

StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Isabella Ronchetti, age 13, for "Dancing Birds," page 43

THE SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

What was that white thing fluttering outside Maggie's window?

DANCING BIRDS

Glas makes beautiful mechanical animals in her attic workshop

Also: A family in Mexico celebrates Day of the Dead

StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

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StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



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Editor's Note

Everyone needs a friend. Friends cheer us up when we're sad. They stand up for us if we get bullied. Nature's wonders are more wonderful when shared with someone special. What would a game of *Star Wars* in the park be, without your best buds to share in the fun? Four stories in this issue deal with different aspects of friendship. In "The Scream in the Night," Maggie and Dallas are best friends who had a bad fight. A wild bird brings them together again. Bay, in "First Impression," moves to Minnesota with her mom and has trouble fitting in. Then she meets Rowen. Luke sees a group of boys playing in the park in "Magical Childhood." They remind him that he's never happier than he is with his own friends. In "Dancing Birds," Glas is a good friend to her cousin Maskine when both girls are dealing with sadness. Do you have a best friend? A group of friends? How do you make life better for each other?

— *Gerry Mandel*

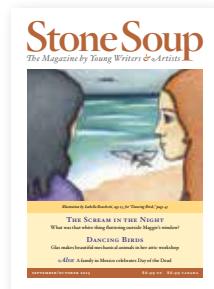
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ON THE COVER Isabella Ronchetti describes herself as an "artist, writer, and sesquipedalian." In addition to drawing, Isabella enjoys reading fantasy, classics, and dictionaries. She writes flash fiction and is working on a novel. See more of Isabella's artwork on her website: isabellaronchetti.com



The Mailbox



I **really love** all the time and effort you put into making this magazine a great one for young writers and artists! As an aspiring author myself, I love reading all the inspiring stories that kids my age write! Every other month I run to the mailbox to get the next issue, and I won't do anything else until I've read *Stone Soup* from front cover to back cover. Thank you for making such a wonderful and fantastic magazine for and by authors and artists!

Sada Kalbach, 11
Seattle, Washington

All of the stories, book reviews, and poems in your magazine are thoughtful and well written, and the May/June issue was no different. I loved the story "Just Don't Quit," by Juliette Shang, because it was about keeping your dreams alive. There was one thing that I didn't like about this issue though. In the review by Jeffrey Huang of *There Will Be Bears* he says in the end, "I would recommend this book to boys and brave girls." I am a girl, and that disappointed me because he made it seem like girls wouldn't be able to handle the book. I agree that some girls don't like scary books, but there are plenty of boys out there like that too. I think that it would have been more accurate to say, "I would recommend this book to brave boys and girls."

Annabelle Baird, 10
Darien, Connecticut

We agree with Annabelle and apologize for not catching this ourselves.
—The Editors

I **want to thank you** so much for publishing my stories. What you do is, in my opinion, incredible! After my five stories were accepted, I feel confident in my writing, as I'm sure all kids published in *Stone Soup* do. I have always wanted to be a writer and this has given me motivation to continue. I recently completed my first novel, *Tall*, and am now trying to get it published. Thanks to my experience in *Stone Soup*, I feel a lot less frightened/confused than I otherwise would've been! Thank you so much!

Shyla DeLand, 13
Remsen, New York

Shyla's latest story, "The Scream in the Night," appears on page  *this issue.*

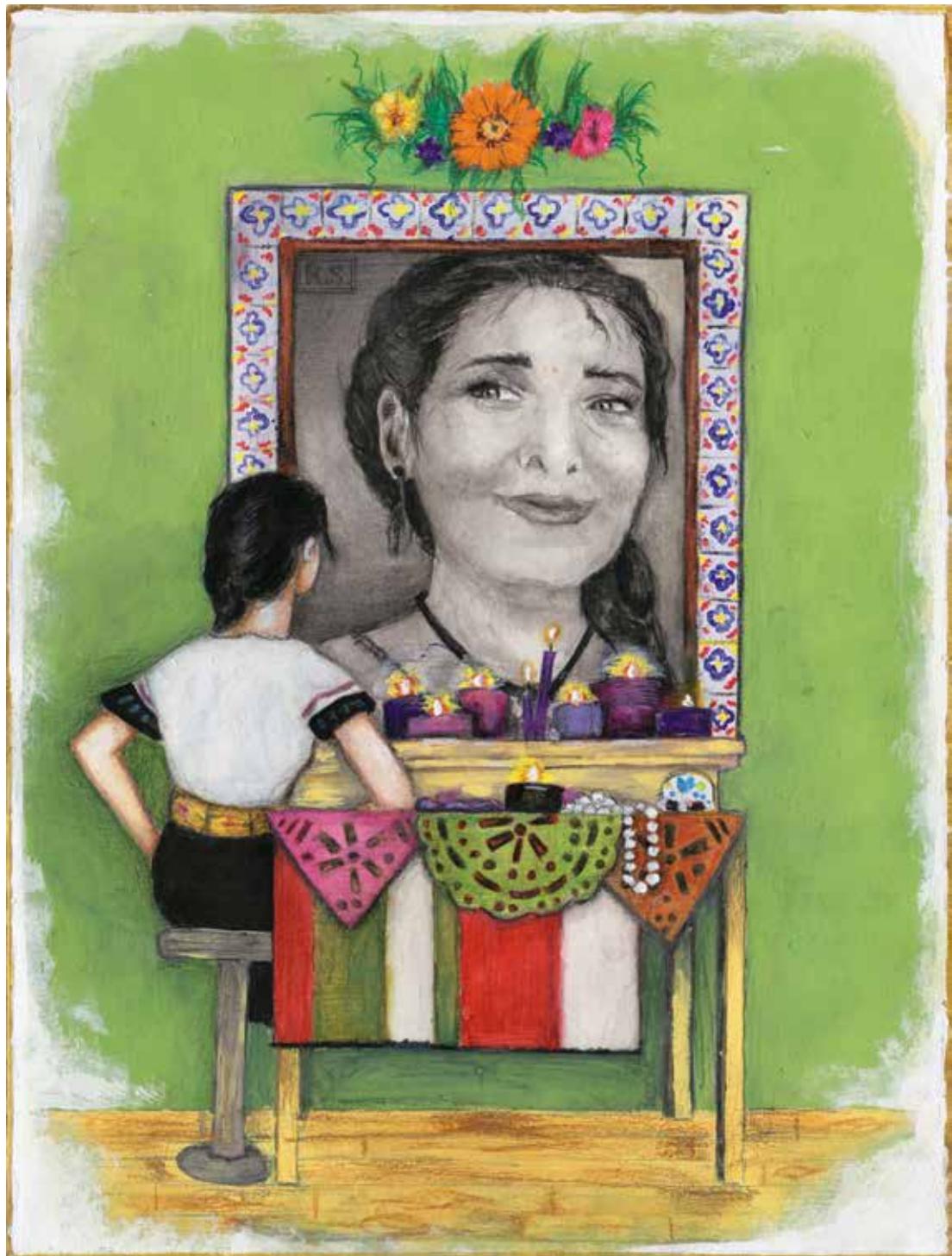
I **have been** an avid reader of *Stone Soup* this year. I appreciate the poems that are deep and make me think hard and the poems that feel light.

Karlee Malcolm, 12
Seattle, Washington

Stone Soup is my favorite! It offers such an inspiring opportunity to kids everywhere! Finding this magazine really sparked my passion in writing and I am so thankful for that. The stories are really fascinating, but I hope that in the future you will add more humorous stories into your magazine as well.

Esha Gautam, 12
Fremont, California

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



"I miss you so much," I whispered, staring at her photo

Spirit of Love

By Sonia Carroll

Illustrated by Ravela Smyth

PERHAPS IT'S BECAUSE we never know what happens to us after dying that makes the topic of death so intriguing. I never thought much of death until I was five years old. I remember asking my mother why the whole city of Guadalupe celebrated my birthday for three days, from October thirty-first to November second. She told me they weren't celebrating my birthday, but rather *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), a holiday to remember all who were gone. I thought about death then but never understood what it really meant. The joyful celebrations every year brushed over the real truth of death. But, four years later, I discovered the true meaning of death. Two days after my ninth birthday on October thirty-first, my abuela (grandmother) died.

"Happy birthday, Josephina!" My papa, mama, and hermana (sister) burst into my room, yelling joyfully. I pressed my fingers into my hazy eyes as a grin spread on my face. I had completely forgotten overnight that my birthday was today. No wonder I had gotten to sleep in so late.

"My thirteen-year-old baby," my mama cooed as she planted a kiss on top of my hair.

"Not quite a baby anymore," my papa grinned broadly, his uneven, jolly smile infectious to us all.

"Mama and I made *pan de muerto* (a special bread for Day of the Dead) and we can eat it for breakfast!" my six-year-old hermana, Abril, belted out while bounding around the room.

Abril pulled me out of bed in my pajamas, and we ran down-



Sonia Carroll, 12
Minneapolis, Minnesota



Ravela Smyth, 12
Northridge, California

stairs, where sure enough there was a large, dense, golden-brown loaf of sweet-smelling bread on the kitchen counter. I frowned, since it was shaped like a skull with orange candies for eyes. It was a reminder to me that since it was October thirty-first, we would not only be celebrating my birthday but remembering my abuela's death.

Mama came down and sliced thick pieces of the bread. Steam curled out of the bread as the knife sawed back and forth. Papa poured us glasses of creamy milk, and we took our breakfast out to the patio facing the street.

The air was crisp and clean, yet the sky was such a clear blue it was like looking at the Gulf of Mexico on a sunny day. I closed my eyes and savored the warm bread crumbling in my mouth.

“Oh this is great, Mama.” I smiled, opening my eyes. Mama hugged me again.

I could see my neighbors in houses across the street setting up their altars. Again, I frowned, because I was reminded that I would have to set up an altar for my own abuela when I went back inside.

“Honey, I know you don’t like remembering that Abuela died, but life sometimes shoves things at us that we don’t like. And the wisest thing we can do is rise to the opportunity to make things better.”

“And how do we make things better?” I sighed.

“We fill our lives with love, passion, laughter, beauty, and joy,” Mama said seriously. And I smiled. It was like her words breathed some life back into me.

After finishing our bread and milk, we headed inside. Papa went to the market to buy food and supplies. In the meantime, Mama, Abril, and I started to set up Abuela’s altar. We laid out a beautiful lace runner on a wooden platform, the base of the altar. It was crocheted with ivory silk thread that was thin as a strand of angel hair. The coy faces of skulls danced up from it, adding zest to the delicate beauty. We then set out Abuela’s pearl necklace and arranged it around a beautiful black-and-white photograph of her. She had been fifty in the picture, yet she looked so young and serene. Her long, thick black hair cascaded over her left shoulder in a braid. Her eyes were a stunning shade of hazel, surrounded by long, dense lashes. She looked firm yet so inwardly kind, which reflected how she used to be all the time. I smiled as I touched the picture. Our memories of her still lived.

Papa came home with bags full of goods. He took out some lovely purple, lavender-scented candles, along with five baskets packed with sweet marigolds. He brought crisp apples that were rich red in color, Abuela’s favorite food. He also brought in Abril’s favorite—colorful sugar skulls. We lined the altar with the candles and apples and put a sugar skull on either side of Abuela’s photograph. As a finishing touch, we sprinkled marigolds over everything and hung a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the wall above the altar. It was simply beautiful.

That night, we lit the candles on the altar.

“I miss you so much,” I whispered, staring at her photo.

“Abuela would be so proud of you. You’re growing up so fast.” Papa patted my shoulder. I smiled. I remembered what Mama said about filling your life with love.

“Love still exists, even when a person dies,” I contemplated. “So I haven’t lost Abuela. Her spirit still lives.”

“Very true,” Mama said quietly. “The altar is filled with our love combined. It is a gift to her spirit.”

Eventually, around eleven, Abril dozed off.

“You should get some sleep too, Josephina,” Mama said, stroking my hair.

“I want to stay up. I just feel like talking with you in front of the altar. It’s relaxing.”

Mama smiled.

“And it’s my birthday, too!” I smiled sheepishly.

Mama and I stayed up all night, talking seriously at some points and laughing until it hurt at others. I finally fell asleep at eight in the morning on November first. I woke up at seven in the evening when I heard Papa making dinner.

“I slept through the whole day!” I wailed when I burst into the kitchen, where Mama and Papa were.

“Most of the celebrating doesn’t start until tomorrow, Josephina,” my papa smiled. “You just needed a little recharge-

ing for tomorrow.”

That night I slept restlessly. I couldn’t wait to go decorate Abuela’s grave and show her I was loyal. And for once since she had died, I couldn’t wait for the festivities, because to dwell on death doesn’t make for a happy life.

Papa, Mama, Josephina, and I all headed down to the gravesite. I remembered how Abuela had always waved and greeted people on Dia de los Muertos, and I felt joy zip through me as I did the same. I saw Papa grinning at me proudly.

We reached Abuela’s grave, and I felt a bit of anxiety. I started to remember her telling me how she felt so tired one day. In my head, the whole sequence of events played. Abuela lying in bed, Abuela not getting up, Abuela not wanting to eat, Abuela getting thinner and thinner, Abuela not having the energy to even kiss me.

“Mama, why wasn’t Abuela the same when she got sick?” I asked, feeling childish.

“Her soul was leaving her body, sucking out who Abuela truly was and leaving emptiness.”

I imagined Abuela’s soul ready to soar from the heavens to visit us on this day, November second, the day of her death and Dia de los Muertos.

“I wish I could see Abuela’s soul when it comes down from heaven today,” Abril



“Welcome home, Abuela,” I whispered

pouted.

“The Aztecs who lived here before us believed that the monarch butterflies that come here in the fall carried the spirits of the dead,” Papa remarked seriously.

I felt my insides light up. “So we see the dead, just in the form of a butterfly?” I asked, again feeling childish.

“I believe that.” Mama smiled peacefully.

We decorated Abuela’s grave with an arch of bright marigolds. As evening approached, bands started playing festive

music, and all around the graveyard, candles and lanterns began to cast their golden rays into the royal-blue dusk. I lighted incense, hoping that the smell would guide Abuela down to earth.

At that moment, I felt a light tickling sensation on my arm. A brilliant orange monarch butterfly had alighted itself on my skin. And I swear, in the black markings on its wings, a word was spelled out. I blinked. The word was still there. *Love*.

“Welcome home, Abuela,” I whispered.



A Moment

By Gertie-Pearl Zwick-Schachter

I roll onto my side,
the grass damp and prickly on my bare legs.
A speckled monarch flits across a big-leaf hydrangea sky.
The breeze tousles the rose bushes, sighs,
then rests.

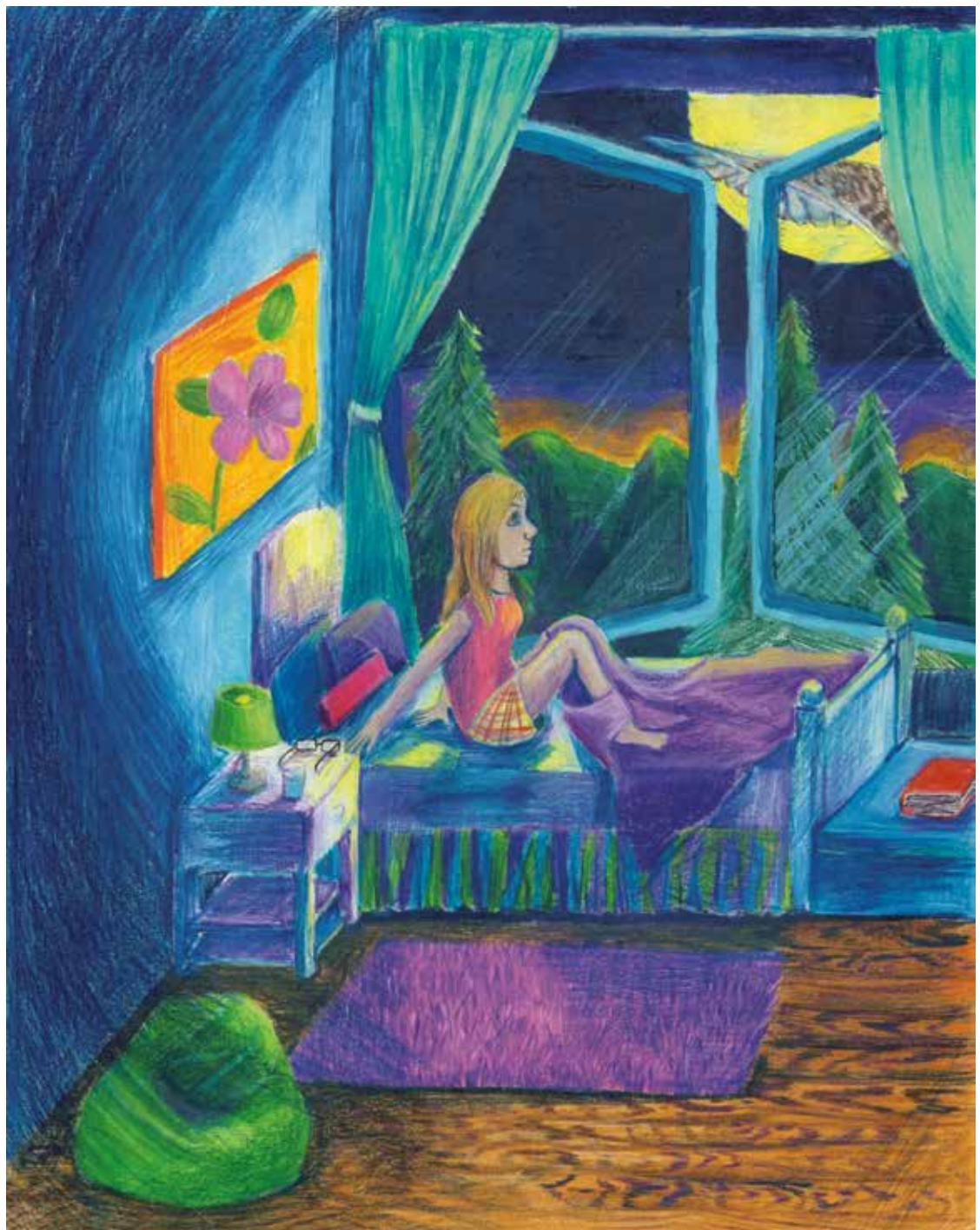
Nature's beauty draws me in, but my own
drowsiness, like the reel of a fishing rod,
pulls me back.

I let the blades pierce my neck, my arms
openly welcoming the chilling sensation
while a tree teases me with its shade, covering
me, then dancing off.

Peace envelops me like the husk of a summer
tomatillo, like the soft petal
of a sleepy tulip.



Gertie-Pearl Zwick-Schachter, 12
New York, New York



Something white fluttered through the trees

The Scream in the Night

By Shyla DeLand

Illustrated by Gabby Heller

IT WAS A HOT SUMMER NIGHT when I first heard the scream. I sat up fast, the blankets tangled around my feet in a sweaty mass of itchy acrylic. My heart was pounding so hard that for a moment I wondered if it had only been a nightmare. But the sound lingered in my ears, steadily ringing, and I decided that it had been a real scream.

I turned to my window and leaned towards it, so close that the screen was brushing my nose. The moon was bright, glowing yellow in the sky, leaving traces of thin light on the trees. I squinted into the darkness, one hand fumbling for my glasses.

Something white fluttered through the trees, dancing along just far enough away that I couldn't tell what it was. My hand closed over my glasses and I slipped them on. The white thing disappeared; I caught a glimpse of it one last time before the green and black trees hid it away.

I lay down again but didn't take my glasses off or try at all to go back to sleep. Instead, I closed my eyes and tried to recreate the image in my mind. I kept picturing that whiteness, fluttering like a flag in the wind. But it didn't make any sense. No animals that I could think of were white and none *fluttered*. I shook my head, puzzled, and tried to turn my thoughts to another subject.

Dallas. I winced. We had fought—big time—and though he'd been my best friend since we were six, I had no idea how to make it up to him. In fact, I could barely remember what we had fought about—only that I had been angry about something



Shyla DeLand, 13
Remsen, New York



Gabby Heller, 12
Vienna, Virginia

he said and he had some amazing comebacks. Did it really matter now?

As soon as daylight crept shyly through my window, I jumped up and popped the screen out of my window. Then, as silently as I could, I leaped out. I landed with a thud. There was dandelion in my teeth and in the dim light I could see grass stains smeared down my pajamas. *Roll, Dallas* would've said. I ran down the lawn in fear of being seen and ducked into the woods. The morning air was cool and misty. Dew clung to my feet. In the tree-tops dozens of birds fluttered and chattered angrily at each other.

My feet found the old familiar path that wound and spiraled through the woods and I followed it without thinking. I hadn't bothered to put shoes on, but, except for the occasional sharp twig, I had nothing but smooth cool earth and slippery soft pine needles to walk on. Dallas and I had used the path so many times I could've done it blindfolded. I couldn't really see where I was going anyway, looking for the white thing.

I bumped into the rope ladder that hung from the treehouse Dallas and I had built the summer before, when we were twelve. It was swinging lazily, which I would've considered normal—except there was no breeze. I narrowed my eyes and started to climb. At the top of the ladder I stopped and swung the door open. Dallas was inside.

"Oh crud," I muttered. My voice sounded raspy.

"Hi," Dallas said. He wouldn't look at

me.

"Hi," I said and slammed the door as hard as I could, then jumped down and started walking away.

"Maggie, you don't hafta leave!" Dallas stuck his head out the window. "It's your treehouse too!"

I kept walking. *Stupid.* I should've known Dallas would be there. He usually slept in the treehouse on warm summer nights. I couldn't even remember why we'd fought, anyway. So why was I still avoiding him?

I hurried back home and managed to pull myself into my window. I pushed the screen in and scrubbed the yellow and green dandelion stain from my chin. Then I threw on a pair of clean shorts and a tank top and hurried into the kitchen. Mom was sitting at the kitchen table with her head in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. I poured a bowl of cereal and sat down across from her.

"Good morning."

She grunted and drained her cup. I couldn't figure out why she drank so much coffee. It didn't seem to help her that much. I considered mentioning this but decided against it.

"Have you seen anything white lately? Like in the woods?" I tried to sound nonchalant.

"No," Mom said slowly. The look on her face suggested that she was about to ask why I wanted to know, so I put a disinterested look on my face and jumped up.

"Later," I said in my best bored-teen

voice.

She was still shaking her head as I hurried outside.

Dad was working in the garden. Sunlight flashed on his shovel and clumps of earth scattered around his feet.

“Dad, can you think of any animals that live around here that are... white?” I asked.

My father frowned, squinting up at the sky as if the answer would be written in the clouds.

“Weasels and snowshoe hares, but only in the winter,” he finally said. “Why? You see something?”

“No,” I lied, “just wondering.”

I walked away, scrunching up my face in thought until I realized that I looked just like my dad. The thought was depressing, and I made sure I kept my face normal, complicated as this mystery was. I wondered how I could figure out what the white thing was. It seemed like I would’ve seen it when I’d gone looking earlier. How was I supposed to find it when it could just disappear? I decided that the best way—the only way—would be to camp out in the woods that night and somehow find the white thing.

By dusk, I had my camping supplies ready: matches, Doritos, a flashlight, and about twenty pounds of candy. I loaded it all into a bag (except the matches—those went in my back pocket) and lay down in bed. I ran through my plan again slowly, making sure I had every detail down.

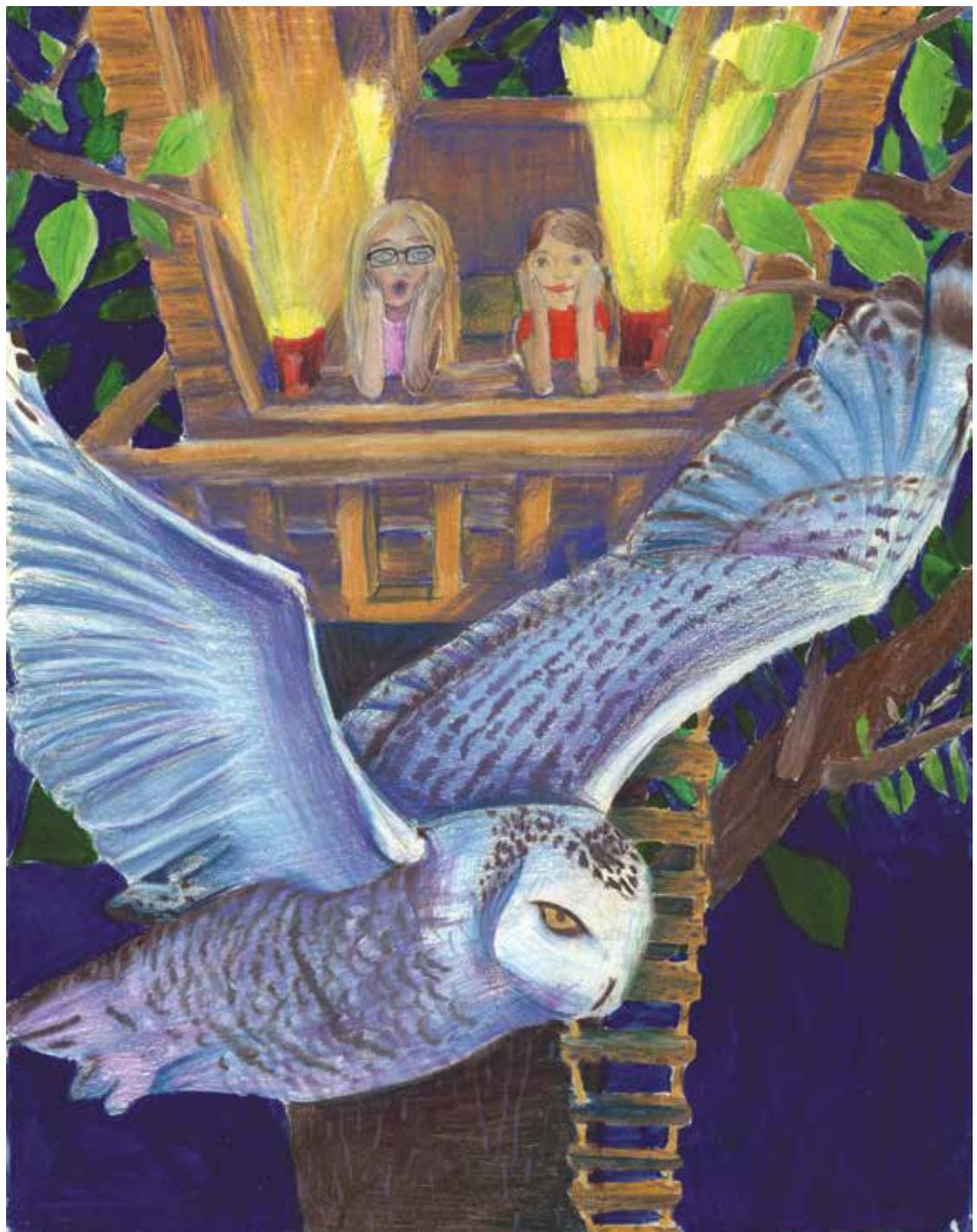
Then I switched on my flashlight and tried to immerse myself in a thick book of Mark Twain’s short stories. All I was waiting for now was my parents to fall asleep. I could hear their voices faintly. It was irritating, since I was getting interested in my book.

Finally, their voices slowed and then I couldn’t hear them anymore. I got up and tiptoed to my door. Nothing. I decided that, just to be safe, I would wait and finish the story I was reading before I snuck out...

The scream woke me. I fell off my bed, my book still open and my flashlight nearly dead. For a moment I was confused, so confused that I tripped twice on my way to the window, practically fell through the screen, and forgot my bag of camping supplies. I did remember to roll, though, and when I stopped, I put a hand to my pocket to check my matches. They were safe. Good.

I hurried through the woods, the moon turning the trees silver. Before Dallas and I built the treehouse, we’d had a fireplace for camping. I figured that would be the best place to go.

I knelt when I felt the crunchy ashes under my feet. In the dim light I could just see the ring of rocks that always held our campfires. I scurried around on the ground until I had a handful of dry leaves and twigs. I dumped them in front of me and lit them on fire. The fire hissed to life



I nodded and stared up at the owl, my mystery solved

and made insane shadows on the silent trees.

Everywhere, everything was black shadow and glowing scarlet firelight. Black and red, black and red.

Nowhere anything white.

I shook my head. It was impossible. I'd never figure it out—ever.

Maybe I had even imagined it all. Something floating around in white, screaming its stupid head off like some ghost woman in a cheap movie.

Maybe it *was* my wild imagination. Maybe I was going crazy.

Then it screamed again.

I jumped up, my heart pounding so hard I nearly fell down again. I wasn't crazy, I wasn't imagining anything.

It was real.

I was trying to pinpoint the direction the sound had come from when it screamed again.

The treehouse.

I started running. Tree branches whipped my face and arms. I stepped on a sharp rock and stumbled. My mind was racing. Was Dallas the screamer? If not, then who—or what—was?

I climbed the ladder and stopped at the door to listen. I couldn't hear anything so I slowly opened the door.

“Dallas?”

He was sitting on the floor. I couldn't

see any blood or wounds of any kind. He looked fine. After a quick glance at me he looked quickly back up at the treehouse window. I followed his gaze and almost fell out of the treehouse in shock.

There was a snowy owl in the window. When she saw me she lowered her head and *screamed*. I started to back away but Dallas reached out a hand and stopped me.

“It's OK,” he said. “She won't come in.”

I nodded and climbed in.

“This is why I didn't want you coming,” Dallas continued. “I wanted her to get used to me first. Sorry.”

“Is that what we fought about?” I asked and grinned. I've never been too good at apologizing. Dallas chuckled and pointed at the owl.

“She screams 'cause we're scary. A threat, you know?” He looked at me. “Especially you.”

“How long...”

“Eight days.”

I nodded and stared up at the owl, my mystery solved. She was so beautiful, white flecked with brown, with huge golden eyes. I leaned my head against the rough boards of the treehouse, laughing and talking with Dallas as we watched the owl.

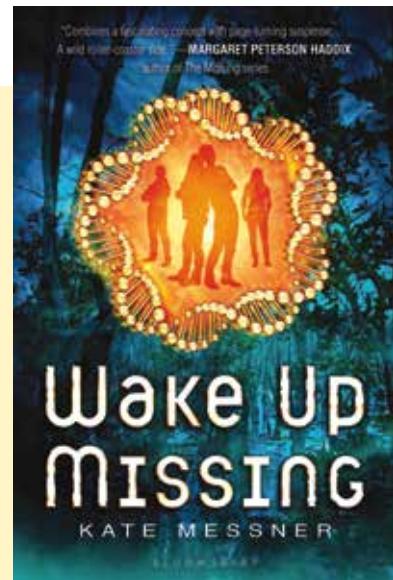
And the owl, calm and silent, stared back.



Book Review

By Abraham Lawrence

Wake Up Missing, by Kate Messner;
Walker Children's Books: New York, 2014;
\$7.99



Abraham Lawrence, 13
Eugene, Oregon

THE MOST TERRIFYING thing about hitting your head so hard is when you wake up missing pieces of yourself." This is what the main character, Cat, tells the reader near the beginning of Kate Messner's novel, *Wake Up Missing*. Cat is a twelve-year-old girl who has a concussion from falling off of an observation platform in a tree while watching birds. She gets headaches and nauseated, and she has balance problems and holes in her memory.

Cat wants desperately to be whole again, so her parents send her to I-CAN, an advanced neurology clinic in the Florida Everglades, which they learned about online. *Scientific American* called it the "Miracle Clinic in the Swamp." Cat tells us, "I thought if I went to I-CAN I'd wake up found." But she and three other kids she meets there, all with similar head injuries, bit by bit find that things at I-CAN are not what they seem to be. Cat sees a newspaper headline that says, "Florida Senator Promises Crackdown on Nations That Harbor Terrorists: Wiley Says Military Intelligence Committee Has 'Secret Weapon.'" She doesn't know at that time that she and I-CAN are involved.

I liked the fast-paced adventure, which kept me reading as the children discover they are part of a top-secret government

project. The doctors in charge of I-CAN plan to replace their DNA and memories with the DNA and memories of dead scientists like Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein.

I am really into genetics and things to do with the brain. Could our memories and DNA be replaced with someone else's memories and DNA? Is it even moral to replace a person's memories? Is it all right to replace them without the person knowing? These are questions that the book made me think about.

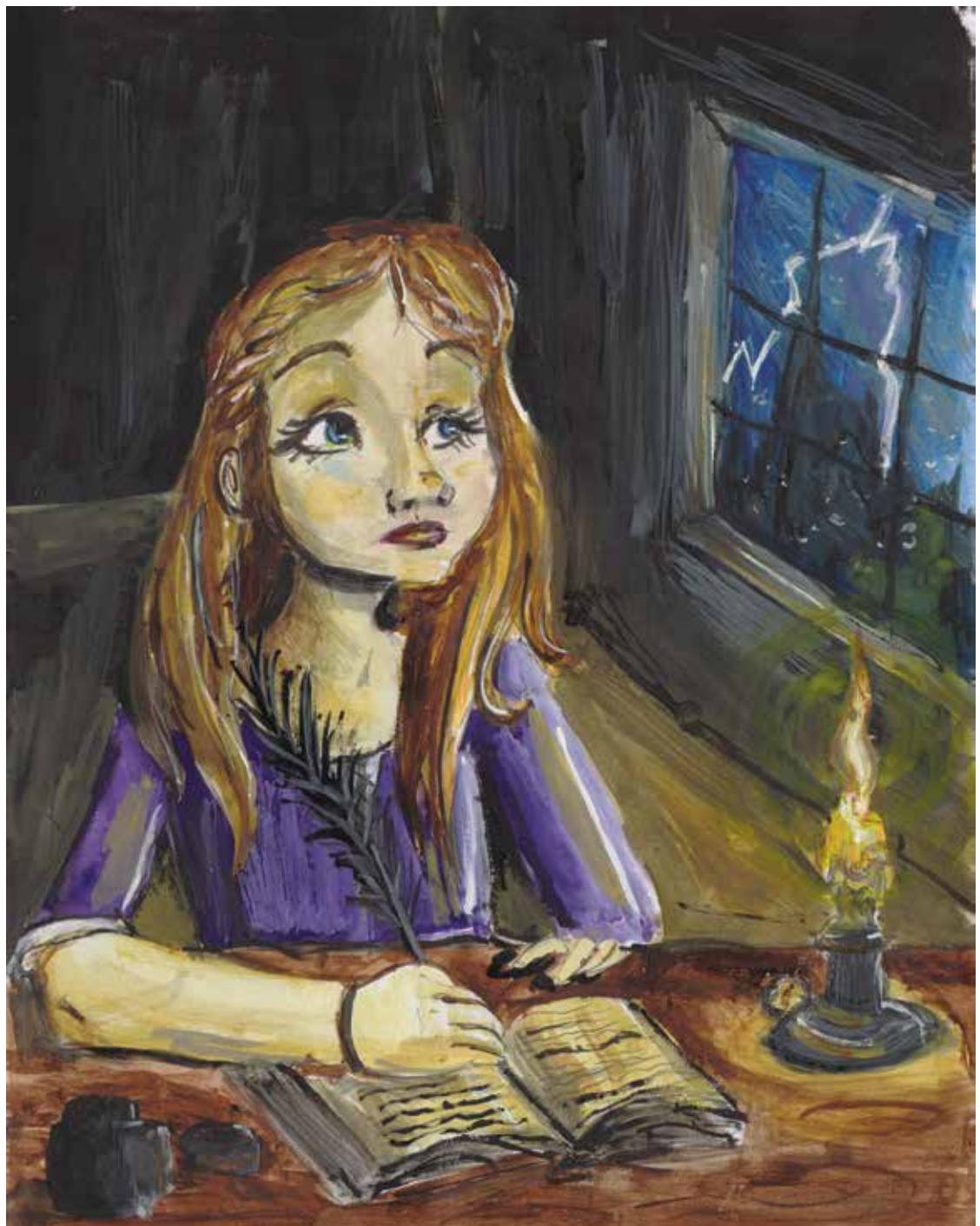
In the science-fiction world of the book it *is* possible to replace memories and DNA, though one of the characters named Kaylee ends up with a brain tumor from the procedure. Another character, Trent, has had his mind altered, replaced with Thomas Edison's DNA and memories. Trent can't remember his own life, including his family. Instead, the only thing he thinks about is alternating current, which from another book I was reading I know is not true. Actually, Thomas Edison was into direct current, not alternating current. But it did not really hurt the flow of the adventure.

I would not want a brain tumor like Kaylee, but I don't know how I would feel about having the brain of Edison or Einstein. If I was one of the kids who found out about the plot, I do not know if I would be like Cat, who just wants to be restored to her former self and escape, or if I would be like Ben, a boy in the story who wants to be turned into a new Einstein.

I had read some about Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein already, but not so much about the other scientists the children were going to be turned into: Marie Curie, Robert Oppenheimer, Lise Meitner, and Beatrice Schilling. But after reading the book, I wanted to learn more.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys an exciting action-adventure story with science and science-fiction intermingled in the plot.





Dear Journal, I see examples of bravery everywhere

Hero

By Nikitha Raju

Illustrated by Valerie Sorokosh

October 11, 1781. Dear Journal, I see examples of bravery everywhere. Benjamin Franklin is rallying up the colonists, hoping to unite them as a nation. Our brave soldiers are fighting England's troops and winning, and basically, everyone is helping the war effort. What can I do? I just sit at home and play with my little brother, Johnny. I can never be a hero like those men. Well, I won't bore you with a list of complaints. I only wished to find solace in writing. I shall write in you again tomorrow. Oh, and may I call you Mary? I fear I cannot think of you as a friend if you do not have a name, even though you are naught but paper and leather. Mother is telling me to go to bed. Until tomorrow.

I CLOSE MY JOURNAL. It was sent from Father as a gift from Yorktown, where he is fighting. I still miss him, but this way, I can almost feel his smile through the pages of the journal that was his way of telling me he still thinks fondly of his beloved daughter.

I blow out my candle, filling the small room with gray smoke. Too tired to undress, I sink into soft goose-feather pillows and fall asleep.

I jolt awake. Thunder crashes, and flashes of light flare up in the sky. Wind gusts and rain strike our small house. Among the rest of the noise, a high keening wail hits my ears. It's coming from the nursery. I tiptoe gently down the corridor and peek inside. Mother is standing by Johnny's cradle. Her soft, wavy



Nikitha Raju, 11
St. Augustine, Florida



Valerie Sorokosh, 13
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

chestnut hair falls down to her slim waist, and her deep-set emerald eyes are framed by long lashes. Her skin is tan, the color of soft clay. I wish I looked like her. My hair is gingery-gold and straight. Cool gray eyes are paired with a snub nose, giving me a rather serious expression. Mother's eyes give her a happy expression, like she has smiles tucked into the corners of her face. Right now, she is not smiling. Suddenly I notice that her lashes are sparkling with tears. Instinctively I move forward to comfort her. "Mother, what's wrong?" In response, she pulls me next to her and angles the cradle towards me. Instantly I see that Johnny is sickly. His normally healthy skin is damp and flushed. I reach out a shaking hand and touch him. His hands are cold and clammy, while the rest of his body is burning up. I gasp as he lets out another wail.

Mother whispers in a hoarse voice, "Lucia, the doctor is so far away and it's dark and stormy. I cannot leave Johnny for so long. I do not know what to do." She breaks down sobbing. The sound pulls at my heart. I suddenly have an idea.

"I will go, Mother!"

Her head snaps up, and she gets a steely look in her eyes. "Absolutely not! I could never lose both of you. Go back to bed. Johnny is not in our hands anymore." She hugs me and pushes me back to my bed-chamber.

"But, Mother, I..."

"No, Lucia."

As I walk back to my bed, I fume at Mother. Why shouldn't I fetch the doc-

tor? I am old enough! A thought comes, unbidden, to my head. If I maybe went to the doctor without Mother knowing, could I... No, Lucia, it is wicked to disobey one's parents. Johnny is so sick though... If I go fast enough, Mother would never know until she sees the doctor. By then she will be so happy about Johnny, she won't scold me! Having made up my mind, I slip to the stables.

As my numb hands saddle Birdsong, I grow more and more worried. It is all very well to make such a bold plan, but to carry it out is something else. The journey to the doctor's is long and dangerous. Hard enough to make in broad daylight, to try to make it at night during a storm is like running into a group of Redcoats. Something no person could possibly survive! However, I have to try, for Johnny.

The rain pours and pours. The wind heaves gusty breaths of air. I travel on. Every pothole might mean injury. Every sharp turn, death. I stop by Potter's Way. If I travel down this way, I might reach the doctor faster, but it overlooks a murky river. If I fall in, I will surely perish. Should I go? I struggle with myself for a minute. I don't know why I am hesitating. I scold myself. Lucia, think of poor, sick Johnny. He is your brother, do you want him to die because of your cowardice? I make as if to go to Potter's Way, but a small voice in the back of my head stops me. Lucia, of course you care about your brother, but think of yourself too. What use are you if you die? Hating myself, I urge Birdsong past Potter's Way, down the



I jerk the reins and Birdsong furiously gallops down the path to the forest

main path. Biting my lip, I ride on, trying to justify my behavior to myself.

After some time, I hear horse steps following me. Somewhere, a muffled neigh is followed by a whinny of pain. Instantly, I am alert. Is it? Could it be? Horse thieves! Mother had told me many a tale about them. Mean grizzled men. If they caught you, they would take your horse and valuables, if you were lucky. If you weren't, they also took your life. I could keep ahead of them for some time, Birdsong was a young horse, fast and sprite. However, horse thieves are very experi-

enced. No doubt, I wasn't the only victim who had a good horse. They would catch up to me sooner or later.

I think fast. I have an idea, a dangerous one, but an idea all the same. If I can make Birdsong go fast enough, I could lose the men temporarily and hide in Silverbirch Forest. When they caught up, I could jump out of my hiding spot and surprise them, before racing back the way I came from and going through Potter's Way. They would be startled for a few crucial moments and give me time to escape. When they regained their senses,

they would chase me for a while but then turn back when they saw that I was going through Potter's Way. A girl and her horse would not be important enough to risk their lives. Inwardly, I feel a flash of joy at being able to take the harder way and prove that I would do anything for my brother. Having worked all the details out, it is time to put my plan into action.

Suddenly, I jerk the reins and Birdsong furiously gallops down the path to the forest. The furious shouts of the men follow me as I pull her behind a patch of trees. Gradually, the men's voices grow closer. Closer, and closer, until I can smell the dank stench of their clothes. Now! I jump out from behind the trees, ignoring their startled yelps, and canter down, heading to the treacherous cliff path. The thieves' voices fade away after they see me turn onto Potter's Way. I hear one of them say that Birdsong and I would surely perish, and my horse would be of no use. Ignoring the sharp flare of fear at hearing those words, I gallop carefully down the steep road, avoiding the cliff. I would reach the doctor's house soon.

Miss Nadia, the good doctor's maid, cries out as she sees Birdsong and me, muddy and disheveled. I start sobbing and speak between heaving breaths. "Johnny is sick, and I was attacked by horse thieves, and-and we're running out of time!"

Miss Nadia calls the doctor. "Daniel, Lucia's here to see you." Wrapping a

comforting arm around me she soothes, "Dear, tell me everything."

After Mr. Dunevon hears about Johnny's condition, he wastes no time gathering up his medical supplies and getting his carriage ready. The deep winding road to my cottage doesn't seem so scary with Miss Nadia and Mr. Dunevon. When we get to the house and Mother sees me, she runs over and gives me a hug. Then she shakes me. "Lucia, what were you thinking! Do you understand how I felt when I found out that you were gone?"

Mr. Dunevon intervenes. "Mrs. Washington, I know you are feeling overwhelmed, however, time is of the essence."

Mother looks up and notices the doctor for the first time. "Oh! My baby is saved! Right this way please!" As she leads him away, she looks back at me with an expression of jubilant relief, with only a hint of disapproval. In that moment, I know I am forgiven.

I am pacing outside the nursery, waiting as Mr. Dunevon sees to Johnny. For some time, all I can hear are muffled voices. Then, "Lucia," Mother calls, "you can see Johnny now." I rush into the room, and as I see nothing but happy faces, I know Johnny will be all right.

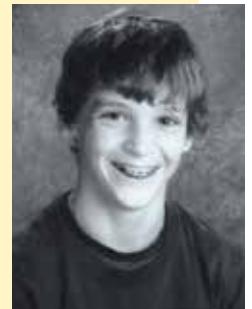
LATER THAT NIGHT, I am huddled in my small window niche, writing in my journal. October 12, 1781, just past midnight. Dear Mary, today I was a hero.



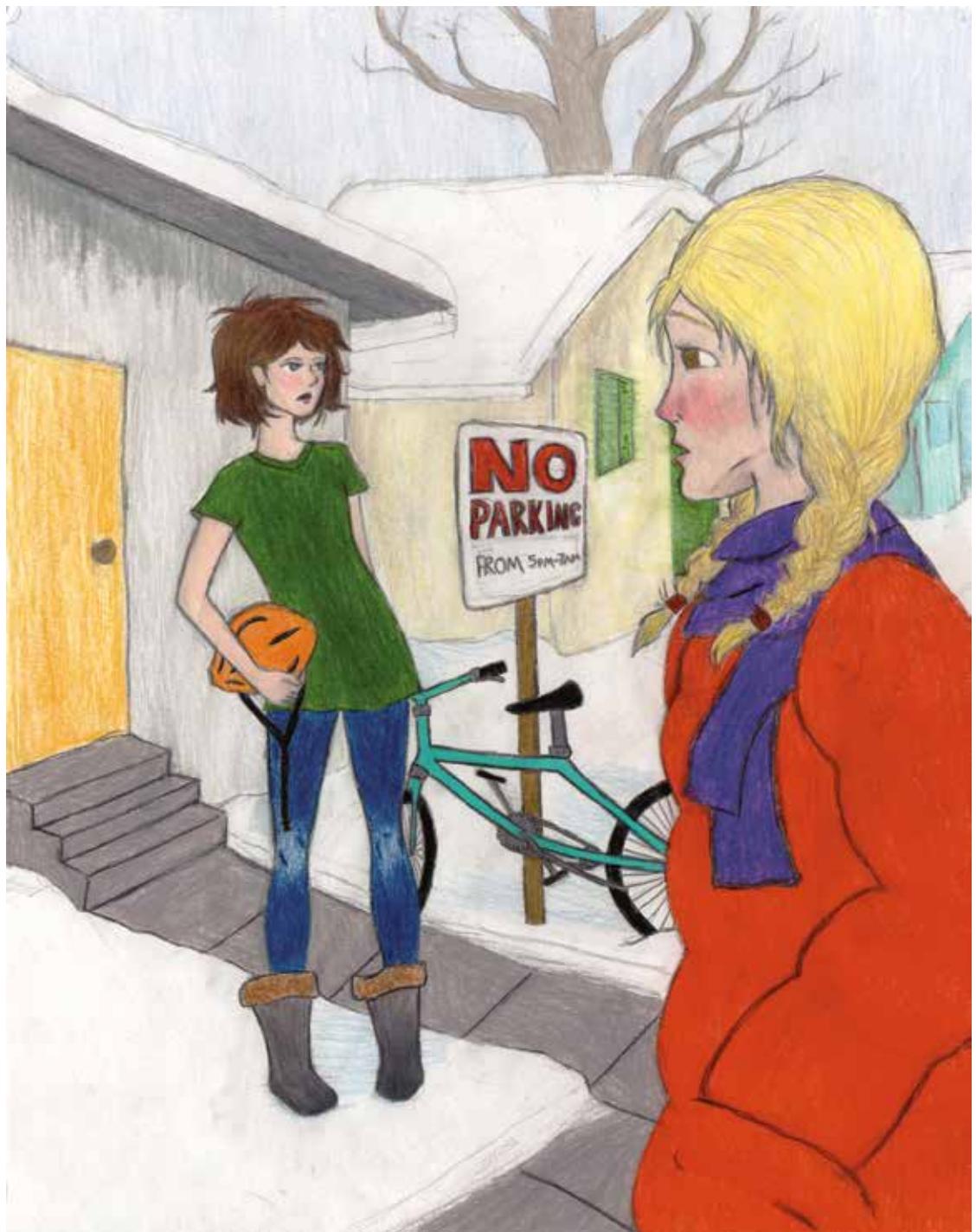
Monster-Muskie

By Ben Stieren

In the cold, dark waters of the lake in Wisconsin,
His yellow eyes swivel about.
His fins never stop waving.
I can barely hear the swish of his tail—
Just a vibration in the water.
His brown-green scales are black in the murk.
His translucent fins are almost invisible.
I can almost taste the blood coming from his fresh meal.
Bubbles float to the surface—
He is feeding.
I imagine the raw, mildew-ish stink that clings to him.
His large nostrils flare.
He hears, and sees my bright rattle-trap lure.
His white, razor-sharp teeth are moving up and down.
I feel the shaking,
 the pounding,
 the tension of my fishing line.
The giant, scaly monster-muskie swims away,
The plastic chartreuse of my lure clutched between his killer teeth.
I hear a *ping!* as my braided line snaps.



Ben Stieren, 13
Omaha, Nebraska



She cuts me off. "It's Rowen. And I'm busy. Good luck."

First Impression

By Eloise Wendt

Illustrated by Phoebe Wagoner

THE WHITE MOVING TRUCK with faded blue letters pulls into the driveway behind us. I stare ahead at the one-story house that is now ours. Unbelievable. I look down, into my folded hands. The never-ending car trip seems like a bundle of candy right now. Will things keep getting worse?

“Bay,” my mom says gently. I look out the window, oblivious to her coaxing voice. Diandra lets out a snicker. Fine. Let my only sister think I’m an idiot. Works for me. I close my eyes, remembering California. The waves rolling in, the sun beaming down. I take a glance at the harsh reality. Snow falling. Short houses. Lakes, not oceans. Why Minnesota?

Mom deserves the silent treatment. She caused the divorce. She caused the move. Diandra doesn’t care, Mom doesn’t care, and Dad’s all the way on the other side of the world, deciding to live his life in Australia. Why didn’t he take me with him? Why did Mom have to package me up and ship me to the opposite of California with her?

I unbuckle my seatbelt and get out of the car. I hold out a finger and let a snowflake land on it. The delicate thing melts at my touch. Shivering, I tug my scarf tighter.

Diandra hops out of the car, swinging her backpack after her. *Only a few more years*, I remind myself as she whips her dazzling blond hair around herself. *Just a few more years before Diandra can drive off, searching for boys or something*. Mom is out next, turning off the car, the old engine stuttering to a stop. She hurries around the car, her high heels clicking as she moves in a stran-



Eloise Wendt, 12
South Orange, New Jersey



Phoebe Wagoner, 12
Carlisle, Kentucky

gled run, working against her impossible shoes. I brush aside my mess of dirty-blond hair that is in two knotty braids.

“Bay,” Mom repeats, raising her eyebrows in exasperation. I turn away, facing the street. No cars pass. An occasional jeep or something rolls by, a trail of exhaust following. “Come on, let’s be rational. What can be so bad with change?” My mom rattles on, but my eyes are fixed on the street, tuning her out. I scan the houses facing ours and turn back to the bumpy pavement that needs work. Then, a bike rides by. Wait, hold it. A bike? In winter? On the calm streets caked with a layer of fresh snow? A biker in this weather? A biker with—wait—no coat on? This is strange.

I’m off, racing after this bike. My mom is taken by surprise, screeching after me, “Bay! Bay! What do you think you’re doing? Diandra? *Diandra!!! Bay!*” My feet thud against the pavement, my breath coming out in puffs of fog. I don’t know what’s taken hold of me. Maybe it’s the move. Maybe it’s the sight of something strange. Or maybe it’s everything tied up in one big knot. The fact that once I finally make a friend, I’m whisked off to another town, expected to rewrite my whole life. The fact that this is impossible for me, and that I never fit in. The fact that this girl might be someone else who’s in her own world. Just another person who is out there, different, odd. Awkward with everyone and everything. I keep running.

The biker finally stops in front of a house a few blocks down from ours. She

takes off her helmet, letting her short, choppy brown hair come into view. The biker rests her bike against a sign that reads “No Parking from 5 P.M.–7 A.M.” and locks her bike to it.

“Hey,” I greet breathlessly, after I’ve caught up to her. The girl looks at me with her blue eyes, puzzled. She looks thirteen, my age. I also notice that she doesn’t seem to be cold at all, even though her arms are bare.

“Hello?” she responds. Her eyes scan me. I hesitate, then continue, a little nervous, to be honest. This girl’s intimidating. Or maybe I’m just intimidated by everything.

“I’m Bay and I’ve just moved in. Few blocks down. I know...”

She cuts me off. “It’s Rowen. And I’m busy. Good luck.” Then Rowen turns on her heel and is marching inside her tan house. Her hair bounces with her stiff body. I’m speechless. My mouth is still open. I ignore the urge to call out and close it, disturbed by her rudeness. I tug at one of my braids, biting my lip, feeling tears welling up.

“Just another one of *those* girls,” I whisper to myself. I just stay there, standing, staring at the house until I give in to myself and turn away, my head down. I slip off my Toms and walk home barefoot, ignoring the biting pain of the cold. The snow melts against the bottoms of my feet, leaving footprints. I give in to the pain, slipping on my shoes. I shiver and continue walking down the middle of the seemingly abandoned street. Thoughts

turn in my head. I already messed up. School hasn't even started. Thank God it's winter break.

I arrive at our new house and stand there, sighing. Our new house doesn't even look good. It's off-white with red shutters. Our *old* house was a brilliant but calm green. I remember introducing Coral to it, and how I could fool around with her, relieved that she didn't care how insecure or awkward I was. But now, I don't have anyone who cares that I exist. I stare at my dull house with hate. Then, I nearly get run over and have to hop out of the street to avoid the honking car. This brings me back to my senses.

The door bangs open and Diandra runs out, shooting darts at me with her sharp eyes. Her hands curl into fists.

"Baylie Natalie Gale! Where *were* you?" she shouts.

"Around," I tell her. She emits an exasperated noise and storms back inside. *A few more years and she'll be off.* If I don't keep reminding myself of this, I think I'll go crazy. I follow her inside. By now, my feet are burning with pain. When I take off my shoes and lift them up to look at them, they are all sorts of different colors. Not good. I venture through the house, trying to remember it from when we toured it earlier in the year. I find myself in what looks to be the living room, where my mom is leaning against the wall, head back. She looks up when she hears me approaching. What follows is a whole speech from her on how impossible and irresponsible I am. Fair enough. She goes

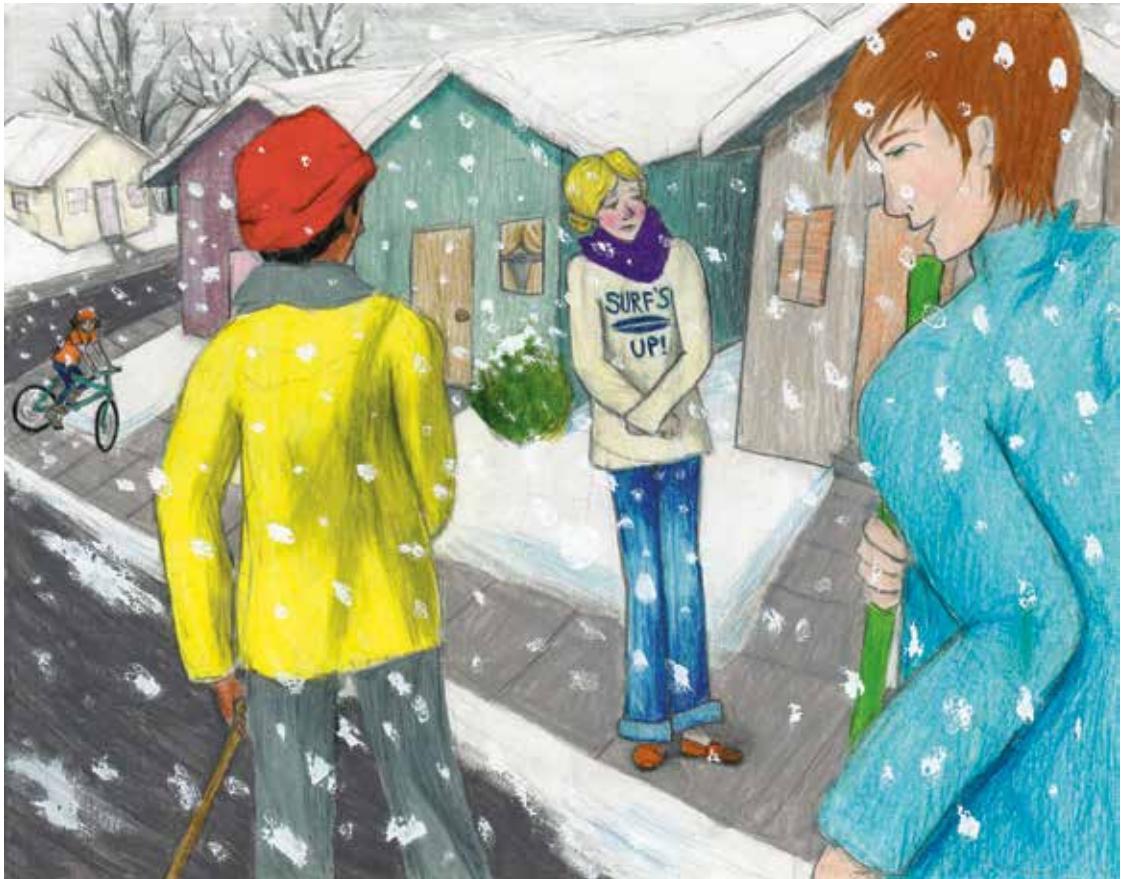
on and on until I realize that if I don't stop her, I'll go mad.

"Mom, I'm old enough to look after myself! You didn't have to get so worried!" I exclaim. Her eyes dig into me.

"Well, it's a little concerning when you chase after a random bicycle and don't return until a half an hour later!" she argues. I return this with a death stare. I really do wish Rowen hadn't been so rude.

THE NEXT DAY is all work. We unpack the kitchen first, putting all the dishes away and then the cooking tools. Diandra stops every ten minutes to text who knows who and complain some more. And then Mom is out half the time shopping for everything in the world, making Diandra the boss. She yells at me every minute, finding something to criticize me for. So the whole morning is torture while I'm the only one doing work. Thanks, guys. But then again, what can I expect from my family?

At lunch we have a break to eat ham sandwiches. I only eat half of mine and am quickly out of the house. I wear my Toms again, even though there is at least a foot of snow on the grass. I don't have any boots from living on a beach my whole life. I pull on a sweatshirt and scarf, throwing my hair into a bun. I roam the streets outside, not caring if I get lost. I walk forever and soon, snow starts to drift down. I shudder at the unfamiliar weather. I push aside the part of me that realizes how pretty the landscape looks with snow covering the small houses.



“Hate to break it to ya, Ms. Surfer, but this is Minnesota”

The streets are just as calm as yesterday, though occasionally I hear the whir of cars on the freeways next to the neighborhoods. I wonder if Mom is mad yet, wondering where in the world I am, when all I want is just to get some fresh air.

I'm walking along one street when I come upon some boys who look like they're playing hockey in the street. I walk up onto the sidewalk to avoid their violent game. The noise of clattering hockey sticks and pucks stops abruptly.

“Hey!” a boy shouts. I inhale a shaky

breath and turn to face them. The boy in front of me smirks. “You’re the new girl, aren’t you?” I open my mouth to respond, but a different boy interrupts.

“Look at her sweatshirt, Andy. ‘Surf’s Up!’ How cheesy!” I glance down at my sweatshirt and my face turns red. The boys laugh. I don’t know what to say. These are my bad moments.

“I-I surf,” is what I come up with. Lame. I wince. Times like these, I’m useless. Odd, weird, lame, awkward. Just plain awkward.

“Hate to break it to ya, Ms. Surfer, but this is Minnesota. If you had any brains at all, you’d realize there aren’t any oceans around here, so good luck with that!” Another wave of laughter. Uh oh. This is going from bad to worse. “Try hockey!” Andy whacks a puck at me. I gasp and duck. They burst into more laughter.

“I realize.” My voice is shaky and quiet and I’m not sure if they can hear me. I turn to leave and start running. Suddenly, I slip on the layer of fresh snow and am on my butt. Who knew snow was so slippery? The laughter is exploding. My face burns and a lump forms in my throat. Wow. Way to mess up, Bay. Way to be the most awkward person alive. Way to...

“Shut it!” A sharp voice interrupts my thoughts. That’s when Rowen and her bicycle enter my view. She lets her bicycle clatter to the ground and storms over to me. She thrusts out her hand. I scramble up in surprise, taking her strangely warm hand. She still isn’t wearing a jacket. Just a plain orange short-sleeve shirt. The boys’ laughs have faded to awe. “Come on,” she says, her voice like nails.

Rowen picks up her bike and starts walking, rolling it beside her. She pauses for second as I hurry over. Then we walk, side by side. Rowen doesn’t look back. She doesn’t say anything. She keeps her eyes forward and we keep walking until I realize that we’re at my house. Rowen stops. The moving truck is still parked in our driveway. There’s a silence and I don’t know what to say.

“Thanks,” I whisper, looking down.

“Not a problem,” she responds. I look up, into her bright eyes.

“I don’t get it,” I murmur. She doesn’t look away. “Why did you help me?” There is another long-lasting silence. At last, Rowen sighs.

“Do-do you ever feel... odd? Different? Like... you’re the puzzle piece that doesn’t fit? You never know what to say, never know how to cover up your mistakes?” She finally breaks our gaze. “That’s me. When I first saw you, I thought you would be just another perfect girl to tease me,” she says.

“That’s what I thought about *you*,” I remember. Rowen looks up. “I’m the odd-ball,” I continue, “the one who doesn’t know what to say... just the awkward one.” She frowns, tilting her head and looking into my eyes.

“I was wrong about you,” we both say at the same time. A smile forms on my lips. Rowen is the same as me. She was just protecting herself. I shouldn’t have judged her. That was wrong.

“I’m sorry,” I say.

“Me too,” Rowen agrees. Then we are both smiling and laughing. Rowen looks relieved for the first time since I met her. Maybe my mom was right. Maybe change isn’t all that bad. After all, it taught me not to judge Rowen or anyone else on a first impression. The snow starts up again. A light flurry. For once, I think I’m happy that the snow is falling, the snowflakes blowing around in the breeze. And then Rowen and I stay there in the street, dancing in the snow.



My Sag Harbor

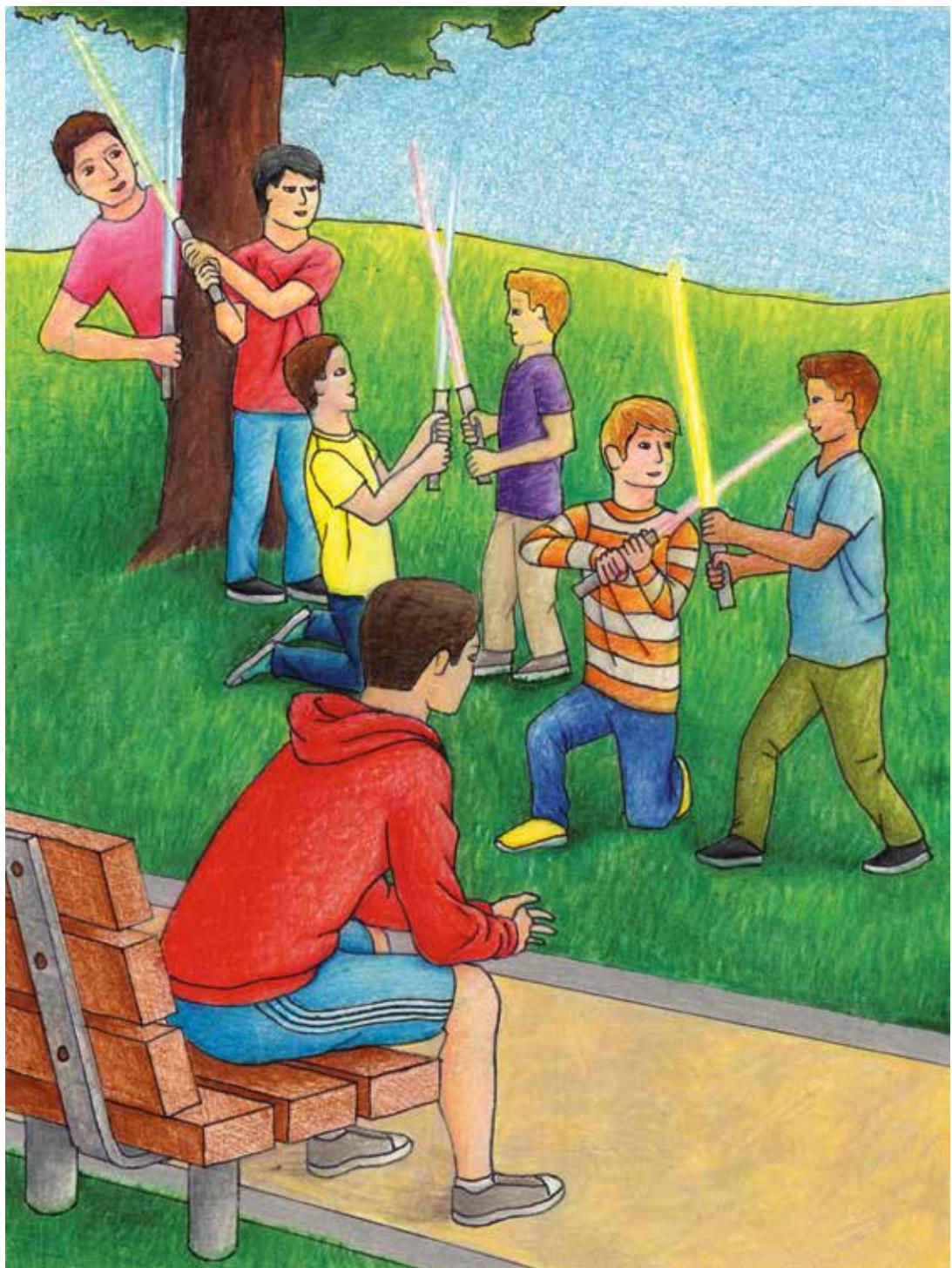
By Charlotte Robertson



Charlotte Robertson, 11
New York, New York

The heavy door is embellished
With a whale knocker
And on the side a doorbell
That no longer rings.
You walk up the porch steps
And turn the cold metal knob
Pushing against the force
That never wants you to open the white door.
This is my Sag Harbor.
The houses are small
With dogs running out in the yard
As you walk into the town.
Pass the little ice cream parlor
And the restaurant with live lobsters
Watching you pass with fishy eyes.
And pass the toy store
Crowded with kids
Holding quarters to get their turn on the
Coin-operated fire engines.
This is my Sag Harbor.

A shimmering turquoise is the color of the Wharf.
Where huge crew ships,
Put down their anchors,
And tie themselves to the dock.
The sailboats can be seen for miles,
Clipped to their buoys,
Floating on the surface like butterflies,
In a peaceful order,
Until a motorboat comes racing through,
Creating waves.
At the beach you see the rolling sand dunes,
And the pebbles that litter the lining of the incoming wave.
Like lace the rocks encircle each other,
On the wet sand contrasting beautifully with
The deep blue of the ocean,
And the lighter sky.
This is my Sag Harbor.



Being carefree is one of the best gifts in childhood

Magical Childhood

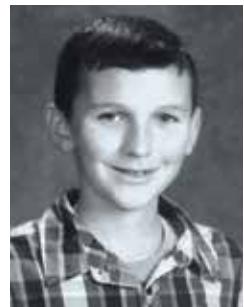
By Luke Bolsma

Illustrated by Gordon Su

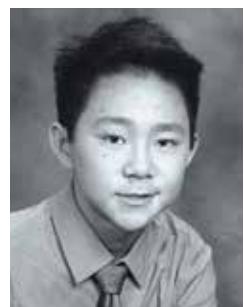
MEMORIES... I AM SIX YEARS OLD. I am the hero of this story. Me and my friends are inseparable. For hours we play *Star Wars*. Some of us are Jedi, others Sith, and some Clones. The bottom line—it is pure magic! The worst fight we all ever had was over whose sled was whose on the hill behind my house, but it did not end our friendship. I wanted to write what it was like in my head to be six years old and compare it to what I would see now.

Panning down on the neighborhood park, I fight the battle droids, deflecting lasers with my Obi-Wan replica lightsaber. My brother, Caleb, and best friend, Daniel, are beside me as we fend off imaginary droids. We then transition to “dueling” the other three boys, Michael, Jared, and Clay, who are also characters from *Star Wars*. In our minds we are on Christophsis from the movie *The Clone Wars*.

As I go on a run, I see six kids running around playing *Star Wars*, swinging around their colorful toy lightsabers. Being thirteen, I really do miss those days. I watch them running behind trees and pretending they have “the force.” For these boys, there isn’t a care in the world. All that matters is just them and their friends. Being carefree is one of the best gifts in childhood. I just wish it could stay, instead of going away to all of the worries of the world. As a little kid, your most scary worry is the imagined monster under the bed, which is how sometimes it should stay. As a little kid, you just want to grow up, but what you don’t realize is, as an adult you will miss it.



Luke Bolsma, 13
Blaine, Minnesota



Gordon Su, 13
Milpitas, California

I battle the Sith. Neither me nor Michael will say the other one won. We will do this for hours, battling each other as *Star Wars* characters, pretending to have “the force.” Caleb would save the day almost every time by fending off one of the other boys. To me, my brother is my hero; he always seemed so smart. I want to be on his side so badly.

As I continue to run along the park path, I have stopped and started to really look at these six kids. They laugh and play. They battle and duel. They fall to their knees and topple over to pretend death. It brings memories flooding back, and I cannot stop thinking of my childhood when I would play *Star Wars* with my friends. I think about the long summer nights, when being out late was nine o’clock, not eleven o’clock.

Now we are in our X-wings, pretending to shoot at each other. Daniel, Jared, Michael, Clay, and my favorite, Caleb, run around from yard to yard, playing. Eventually, we “land” and I am captured. I am taken to an outpost where I try to escape but can’t. In the distance, however, I see my best friend, Daniel, and my brother,

Caleb, coming to save me and save the day.

I keep running, watching, and listening to the boys play, and I notice how much the little boy with dark brown hair looks up to his older brother, just as I still do. I am so much older now but still feel what that play feels like. That same little brown-haired boy is taken prisoner, while a friend and the boy’s brother come to his rescue. They succeed! Now all three of them run away to go hide and probably attack once again.

All this is ended by getting called home for lunch by their moms. They make plans with their four friends to meet back up to continue after lunch. Deep inside, all the while, they are hoping it is all real in another galaxy, and maybe it is.

In this galaxy, it is just six boys and some movies, and their imagination. In a galaxy far, far away, two brothers wait for Episode Seven of *The Saga* on December 18, 2015. On that night, they hope that, just like when they were six, it is all real. Four of the boys will go to the movie at midnight, because it was all so much more than a movie—it was days of playing. It was the greatest thing in the world. ☀

One Last Chance

By Tatum Schutt

Illustrated by the author

ELLA WRAPPED HER LEGS around the cold metal of the folding chair, held her résumé, headshot, and sheet music tightly, and clenched her teeth. She didn't want the moms sitting in the back and the kids around her to see the uncontrollable nervous twitches she was having. This usually didn't happen at normal auditions, but this was her last chance for a whole year.

When she had told her parents she wanted to be an actress, they had shaken their heads sadly.

"We thought you would make better decisions, honey," her mom had said. They were both doctors. Her mom was a brain surgeon; her dad devoted his time to finding a cure for cancer. Both geniuses in their fields, and everyone expected their only daughter to be one too. Ella looked like her parents; she had the dirty-blond hair of her father and the piercing green eyes of her mother, but that was as far as the similarities went. While both of her parents were immaculate, her room was commonly known as "The Pig Sty." She was the only one of the Parks who could sing to save her life, and, worst of all, she almost threw up every time she saw a drop of blood. Her parents loved her, and Ella loved her parents, but sometimes she felt trapped in a dark cage of expectations.

She had wanted to be an actress ever since her parents were given tickets to see a Broadway show when she was seven. The singing and dancing had thrilled her, and the acting made her believe that the story was real. When they got home, she had



Tatum Schutt, 13
Wilmington, Delaware



This was the last audition for a whole year, and Ella was a nervous wreck

asked her parents to enroll her in dance lessons, and she printed out the sheet music to learn.

Now, five years later, she had finally told her parents she did not want to be a doctor. They were very disappointed in

her, but, trying to be fair, they had agreed to a one-year trial run.

Ella had said that if they took her to all of the auditions she heard of and let her enroll in more dance classes for one year and she didn't get into a show, then

she would not go to any auditions the following year and take the young doctors program. Her parents believed that Ella should start young to ensure that she would be one of the most promising medical students by college graduation.

To others, this might not sound like a high gamble. She would be allowed to go to more auditions after the doctor year, so what was the big problem? However, one year is a much longer time to kids who have only lived ten, eleven, or twelve of those. It would seem even longer, almost like an eternity, if you could not do the thing you love at all.

Dr. Parks and Dr. Brigham (her mother went by her maiden name in order to be less confusing) both thought this was fair and had agreed. They really did want the best for Ella, but they were sure that being a doctor *was* the best.

So anyway, here she was. Her parents had dutifully carried out their part of the deal and had taken her to auditions from January all the way through to December. She had not gotten into any shows. Each time, something had happened to mess her up. Once, she tripped and fell during her routine, another time she didn't smile once, and yet another time she brought the wrong sheet music. She lost her voice during one, skipped a paragraph during a cold reading in another, and held her music in front of her face so no one could hear her in another. It got to the point where it seemed that there was nothing more to go wrong. Before she walked in, she would pray to get through

just one audition without messing up, but she never did. Everyone else seemed so experienced, so knowledgeable. This was the last audition for a whole year, and Ella was a nervous wreck. "Stop shaking!" she angrily commanded herself, but she couldn't. She had learned the music and dance routine flawlessly, but what if something happened like all of the other times?

Suddenly, a voice broke through the layers of worries. "Ella Parks, up next. Slate, please."

She stood up shakily and told herself, "Act like this is *your* audition. Like you already got the part. You can do anything you want to do. You have waited long enough for this opportunity, and here it is. As your grandfather often says, 'Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That's why we call it the present.' So seize the day, Ella!"

With that, she felt her wobbly smile turn into a winning one. She stood up straight and tall, and confidently walked to the center of the room. "Hello!" she said in a loud, clear voice. "My name is Ella Parks, and I will be singing 'Popular' from *Wicked*." She walked, no, floated is a better word, over to the accompanist and handed him her music. She closed her eyes as the music washed over her, and began to sing.

ONE WEEK LATER

THIS LETTER arrived in Ella's mail box, one week after the audition, on Christmas Eve.

Dear Miss Parks,

We would like to congratulate you on your acquisition of the role of Annie in our production of *Annie*. We are thrilled to have you as part of our cast in this show and hope you will audition for many more in this theater. The rehearsal schedule is included. Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and we will see you for the first rehearsal in January.

Sincerely,

Trish Cassella, Director

Stephan Fitzsimmons, Music Director

Tony Lenti, Choreographer

When Ella read this, she screamed and jumped with joy and excitement. But her parents were not smiling at all.

“We had agreed to one year of acting. This show will be going well into the year we had said would have been for the young doctors program.”

“But Mom, Dad!” Ella wailed. “This is my trial session! I am in a show! I thought that once I was in a show, I would never have to try to be a doctor again!” Her parents exchanged a look.

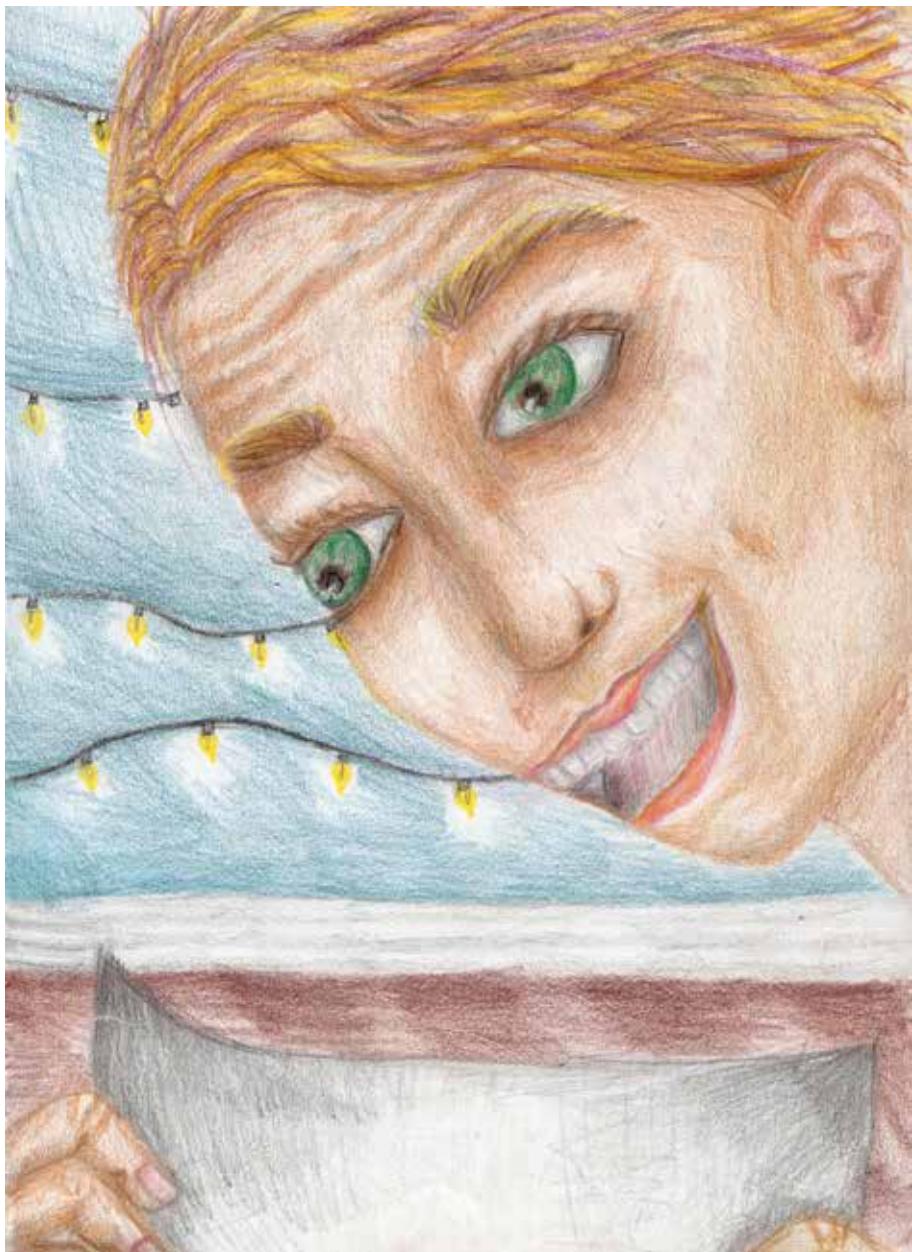
“We never agreed to that, darling,” they said. Ella began to cry. This had gone from the best day ever to the worst. Here she was, thinking the battle was over and won, but in reality she had not gone anywhere. Would this be what her life was like? Always a dead standstill between what she loved and what she hated? However, her mother, noticing she was crying, looked unsure. She whispered something in Dr. Parks’s ear. The look on his face visibly softened.

“Excuse us for a moment,” he said, and both of Ella’s parents went into the kitchen. Ella barely noticed. Her face was buried in her lap and she was sobbing. Five, ten, fifteen minutes went by with no sign of her parents. Ella had stopped crying and was staring dismally into the fire. When her parents finally walked in, Ella didn’t even bother turning her tear-streaked face towards them. But when she heard her father’s gentle voice, she turned.

“Ella,” he said, “did I ever tell you about how I became a doctor?”

“No, and I don’t want to hear it,” Ella replied. She had gone from desolate to raging mad. How dare they stop her from doing what she loved! Maybe she should run away... Her father continued anyway.

“My whole family was stockbrokers. They tried to make me be one too. But I hated it. All I wanted to do was study medicine. When I told them that, they refused to believe or let me. At the time I thought they were the cruellest parents on earth, and I swore never to be like them if I ever had children. And I realize that for the past few years, I have broken that promise. But now I see, that just like my parents, the reason I have held you back is because I am worried about you. Medicine is all I have ever known, and now you want to go into something that is completely foreign to me. I am scared that you will not make it, and that maybe it will hurt my baby girl, but I see that this is the thing you love. Because of that, your mother and I have decided that we will never try to push you into something



When Ella read this, she screamed and jumped with joy

that you do not want to do ever again.”

“Really?” Ella asked, her expression showing how excited but scared she was as well, is if she thought it wasn’t true.

“Truly,” her father answered, beaming down on her.

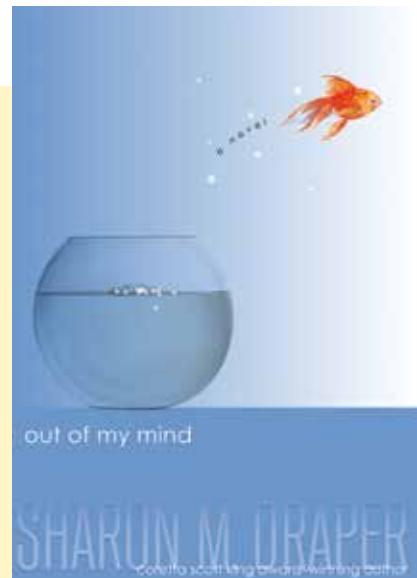
I guess it wasn’t the one last chance after all.



Book Review

By Lila Gaudrault

Out of My Mind, by Sharon M. Draper;
Atheneum Books for Young Readers:
New York, 2010; \$17.99



Lila Gaudrault, 12
Cape Elizabeth, Maine

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD Melody Brooks is a genius. She remembers everything that has ever happened to her, from the lullabies her parents sang to her as a baby to the words from every documentary and TV show she's ever watched. Melody's life is like a movie, and she remembers every bit of it. There is only one problem. Melody can't walk. She can't talk. She can't write. Melody Brooks has never taken a single step, spoken a single word, or written a single sentence in her life.

Melody has cerebral palsy, a disability that, as she puts it, "limits her body but not her mind." Unfortunately, not too many people realize this. Melody is tired of being treated like a baby by her teachers, doctors, and classmates. She wants to do something amazing, like Stephen Hawking. She wants the "normal" kids to notice her and ask her to play, just like everyone else. Most of all, though, Melody just wants to talk. Words have always surrounded her, floating around like a cloud of air, always just out of reach. Her inability to speak is making Melody go out of her mind, and she is intent on finding a way to speak.

Melody's story got me thinking: What would it be like to never walk, or talk, or write? I could only think of one word

to describe this situation: hard. I would never feel the thrills of crossing the finish line at a cross-country meet, or putting pencil to paper and making words come alive when I write. I couldn't plant a garden in summer, or go sledding in winter, or ride my bike in spring. I couldn't feel the rushing of water when I dive into a pool, or thank a friend for a birthday gift. Worst of all, though, I could never even *know* what it was like to experience these things. Yet, somehow, Melody still manages to always have a smile on her face and embrace life the way it is. She does some pretty amazing things too. Melody makes the Whiz Kids team, stands up to bullies, and even saves her baby sister from being fatally injured. All in all, I found Melody to be an incredible person, with an awesome personality to match. *Out of My Mind* really emphasizes the quote, "You can't judge a book by its cover," just like you can't judge a person by the way they look. As Melody puts it, "You have to go beyond the wheelchair, there's a real person inside."

Out of My Mind is easily one of my all-time favorite books. I loved everything about it, from the characters to the plot and the setting. I'd recommended it to everybody. Just beware, *Out of My Mind* is so great, you might not be able to put it down! ☀



“Beautiful, aren’t they?”

Dancing Birds

By Ayla Schultz

Illustrated by Isabella Ronchetti

IT WAS A COLD SUNDAY MORNING in the fall. The trees were bare and looked like they needed a coat. The ocean water lapped up against the sand, liquid ice. Two boys played by the beach, each daring the other to go farther into the freezing water. A little girl sat atop a sand dune, staring but not seeing anything, her eyes dark blue and blank, her mind traveling far from the chilly scene laid out in front of her.

MY MIND WAS with my grandmother. I could just imagine her sitting next to me on the frigid sand, in her bright red coat, pointing out all kinds of clouds in the sky, finding things that were invisible, like fat Arctic terns hidden between the sand dunes. Then she would take me home, make her cinnamon hot chocolate, and sit down and keep knitting striped slippers to sell at her shop the next day. My brothers would come home, cold, wet, and laughing. Mother would return from the bakery and settle down, close her eyes, and listen to some unheard music.

After dinner we would all sit around the fire. Papa would come from the kitchen and tell a story about growing up in Denmark. The story usually involved his brother, Uncle Alge. Uncle Alge was special because he could feel no pain. He did ridiculous things. He once took a swim in the ocean in December, came out, and rolled around in the snow. My grandma would be sipping elderberry tea, Mother would be stoking the fire and drawing things on her sketchpad. My two brothers would be



Ayla Schultz, 11
Brooklyn, New York



Isabella Ronchetti, 13
Florence, Italy

playing some card game. I would be listening to Papa's story.

Now Grandma has gone back to her home in Wales and Papa has gone to help Uncle Alge in Denmark. It is just Mother and I running the bakery. Grandma's knitting shop has a big, mean, red "For Sale" sign in front of it. Mama says that once we sell the shop we will go back to Wales and join Grandma. I do not want to leave our town in Quebec by the sea. This is the only home I have ever known.

I am Glas Aaderyn Eden-Pasăre. The funny thing about my name is that if you translate it into English it would literally mean blue bird bird-bird. As it happens, I love birds.

It was seven o'clock when a knock splintered the soft morning silence. Mama opened the door and was met by a stream of apologies, in French, of course. This must be the postman, Étang, I thought. He is our village chatterbox. Once the swell of explanations had subsided, he handed my mama a small, rather plain, brown envelope, the kind of envelope that could not contain anything good. He left, and Mama promptly shut the door, locking out any further disturbances to our morning. She slit open the letter with a satisfying rip, as if ripping it would make all the trouble it might contain disappear.

My mama looked distinctly unhappy with the contents of the letter. She

opened her mouth to speak but closed it again, an indecisive look on her face. Finally, after giving the distinct impression that she was a fish, she spoke. "It seems that your cousin Maskine is coming to visit." Maskine is the daughter of Uncle Alge and my dead Aunt Marge, who died when Maskine was ten.

I decided to give
her time to adapt,
like a new species.

She arrived two days later. I saw her in the driveway, a small, coat-shaped figure, looking up at the house. The house is beautiful, it has a looming presence that you cannot easily forget. She seemed to be relishing every last detail, as if imprinting all of the worn, smooth stone in her mind. She struck me as a person who would not miss anything. Perhaps she could teach my brothers not to dump their green beans on the floor for Galapagos, our dog-like pet tortoise.

She finally came inside. Placing her suitcase down in the center of the entrance hall, she proceeded to start staring again, looking up at the stairway that spiraled like a snake, a beginning but no apparent end. At dinner that night Maskine was silent. In the days that followed, the silence expanded, an ever growing puddle. She did not seem to be able to speak. Some tricky hobgoblin had stolen her tongue. She seemed to wear sadness as a second skin. I decided to give her time to adapt, like a new species. It takes them millions of years to develop all the skills that they need to survive. If they don't die

out first.

One cold December day I was sitting on my favorite sand dune. As usual I was watching the birds run from the crystallizing foam. I loved the way they did their complicated dance across the frigid sand, as if their feet were flying to escape the cold. I wish I could dance that well. I am a horrible dancer. When I try I stomp on my dance partner's feet, and then my brothers keel over laughing at the look on my mother's face. Soon we are all holding our sides, we laugh so hard.

"Beautiful, aren't they?"

I was rudely jumped out of my imagination and back into reality. I turned around. Maskine stood there, looking cold.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The birds, of course. Aren't they dancing?" And those words would echo in my head for a long time after that. In that moment she saw the birds exactly the way that I did. The silence still hung around Maskine afterward, but it was more comfortable, like one between old friends who understood one another.

One morning, about a week later, the doorbell rang. I was in my attic room, working on my mechanical birds. I love to make things. Especially things involving birds. My father started to teach me how to make mechanical animals when I was five. It started with mice. Soon I could make little rows of windup mice all by myself. I can understand machines better than I can understand people. People are so complicated and unpredictable. Gears

and cogs, however, do what they are told.

I was sitting upstairs, making wings for the Arctic tern that I was building, when the doorbell rang. I walked to the stairs and looked down. The postman, Étang, was giving a letter to Maskine. She opened it and a few minutes later flew upstairs. Running into her room, she slammed the door. The sound echoed around the house. Bouncing off the walls, wanting to get out.

I thought nothing of it until I found the letter later that afternoon. I wasn't looking for it, but it lay there, on the floor, calling to be read. My curiosity got the better of me and I picked it up. The paper was a soft shade of yellow. The kind that was calming after bad news. That was the only thing that this letter could hold.

Dear Maskine,

Are you having a nice time in Quebec? I hope you have found your tongue enough to say your pleases and thank yous. I am sorry, sister, but nothing is good at home. Papa is getting worse, and Uncle John got lost last night. He came back in the morning mangled and bloody. I know you do not want to hear this, but it would be wrong if I do not tell you. Papa is not getting any better. On the contrary, he is getting worse. He has a fever and doesn't want to get out of bed. I could not tell you this terrible news myself, but the doctors believe that Papa will not live much longer. At most a month. He wants to see you before he departs this world. Papa says he loves you. I will come and pick you up from Aunt Sophie's. The boat journey will be rough,

but Papa dying will be rough. I love you.

Your older sister,
Charlotte

I sat there for a while. I did not know that Uncle Alge was teetering on the edge of death. Now I understood Maskine's silence. I had to think of a way to cheer her up, at least for a little while. If my world felt unsettled, hers was crumbling.

I was sitting up in my attic workshop when the idea struck me. I would try to make my biggest project yet. It might not work, but at least Maskine would know I tried. The cold rain did a sad and solemn dance across my window. The grass was a wet and knotty mess. We were all inside, wearing long sleeves and still shivering from the cold. We hurried around from heated room

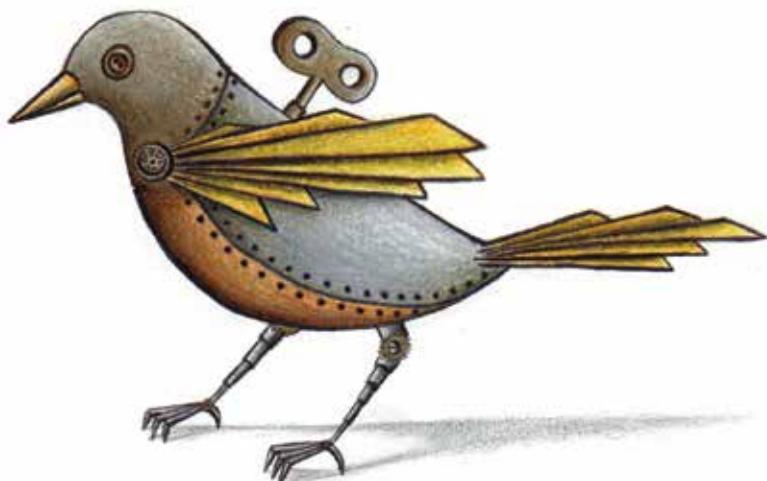
to heated room. My attic room was not as drafty as you would imagine it to be. I worked all afternoon, and hours later, with the darkness now at my window, I was done.

I called up Maskine to see what I had made. She came up, her eyes sad. When

she came in she looked around at all of my mechanical animals and I saw what true amazement looked like. Then she noticed what was sitting

on the table. I had made her a tiny, dancing bird. I silently handed Maskine the key and she quietly took it from me. She walked forward and gently put the key into the slot. It smoothly turned. The bird started to dance, lifting its legs up, like the birds had on the beach that cold day.

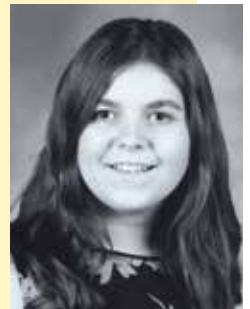
And slowly, for the first time since Maskine came here, she smiled. ☺



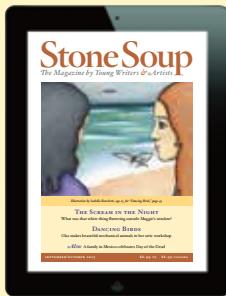
Finding a Bug on a Summer Morning

By Ella Fasciano

here
this is a black dot.
that moves uncontrollably in the slight breeze
at odd angles
in twisted, bent ways
looking almost as if it is grasping
at the delicate balance it now hangs in
my breath is heavy
as I try to make it fly, again
the damage worsens
and breaks
this is not your final resting place
I whisper
my voice carried off by the wind
I blow
hard
my tiny black dot
fly's away



Ella Fasciano, 13
Lebanon, New Jersey



Bonus Materials

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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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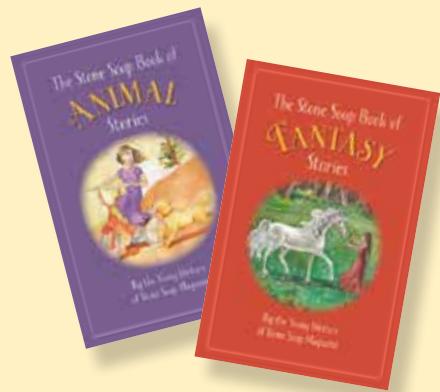
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