

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

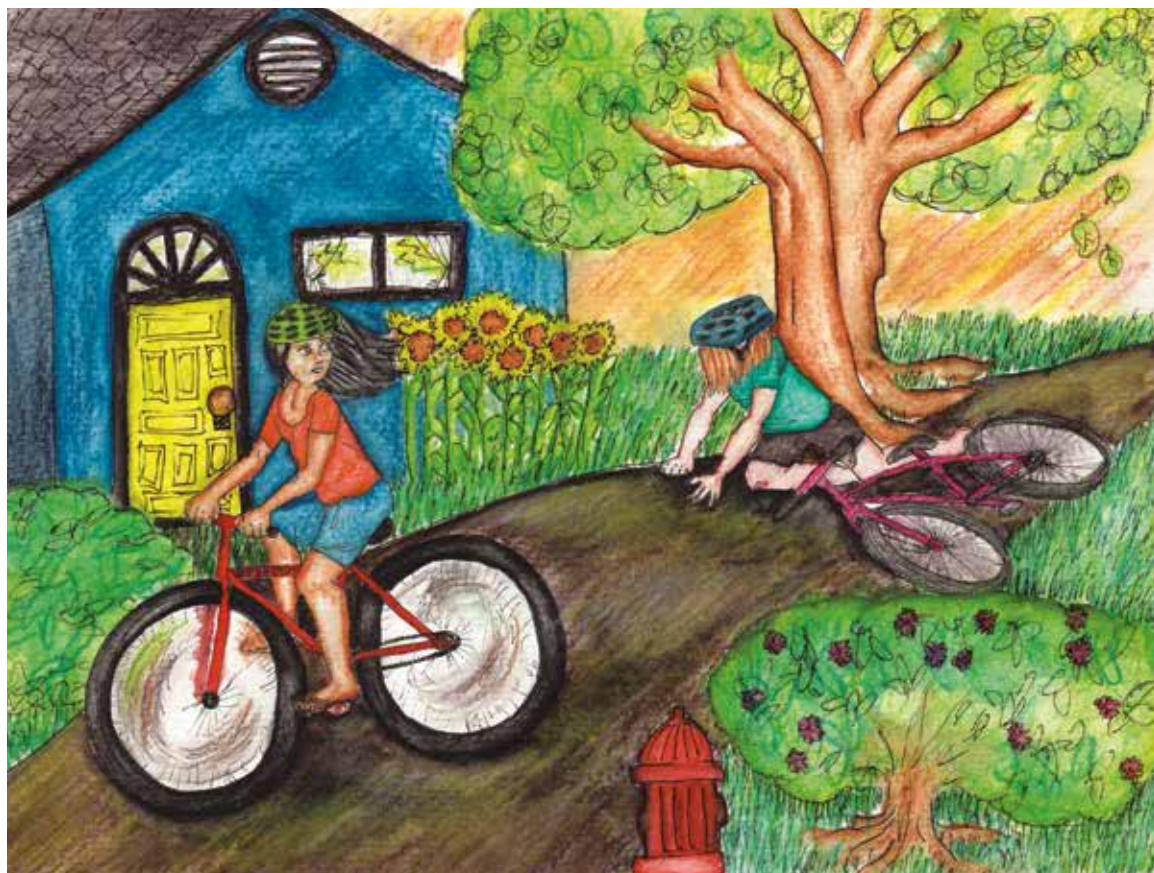


Illustration by Bethany Pardoe, age 12, for "About Winning," page 25

CATCHING MICE

Eoin can't obey Granny without betraying his own values

ABOUT WINNING

June needs help to be a better person

Also: A poem about saving the planet

JULY/AUGUST 2014

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 42, NUMBER 6
JULY / AUGUST 2014

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Editor's Note

Real or imaginary? Three stories and one poem in this issue deal with magic or with events so unlikely they seem like magic. We all love fairy tales and stories where our fondest wishes come true. We all like to think miracles can happen. In the story called "Miracle," a girl appears out of nowhere with a message that helps Jason see the world in a new light. "The Locket" is all about magic. Only Chorus and her sister can see the locket. It gets hot and gives each girl perfect advice at just the right moment. In "Believing," Naomi misses her mother terribly. How can she get closure when her mom's last words were left unsaid? This story's magical ending will bring tears to your eyes. Then there's the charming poem, "The Fairy House." Real or imaginary? Did you ever have an experience that could not easily be explained? Was there a feeling of magic about it? Try to capture that feeling in your next story or poem.

— *Gerry Mandel*

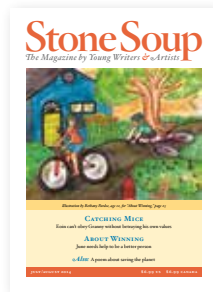
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ON THE COVER Bethany Pardoe has been drawing since she could hold a pencil. She especially likes to draw people. Her mom teaches in a Waldorf school, and Bethany is in her mom's class. Her dad, a former professor, owns a restaurant, and Bethany is painting pictures and a sign for the restaurant.



The Mailbox



I love *Stone Soup*! It's one of my favorite magazines that I read every day! The stories in *Stone Soup* either make me want to cry or laugh! I like how all the stories are because the author lets their feelings out. My favorite stories in the January/February 2014 issue are "More or Less," by Sammy Westfall and "Hope," by Isabel Folger. I have favorites, but I love all of the stories and poems! I also really love the book reviews. I get good recommendations for books. I've read a few of the books from book reviews, and they were great! I can't wait for the next issue of *Stone Soup*!

Renee Greene, 10
Foxboro, Massachusetts

Thank you so much for creating *Stone Soup*. I love it and hope you will continue for another forty years!!

Milagros Lee Wilson, 10
El Paso, Texas

A friend gave me some issues of this magazine. I am forty-one but have enjoyed all of them. The story that touched me most was "The Chesapeake Bay Manatee," by Brooke Antoine [November/December 2011]. I love animals of all types so thank you for that story. I am blind. I read your magazines in braille. So though I cannot see the art, I thank you for the encouragement you all have given to children. Keep up the great job.

Cristyn Steiner
Sturgis, Michigan

I read the poem "The Ocean," by Emma Rose Kirby [September/October 2013]. I enjoyed reading about how the ocean felt to her. I can imagine sitting on the ocean floor away from my fears, then coming out to the warm air and receiving my worries back again. I like to think about lying in the ocean with the sparkling sand, little animals, and the waving sea plants! I can understand why it can drown out your worries and bad things in your mind and make everything seem so peaceful. I also like when she describes coming out, to her worries and fears, but pushing them back. Then, with the ocean still protecting her, she walks away!

Miriam Herron, 10
Hanover, New Hampshire

I have been a fan of this magazine since I was a little girl. I hope you take the time and pleasure to read my work thoroughly. I am elated to be sending something to you for the first time.

Seo-Ho Lee, 11
Houston, Texas

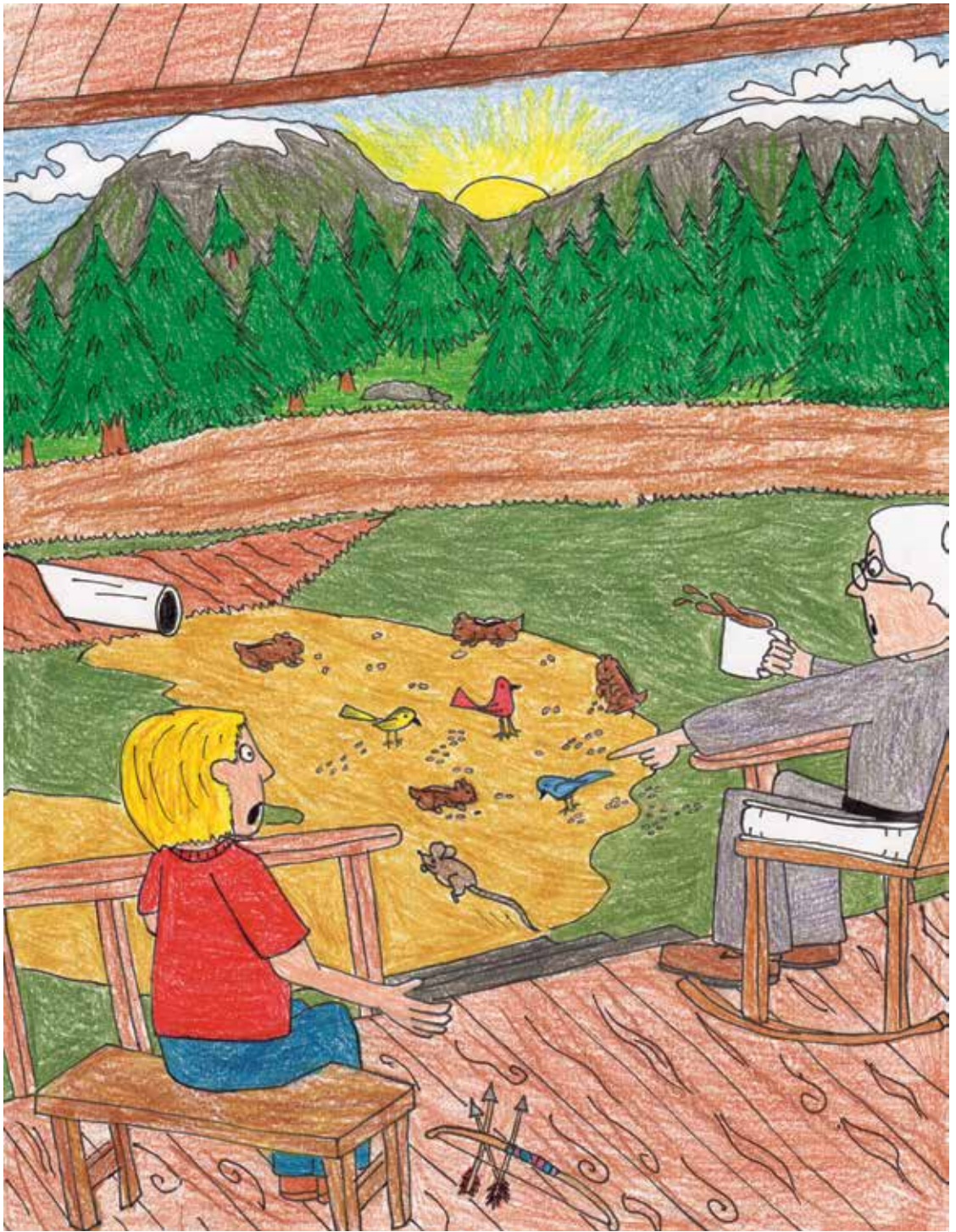
Seo-Ho's poem is recognized in the Honor Roll on page 48.

Both of my daughters haggle over who gets to read the magazine first when it arrives. Thanks for inspiring both of my kids to write more and get past their fear of submitting something for potential publication!

Rob Williamson, parent
Madison, Wisconsin

Cecilia Williamson's artwork is recognized in the Honor Roll on page 48.

Stone Soup welcomes your comments. Send them to editor@stonesoup.com.



"There... there!!! That pesky little rat!"

Catching Mice

By Eoin O'Mara

Illustrated by Thomas Buchanan

THE MOUSE WAS a smooth-furred, jittery-nosed, small-as-grass field mouse. I remember sitting on the roughly carpeted floor early in the mornings, when it was too cold to go outside, and watching him swipe food before the chipmunks and birds, who were at least two times the size of him, got at them beforehand. I remember sitting there for hours at a time, every morning, my face so close to that cold glass door that every two seconds I had to wipe off the foggy blotches my breath made against it. And after the first glance of that mouse I ever had, I knew I had made a connection with him—one which I never wanted to be broken.

I never told anyone when I saw him. Because I knew that if I did, they would have killed him.

In the time when the sun rose above the peak of the mountain across the road from the two-floored cabin that my grandparents owned in Colorado Springs, after the time of my daily watching of the mouse, me and my grandma sat out on the porch. Me, my sister, my mom, and my dad call her Granny. We sat there, silently, watching the chipmunks and the birds feast on the sunflower seeds we placed out that morning. *What a pretty day*, I thought. *We haven't had one in a while*. Unfortunately, the August rain had been pouring down on us for the past fifteen days, and since we only had two more out here, I was hoping for it to be the best ones.

"There's a lot of chipmunks out here," Granny noted.

I nodded. "There is—much more than yesterday."



Eoin O'Mara, 11
New York, New York



Thomas Buchanan, 10
Newalla, Oklahoma

Granny rocked slowly in her thickly white-cushioned rocking chair. The paint on the metal bars that supported her, at least thirty-five years old, was chipping off at a steady pace, revealing its rusted corpse. She sipped her mug of coffee, careful as to not let any drip on her once light purple, now light gray, stringy old jumpsuit. A gentle tap of her thumb against the mug handle soon sufficed for the awkward silence she left by gazing off into the distance. *What's she thinking about now?* I wondered. It was typical for

her to do this, as was it for me to think about what exactly she was playing around in her mind. It was around seven o'clock in the morning, and though her eyes were still a little groggy, they were keen on the lookout. For that mouse. I had always kept my daily sightings a secret for a reason, that being I was quite alone with my relationship. To everyone else, that mouse was a pest that deserved to be gotten rid of. I often wondered about that mouse as much as I watched him. About what was going on in its small brain. Especially if some seventy-eight-year-old man was rapid-firing a BB gun at you as you nibbled on a piece of celery that was thrown out for the little bunny after dinner. About how that would feel. About how it would feel if everyone hated you.

It was as I thought about this that that mouse bolted from under the porch and into the play area of the chipmunks.

I often wondered
how it would feel if
everyone despised you.

Instantly, Granny lurched to the edge of her chair. "There... there!!! That pesky little rat!" She pointed toward a small stubby tail that was poking out behind one of the cinder blocks. She whirled quickly to me. "Get your bow!!! Kill it!!!" she growled at me. I jumped up, scaring a few birds away. My mind was blank—no thoughts came through to me. And I wouldn't know this at that moment, but now I know that it wasn't me who was thinking this. This wasn't going on in my head. It was Granny's thoughts. The want to

make her proud of me invaded my mind. It controlled me, my behaviors, my thoughts. My feelings. My actions. Like a parasite, eating away at the moral meaning that I once was. I dived through an array of chairs on the other part of the porch, grabbing my bow and three arrows. I gripped them hard as I bolted back to the edge of the porch. I nocked an arrow with swift movement, locating the mouse sitting in a tube, eating some seed. I pulled back. I didn't stop. I aimed. I bet I would have stopped. I let go.

The arrow whizzed through the air slower than ever. I could see each of its carefully placed rubber tails. They spun with such precision, such determination. The air seemed to not even move as the arrow point sliced through it like a pair of scissors against a sheet of wrapping paper. One singular sliding motion. So delicate. So nasty.

Sssbbhheeiinnnggg! The arrow wedged itself in the gravel right next to the tube. I could see the mouse start to shiver in fear, even ten feet away. I stopped for a second. That was that little mouse who I watched so affectionately every morning. *What am I...*

My grandma stopped my train of thought. “What *are* you doing?!! Shoot again!!!” I reluctantly nocked another arrow. *I have to make her happy*, I thought. I pulled back on the arrow. *Ting!!!* This time the arrow slammed into the pipe and ricocheted a few feet away on the gravel. The mouse jumped and moved a little bit forward. It was vulnerable.

I drew back slowly with my last arrow.

And then I stopped.

“*Do it!!!*” My grandma looked like she was at a wrestling match—her fists were clenched in a defensive position. She held them tight, close to her chest, looking like she was ready to throw a punch at something. At that mouse. But instead, she was making me do it. Why? I looked at the mouse down the arrow. It was shivering uncontrollably. *I have made this happen. I have scared a little mouse of no threat. A little field mouse passing by, lonely, alone, only to*

let us wicked people hate him more than anything. A slight breeze blew by. I still stared at that mouse—and I saw a little twinkle in his small black eyes. I often wondered about that mouse as much as I watched him. About what was going on in its small brain. About how it would feel if everyone despised you.

I let my string slowly slide back into place. The mouse scurried under the porch, seeing its opportunity. I felt a wave of relief, but I held in my sigh. I set the bow gently down on the ground.

I didn’t really look at my grandma. After that, I never really did for the next two days. Not even at the airport, when we had to leave my grandparents. But, out of the corner of my eye, I saw that her lips were pursed. Her face was red, and her hands now gripped tightly to her coffee mug. It was lopsided, almost spilling onto her old signature jumpsuit. I knew that she would most likely never talk to *me* again for this whole trip. Not until who knows when. I didn’t care. She had made me centimeters away from breaking a connection that I had never wanted to be broken.

Ever.



Nature's Plea

By **Aiwen L. Desai**



Aiwen L. Desai, 12
Madison, Wisconsin

The howl of a wolf
Driven from her home
The wail of an elephant
Shot down for his precious tusks
The lament of a polar bear
Wandering in search of untouched ice
They are nature's plea

The moan of a tree
Torn from its sacred ground
The cry of a dolphin
Caught in a blood-red net
The scream of a seagull
Caught in suffocating oil
They are nature's plea

A plea to stop destroying
But instead to create
A new world
Where seagulls fly free,
Where dolphins frolic happily,
And where elephants graze without fear

It is a plea to repair the equilibrium of nature
To not blot out the stars with smoke
But to dance with them
Raising hands, paws, flippers, hooves
In celebration
Of a darkened world
Brought back to the light

Subway Adventure

By **Elam Fifer-Whiting**

Illustrated by **Savva Gretzky**



Elam Fifer-Whiting, 13
Westminister, Colorado



Savva Gretzky, 13
Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

IT IS SUPER HOT, HUMID. Sweat is running down my back like a brook. I am waiting. The A train is mine. I am on the east side of the Forty-Second Street platform for the southbound A train. People are running, late people walk slowly, lost people are walking purposefully.

A woman pushes a rattling, clanking cart. She is dirty, a wrinkled old woman. She bumps to a stop next to me. She jingles a cup at me. She wants money. I have none. She and her cart continue on. I feel sadness. She is poor. How did she become poor? How did she get the cart on the platform? Where does she live? Why do I not have change for her? Where is she going? I don't ask. A train stops, it is not mine.

There is a band playing, a one-man, four-piece band. His face is small and thin, his clothes are clean. He is joyful, he is playing joyful songs. The music man is tempting us to dance with joyful music. I agree to dance. How come he is happy? His bucket has my money. Why did I give him my change? I feel a breeze, a train is coming, but alas it's not mine.

Some people are standing, waiting. Some are short, some are poor, some people are smiling. They are rich with happiness. Some are talking to one another. Some are talking to themselves. Some turn their heads and they are no longer talking to themselves, using Bluetooth. I see lights; a train comes soaring around the curve. It is still not my mine.

By now where is this train? I look down the track. No train. I look across the platform, I see no train. I look at the platform

a summersault in midair. The men do a finale. People clap and whoop in approval. They pack up their boom box. With hats extended, they ask for donations. I wish I had money, sadly, my money is at Forty-Second Street. I let them pass.

Twenty-Third Street arrives. The man and his son debark, squabbling stopped. The baby stops howling. More people press on to the train. There is a man on the platform hawking God. Screaming, he tells me, "You are a grave sinner. Your soul is going to hell." Bible quotes fly out from his mouth, like an expert. I feel sad. I see his hat upside down by his feet, I see his hat, filled with dollars. Since I am going to hell I am glad I am penniless. The doors close, the train starts with a clank.

Fourteenth Street arrives. A man gets off, shopping bag in tow. A few people enter. A group of boys carry a box of candy. "One dollar each!" hollers a boy. "Help support our soccer team!" I am still broke. They need money not for soccer. Their clothes are tattered, their faces tired. I don't think they have a soccer team. I wonder where they got the candy. Where are their parents? I just nod at them.


The connecting stop is Fourth Street. The baby sleeps in its mothers arms. Crowds switch, the baby still sleeps. Someone sits next to me. We look away. The train leaves. The train gently rocks around curves. My seat mate and I bump gently, in silence. This crowd is mostly workers headed home, silent. At the window I stare. My reflection stares back.

My face says tired. Sniffles, sneezes, and coughs break the silence. I wish the baby would cry. The train slows for Spring Street Station.

The lady and child depart. I will miss them. The crowd thins. From the station, the train eases. A woman has no bags, staggering, she makes her way forward, talking, she is making no sense. Closer, she moves. "Here's one," she says. Stepping closer, "You're a fine boy." Closer still, "You have been adopted, by a woman." She is right. How does she know? Eerie? "You are not going to look at me," she challenges, sticking a finger in my face. I study it. The fingernail is manicured into a fine point. *Bizarre*. Her fingernails are clean. "Look up," she demands. I don't. My eyes she cannot see. My soul, she wants to read. I refuse. Her challenge I win. With relief, I sigh.

The train arrives at Canal Street, this is my stop. The soul-steeling woman gets off. I stay on, letting her go. I choose to go one stop more, to get away. I will come back on the next train. Getting home late is safer. I like my neighborhood. Is she in my building? I shiver. I hope not. The train leaves the station, I can't see her. I breathe deeply. My seat mate tells me, "You did well, good job. She wanted something from you."

"I think it was my soul," I say.

Quietly, he says, "I think you're right." Fear crawls up my spine. As I exit at the next stop, the spell brakes. I sigh. Tomorrow will be another day on the subway. I'm fine. 

Miracle

By **Hana Tzou**

Illustrated by **April Heaney**

“**J**ASON, SWEETHEART, just please get out of the car. It may be cold, but it really is beautiful.”

I crossed my arms tighter and sank lower down in my seat. The wind coming from the open door whipped my shaggy blond hair into my eyes.

“Jason David Sagar, you are ten years old, not three. Get out of the car!”

Still sulking, I slammed down on my seatbelt buckle. It gave an annoying little *click* and sprang free. I gingerly stepped into the cold, and then stomped to the edge of the cliff, as far away from my parents as possible. I could sense them exchanging worried looks behind my back. “Do you want to go play on the rocks, darling? I’ve heard that they have really amazing tide pools.”

“No.”

“Come on, son.” It was my dad. He placed his hand on my back and practically shoved me down the narrow rock stairs that led to the beach. Honestly, it was very unfair. They force me to come with them to this stupid “rural” town for some “social diversity,” and now they actually expect me to get out of the car (during winter, no less)? I’m pretty sure a week is enough time to see every single tide pool in Bodega Bay. But right now, I just wanted to curl up on my bed with the iPad.

I stumbled across the thick sand towards the crashing waves. Dad’s hand was still on me and he pushed me towards a large clump of rocks that obscured my vision of the sea.



Hana Tzou, 12
San Jose, California



April Heaney, 13
Roanoke, Texas



"Lovely view," a voice said behind me

"Go climb that, Jason." He said it in a way that clearly meant: stop pouting and do something to amuse yourself while your mother and I talk grown-up things.

Well, whatever. If I got out of their hair maybe they would leave me alone for a couple hours once we got back to the house. Only marine biologists would be perfectly happy with leaving their only son on a pile of rocks while they did science.

I dug my hands into the slippery crags of the rock and pulled myself over the edge. It flattened out into a long plateau, stretching out to the ocean. I walked to the end and sat down, dangling my legs.

"Lovely view," a voice said behind me, and I whipped my head around. A teenage girl in a Daisy Duke yellow bikini and shorts was walking my way. Her long black braids fell down past her waist, like a Native-American Rapunzel.

She sat down on my left. "I'm Miracle."
"Jason." I ignored her outstretched hand. Maybe if I were as rude as possible, she'd go away. My parents had probably sent her in some lame attempt to make me socialize.

"Perfect weather for tide-pooling. Or thinking on top of rocks, I suppose."

I raised an eyebrow and glanced at her. How could she not be cold? I was wearing two sweat-shirts and jeans, and I was freezing. But at a closer inspection, I saw that though her cheeks were slapped red from the wind, no goosebumps dotted her skin. And then I saw her hand. The right one wasn't even a hand, just a deformed stump with four tiny slivers of nail embedded into her skin.

"What happened to *you*?" I asked, not being able to tear my eyes away from the strange sight. "How did you even get up here?"


She didn't answer, and instead stared off into the distance. "Don't ever take life for granted, Jason. You have to look on the bright side of things. See this beach right here, along the entire coastline?" She swung her stump around. "You may find it cold, or ugly, or even boring. But look closer." I followed her arm down to the crashing waves. "Look at the way the water pounds relentlessly against the surf. Like it's yearning so much to just reach the shore, only to fade away once it gets

there. Look at the way no one disturbs the beach with trash and dancing and loud music. Look at how beautiful that woman becomes when she steps out of the car, and the wind attacks her hair like a cat with its prey."

I stared at my mother, trying to push the long blond strands away from her face while keeping hold of her biology equipment. Miracle was right. She looked... beautiful. At least ten years younger. Probably the way she looked when

my dad proposed to her, just a mile away, on Goat Rock Beach. And suddenly, I saw the radiance of it all. The powerful waves, slowly grinding the rocks to sand in their desperate haste to reach the oceanfront. The black rocks, so plain at first, but teeming with life at a closer glance. And above all, Miracle, the joy of life shining in her eyes, even though she was deformed, even though she was scarred for life, she still loved every moment of it. And that was the moment I decided to do the same.

I stared out at the ocean, and then looked back at her, to thank her. But she was gone.

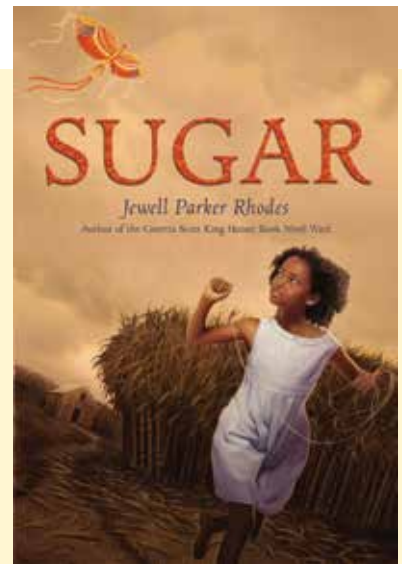
AT THE END of the week, I looked out the car window at that beach and gave it a small wave. And maybe, just possibly, as we rounded the bend, I saw a flash of Daisy Duke yellow, waving back. 

Maybe if I were
as rude as possible,
she'd go away.

Book Review

By **Sonia Patel Banker**

Sugar, by Jewell Parker Rhodes; Little, Brown Books for Young Readers: New York, 2013; \$16.99




Sonia Patel Banker, 9
San Francisco, California

TEN-YEAR-OLD SUGAR lives on the River Road Plantation in Mississippi in the early 1800s. Sugar is a young African-American girl whose father died during the Civil War and whose mother died of sickness shortly after. As Sugar spends her time cutting cane, Mister Wills, the plantation owner, hires more cane workers from China. These men befriend Sugar as she learns a new culture, but the workers in River Road do not like the Chinese men because they are worried that the Chinese men will take over the land. Sugar wants the Chinese men to have equality in River Road. She says, “I like the Chinese men. Reverend, don’t you preach, ‘Treat other folks like you want to be treated’?”

Sugar cut cane until the sun turned red, orange, yellow, and pink, and faded into night. As Sugar says one night, “I stare at our shadows, lying, side by side, on the porch wood.” In the first few pages, I was shocked that Sugar hates her name! She throws up and gags if she eats sugar. As soon as the villagers finish cane working, they would eat the stalks. But because Sugar worked on the cane farm since she was two days old, she is tired of smelling the scent of sugar. It reminds her of the life she wants to leave behind.

Though I am very different from Sugar, my family's history is similar to Sugar's amazing life story. My grandfather worked on a sugar cane farm for years. He grew up in a small Indian village called Panetha. He woke up at four A.M., took a shower, and prayed to God, and then at six A.M. set out for farming. He was about Sugar's age then, and he either worked until noon or sometimes until six P.M. He worked with at least ten to fifteen people beside him. He told me that he cut sugar cane with a big knife. Inside the sugar cane is a solid fiber, making sugar cane juice. On the outside, the cane is not prickly, but be careful about the leaves! They are sharp and pointy. He sweated in the over 100-degree summers in India. He said he loved to farm. But like Sugar, he had a dream. His dream was to study and to come to America. In the late 1960s he came to America from India, just like the Chinese men came from their home country. And like my grandfather, Sugar achieved her dream to leave the sugar cane farm.

I also relate to how Sugar bridged cultures. On holidays, Sugar encourages River Road to celebrate Chinese holidays. I encourage my school to celebrate Hindu festivities such as our Lower School Diwali Assembly. I hoped for grades pre-K to sixth to learn about our holiday, a day filled with joy and happiness.

I think you should read *Sugar*, by Jewell Parker Rhodes, because I learned so much from the story of her struggle. I think that reading from authors of different backgrounds shows you new perspectives. I also recommend this story because it shows love of friends and warmth of adults. I hope my review will encourage you to read the book. 



"Do you like my locket?"

The Locket

By **Elia Smith**

Illustrated by **Ester Luna**

ONE WARM SUMMER EVENING, when the sun was just beginning to set over the sea, a single bird chirped melodiously. His fellows one by one joined in, each singing a different melody and pitch, but somehow all truly going together. The soft, sad song of the cricket gently burst through the birdsong at random intervals, yet sounded perfectly orchestrated. A cool breeze swooshed the long panoramic grass in perfect time to the melody. This was the best serenade to ever be possibly heard by human ears, a song created by nature. And in that precise moment, when the music was its peak, a baby girl was born. Her cheeks were flushed from the moment she was born, and the puffiness that swelled around the eyes of other babies was completely absent. She had wide blue eyes, the color of the ocean, that looked curiously around the room. Then, as all other newborns do, she began to cry. But this was a different sort of cry, not a cry of surprise or sorrow, but a cry of joy that somehow fell into the melody of the crickets, and the birds, and the wind. She was named Chorus, for the chorus of nature.

SOME TEN YEARS LATER, in the cool middle of autumn, Chorus woke up in the early morning. Even with her eyes closed, she could sense a bright light in front of her face. She figured it was just the sunlight reflecting in the small tortoiseshell mirror that was ever present on her bedside table. But when she partially opened her eyes, she saw it was not. The mirror had



Elia Smith, 9
Santa Monica, California



Ester Luna, 11
Washington, DC

fallen to the ground next to her bed, face down, and the curtains were closed. It was a golden locket sitting on her bed, on the small, decorative quilted pillow that often plopped to the floor during the late hours. Its golden sheen glowed even in the near blackness of her room. She leaned over to the bedside table and flicked on a little lamp so as to see it better. Gently, Chorus picked the locket up by its thin gold chain and turned it over and over again in her fingers. It seemed to emit a warmth, flowing through Chorus's fingers pleasantly, fully waking her up. "This isn't mine..." she wondered aloud. "So whose is it? And where did it come from?" She began to study the two smooth faces of the locket. They were completely blank. Or so it seemed. When she looked at the front side for the third time, tiny words were scrawled on it, in seamless, perfect cursive. *This belongs to you, Chorus... for now.* She shivered.

What did it mean, "for now"? How did it know her name? And how did that writing appear? Chorus shook her head, blond curls whipping her cheeks. "It was there all along. I just didn't see them at first." She did not quite believe herself, because deep down she knew it *definitely* wasn't there before. But she started to get ready for school, and after she brushed her hair and got dressed, she paused to grab the locket and close the clasps around her neck.

Downstairs, her little sister, Lavender, was already sitting at the table, munching a piece of toast with *way* too much butter. Lavender was in first grade and

thought she knew everything. This was completely off, Chorus thought. Lavender could hardly read the word *umbrella*. She always said "umbella," but maybe that was Lavender's speech, not reading skills. No one could be sure.

"Hello, Chorus! Good morning! Welcome!" (Lavender *loved* greetings.)

"Yes, hello, Chorus honey!" Their mom gave Chorus a quick kiss. "Now hurry up and eat. We don't want to be late, do we?" Chorus sat down in a vacant chair, got up again, brushed all the crumbs onto the floor, and sat down with finality.

As she wolfed down her cereal, she asked her mother, "Do you like my locket?"

Her mom turned around. "What locket?"

Chorus gasped, and she touched her chest. But the locket still was present with the same heat as before under her hand. Puzzled, but unwilling to pursue the subject, Chorus finished her breakfast and tugged on her sneakers without bothering to re-tie the laces. When Chorus first got the shoes, she had tied one triple knot in them and never had to do so from that point on. In other words, she used lace-up shoes as slip-ons. She quickly checked her backpack for her lunchbox and her homework. Chorus then zipped the bag shut and slung it over her back. Taking hold of Lavender's small hand, she gave her mother a hug and ran out the door to catch the bus.

When Chorus and Lavender were alone in the smooth leather back seat of

the school bus, Lavender whispered, "I can see the locket."

Chorus stopped staring out the window and turned to her little sister. "Can't anyone?"

Lavender's brown eyes widened. "I don't think so. Mommy couldn't. I could tell."

Chorus wrinkled her brow and narrowed her eyes in concentration (and a tad of annoyance) and did not speak for the rest of the ride. When they arrived at school, Chorus suddenly addressed her sister. "Why couldn't she?"

Lavender's eyes sparkled. "Magic."

The hands on the classroom clock seemed to be frozen in place, as clocks do when you stare at them waiting for something. Chorus counted down the minutes. The lesson on common and proper nouns was mind-numbing. It wasn't usually, but today Chorus was anxious for language arts to end. Three... two.... one....

Briiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing! The bell's chime thundered through the school. Chorus sprang up and dashed into the hallway. She nearly sprinted through the corridors and into the choir room, where she leaned against the wall, panting.

"Look who's here first! Hello, Chorus!" Miss Macintosh, the singing teacher, hurried towards her, her floaty sky-blue dress swooshing around her ankles. However, when she neared Chorus, she stopped and frowned. "Have you been

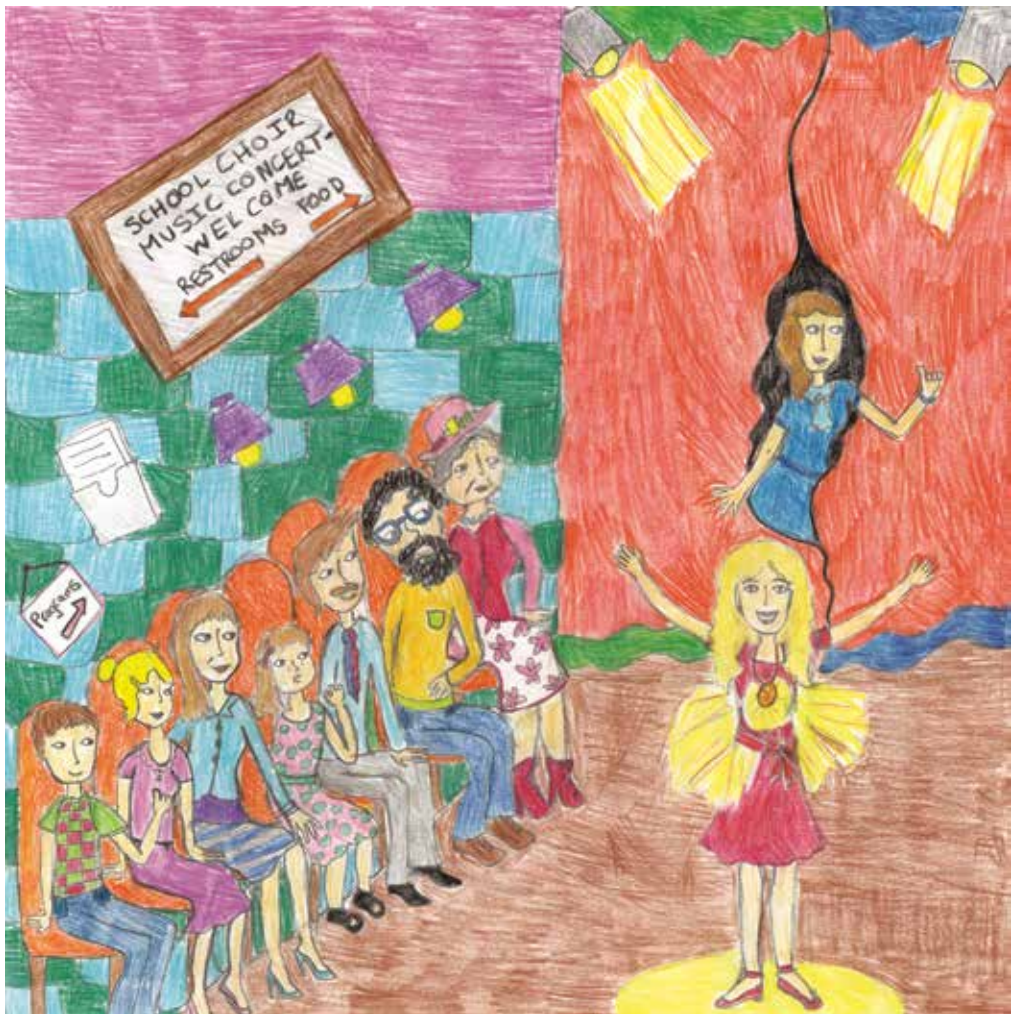
running?" Chorus gave a guilty smile. Miss Macintosh waggled a finger in her face sternly but jokingly. "No running in the halls. You know that, or you should." Chorus half shrugged.

When all the kids in the choir class had gathered in the classroom, chattering and giggling, Miss Macintosh cleared her throat. The babble of talk froze like a cup of water in a freezer. "Before we start today, I have something important to say." Chorus leaned forward. "We'll be having a concert! Here's the best part." (Miss

Macintosh was nearly jumping up and down.) "All of you will have solos!" Chorus slumped in her chair. Her stomach felt like a million butterflies were beating their tiny wings on her insides. She loved to sing. It was her favorite thing in all the world. But the most amount of people she ever sang to solo was three. Her mom, her dad, and Lavender. Was she ready for this? Chorus felt a lump in her throat. She thought she knew.

Later that day after school, Chorus paced her room. "Maybe I'll not sing. I'll just... uh, tell Miss Macintosh I'm scared. Yeah, that's what I'll do." Convincing herself about this matter was as easy as attempting to persuade a room of cats not to eat mice. "Oh, what should I do? I really want to, yet I don't all the same!" she wailed in desperation. Suddenly, her chest burned. "Youch!" Chorus leapt up and put

**"This isn't mine..." she
wondered aloud. "So
whose is it? And where
did it come from?"**



When she opened her mouth, it was the most beautiful music ever

her hand to her rib cage. There she felt the source of heat. The locket.

She reached behind her ponytail to feel for the clasps. Chorus carefully unlatched them. She held the locket in front of her face, and nearly dropped it. There was more writing.

Do it. It's best, girl.

She really did drop it then.

Chorus had made up her mind. Or,

so to speak, it had been made up for her. That night, as she stood in the warm downpour of the shower to think, her mind suddenly had an interesting thought. Bravery had an enemy. Not the thing to be brave against, but bravery itself. Its name was and forevermore will be fear. "Being fearless is not as simple as it seems," said Chorus aloud as she stepped out of the shower. "It might even be im-

possible. I wonder if it is." She brushed her teeth for two minutes and tugged on her pajamas. Then she crawled into bed, the idea that being fearless was impossible haunting her thoughts as she drifted off to sleep.

At the next choir class, Chorus noticed Miss Macintosh was not her bouncy, bright self. She seemed subdued. After class, Chorus thought she ought to ask what was the matter. "Is there any trouble, Miss Macintosh? You seem awfully quiet today." Miss Macintosh sighed.

"Nothing too important, Chorus. It doesn't matter."

"Something *is* wrong, Miss Macintosh. Please tell me what it is. Maybe I can help."

"I'm afraid to answer a question."

Chorus was confused. "Why?"

"It's a very important question. One my life might actually depend on. I know what I want to say, but is it right?"

"What is the very important question?"

"Will you marry me." She said it like she didn't know whether it was a compliment or an insult. Chorus was all agog.

"Don't you want to, Miss Macintosh? You said so yourself. That's *wonderful!*" Chorus patted her singing teacher's shoulder. "You've gotta do what you think is right. Believe, Miss Macintosh, believe." When she said it, she felt a heat around the place where the locket was dangling.

All too soon, even though it was almost three weeks later, it was the day of the concert. Chorus's chest heaved up and down from nerves (and hyperventi-

lation.) She clutched the dark crimson skirt of her dress and watched as one by one the choir members went on stage and sang. About three minutes before her turn, Chorus grabbed the locket for consolation. There was a creak under her hands. The locket was opening. Inside, there was a single word engraved. *Believe*. When she stood onstage a few moments later, she had one thought only. To believe. When she opened her mouth, it was the most beautiful music ever, almost to rival the nature serenade. In the audience, Lavender listened in rapture. She had one thought only as well. *I want to sing like Chorus.*

EPILOGUE

THREE YEARS LATER, Chorus once again stood behind the curtains of a stage, waiting for someone's turn to sing. But not her own. She, this time, was not waiting in agitation, but in excitement. And she no longer wore the locket around her neck. Lavender did. She watched through Miss Macintosh's (I should say *Mrs.* Macintosh's) announcement about upcoming events, and some kids' singing. Then it was Lavender's turn to perform. Chorus's little sister looked down in the direction of the floor. Only she and Chorus could see the thing she was really looking at. The locket. Then Lavender smiled and began to sing in nearly the same quality as Chorus had three years previously. The locket had said the same thing that was said to Chorus before. *Believe.* ❀



We could tell each other anything there

About Winning

By **Lauren Vanden Bosch**

Illustrated by **Bethany Pardoe**

THE DAY I ABANDONED my best friend was the day I lost myself. With her I was everything, and without her I was nothing.

It was a rainy day, and I was lying on a fluffy pink mat in Ashley's room. There she was, standing, legs crossed, but not enough to hide the trembling. There she was, long dark hair tied back in a messy ponytail, unwashed and uncombed. There she was, biting her nails. Ashley never bit her nails. I had a hard time believing this creature was my best friend. And yet here she was, reduced to a nervous wreck, awaiting my reaction to her unbelievable announcement, "I'm moving away."

My reaction was stalking out of that room without a backward glance. She did not try to stop me.

It turned out I never entered that room again while Ashley lived out her few remaining months there. The very next day during lunch I made a beeline straight for Jennifer and Tiffany's table. I avoided catching Ashley's eye. Instead I focused on laughing to Tiffany's incredibly stupid jokes. Ashley was much funnier.

I called my mom on my cell after school.

"Hello, Mom."

"Hi, June."

"Mom, can you drive me home?"

"Honey, don't you want to walk home with Ashley?"

"Well... I want you to drive me to Tiffany's house. She invited me over."



Lauren Vanden Bosch, 12
Grand Rapids, Michigan



Bethany Pardoe, 12
Nelson, British Columbia,
Canada

"Homework?"

"None. Mom, I always finish my math. It's easy."

I could hear a sigh on the other end. "Coming." Then she hung up.

So that's how my life became—going over to Tiffany's house and watching horror movies with her and Jennifer, eating junk food, and making Tiffany's mother angry. It wasn't ideal, but I thought I handled it really well, until the day Ashley moved away. That day I spent sitting on my bed, clutching a bowl in my lap in case I threw up. It was a good excuse for staying home. After all, I had thrown up more than once as a result of eating too much junk food at Tiffany's. Though that day I don't think my nausea was caused from an upset stomach.

AT DINNER a month later Dad mentioned he'd be coaching cross-country at school. I had already signed up and when I told him he was delighted. "But Dad," I said, "I'm short. I won't be very fast."

"Nonsense," he said. "You're very athletic. I'm sure you'll have a medal in no time."

That's when I knew I had to get first place. Otherwise no one would ever treat me like a thirteen-year-old girl again. No girl my age was as short as I was, although Ashley had been pretty close.

My mom broke into my thoughts. "Pass the potatoes, dear," she said. "And oh, that reminds me, a new family is moving next door. The Reeds. And, June," she turned

to me triumphantly, "they have a daughter your age!"

I sunk into my chair. Great, I thought. A new girl. I will have to walk her to school and be her friend and listen to her sniveling. "What's her name?"

"Melissa."

I hated Melissa Reed.

IT WAS THE DAY before cross-country was to begin and I decided to go for a run. I pulled on black running capris and a neon-green T-shirt. I used an athletic headband to keep my hair out of my face, then tied my black ponytail with a hairband. Bronze skin, shoulder-length black hair, short but strong. That was me.

I ran out the front door into the crisp, fall air, heading down the sidewalk. Suddenly I stopped short. There was a moving truck in the driveway of Ashley's house. A door opened and a tall, slender girl with a dark brown ponytail came out. She turned and looked at me.

Her eyes. They were cold, cold blue eyes. Under her gaze I felt vulnerable. Turning, I sprinted up the street, rounded a corner, and slowed into a jog. Her eyes were still there, imprinted in my mind. I couldn't shake them away.

Without meaning to, I took the route to the park Ashley and I always used to go to if we had anything serious to talk about. I crept underneath the willow tree next to the lake where we used to conceal ourselves. We could tell each other anything there.

Ashley.

I got up and ran away from that place. Tears blurred my vision. I tripped and fell on the pavement, lay there, sobbing. Ashley. Ashley. Why don't you come back?

I heard footsteps behind me and turned, still crying. For one stupidly hopeful moment I thought it was Ashley, but then the cold blue eyes made themselves known and hatred consumed me.

"Go away!" I shouted. "Go away, go away, go *away!*"

She stared at me with wide eyes, then sprinted away. I watched her fade into the blurry background of birdsong and swaying trees. Then I laid my head down on the hard pavement and knew no more.

My mom came to get me later. She said nothing, only looked at me anxiously and wiped my tears with an old handkerchief. It was already wet, perhaps from her own tears. I was too sleepy, my face raw from crying and my head aching, to care. My last thought before I fell asleep was, cross-country tomorrow.

I woke up. Cross-country today.

I walked Melissa to school, sat with her in the classroom and at lunch, navigated her to her classes and to the bathroom, listened and answered her questions and was her all-out friend for an entire day. It was exhausting. I couldn't look forward more to cross-country. No Melissa there.

How wrong I was.

I suppose through my haze of tears the day before I hadn't noticed she was wearing running capris and tennis shoes just like me. But there she was, and quickly she sidled up to me. Groan.

My dad whistled piercingly. Everyone covered their ears.

"All right, cross-country! I'm Mr. Whitley and over there is my daughter, June."

Everyone's heads swivelled over to me. I glared at my dad. He grinned back, then said, "Run sixteen times around the soccer field. *Go!*"

Melissa was off like a bullet shot. She whizzed around the field faster than anyone. I was angry. The new girl couldn't beat everyone else. I forced my legs to pump faster, harder. Several others began to do the same. I passed others and got in front. Then I was right behind Melissa. I ran up to her and shoved her, hard, then sprinted away. Only one more lap to go. Melissa hadn't fallen. She was right behind me.

"Are you just doing this for your dad?"

Gosh, she didn't even sound breathless. My breath caught in my chest and I wheezed. "Of course not. I love to run," I said.

"So do I." She paused a moment before saying, "But maybe you care more about winning."

"Shut up," I said before sprinting away. Only a hundred meters to go.

She was right behind me. And then she shoved me. Lightly, as if a reminder. Then she took off, ponytail flying in the wind. I was momentarily shocked before I started running again. Something was bothering me.

Who did she remind me of?

I slowed at the edge of the soccer field,

deep in thought. Looked at her, shook my head. I didn't know.

But I was to find out very soon.

IT WAS THE DULL, rainy day of my first meet. I ran outside the school building while hail bit into my skin like mosquitoes. I scanned the after-school crowd anxiously. Where are you, Dad? I thought, biting my lip. Seconds from a nervous breakdown, I located the van, shiny with rain, in the parking lot. I climbed in and collapsed on the back seat.

"Hi, June," my father said, while distractedly navigating through the busy parking lot. "Melissa's parents didn't want to drive her in this weather so I offered to take her. Hope you don't mind."

I glanced at the back seat. Melissa sat upright, legs crossed, hands folded in her lap. She looked very tense. Directing her piercing glare at me, she said, "My parents didn't want me to go. But I came anyway. They need me, you know, if we're going to get a decent shot at this thing."

I regarded her coldly. I knew why she came. To beat me. I knew because it was the same reason I begged my mom to let me go to the meet. Even though we were only a few feet away, those few feet pulsed with constrained hatred. I pointedly turned to stare out the rain-spattered window. We'll see who the better runner is, I thought decisively.

This meet was a big one. Middle school teams all across the state came to compete. There would be over 600 runners. The very thought made me feel cold. I

remember what Dad had said yesterday. "Push yourself hard. Pass people. Keep in mind the first fifty runners get medals."

I wanted to get a medal. But more than that I wanted to beat Melissa.

The meet was all sound and activity. Tents waved back and forth in the wind like brightly colored flags in a dull gray sky. Smells of hot dogs and popcorn permeated the air. Teenagers in uniforms stretched and ate and drank. Parents hugged and kissed their kids. Stressed coaches shouted out last-minute reminders. And finally, there we were, lined up in a perfect row. We were in box number seven. It's considered a lucky number. Of course, I don't believe in luck. Luck is a fantasy. I planned on winning this race, beating Melissa, not by chance but by skill.

Poised on the starting line, I was full of electricity and aware of everything around me. Melissa's rapid breathing. The blister on my right toe. A drop of rainwater (or was it sweat?) that trickled down my neck. My dad's warm, damp palm on my back. The encouraging whisper of a teammate. Wind in my ears. Rain. Conversation. Silence. And finally, the shrill note of a whistle.

I shot off the starting line like a wild animal from a cage. I was free. *Free*. I flew like a bird toward open skies. The labored breathing and scuffling of shoes of those around me was muted by my emotions. Everything else seemed to fall away, it was only me, me running. But suddenly I heard someone approaching behind



A memory of Ashley and me popped into my head, unbidden

me. Not just anyone. I'd practiced with that girl too long not to know the sound of those rhythmic breaths by my ear. My hair stood on end. Ran, ran, adrenaline coursing through my bloodstream, pushing ahead through the vast crowd of ponytailed runners. Ran because I hated her. Hated her for coming and taking Ashley's place. For being a better runner. For being her, Melissa.

In my frenzy of anger and loathing I almost didn't hear the strangled sound behind me. I was running up a very steep hill and my breaths were becoming louder until I heard almost nothing else. But

I heard. And I turned, just for a second. What I saw made my heart stop.

In the blinding blur of moving bodies I saw a prone figure lying on the pavement. Long gangly legs. A leg twisted behind her. Blood oozing off her elbow. Brown hair falling over her face. Something froze within me. The brown hair. That was the person Melissa reminded me of. Ashley. The shade of brown was very similar. And now, looking at her motionless on the ground, a memory of Ashley and me popped into my head, unbidden. She and I were seven, learning how to ride bikes. I was pedaling faster and faster in

my eagerness. Ashley struggled to keep up with me. Suddenly her bike crashed into a tree. She fell on the sidewalk and started bawling, the hair falling over her face. Just like Melissa. And what was the difference, really? I hadn't liked Ashley right away. Why hadn't I given Melissa a chance? And Ashley? Why had I abandoned her? This was my fault, all my fault.

I took off down the hill against the tide of runners. Several gave me startled looks. I pushed past them all and reached Melissa. Kneeling by her side, I realized I had no idea what to do. Comfort her? Heal her wounds? Impossible. Help her back to the starting line? I decided to do that.

"Melissa." My voice sounded weak, trembling. I started again. "Melissa."

She made no response.

"Melissa." I shook her gently. She opened her eyes. They were not cold eyes. They were eyes full of pain. "Melissa, do you think you could make it back to the starting line if I helped you?" Dazed, she nodded. I took hold of her by the arm—careful not to touch her bleeding elbow—and heaved her to her feet. As she leaned against me, we slowly hobbled away from the river of runners and back to the starting line.

My dad carried Melissa over to a bench while her parents hovered nearby, dabbing her wounds with tissues and cheering her up. I was standing slightly aside, watching them, as my dad came up to me.

"She only has a sprained ankle and some bleeding on her arm and knee.

Nothing major," he told me. Then he lowered his voice and said, "June, I'm very proud of you. You did the right thing. If you had gotten first place I still wouldn't have been as proud."

I didn't know what to say to this. I was relieved. He wasn't angry at me for not completing the race. Even though we wouldn't win this meet (Melissa was right about her being crucial for the team), he didn't look frustrated, disappointed, or cross. Instead he put his arm around me and I leaned into his tall frame. Perhaps someday I'd be as tall as him. It was a cheering thought.

Turning now to the sound of cheering, I saw a girl cross the finish. She accepted a medal with breathless joy. Fiftieth place. And it wasn't me, but her, who had gotten it.

But then I realized something about winning. You can't win by being mean to your best friend, or to the new kid whom you have no reason to hate. I realize now she had been right: I cared more about winning that medal than running, or being kind to her, or remaining friends with Ashley despite the distance that separated us. I didn't realize that what I needed to win was not a medal, but a friend. A friend that could help you be a better person. And I, June Whitley, needed help being a better person.

I reached in my pocket and pulled out my cell phone. Dialing her number, I smiled.

"Hey, Ashley? This is June. I'm so sorry about everything..."



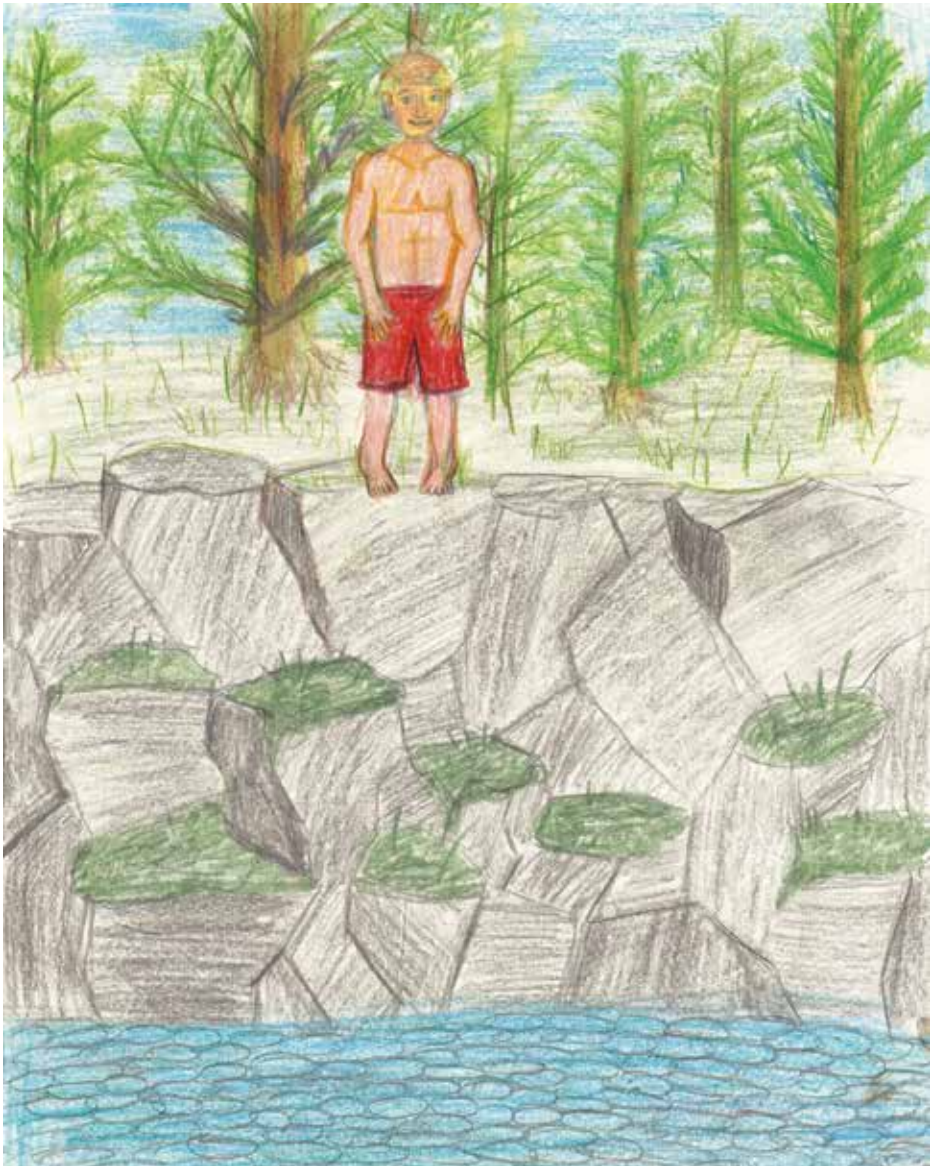
Dreams

By **Jasmine Middaugh**

I see things
I see things that I don't understand
By the time I wake up, they're gone
I try to understand what they mean
but it never comes back
I only remember remnants of my dreams
like people I don't know who are happy or sad
and when I remember the whole dream
I see a big city that I'm looking over like a guardian
but in other dreams, I see it destroyed
I don't tell anyone what I see
or blame myself for letting these dreams get in my head
All I do is see them
just watch them
and the dreams float away without a trace



Jasmine Middaugh, 12
Newark, Delaware



I stand there, soaking up the warmth of the sun

The Leap

By **Josiah Ney**

Illustrated by **Nicola Froese**

I STAND AT THE TOP of the cliff, gazing down at the clear, cool green of the water. I can see the rocky bottom magnified through the river's glassy surface. The sunlight flickers along the cliff, reflecting off the smooth water. I will myself to step closer to the edge, away from the shade of the small firs, and into the sun. I stand there, soaking up the warmth of the sun as it plays over my body. My bare feet grip the rough, gray rock; my toes curl over the edge. A lazy waft of air reaches me from the river, carrying the faint scent of long-gone salmon and the cool soothing smell of the river itself. I gaze down and see the rock dropping away toward the river below. It reaches the water and turns green and mossy as it continues its downward journey. Little eddies of pine needles gradually drift down the river toward the faint sound of the rapids. I tense my muscles, hesitate, in a moment of indecision, and then I jump. The wind whips by me, no longer a faint whisper, and I windmill my arms to stay balanced. I glimpse the water rising to meet me as I point my toes and enter the water. I sink—down to the tranquil depths—before rising slowly to the surface. My feet sting, but I have done it. I grin my silent jubilation as I swim to the cliff and begin the climb once more. 🍄



Josiah Ney, 13
Gold River, British Columbia,
Canada

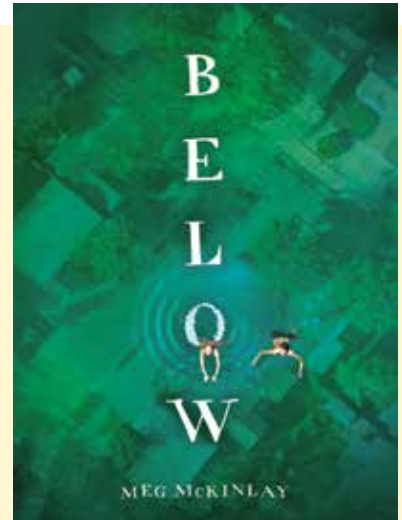


Nicola Froese, 12
Vancouver, British Columbia,
Canada

Book Review

By Sundari Arunarasu

Below, by Meg McKinlay, Candlewick Press:
Massachusetts, 2013; \$15.99




Sundari Arunarasu, 11
Portland, Oregon

ANYONE WOULD THINK that if you drowned a town with five thousand swimming pools of water, it would be done and gone, forgotten forever! But twelve-year-old Cassie knows that everything has a way of revealing itself, sooner or later. Since she was a little girl, Cassie was always interested in the town that the mayor, Mr. Finkle, had drowned by flipping a lever. Cassie would draw pictures and look for newspaper articles about the drowned town because that was the day she was born. She was born early, so she had to swim laps every day to keep her lungs healthy. One day, curiosity gets the better of her and she decides to swim in the lake with the drowned town instead of the usual swimming pool.

I can relate to Cassie well because I have always been a curious person and have wanted to know more about things. I also am a swimmer and love the water. Cassie has always wanted to know more, and when she finds out her classmate Liam has the same interest as her, everything starts piecing together. Liam's dad was in an accident the day Liam and his twin brother were born. His brother died at a very young age.

Cassie and Liam start exploring the lake, going underwater and catching glimpses of the old town. Their search doesn't give

them any results for a while. One day, however, they see something sticking out of the water. It is the fire tree, what they used back in the old town for spotting fires. Little by little, more of the water is gone, and the first platform on the tree is above the water. There is one problem, though! The mayor, Mr. Finkle, doesn't want any memories from the old town, and seeing the fire tree would just remind everyone about their old lives. He plans to fill the lake with water again. Mr. Finkle seems like a person who would always want things to go his way. He always seems kind of suspicious and careful around everyone when Cassie and Liam find the fire tree. A few days later, they find a shed under the water while exploring the town. They break into the shed and see a brand new red car. Cassie and Liam find that very peculiar because no one would want to trash a car on purpose, especially a new one. When they solve the mystery of the red car, it is destined to change everyone's life forever.

My favorite part of the book is when Cassie makes it to the fire tree the very first time. She has never swum such a long distance before, and when she finally makes it, Cassie has accomplished something special. I think the author, Meg McKinlay, makes everything so realistic you feel like you are part of the story. I found myself hoping, aspiring, anticipating, and envisaging that Cassie would figure out the mystery. It is also sad and melancholic to think that a whole town has been drowned and no one will ever see it again. I recommend this book to anyone who likes a mystery full of surprises to keep you on the edge of your seat. 



"Can I ask you something? Why are we moving?"

Believing

By Isabel Folger

Illustrated by Posy Putnam

“**W**E’RE WHAT?!!” I GASPED, blinking in disbelief. “*Moving, Naomi. To Hawaii.*” My dad looked like he was torn between which expression to wear: excited or sympathetic. He ended up looking understanding when he was talking to me, and thrilled when he looked at my eight-year-old sister, not that she needed it. Peyton was practically bouncing off the walls, squealing with delight. I guess I should have been happy too, but after twelve years of growing up here, with my friends, I wasn’t. A vacation to Hawaii would have been nice. But living there? And then there was the weight in my mind that I had been pushing away for about a year and a half, ever since... No, I thought, tears brimming in my eyes, I didn’t want to think about it.

Meanwhile, Peyton was screaming, “Woohoo! We’re moving to Hawaii! The water’s as warm as a swimming pool—Katie told me!” Katie had one daughter, Selena, who was Peyton’s age. The two had already become best friends. Selena’s parents were divorced, and Katie had been Dad’s girlfriend for about a year, the first one since... What am I doing? I thought. Every thought turns back to—no, I *won’t* think about it! I blinked back tears *again* so that Dad wouldn’t see them. The last thing he needed was more stress, and it wouldn’t be fair for me to push mine onto his plate.

“We’ll go to the beach, and I’ll make sand castles every day! Wait’ll I tell...” And then it hit her. She slowly looked up at Dad, her lower lip quivering. “Papa?” she said, her voice shaking as



Isabel Folger, 12
Santa Cruz, California



Posy Putnam, 13
Oxford, England

the realization finally caught up with her. "What about my friends?"

"Well...." Dad paused, stalling for time. "You'll be able to call them every day!"

But Peyton wouldn't take it. Tears flooding down her cheeks, she ran out of the room, sobbing, "I'll never see my friends again!"

"Well, actually..." Dad tried to call after her, but she had already reached her room. He looked at me, muttered, "Wish me luck," and strode out of the room after her. I knew that this time it would take a lot of persuasion to win her over.

I sighed and glanced at my watch. It was past lunch time. Stomach growling, I got up lethargically and ambled over to the kitchen to make a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich.

By the time I had finished eating my sandwich, Dad and Peyton were returning to the kitchen. Dad's whole face, I noticed, looked considerably wearier than it had when he had left. Peyton was clutching the teddy bear whom she'd named, not very originally, Teddy. Her tears had dried, but she still bore a melancholy expression. Her appearance was that of a child about three years younger than she; still in her nightgown and slippers from when she'd come down to breakfast, her curly hair a tangled mess on the back of her neck, holding an oversized teddy bear tightly around the neck.

"Can I ask you something?" I asked Dad, clearing my plate as he and Peyton settled down in chairs.

"Of course!"

"Why are we moving?"

"Oh!" he looked around, searching for the right words. "Well," he said finally, "Katie and I had some... special news that we're going to share with you... *together*."

Katie? I thought, glancing at the clock again. She's supposed to be back any minute now from the airport, after visiting her family in... Hawaii. Anyway, what could Dad be talking about? Special news, what spe... And then it hit me, smack in the head, like a snowball. No, I thought, no, no, no! But Katie was already knocking on the door—Dad was answering it—they were walking over to us, hand in hand, Selena scurrying up behind them...

"OK," Dad announced, once we'd greeted Katie and Selena. "As I've mentioned, Katie and I have something special to tell you." I winced, noticing that he squeezed her hand when he said "special." Don't get me wrong—I love Katie. She's really sweet, she's usually the only one to laugh at my corny jokes, and I've never had a boring afternoon while she's been around. It's just that no one could ever replace my mother, and—I'd thought Dad had the same opinion.

My heart pounded in my chest as Katie opened her mouth. "We're"—wait for it—"getting married!" Peyton and Selena started jumping up and down, squealing. My stomach dropped, but I planted a smile on my face. Thankfully, no one seemed to notice that only my lips were smiling.

ON THE DAY we found out about Dad and Katie's engagement,

Katie had brought home a pizza and cupcakes she'd picked up on the way home. We held a little sort of party in the living room, just the five of us. Dad turned up the radio and, after hearing the story of their engagement twice, we played round after round of charades, laughing and eating. For that one evening, I forgot all about what had been burdening me ever since I found out we were moving.

When we'd reached our fourth round of charades, Peyton was hopping around in a circle, whipping her hands in the air.

"A horse!" Katie guessed. Peyton shook her head.

"No, a horse rider!" Again, Peyton shook her head.

"A cowboy!" Dad boomed.

"No!"

"Ooh, I know!" Selena was jumping out of her seat. "A cowgirl!"

"Right!" Peyton shouted over the radio, taking her seat in between Katie and Dad. I turned the radio way down.

"I forgot to ask," I said, turning to Dad. "When are we moving?"

"Wednesday, next week," he replied with a glance at the calendar hanging on the wall next to him. I nodded slowly, but they'd already gone on to talking about something else and didn't notice.

WHEN YOU WANT a week to last forever, it's usually gone in the blink of an eye. I wanted our last week at home to go slowly, and it did, but with every moment that crawled by, I felt a pang of sorrow about what was ahead of

me... and what I was leaving behind.

Tuesday afternoon, Dad, Peyton, and I were walking to Katie and Selena's apartment, which was only a mile away from ours. I soon fell behind and told them I would catch up with them later.

At the next crossing, I turned right instead of left. This would be the last time I would get to do this.

When I reached the graveyard, I retraced the steps I'd followed so many times. Before I realized it, I was in front of the white gravestone, already bent on my knees towards the ground. The usual tears had filled my eyes and were spilling onto my cheeks. I didn't bother to wipe them away.

I turned my teary eyes towards the message on the gravestone, the lettering swooping and curving.

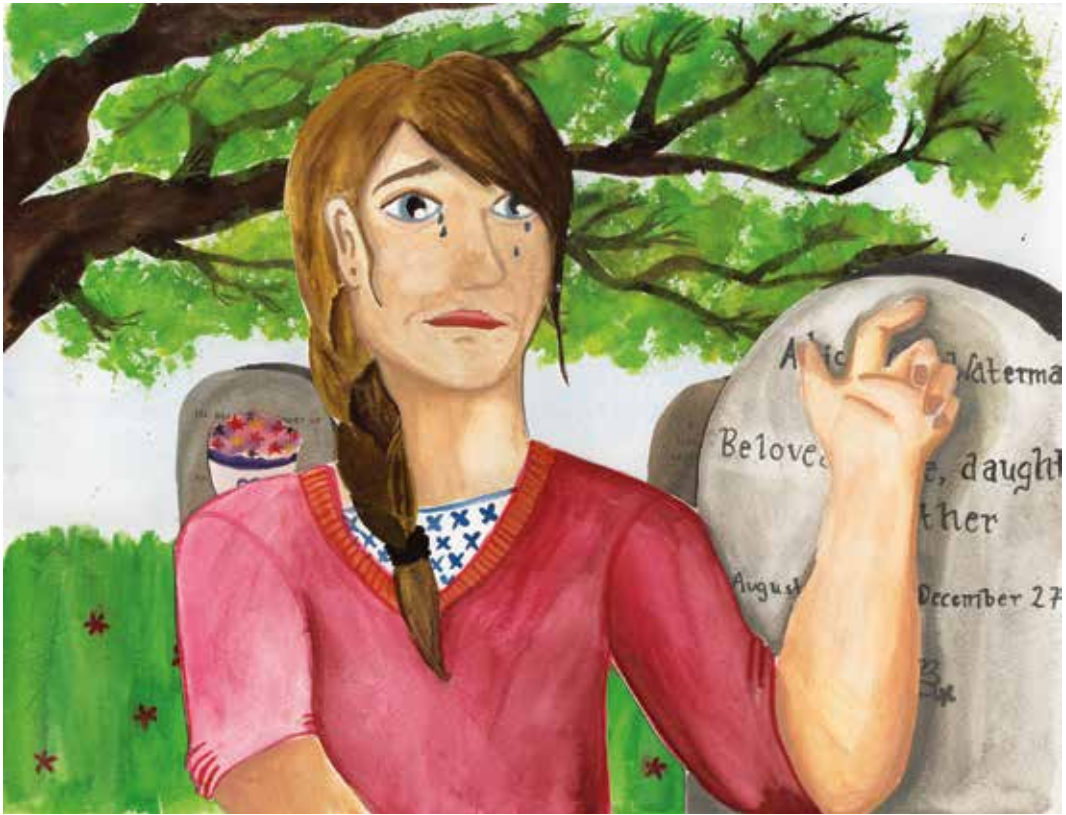
Alicia Roy Waterman

Beloved wife, daughter, mother

August 13, 1968–December 27, 2011

I rubbed my hand over her name, and then it slowly glided over to the word *mother*. Somehow, I could feel her presence just by being here, where her body had been buried. I knew that when we moved to Hawaii, I would lose my last connection with her. But Dad had already sold our house; there was no turning back.

Tears still blurring my vision, I stood up and turned to go. I felt my foot hit a jagged rock on the ground, my hands flying out helplessly as I tripped. My head collided with the hard stone, and dull pain



Somehow, I could feel her presence just by being here

surged through my brain, quickly spreading to my shoulders. Before I realized what was happening, dead grass was the only thing between me and the ground. A wave of shock hit me sharply as I fell, and the faint colors that had been blurred by my tears became steadily darker, swiftly turning into blackness without giving me a chance to object.

I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL, the constant drone of bustling nurses drowned in my feelings. Peyton and Dad were with me, Peyton's curly blond head buried into Dad's gray coat because she didn't want

to look, to believe what was happening. I pulled back the thin covers and sucked in my breath. I heard a nurse mutter, "Skin cancer," to another nurse, with a glance down at her.

She was lying there, her face drained of all color and strength. Her eyes opened for a fraction of a second, and I hoped against hope that they wouldn't close.

I leaned in towards her and whispered what I had wanted to be the last words she'd heard from me. "I love you."

A smile flickered, not across her lips, but in her eyes. Taking what was clearly all the strength she could muster, she opened

her mouth. “I-I...” I grasped her hand, trying to push life back into her.

“You what, Mama? What is it?” I begged.

“I...” And then her eyes closed. I could almost see the shadow of death creeping over her wan complexion. She was gone.

And she still hadn’t finished.

SOMEONE WAS SHAKING ME. I opened my eyes.

Katie was hovering over me, clearly relieved that I’d awakened. “Naomi? Are you OK?”

I touched my head and felt a washcloth there, soaked in cold water. “I’m fine,” I murmured.

Katie got up and pulled Dad aside, who had stood a little behind her. Katie had some medical experience, having worked as a firefighter for six years before she had divorced and moved.

“How is she?” Dad asked.

“She’s fine,” Katie whispered. “It’s not as bad as it looks. She just needs a few hours’ rest.”

I heard Dad mutter “thanks” with a sigh of relief, come over to me, and lay his warm hand on my forehead, saying, “It’s going to be all right.” I wasn’t paying attention, though. I was thinking about my dream. It had seemed so vivid, so real, and I knew why... It wasn’t a dream. It was a memory.

DAD WAS A POET. Unfortunately, people don’t usually make that much money off of writing poetry, even if

they’re great at it, like my dad was.

Before he died, my grandpa, Dad’s dad, had a high position in a wealthy industry. Being an only child, Dad inherited all the money he’d saved. Off of that, he was able to do what he loved without worrying about financial stress. He wasn’t rich, but we were able to live a comfortable life.

On the day I woke up from falling unconscious at the graveyard, Dad sat me down. He told me that he’d seen me take the wrong turn and that he’d known where I’d been going, but that he’d wanted to let me have my time. He told me how, after not seeing me for twenty minutes, he’d gone back to the graveyard, looking for me, and how I’d been lying there, blood all over my forehead. According to Katie, it turned out that there was only a small cut, but it had looked worse because the blood had smeared. As he was telling me this, I was hoping that he’d say we were going to stay just a couple more weeks while I recovered, but no such luck.

Then he became serious, and when he spoke, he looked straight into my eyes. “I want to ask you something, Naomi. Why did you go today?”

I looked at my knees, pondering whether or not I should tell him the truth. I finally decided to come out with it. “Well... since... since she died, I... I’ve felt like that graveyard was... was...” I burst into tears. Dad pulled me into a hug and wiped my tears with a tissue so I could finish my sentence. “...was the only place I could still be with her.” I said it

fast, so I could get it out without pausing to cry before I'd finished. We sat like that for a few minutes, until I couldn't shed one more tear and we could talk without interruption.

"Sweetie, why do you feel this way?"

"Because... well, because it's where she was buried." Why else? I thought.

Dad sat back and was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Honey, do you miss what she looked like? Is that really what you miss about her?"

"No!" I shot at him.

"I thought so." His voice softened. "You miss her personality. Her heart. Her soul." I nodded reluctantly, wondering where he was going. "But that's the thing," he continued. "Souls never die. Only bodies die. Her body itself is dead, but her soul will always remain alive, in the world, in others, in you. Once you can believe that, I can assure you, it will be a lot easier."

Then he got up and left, leaving me in my room to go over the millions of thoughts that had just entered my head in those last few seconds.


THE NEXT DAY was a blur of packing, driving, and flying. Within the next week, we had finished moving in and started to prepare for the upcoming wedding. Before I realized it, I was at the beach in Hawaii, Dad stretched out in a beach chair next to me. Katie, Selena, and Peyton were by the shore, building a sand castle.

I gave Dad a pleading look. He said, "Need to clear your head? Me too. Let's go for a walk."

We began to make our way up the shore wordlessly. I was absorbed in my thoughts about what had happened the previous week, about our conversation, and about my dream. It was now fresh in my mind again, as if it had happened yesterday. The thought that Mama hadn't been able to finish what she was saying surged through me again like a knife through my heart. I *thought* I knew what she was going to say, but how could I be sure?

Dad's words were echoing through my mind. *Her soul will always remain alive, in the world, in others, in you. Once you can believe that, it'll be a lot easier.* Believe she was still with me? Yeah, right, I thought. It's not like I'm magical or anything; I can't bring something back if it's already gone.

We'd walked half the length of the beach by then, and all of a sudden, Dad stopped in his tracks and stared at the ground. I stared too, pinched myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming, and stared again. Scrawled in the sand with a stick, in handwriting that was only too familiar, were the words, *I love you too*. I looked up, and I could have sworn I saw Mama's face, barely there, but there nonetheless. I could tell from the expression on Dad's face that he could see her too. At that moment, I realized that she wasn't gone. She had never been gone.

I looked back at her, a smile now plastered across my face, and believed. 

The Fairy House

By **Lucy Hoak**

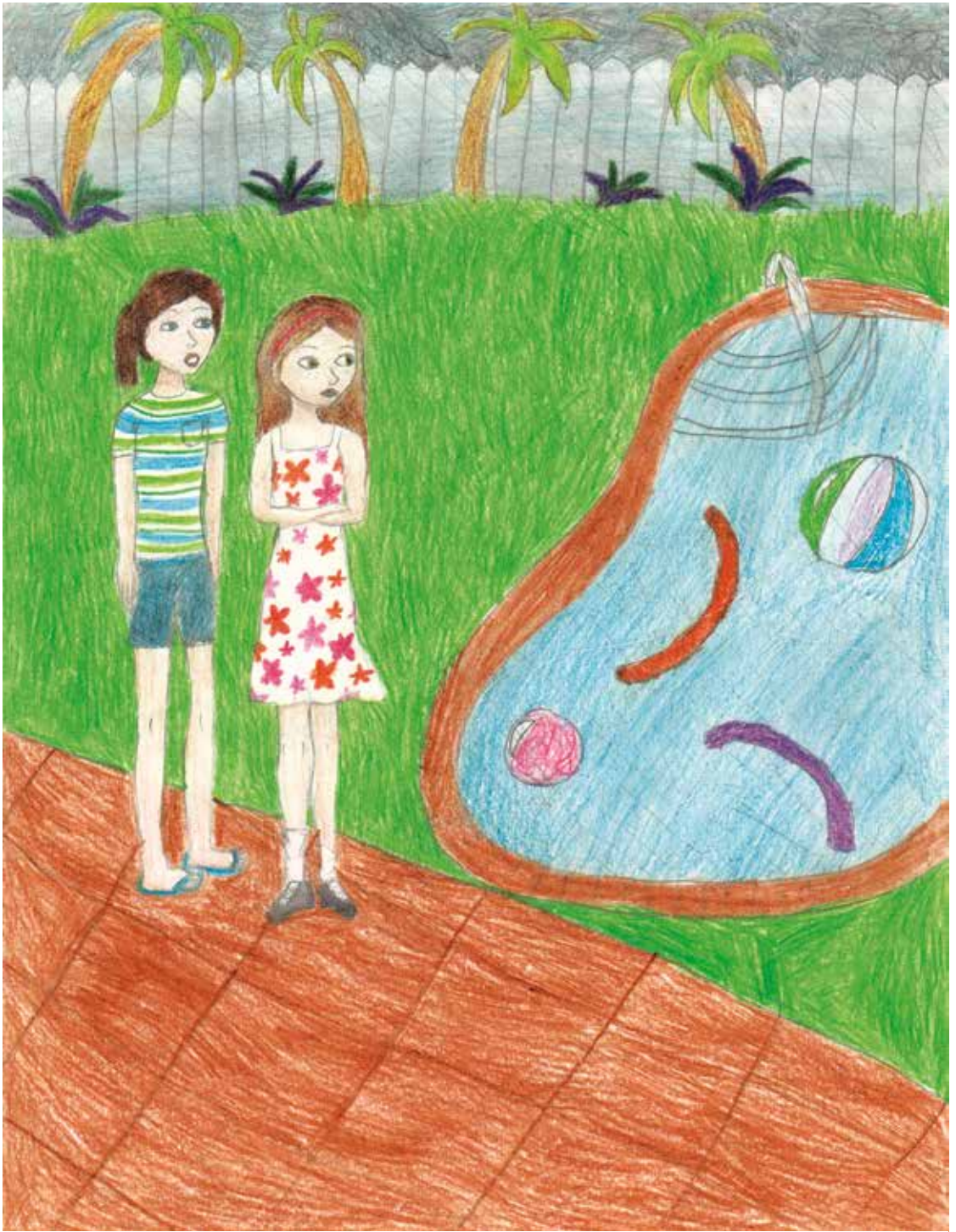
Nestled between two gnarled tree roots
Is a fairy house with
A sunken floor of red clay,
A triangular roof of interlocking sticks,
And a winding path of pebbles leading to a
Bark door.

Inside, a sand-colored stone serves as a nightstand,
And next to it lies a bed with a
Moss mattress and maple leaf bedspread.
A blank scrap of paper
And a pencil sharpened down to an inch
Wait expectantly on the nightstand,
Placed there by the child
Who constructed the fairy house,
With hope of receiving a message from any
Diminutive guests.

But the paper remained as blank as ever,
And the child abandoned her belief of fairies.
Though perhaps
She overlooked the mussed bedspread,
Or disregarded the chip in the bark door,
Or failed to notice the rose petal on the floor.
Perhaps she overlooked the fact that fairies
Cannot write.



Lucy Hoak, 13
Falls Church, Virginia



"You see, if there was no rain, there would be no plants or animals"

Rain

By **Zhimei Xu**

Illustrated by the author

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. I turned over and rubbed my eyes while yawning. I glared at my alarm clock. It looked back at me. Seven o'clock, it said, indifferently. *Beep. Beep.*

A jolt of energy rushed through from the tip of my toes to the top of my head, as if someone zapped me with an electrical wire. I sat up in bed. "Today is the pool party at Lizzy's!" I yelped.

A splatter sounded at my window. I froze suddenly, fear written all over my face. The splatter came again. It was louder this time. The splatter turned into a steady *patter patter patter*. I rushed to my window. It was not the sprinklers. "It can't be! Not today!" My head plopped on top of my pillow and I groaned. "Rain." It seems to me that rain loves to come when you've planned something outdoors.

"Wake up, Gwyn." My mom peeked inside.

"I'm up." I cast the window a dismal glance. "And it's raining."

Mom sighed. "Well anyway, get dressed."

I slid off my bed and trudged towards my closet. I picked out a white dress with pink and orange flowers. It had two thin straps.

Breakfast was disgraceful. I accidentally dropped a hard-boiled egg, still in its shell. As I was bending down, my elbow touched something dewy. Next thing I knew, something pulpy and orange was on the floor.

"Gwyneth Williams! You spilled your orange juice," said Mom.



Zhimei Xu, 11
Miami, Florida

I groaned. “I hope the rest of the day doesn’t go like this.”

When Mom drove over to Lizzy’s, it started to rain again. Sometimes it would start and sometimes it would stop. The weather seemed uncertain whether to rain or to shine. Our gray Ford turned around a corner and *whoosh!* The rain suddenly poured down, beating fiercely on the windows of the car.

“What’s a pool party with rain?” I groaned. A thin branch of light popped up from the distance. It disappeared as quickly as it came. A deep rumble almost like a lion’s roar sounded.

“And a dash of thunder,” said my mom. “Well, that means you can’t swim. Water is a good conductor of electricity.”

Our car swerved around another corner. A very long two-story house appeared. “Lizzy’s house,” I murmured. “Bye, Mom.”

“Take care, Gwyn!” said Mom, waving her hand.

I smiled and sprinted across the freshly mown grass. I stood in front of the door, not exactly sure if it was rain dripping down my legs or sweat. I pressed the round white button next to the door. Lizzy’s mom answered. Her chestnut hair was sprinkled with gray specks near the forehead. “Hello. Lizzy’s in her room with her cousins.”

“Thanks,” I replied, adjusting my

orange bag.

My feet crawled up a flight of stairs, my shoes going *squish-squash*. Lizzy’s room was at the end of the hallway, yet I could still hear shrieks of laughter followed by a “My goodness! Is that true?” Not wanting to be an eavesdropper, I pushed the door and went in.

“Hi, Gwynnie,” said Lizzy, smiling her oh-why-hello-I-didn’t-see-you-there smile. Her black-brown hair was tied into a ponytail and she was wearing a blue and green striped shirt.

“Hey Liz,” I responded. I dropped my bag into the corner and plopped down on the purple beanbag. Lizzy’s cat meowed loudly. “Hi James,” I greeted the cat.

“It would have been a pool party if it wasn’t raining, so I guess we’ll have to do something else,” said Lizzy. “Do you remember last year? Boy, that was fun!”

I smiled as I recalled the event. It was a very hot day, but not uncomfortably hot. The tall palms swayed in the breeze. Children laughed as someone did an explosive cannonball. People scrambled out of the pool as Lizzy came out of the house with lemonade. I remember the sweet-and-sour taste of the lemonade, the ice cubes crowded together on the surface of the lemonade. I recall the cat, James, coming out of his hiding place and terrifying half a dozen girls in the process. Oh yes, I remember that day.

This is very peaceful.
I feel bad for the girls
that are inside.

"Too bad it's raining, though," said Julie, one of Lizzy's cousins. Her hay-colored hair was plaited into two braids. She wore a T-shirt that said *Go Team!* on it.

Lizzy's other cousin, Mina, sneezed. "You know," she said, wiping her nose, "sunshine and flowers and a blue sky everyday wouldn't be so great. Even if it is beautiful, it wouldn't be special anymore."

"You have a good point, Mina," I said. "It wouldn't be so special."

"Well anyway, we talked enough. Who wants to play some Wii?" Lizzy asked, rising to leave. A chorus of agreement echoed around. I followed everyone into the living room.

An hour or so passed. The girls were arguing about who got to play, and my ears were starting to ache. Not wanting to make a scene, I went outside quietly. They didn't even notice. I breathed in the fresh air. It smelt like damp earth. Worms wiggled out of their flooded homes. The rain dwindled down to a drizzle and birds sang their merry songs again. Palms were abundant in the yard, scattered alongside the white fence. Palm fronds reached out like many-fingered hands to grasp every drop of the rain. Pool toys floated on top of the pool like a new style of lily pad.

A drop of rain splashed on my cheek. I sipped my Capri Sun and thought about how much was left and if I should finish it or if I should just wait until I was thirsty. Dancing pink flowers decorated the yard. A faded yellow butterfly floated across

the yard. I watched it flutter its delicate wings. The dew on the grass sparkled as the sun began to slowly appear. A cool breeze blew my hair to the side.

This is very peaceful. I feel bad for the girls that are inside. They may not see the way I do, but I don't care. Let them argue! I smiled. Looking back, I saw the sliding door creak open and there stood Mina.

"Hello!" I grinned at her, trying to be warm and friendly.


"Hello," she said, trying not to show that she was worn out by the argument. "I came here to enjoy the peaceful surroundings."

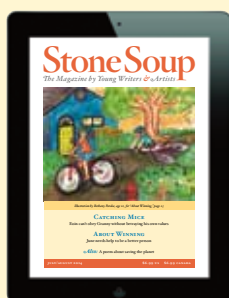
"You like it too?" I asked. I wasn't surprised. I remember when Mina entered a poem contest. She wrote about the plants and animals in Florida.

"Yes," she replied, smiling. "I like nature very much." The topic seemed to please her. "But I like rain too." Seeing the confusion on my face, she quickly added, "But it *is* a bummer that it is raining."

"You see, if there was no rain, there would be no plants or animals. No plants, no peace. No peace, no happiness. You see how it's connected? And besides, who likes seeing sunny day after sunny day, with no variation in between?"

I stared at my shoes, embarrassed at my frustration earlier. "I guess we'll have to enjoy the rain while it lasts."

"And sunshine," said a voice. I spun around. Lizzy winked at me and nodded at the bright shining sun. "Who wants to go first on the diving board?" 



Bonus Materials

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- Editor Gerry Mandel blogs about the featured story from each issue.
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Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll! We receive hundreds of submissions every month by kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

— *The Editors*

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