tall across the deck to tell the captain to turn toward the palace. I would be a Pharaoh, I will not marry, but choose an heir from the people, and Egypt will prosper under my rule. I am sure that I can do it. Sobek believes in me, and so does Isis. My people will learn to believe in me, because I believe in myself. 

# The Hunt

By **Will Stroud**

*Illustrated by* **Ksenia Vlasov**



Will Stroud, 13  
Sacramento, California



Ksenia Vlasov, 12  
Katonah, New York

**B**UCK FELT THE WIND blow through his shaggy hair as he pounded his way across the frozen forest, his whole pack following half a minute behind. The chase had lasted three days, three long days of running at top pace, his nose continually dipping toward the ground, sniffing for any twist or turn his prey might make. He had been on many hunts but never one this lengthy and tedious. But then again his prey wasn't what it normally was. He wasn't chasing humans, who were slow on foot and only dangerous when a club or gun was within reach. No, he was tracking something unique, something not normally seen in the sprawling forestland of the Alaskan wilderness. This type of animal was typically killed by predators at a young age, an age when its brawling hooves were not quite the works of death and destruction that they would later become, and those bloodcurdling antlers were not so large and sharp as they would grow to be. He could feel his prey getting closer, could feel it in the earth; the very ground he stood on was informing him. He understood it; he took its knowledge to be true, as true as the roaring wind or the vast bottomless sea. His prey must be resting. He himself had started to feel a pang of delicate soreness every time a paw hit the ground. Surely his quarry could feel it too. Buck was pondering this when he passed over a large hill. With a glance that bordered on premonition, he saw it. Proudly holding its ground on a patch of trampled and dirty snow waited the moose. Buck waited a few seconds for the rest of his pack to catch up before he decided to





*With a glance that bordered on premonition, he saw it*

press on a little further toward the magnificent beast. It kicked up snow, dirt and even little bits of wood as the circle of wolves grew ever more tight and threatening. Buck was the first to pull up and try to make a go at the moose; he would have it no other way. As he made his approach he growled in a low tone so as to warn that he was ready to attack. Just as he poised himself to do so, his brother wolf and his younger sibling jumped in and began to rip at the strapping old moose's flanks as if their attack had been choreographed. The moose quickly bucked them off his sides, his legs pistoning up and down in the air. As though it was caught in a sudden gale,

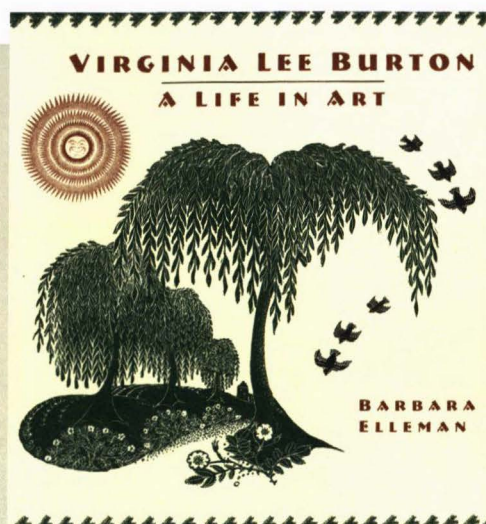
the moose shivered and then charged straight at Buck. He artfully moved to the side, narrowly avoiding a certain death by the moose's sharp, shredding antlers. Buck then took the one millisecond in which the moose paused, vulnerable to attack, to jump straight for its throat. Knowing the time had come, the whole pack dove upon the rampaging moose. Buck was slung back and forth on the moose's neck like the pendulum on a metronome, but held on for fear of his own life, and for want of his opposition's. The moose took a long time to die, but he did. And triumphantly, Buck stood over his kill, king of the forest for the time being.



# Book Review

By Vivienne Clark

*Virginia Lee Burton: A Life in Art*  
by Barbara Elleman; Houghton Mifflin  
Company: Boston, 2002; \$20



Vivienne Clark, 10  
Albuquerque, New Mexico


I CAN STILL REMEMBER when my dad read *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* to me. In fact, my dad remembers when his mother read *Mike Mulligan* to him. Did you ever wonder what was the story behind the acknowledgment to Dickie Birkenbush at the bottom of a page in *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*? Have you ever wondered if there was a real Mike? I did and found the answers in the book *Virginia Lee Burton: A Life in Art*. If you are curious, read the book to find the answers in the first chapter.

*Virginia Lee Burton: A Life in Art* is Burton's biography that describes her creativity and lifestyle. Energetic and amiable, Virginia kept busy from dawn to dusk, raising sheep, vegetables and two children on her New England farm. Abandoned by her mother as a teenager, she found emotional strength from her artwork, as well as her skill as a dancer. Burton created a home environment that promoted her artistic fervor, surrounding herself with artistic things and people. Her husband was, in fact, a well-known sculptor. Numerous photos that depict her life in art fill this book. I particularly like the one of her dancing on the giant granite picnic table in her backyard. In another photo, Virginia and her sons stand in front of the boys' bedroom wall



that shows hilly tracks and trains painted by their mother. The back cover shows an eye-catching picture of her uniquely decorated barn studio, only steps away from her house.

I admire Virginia because of her ability in handling the emotional stress of her mother's abandonment. Despite the negative impact that this must have had on her, she created a happy life for herself and her family. Interviews with her sons, who never recalled any visible signs of distress from this sad event, proved her successful efforts. While I still have my mother, I want to follow Virginia's example of not dwelling on negative aspects of her life, but living in the present and improving her future. It must have taken a lot of courage to remain positive without letting her inward feelings affect her outwardly. I probably could not do this, because, if I have a problem, I go to my mom. Without her, I would have a hard time coping.

Although Virginia was emotionally stronger than me, we are similar in several ways. Like me, her perfectionism made her constantly fix her work. If I'm doing a project and don't like something about it, I mess with the mistake until it looks right. Sometimes, I end up making it worse. Virginia loved drawing, always sketching down ideas. When she took art and designing lessons, she had a long commute by rail, ferryboat and cable car. During those long hours, she sketched her unwary fellow passengers. I also enjoy sketching my friends and other people I meet. If I don't have anyone to sketch, I draw people and animals from my imagination. Virginia read her stories to her children to test if they were interesting enough for them. I'm always testing my funny stories on my younger brother to see whether he will laugh. The hard part for me is writing the stories down on paper. It's fun to read a biography about a person with whom I found much in common. 





*"Do you think that someone up there is mad at us?"*



# Rainy Day Man

By Sharon Wang

Illustrated by Anjali Thakkar

**E**MILY AND I were the best of friends.

I remember those times when we were four, licking melted ice cream off our fingers in the burning sun. I remember fifth-grade days spent frolicking in the pool in hot and freezing water alike. I remember the seventh-grade blues, where the sorrow of both of our failed romantic endeavors were shared equally and sympathized upon by the other. I remember that we were inseparable.

Our birthdays were within a week of one another's. Instead of holding one big party, as it seemed to be the tradition for friends like us, we held two huge ones. The sun smiled for us on our parties always. We were shocked the year that clouds sneaked up on us and hid the sky; it went against everything we had always believed in. Soon, it had us under the sheets for cover.

"Hey," I whispered in the barest scratch, pointing at the sky outside the window, "do you think that someone up there is mad at us?" I was afraid that whoever that someone was, he wouldn't think twice before thunder-bolting a little girl who affronted him.

"I dunno," she replied, revealing a profound secret, "but the Rainy Day Man isn't mad. Mommy told me that he's an old man who gives good girls presents on rainy days to cheer them up. She said not to tell anyone, 'cause if everyone knew, then everyone would be good on rainy days and he would become all over-worked like Santa." I nodded at this wisdom. Most kids were



Sharon Wang, 13  
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San Jose, California

whiny on rainy days, and Emily certainly was a whiner. It was with hope and wonder that we waited for our gift until sleep arrived to harness us into her land of dreams.

But moment passed with time and memory faded with moment. Seven, eight, nine, ten . . . We were still together, like I always knew we would be. Eleven, twelve, thirteen . . . We remained the best of friends in spite of everything life threw at us.

**I**N OUR eighth-grade year, Emily caught a crush on Chris Hubbic, a black-haired, pale-skinned, pierced-eared Goth. For the life of me I could never figure out why, and she admitted that she didn't know either. The very fact that the attraction existed was to be the most sacred of secrets. I, being the faithful friend that I was, swore to never tell. Alas, I should have known better. My mouth was never really good at following the instructions my brain gave it.

"Really, I only told one person!" I whimpered, trying in vain to explain it to Emily the next day. "I really have no clue why everyone seems to know!" But what can words do to mend trust once ripped? I watched as she turned a deaf ear to my pleas, instead stomping off to weave through the crowds in the hallway until she was lost in the sea of students.

The first day after, I almost wondered if she was playing some sort of twisted game. She avoided me on the bus, and moved to the opposite side of the room

when I walked into my classroom first hour. And soon, I realized it was much, much more than a game. Our long-held belief that we would be companions until the end of creation had crumbled into dust beneath our feet.

We gradually drifted apart, each adopting a new set of friends. Our mutual friends learned to never talk about one in front of the other. When Emily's birthday arrived, I watched as all the members of our former set of friends were invited to her birthday party. All except for me.

The day of the party, my rebellious feet carried me to a store, where I bought a small gift and some wrapping paper. I wrapped it up with surprising care—after all, why should I care if the present turned out messy?—and had my mother drive me to Emily's home. Inside, music was blasting so heavily that it seemed to weigh down the house. I heard voices, and one by one I identified them. Jenny, Kelly, Shelly, and Erin. Julie, Megan, and Melanie . . .

I paused there at the door for an eternity, wavering, deciding. Then, with a sudden burst of adrenaline, I realized that I might as well do what I came to do.

Ding! The sound of the doorbell was faint to my ears and drowned out by the screams of laughter and music within. I waited, my nervousness rushing back and forming a knot in my throat. One minute, then two, then three. No reply. In a surge of rage, I dug my heels into the cement so heavily that I left a dirt mark with my shoe when I turned and left. If she hated



me enough to not open the door, then fine. She wasn't going to get a present either.

The next week, for my birthday, I didn't have a party at all. Perhaps it just wasn't the same without Emily. Perhaps I wanted to show her that some people had the decency to not just go ahead and invite everyone but one person. In a way, the incident at her birthday party was like a final seal to a truth that way back somewhere in my heart I had refused to admit: Our friendship had been blown away by the wind, and it was not about to fly back.

Something in me clicked that day. Somehow, I became the one who tried to stay as far away as possible on the bus and in the classrooms. After we graduated from middle school, we both departed to different high schools. Emily simply disappeared from my life.

**H**IGH SCHOOL was amazingly busy. So many clubs; so little time! I was a member of Future Problem Solving, Young Writers, Spanish Club, and Math Club. I joined our school's volunteer organizations, SADD and Project LEAD. I was in a constant race for volunteer points so that I could become a prestigious member of one of these two clubs.

By my tenth-grade year, doing odd jobs here and there for the volunteer organizations had become habitual. On a dark, rainy Friday about two weeks before my birthday, my mother drove me to a high school in another town to supervise mentally retarded kids at a football game.

I sat with my friend on paper bags on the bleachers in ice-cold rain that stung our cheeks and soaked into our clothing. In front of us, the three mentally retarded kids were shielded by huge umbrellas, comfortably sipping hot chocolate and wolfing down popcorn. Large raindrops rolled from the sides of the umbrellas onto our laps. My fingers were frozen numb, and I couldn't move them. From somewhere that seemed far, far away came the scream, "There's eleven naked guys over there with GO ADAMS HIGH painted on them!"

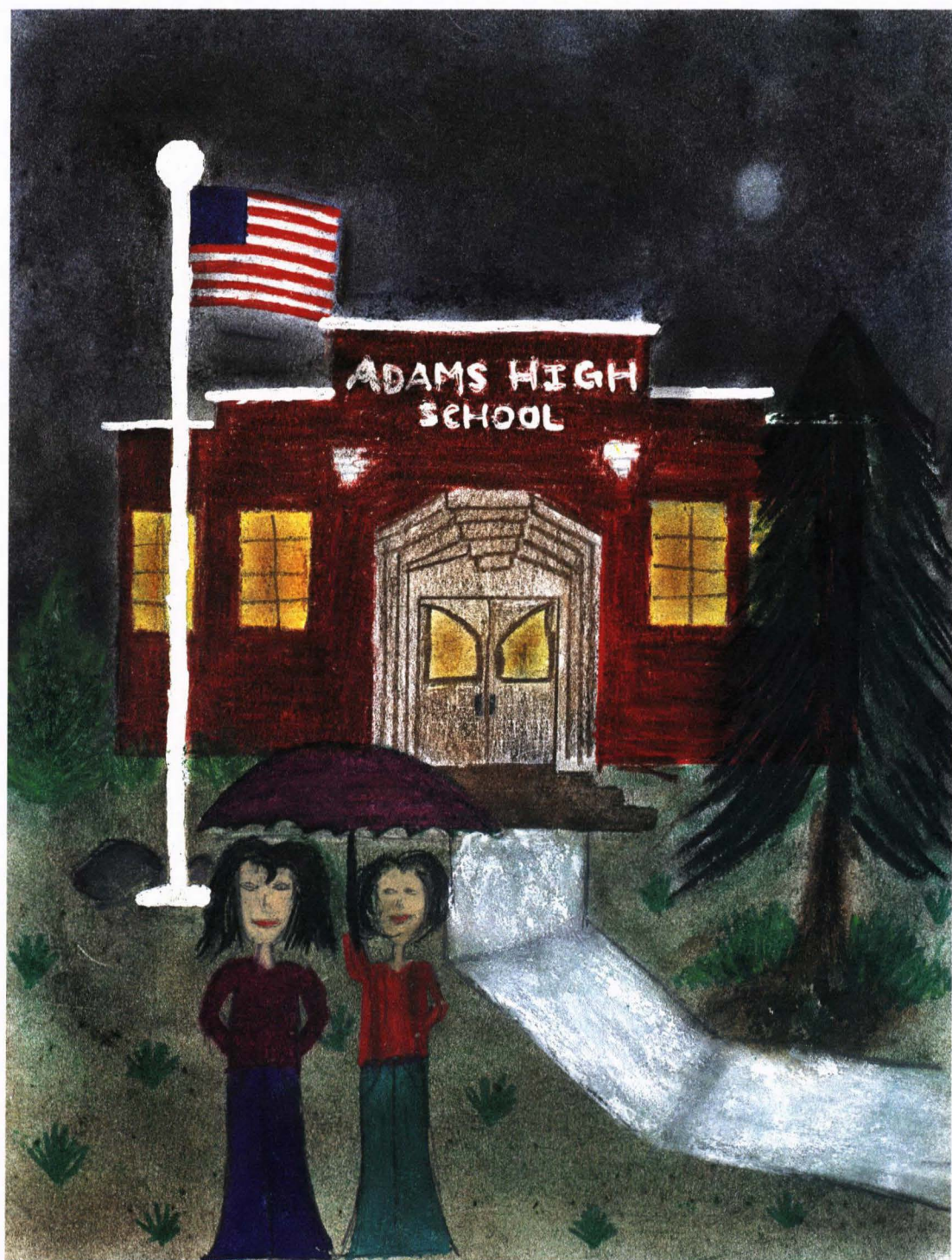
"Aren't they cold?" was my only reaction. The night drew on slowly and painfully. My friends and I watched silently as the mentally challenged kids departed one by one in their heated cars. A certain part of my brain that was only partly awake wondered why I hadn't gotten frostbite. Indeed, there was no sensation in my digits. I clumsily removed my cell phone from a pocket and called my mother to pick me up. The high school was far from my house, and it was difficult to find in the dark. I waited until all my friends had gone. There was no one else there.

I had always been afraid of the dark. The night was black and lonely, an unwelcome stranger that I wished I could chase away. I wanted to sit down right there and cry forever, not even knowing why.

"Sharon? Are you all right? You look terrible."

I gasped, turning to meet a face that had all but vanished from memory. "Emily?"





*I now knew what had broken our friendship*



Suddenly, the night wasn't so dark.

"Hey," she replied softly. We stared at one another for a while, unmoving. "Waiting for a ride?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Mind if I wait with you? I mean, you look so lonely and all, and it's so dark and cold..."

Mind? Please stay with me . . . "What . . . what are you doing here?" I asked uncertainly.

"I was working at the concession stands," she replied, not unkindly.

At her tone, I gained courage. "Really? I . . . I was supervising some mentally challenged kids." I laughed nervously. It evolved into a laugh of heartfelt joy. Like a snowball, I started talking slowly and apprehensively and picked up speed and energy on the way until I burst into a torrent of words that jumbled up with each other and made little sense to even my ears. "And wow, is that your car? You can drive? I'm so jealous! You mean you actually don't mind talking to me? I mean, with you not wanting me at your party and all, and I guess I have too much stupid pride . . ."


She looked up, and began speaking very, very softly. "You know, it's dumb of

me, but during that last birthday party in eighth grade, I was hoping the whole time that you would show up anyway, and then everything would be OK again. I should have just invited you in the first place . . ."

If she had been hoping for me, then why . . . ? Could it possibly be that the music was so loud that she didn't even hear me? The doorbell had sounded faint even to my ears. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Don't blame it on yourself," I suddenly said with a smile. I now knew what had broken our friendship. "Blame it on . . ."

"Stupid pride." We both said it at the same time. And we laughed.

"Do you think that the Rainy Day Man will give us a present today?" I asked in a five-year-old voice, reminiscent of the way we talked way back when I had first asked that question. Thinking back to the time that we had waited a whole night for our gift from the Rainy Day Man, we both burst into more bubbles of laughter. Finally, Emily was able to recover her breath. She looked at me, and I looked at her. "I think he already did," she said.

The next week, in the mail, I received an invitation to a birthday party. 

# Winter Palaces and Ice Ballerinas

By **Delia Rainey**

*Illustrated by* **Liza Nikitin**



Delia Rainey, 10  
St. Louis, Missouri



Liza Nikitin, 12  
South Salem, New York

**I**T SNOWED LAST NIGHT, first it came down softly, then hard. My father was watching the news this morning, and told me that my school was cancelled because of the slick ice on the roads. My mother said that Jack Frost had done a good job last night. I could tell he did too. The windows had enough frost on them that I could write my name with my warm pink finger, melting the frost. I found this so amusing that soon most of the windows in the house had my name written all over them.

When my father saw me still inside, he sent me out to shovel the driveway and scrape the car's windows. I whined and complained, but my father does have a way with persuading me to do things. So I put on my mittens, zipped up my coat, pulled over my earmuffs, gripped the snow shovel, and made my way outside. A cold chill made its way up my nose and my cheeks, turning them cherry red.

Before I started shoveling, I looked around me. Everything looked like a winter palace. The kind of palace you'd think the Snow Queen would have lived in. Forgetting about the chore my father had sent me to do, I dropped the shovel and walked into the winter scene. The naked trees and evergreens had snow stacked on top of their branches. Also, if I hadn't counted wrong, I only saw one spear of grass coming up from the snow. There were squirrel and rabbit footprints in the white blanket, leading to a tree or burrow. Every one of the tiny details outside was like magic to me. Pure magic. The icicles on the roof, the





*I felt like I was the Snow Queen in the winter palace*

way the wind would blow snow off tree branches, even my own boot prints, printed in the snow.

I felt like I was the Snow Queen in the winter palace, and the chubby robin that was trying to get warm on a tree branch was the Snow King.

"Snow King," I told the robin. "Come down and play with me." Frightened by the sound of my voice, the Snow King flew off the branch, although it was hard for him to do this because of all the weight he put on for the winter coldness. As the snowflakes fell, they looked like graceful ballerina dancers, twirling and floating. I stuck out my tongue and a ballerina landed on it. The little ballerina snowflake tasted like frozen water only it had more texture to it. I turned around in circles with my tongue sticking out, catching ballerinas.

At the corner of my eye, I saw all of the snow, blanketed on the driveway of my house. At that moment, I remembered the task I was sent to do. But, I didn't want to leave my winter palace. So I pretended not to remember the driveway, and continued to watch ballerinas dance through the sky. Then, to my surprise, my father came out to see how I was doing with the driveway.

"What are you doing?" he asked me. I bit my lip and thought for a moment.

"I'm watching a recital of ice ballerinas," I replied. "While I was sitting at my throne with the Snow King, in a winter palace of pure magic."

I stared at my father. My father stared at me.

To my amazement, he smiled. "Can I join?"





*There was nothing to do but run forever, racing the shadow of the hawk to the end of eternity*



# Through Draco's Eyes

By **Megan Kirby**

*Illustrated by the author*

“**C**ARMEN!” DAD’S VOICE RANG, crisp with excitement. “Come look what came in today!” Half-heartedly, I swung off the couch and walked heavily to the door. I groaned as I stepped out of the air-conditioning into the stifling summer heat. I jogged to the corral where Dad stood and leaned on the fence next to him. I followed to where his finger pointed and saw what all the commotion was about. It was a huge black stallion, sides lathered in sweat. He stood silently in a corner of the paddock. Other than the occasional flick of his tail to ward off pesky flies, he was still.

“Isn’t he a beaut,” Dad sighed, leaning over the fence rail. I nodded and leaned forward too, holding out my palm.

“C’mere boy, lemme get a good look at you,” I called. He whipped his head toward me, eyes wide and alert. He started a quick trot toward me.

“Carmen, NO!!” shouted Dad, yanking me to the ground. Terrified, I watched as the horse let into a wild gallop and smashed into the fence. He reared, hooves flailing, and cantered back to his corner, where he resumed whisking flies.

But his image was stuck in my mind. The fire in his eyes! His nostrils had been flared so wide that I could almost picture smoke coming out of them like some sort of dragon-horse.

That got me thinking. Dragon-horse . . . Horse-dragon . . . “Draco,” I whispered, hoisting myself up.

“What?” Dad asked.

“Draco,” I said louder. “His name’s Draco.”



Megan Kirby, 12  
Aurora, Illinois

Dad chuckled and said, "Well, it's time I got your Draco into his stall." He swung a halter over his shoulder and headed slowly toward Draco, murmuring soft words.

Finally, he got close enough to place a hand on his quivering side. Suddenly, Draco reared, sending Dad sprawling on the ground. He galloped madly around the pasture as Dad escaped.

"Th-that horse," he gasped, "is a live one!"

Later that night, I came out to the pasture with some carrots and a halter. There was Draco, silently brooding in his corner. I leapt deftly over the fence and stood still. He regarded me warily, but lost interest as I stood still. I put the carrots in my palm and held them out to him.

As we stood in the fading orange sunset, my mind began to wander. Before I knew it, I felt warm breath on my fingertips. Draco had come for the carrots. As he crunched, I slowly placed a hand on his forelock. He brought his eyes up to meet mine, and instantly I felt a trust form between us.

Carefully, I slid the halter over his head and led him to the stalls. He stomped his foot on the wooden floor, shuffled through the hay, and gave a defeated sigh. I patted his side and whispered, "Spirit, boy, spirit."

"I DON'T KNOW how you do it, Carmen!" Dad shook his head in wonder as I rode Draco bareback around the paddock. I had spent a lot of time with the horse and he had learned very quickly. I

had a feeling that perhaps he had belonged to one of our neighbors, and was a runaway.

As it became clear that I could handle him in the paddock, I decided to run him outside on the prairie. I chose a strong bridle and led him out, but his confusion was clear when I began to trot him toward the open prairie. But with every step away I could feel his mind clearing and his muscles coiled to readiness.

Once we were out from the ranch, I let the reins go slack. He stopped completely for a moment before he realized what I was doing. How he flew! And for once, I saw the world through Draco's eyes.

The wind rippled the Indian grass, looking like the waves of an ocean. The sweet scent of the prairie rose wafted on a light breeze. And there was nothing to do but run forever, racing the shadow of the hawk to the end of eternity.

I leaned eagerly against his neck, wind whipping my face, and forgot everything . . . Suddenly, a picture of the ranch flashed across my mind. We were far from home, now. I pulled the reins, but he strained forward. As I struggled to pull back, he fought for his head.

In a last effort, I called softly, "Draco, we have to go home." I gulped. "Well, my home, anyway. I can see it's not yours, and never will be." He slowed to a trot, then a walk. I turned him slowly toward the ranch.

A change came over him the next day. His eyes had a glazed-over look; their old fire was gone. He barely acknowledged





*A black horse, not my Draco any longer, stood silhouetted against the sun*

me, just kept his eyes on the window opened to the prairie.

**T**HE NEXT DAY, he stopped eating. Worriedly, Dad called the vet, but I knew he wouldn't find anything wrong.

Draco was dying of a broken spirit. I went to talk to Dad.

"No, no, absolutely not!" Dad said.

"But Dad!!" I cried.

"Carmen, no! It is simply out of the question! Those horses are income for

you, me and your mother! We are not letting him go!"

I turned around to the door, tears in my eyes, when he said, "Carmen, wait." I turned halfway. "I forbid you to go into Draco's stall until after he's sold."

I turned to stare, not believing what I heard. "I hate you!" I screamed. "I hate you, I hate you!" I tore down the hallway, slamming and locking my door.

A few seconds later, Dad was pounding on it, yelling, "Carmen, open the door this instant! Carmen!"

I ignored him, turned my stereo on full blast, and fell into a troubled sleep.

A few hours later, I woke to the rumbling of an empty stomach. I crept down the dark hallway into the kitchen and helped myself to last night's cold spaghetti leftovers. As I sat thinking in the dim kitchen, I knew what I had to do.

The stable door creaked open louder than I had meant for it to. Still, the only sounds were the muffled snores of horses. I made my way down the stalls, and stopped at Draco's.

He was wide awake, his eyes sparkling and alert. He gave a high-pitched whinny that seemed to say, "What took you so long?"

I slipped a halter on him as he nuzzled my shoulder. I led him out into the night and mounted, giving him a hard kick. He shot past the stables, the pastures, his prison, till there was nothing but open space.

The night surrounded us, but it wasn't a dark sort of night. The full moon turned

her pale face toward us, and thousands of stars twinkled merrily. The prairie grass was silhouetted black against the swirling purple sky, and an eagle flew overhead, something grasped in its talons.


Draco simply ran. It was so natural, so beautiful. His feet seemed to hardly touch the ground. He blended in perfectly as though he had never been gone. I just wanted him to run, run forever. To escape the buildings and fences that confined him from this. But seemingly, he had more sense than I.

Eventually, he slowed to a walk, then stopped. I knew what he meant. I slid from his back and held tight to his halter. His eyes met mine, like they had that night long ago in the pastures, and again I felt that bond of trust and love, but now, also of thanks.

I buried my face in his mane and shed my tears. "I'll miss you, Draco," I whispered, slipping his halter off.

He stood still, waiting. "Get out of here!" I hollered, laughing through my tears. He shot off, but turned to circle me before running toward the horizon. At the top of a grassy hill, he paused and turned.

Just then the fiery sun peeked from behind the grass. It made the ground look like molten gold, and a black horse, not my Draco any longer, stood silhouetted against the sun.

He reared, mane and tail whipping, before he turned and disappeared. I turned away, awed by the wonder I had just seen, and headed home. I knew I had done the right thing. 



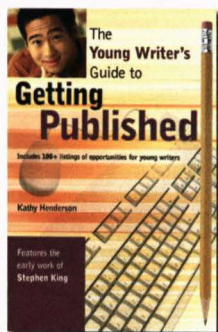
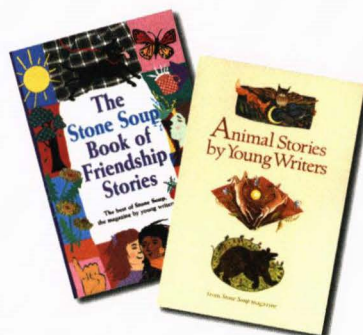
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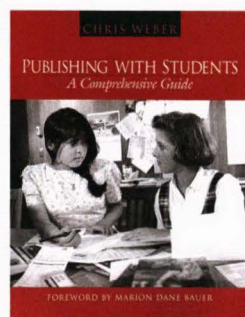
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