

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Audrey Zhang, age 12, for "Join the Fun," page 43

IRIS IN THE GERMAN GARDEN

Ever since she read *Harry Potter*, Iris has believed in magic

JOIN THE FUN

What will she do? Veronica must choose between fashion and fun

Also: A boy comes to terms with his parents' divorce

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2016

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 44, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2016

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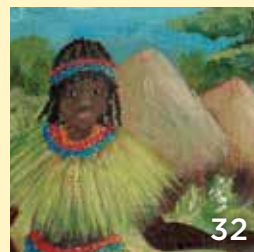
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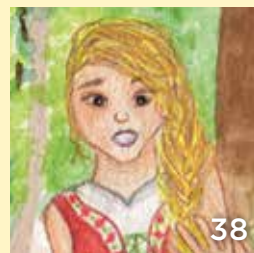
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Editor's Note

What does bravery mean to you? Two stories in this issue have “brave” in the title, one called simply “Bravery,” a devastating story about a young girl in Africa who loses her parents to slave traders. She must find the strength to move forward. In “A Different Kind of Brave,” Melissa stands up for a disabled girl who is being bullied every day on the school bus. Other stories in this issue have brave characters too. At a tough time, Iris bravely uses her imagination to make her life and that of two neighbor boys a little better. And Elise takes action to stop the kidnapping of wolf pups in her village. In a perfect world, children are safe, cared for by loving adults in a happy environment. In the real world, kids are faced with troubles like everyone else. Can you think of a situation that required you or someone you know to step up and be brave? That thought may just be the seed of your next story.

— Gerry Mandel

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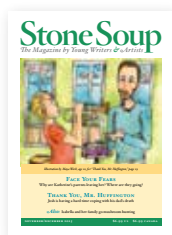
Submissions

Read our guidelines at stonesoup.com. If you have submission questions, write to editor@stonesoup.com. No email submissions, please.

ON THE COVER This is Audrey Zhang's fifth time illustrating for *Stone Soup* and her first cover. Audrey famously won the national Doodle 4 Google contest in 2014. Read our blog post and watch a video about her win here: <http://tiny.cc/vhf14x>. In addition to art, Audrey enjoys writing, and she plays flute and piano.



The Mailbox



Thank you for giving Nadia and so many other children (including my other two faithful *Stone Soup* readers, Stefan and Sonia) incredible inspiration, affirmation, and joy!

Marina Szteinbok, parent
Mamaroneck, New York

Marina is the mother of Sonia Suben, whose story, "The Sound of the Sea," appeared in our March/April 2014 issue, and Nadia Suben, whose story, "Thank You, Mr. Huffington," appeared in our November/December 2015 issue.

Thank you so much for your magazine! I've been an avid reader of *Stone Soup* for two years, and I practically jump for the mailbox when the next issue is due to come. I don't really have friends who enjoy writing outside of English class, and your publications have made me realize that I'm not alone! Keep on inspiring young writers!

Kiva Call-Feit, 12
Pocatello, Idaho

It's amazing how *Stone Soup* offers a way for kids to show off their talents in writing and art, something not many other literary magazines allow. It's a way to live and grow our dreams of being authors, poets, and artists, and I hope you know how thankful I am for this opportunity.

Hallie Chen, 13
Renton, Washington

Hallie's work is recognized in the Honor Roll on page 48.

The July/August issue of *Stone Soup* was incredible. My favorite stories were "The Path to Acceptance," by Logan Gusmano, "Memories," by Sophia Harne, and "Different City, Same Stars," by Abby K. Svetlik. The illustrations and writing in all three of these stories were fantastic! However, I have one suggestion for you. I've noticed that you publish quite a lot of stories in *Stone Soup* where one or both of the main character's parents die. In fact, I feel like you publish too many. I'm not saying that you should stop publishing stories about this topic altogether—"Different City, Same Stars" had this theme, and I loved it because the characters and descriptions were all very vivid and it had an ending that really hit me. But maybe publish less. Some stories you've published on the parents-dying topic all sound the same to me. I take more delight from reading unique stories like the one I made an illustration for.

Anna Dreher, 13
Portland, Oregon

Anna illustrated "Frustration, Happiness, and Pure Amazement" in our November/December 2015 issue.

Stone Soup is my favorite magazine because the stories, poems, illustrations, and book reviews are all created by kids my age! Unlike with other magazines, I read every *Stone Soup* poem, story, and book review! Sometimes, I read them twice.

Vera Sablak, 12
Concord, Massachusetts

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



"I expected it to be a bit grander, didn't you?"

Iris in the German Garden

By **Maisie Bilston**

Illustrated by **Alia Tu**

AN OLD MINIVAN slowly grumbled its way up the ugly, concrete driveway, passing an old clump of purple-brown wisteria vines, rumbling by a dingy hedge shielding the moldy garbage can, full of old holes where squirrels and raccoons had once tried to nibble their way in to eat the trash.

“Well, here we are!” said a woman in a falsely cheerful voice, dragging an old, moth-eaten suitcase.

A girl of about eleven adjusted her hat and coat. She brushed back her dirty-blond hair and said, “Are we really? My, I think I expected it to be a bit grander, didn’t you? But I suppose it’ll have a simply lovely garden to play in, won’t it, Mother?” She said all this very fast, in a bossy-ish sort of English accent.

“Yes, I’m sure it will,” her mother replied. She gave a tired smile and seemed to be trying to convince herself as much as her daughter.

This girl’s name was Iris Stellar-Lupos. Her mother, Jill Stellar, was a widow. Iris’s dad, Robin Lupos, had died of cancer a few months ago. Before Mr. Lupos had died, he and Iris’s mum had planned to come to Germany for a year, so that Iris could learn a second language. But then Robin had died, and Iris’s mum decided that they should come to Germany anyway. A change of scenery, she thought, might help Iris forget about... well, she didn’t want to think about that.

Iris took her small suitcase and followed her mum up the stairs. As they entered the grimy glass doors a robotic female



Maisie Bilston, 11
New Haven, Connecticut



Alia Tu, 13
Redwood City, California

voice said, "*Willkommen im Wunderhaus!*" Iris looked enquiringly up at her mother.

"It's German for, 'Welcome to the Wonder-house,'" her mother replied, trying to smile. They walked up five flights of stairs (there was no elevator) until they came to a door saying "Stelar Lupus."

Great! Iris thought. They can't even spell my last name!

Mrs. Stellar opened the door, saying, "Home, sweet home!" She was always too positive.

"Now, honey," Iris's mother said as they trudged down the hall, staring gloomily at the peeling orange wallpaper, "you go into this room and unpack. Finally you can have your very own bedroom!"

Muttering indistinctly, Iris opened the bedroom door and slipped quietly inside. She didn't want to be disturbed.

Iris didn't bother unpacking. She took out her diary and a stub of pencil, threw herself onto the little cot in the corner, tried to make herself comfortable by pulling the thin, moth-eaten covers up to her chin (but abandoned that quickly as the faded orange wool was itchy), and began to write:

I hate it here... I miss my dad... Why did he have to die?... I want to be at home with him, not here...

IRIS AWOKE to the sound of shouting. She opened the window and leaned groggily out. "Please! I'm trying to sleep!" Two boys stared at her from the outdoor corridor that ran around the inside of the building. One was roughly Iris's age. The

other looked about six.

"Ooooooh!" the older one yelled. "She's trying to sleep! Has the little baby got enough rest? Little ones are very delicate!" he mocked. Iris closed the curtains, hoping they weren't so faded that they were see-through, pulled on her dress, hat, and coat, and stormed outside. "LEAVE... ME... ALONE... IN... FUTURE!"

"Hey, don't shout!" said the elder of the two. "I'm James Rickmann. But please, dear lady, do call me Jamie." He made a fake bow. "And this charming young gentleman is Molasses."

"Huh?" Iris stared at him, unable to make sense of what he'd said. She was still very jet-lagged and felt slow and clumsy.

"His real name is Milo, but everyone calls him Molasses," Jamie explained. "We're from New York. Our family is staying in Germany for a year."

"I," Iris said, trying to shake off her tiredness, "am Iris. And please don't shout. It disturbs the magic." She smiled annoyingly, in the I-know-something-you-don't kind of way, which is very different from the I-have-forty-three-dollars-in-my-pocket way, or the it's-my-birthday-and-I'm-getting-a-video-camera way.

"Aw, you don't really believe in magic!" Jamie said, "People only believed in that before there was science and stuff."

"Yes, I do!" Iris retorted. How could they know that she had believed in magic ever since she was nine, when she had first read the *Harry Potter* series. They had been her favorite books ever since. How

could they know about everything that had happened to her in her short, eleven-year-long life? About how her dad got cancer and died?

Her head throbbed, but she tried to ignore it. "I'll prove to you that magic exists! Wait here!" Iris dashed back into her apartment, filled an empty jam jar with water, and grabbed her Hermione Granger wand and some irises from a vase in her room. She ran back outside, dropped the flowers into the jar, and pressed and twisted and squeezed them until she had dyed the water the purple of the flowers. "This," she said, trying to imitate Hermione's bossy voice, "is Draught of the Living Death, from *Harry Potter*. It..."

"We know!" Jamie interrupted. "We've read *Harry Potter*."

Iris sighed, then said, "Abracadabra!" and pointed the wand at the "potion." Nothing happened.

Iris tried not to burst into tears as Molasses giggled and Jamie whooped. "I'll prove to you that magic exists. I'll prove it to you!" she said. "Meet me here in a few days and I'll show you!" She stormed off towards the rusty metal apartment door that must once have been painted orange, snatching up her mother's half-finished tea and some paper from the printer. (She hoped her mother wouldn't notice; paper was expensive.) Then Iris sat down and began.

OF COURSE magic exists!" Iris hissed. It was the next day, and Iris's first at her new school, Gruene Grundschule.

It was made of concrete with peeling white paint, and the slide in the playground was always too hot.

Their classroom was old and had never gotten around to getting one of the new whiteboards, the ones that were electronic and could show pictures.

Jamie sat next to Iris in class, but he wasn't listening. He was busy staring at their math teacher, Frau Blumen. This meant Mrs. Flowers. She always smiled, displaying beautiful, white teeth. Her shiny golden hair was always loose. Her blue eyes were always lined with pink eyeshadow, her lips were always bright red, and her eyelashes were always super long and curly.

Iris thought Frau Blumen looked like a silly fashion model, but Jamie adored her. "Jamie, what are you staring at?" Iris asked.

"Nothing," Jamie answered quickly.

"I expect 'nothing' is still doing sums up on the board," said Iris haughtily. "As I was saying, magic has to exist. The Loch Ness monster, Jamie!"

"Aw, magic's for girls! I don't wanna do your stupid girly stuff," Jamie said.

"You," said Iris, in her deadly quiet don't-you-dare voice, "are the most awful, sexist BRAT I have ever had the misfortune to meet." She exploded. "I NEVER WANT TO TALK TO YOU AGAIN!"

Frau Blumen smiled her annoying smile. "*Wir schreien nicht in dieser Klasse, Kind. Bitte, mach es nicht noch einmal.*" Iris understood her. She knew it meant, "We don't yell in this class, child. Please, don't

do it again.” Even though she’d never been told off in class before, Iris did feel some pride, because she’d understood.

AS IT HAPPENED, Iris did talk to Jamie again. But only because she had to. If she didn’t, he’d think she was lying about the magic, and she didn’t think she could bear that.

It was three days after the “Abracadabra” incident. Iris brought out the thing she had been working on into the overgrown garden outside the Wunderhaus. It was a map.

There was a courtyard that was right under all the apartments. In the middle was an old, brown pine tree. It looked slightly out of place. Iris thought that there should have been a fountain there, perhaps with beautiful lily pads, and irises growing around the outside. Iris thought no garden was complete without irises.

The grass Iris, Jamie, and Molasses were standing on was slightly gray, as though it was tired of living and just wanted to go away.

Iris took out her map. It was just a piece of paper ripped around the edges, wiped with tea bags to make it look old. She had written with an old Sharpie. She thought it looked like a quill had written the words. “This,” Iris said, “is a map of the garden. Do you want me to show you around?”

Jamie read off some of the names. “Werewolf Woods, Black Cat Alley, Place of All Dangers, and... the Slips? That’s ridiculous!”

“Slips are holes in the fence. You can

crawl through them onto the other side of the garden,” Iris replied through gritted teeth. She didn’t want her precious map to be called ridiculous, especially not by Jamie. She’d show him. Suddenly the warm day seemed more humid than before, and she thought she felt sweat dripping down her arm.

“I don’t wanna do magic! Let’s do Barbies!” Molasses said out of the blue. Iris and Jamie stared at him, but he only shrugged. Molasses was just surprising that way.

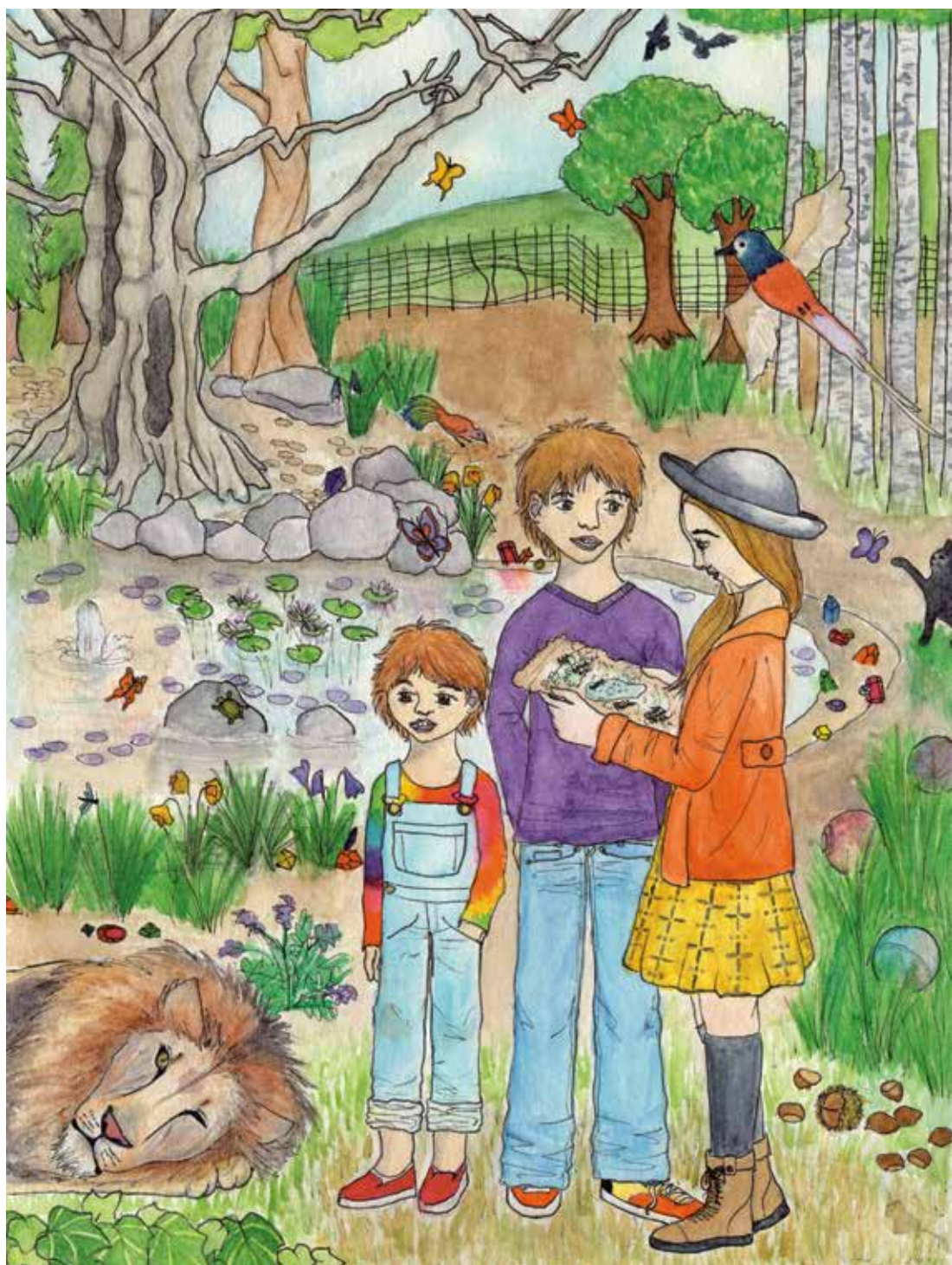
“Fine!” Iris raged. “I’ll go and enjoy the magic myself. Goodbye.”

“OK, OK,” Jamie said, making a face. “We’ll do the stupid magic with you. Happy?”

“Follow me!” Iris replied haughtily. She led them through Conker Heaven Walk, named so because of all the conkers scattered around. Those conkers were the only things in sight that weren’t gray and dusty. They were shiny and a rich, caramel brown on the bottom. There were chestnut trees in Iris’s garden at home. Iris and her dad used to collect conkers together. That was why she called it Conker Heaven.

Next she showed them all three Slips and warned them to watch for the poison-spitting Grimmins that swam on the lake. She said the Slips were the only place where werewolves and ghosts couldn’t go.

The lake was beautiful, she could almost see her reflection in the water. The pebbles on the floor of the lake were shiny and some were her favorite shade of purple. Like irises.



Bit by bit, Jamie and Molasses finally saw the garden as Iris saw it

Then she took them into a small clearing and showed them the Wicked Tree. "Never touch that tree," she warned. Jamie stared at her. She knew he thought she was crazy, but she didn't care. "Four-thousand years ago, a basilisk entwined himself around it. He made sure that anyone who touches it is overcome by evil. When you get near it, it makes you sleepy. That makes it easier to take over your soul. The only possible cure is to feed the victim daffodil stuffed with cinnamon before three hours are over."

As she spoke, bit by bit, Jamie and Molasses finally saw the garden as Iris saw it, felt magic pressing in on them, a sugary feeling that warmed them up like hot cocoa.

Molasses looked up and gasped. Where clouds once sat now hung beautiful girls, with hair the color of night and eyes like emeralds.

"Those are the Witches," Iris said.

Jamie saw a lion, lying contentedly in the sun. He opened one eye lazily, murmured, "Hey, Iris," then fell asleep again.

"That's Shaman, King of the Garden," said Iris.

As Iris showed them around, Jamie and Molasses noticed that they felt sleepy, so very sleepy. They supposed they were still jet-lagged. Maybe tired from trying to understand all that German.

"Come on, Molasses! Jamie, hurry up," Iris looked back and saw that Molasses had fallen down and leaned on a nearby tree, saying only, "I still prefer Barbies."

Iris ignored him. "Here," she said, hold-

ing out a dock leaf to Jamie. "Take it. It'll help with your tiredness." Jamie took it. Then he looked around the small clearing in which they were standing.

"Wow! This is pretty awesome. But will we be able to get home again?"

"Yes, of course. I can show you the Witches' Woods, and Wisteria Walk, and Black Cat Alley! In England, black cats bring good luck. So it's lucky to walk down there. But wake Molasses up first so we can... Jamie!" Iris gasped. "Do you know what tree he's sleeping on?"

"Oh, God!" Jamie said. "The Wicked Tree!"

LEAVES BEGAN to swirl, the previously clear day now turned dark and stormy. The Witches turned into black birds of prey, red eyes looking down as they circled, now and then crying loudly, "Dee-vil! Deeeth!"

"The Devil's messengers!" Iris called. "Don't look up, if you do they'll turn you into one of them!"

"Just save Molasses!" Jamie answered.

"Quick! Get the cinnamon!" Iris yelled.

"How? Mom doesn't have any!" Jamie yelled back.

"You're magic here, James! Think! Just say *cinnamon*!"

Jamie yelled his request up to the sky. He didn't look up. Suddenly, a jar of cinnamon appeared in his hands.

"Got it!" Jamie yelled.

"Now say *thanks*!" Iris screamed, as if it was obvious. "But don't look up, whatever you do!"

"Who am I thanking?"

"The sky!"

"Oh, thanks, great Sky!" Jamie yelled, sarcasm dripping from every syllable. He turned to Iris. "The daffodil!"

"Hurry, give me the cinnamon! We have only half an hour left. Time moves faster when the Devil's messengers arrive."

Jamie shoved a handful of cinnamon into Iris's hands. She crammed cinnamon into the daffodil, then ran to where Molasses lay. But she couldn't get closer than five inches from his mouth, as if some invisible force was pushing her away. "I... CAN'T... DO... IT!" Iris said desperately. "THE... POWER... IS... TOO... STRONG!"

"Molasses!" Jamie screamed. "Wake up!"

"I am no longer Molasses," said he, opening his eyes to reveal empty sockets. "I am a servant of the Devil!" He lunged at Iris, opening his mouth to show vampire teeth. "Please... Molasses! Remember, you're Jamie's brother... and you like Barbies... and your parents will miss you if you suddenly vanish!" Iris thought she saw a flicker of brown in the empty sockets. But then it was gone.

Molasses opened his mouth, bared his fangs, and prepared to bite. Iris took her chance. She shoved the daffodil into his mouth.


The wind stopped, and the birds vanished. Molasses fell to the floor. His red hair fell in front of his eyes. Iris and Jamie stood waiting. Iris started to cry. Jamie did, too. Then, suddenly, Molasses opened one brown eye.

"That was fun!" he said, sitting up. "But I'm a bit sleepy, so can we play Barbies now? It's quieter." He grinned.

Jamie ran to hug his brother, and Iris ran to hug Jamie. For one moment, their eyes connected. Jamie's green, Iris's blue, and Molasses's brown.

In that one shining second when their eyes connected, all three knew at the same time. Each knew life in Germany wasn't going to be easy. Molasses still liked Barbies—Jamie teased him constantly, "Aw, Barbies are for girls." Iris told him off constantly—"Stop being sexist." Jamie still liked Frau Blumen, the slide in the playground was still too hot, and Iris would always miss her dad. But Iris also knew something else, something they all knew: They were a trio.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN THE YEARS 2013–2014, my family took a year-long sabbatical to Germany. I speak German at home with my father as a second language. We stayed at the Wissenschaftskolleg for the year, and the building and garden we lived in were the inspiration for "Iris in the German Garden." My younger siblings and I made a map of the gardens, like Iris did. All the names on Iris's map were on the map my siblings and I created, with my mother's help. This story is one I acted out countless times in the garden with my family and friends, and as I remember it so well, I decided to write it down. So, really, this is my story. I hope you enjoyed it. 

A Different Kind of Brave

By **Sadie Perkins**

Illustrated by **Sarah Uhlman**



Sadie Perkins, 11
Madison, Wisconsin



Sarah Uhlman, 13
Morrisville, Pennsylvania

I BEND OVER and finger my key chain, determined to escape into the world of Little Miss Piggy and Mini Kermit the Frog. I try to ignore the teasing around me. I try to ignore Andrea, who is seated across from me, arms over her head, yelling at them to stop. I try to ignore the bus driver, who isn't paying attention at all. The best thing I can do is ignore, I think. But something makes my eyes turn upward, my ears tune into the cruel words. Andrea is wearing a red coat today. Her eyes roll around inside her huge glasses. She's an autistic girl. And that automatically makes her a magnet for bullying. Henry, a boy in the back, yells names at Andrea. More kids try to grab her hat and jewelry. Her backpack is in the middle of the aisle. Somebody grabbed it and threw it there. That's where it's staying for now.

I can see some kids are glad they're not getting picked on. Like Sean, who can't keep a friend for more than a week. Some kids tease him behind his back. Others simply ignore him, sending an anti-Sean vibe and signaling to everyone, even the youngest kids, that he's not cool to be around. So of course he is laughing his head off as Lucas, sitting behind Andrea, pops up and yells, "Freak! Freak! Freak!" over and over in her ear.

"Stop it!" she screams. No one listens. Somebody flashes his middle finger up at her. I gasp. Everybody knows what that is. It's terrible and mean. Andrea is in a hostile atmosphere. Kids go out of their way in an exaggerated fashion to avoid touching her.



"If I ever see anything like this again, you'll have me to answer to."

When she gets off at her stop, everyone forgets her. Like me.

When I get off, I run to my house. My room is so quiet, the walls a peaceful shade of blue. I forget that Andrea probably isn't very happy right now, and I forget that Sam and Lucas are home safe, with no consequences.

THE NEXT DAY, I am tense as I climb on the bus. The moment Andrea gets on, she says, "Hi, guys!" in a piercing voice and waves.

Sam screams, "Look out, here comes

Andrea!"

Somebody sticks a kick-me sign on her back as she walks past. When she sits down, someone else grabs her hat and throws it out the window.

In a clear, strong voice, I hear someone say, "Mr. Dave, stop the bus."

Everybody's eyes turn. Melissa, a fifth-grader, rises up. The driver slams on the brakes. Calmly, Melissa walks down the aisle, quietly gets off the bus, picks up the hat from the street, climbs back on, and returns it to Andrea.

Then she faces the bullies. "You need

to leave Andrea alone. Period!” Her words are loud. Melissa takes Andrea’s arm. “Come here, Andrea,” she says. Andrea gets up. Melissa wraps her arm around her. “Look,” she demands. All of us look. The bus is silent. The driver is staring in the rearview mirror. “This girl deserves respect,” Melissa tells them. “All of you ganging up on her at once is cowardly. It’s malicious. It’s cruel.” Everybody nods. Even Sam.

“If I ever see anything like this again,” she says to Sam, Lucas, Richard, and George, who are the leaders of the bullying, “you’ll have me to answer to.” She doesn’t say this violently, but in a quiet voice. “And all of you.” She motions to us. “Did you ever once stand up for her?”

We shake our heads.

“That goes for you, too. All of you say sorry to her.”

“Sorry,” we all chorus.


“It doesn’t make any sense to bully people who are afraid of you like she is. I know you think that mercy is for weak people. Think again.” She lets go of Andrea. Then Andrea starts to clap.

And then Rochelle, in the last seat, joins in timidly. Her seat partner, Abby, starts in. It’s like one of those waves you do at baseball games. Everybody starts clapping, the ripple going through the whole bus. Everybody claps, even the bullies. Then Rochelle stands. And everyone stands. It’s a standing ovation. Everybody

gets to their feet gracefully at the same time and claps. Boys whoop and holler and whistle. Lucas even takes off his baseball cap. The bus driver gets to his feet and claps, too. I’m clapping my hands so hard they’re about to fall off, so I run up the aisle and throw my arms around Melissa,

who pulls me to her, and we’re giggling and then laughing as we bounce up and down, hands on each other’s shoulders. Then everybody’s up out of their seats and hugging Melissa, and hugging each

other. Everyone’s laughing, light shining from their faces. If this was a movie, there would be happy, up-and-down light fiddle music playing right now. Even the fiddler would be doing a tippy-toe dance and rhythmically making the bow fly up and down. Then Rochelle hugs Andrea. Kids are high-fiving Sam and the other boys. And then we all try to hug Melissa and Andrea at once. They’re squashed in the middle and we’re crowding around them.

All of a sudden I realize how backwards we had been thinking. *Brave* to us was riding a horse through a deep dark woods to rescue a treasure. *Brave* was risking your life to save princesses from wicked stepmothers. Now I know there is a kind of brave that involves the possibility of a hundred children rising against you. It involves the risk of not being safe from the bullies anymore. It involves, most importantly, you saying one little sentence that could change something forever. 

“And all of you.

Did you ever once
stand up for her?”

How It Works

By Alden Powers

I sit here, and I don't notice the dirty dishes, left lying
in the sink
I don't stare at the holes in the wall, strange and unexplained
I don't ponder the fishbowl, tipped over on the floor,
or the color the light makes as it bounces off the
broken mirror

I do not wonder about the skittering in the attic,
And I don't think about the ceiling tiles,
slowly chipping down, and gathering in the roots
of my hair

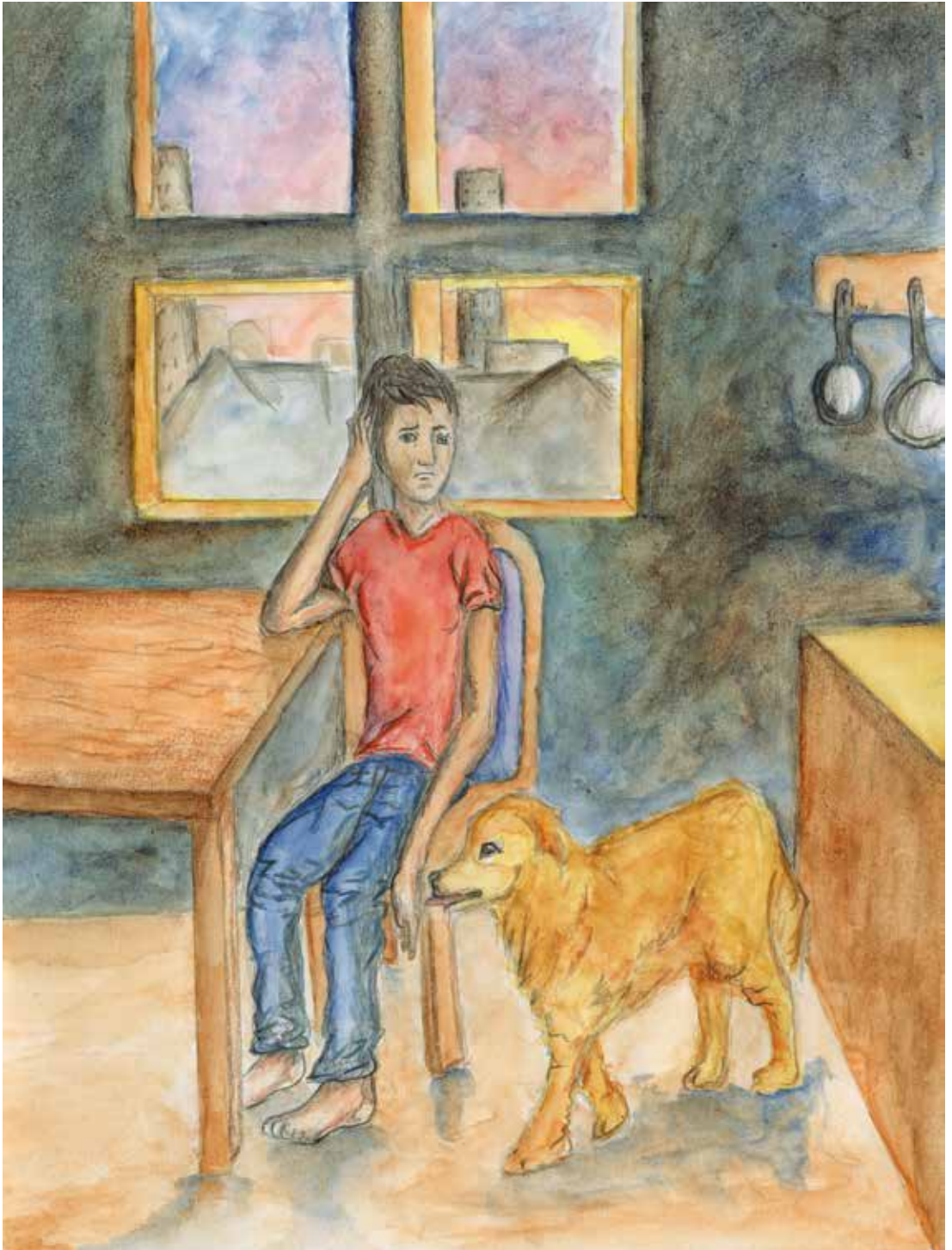
I sit here, and I don't notice anything,
As the browning shutters bang against the wall like the wings
of a caged bird

Because I've noticed
That noticing just makes it feel less like

Home



Alden Powers, 12
East Hampton, New York



I felt that she was the only one who cared about me anymore

Seeing Over the Side of the Boat

By **Benjamin Halperin**

Illustrated by **Kyle Trefny**

I DON'T LIKE MY PARENTS. Actually, that's not true. I love my parents, but they are so stressful. Everything has to be a fight. They fight over who is driving me to baseball practice. They fight over who gets to spend the weekend with me. Like two days ago I missed my baseball game because they were fighting over the mortgage. I don't know what the mortgage is, but it sounds important. That game was our baseball team's first loss. I am the starting shortstop and the fastest kid on the team. A few days ago I overheard them fighting over who gets to keep me. That is what I don't understand. Why would one parent get to keep me? The whole point of being parents is sticking together and taking care of me. So what is this talk of only one parent taking me? I found out yesterday after school. Mom and Dad sat me down in the kitchen.

It was the first time they have been in the same room and not been yelling at each other in a long time. Dad's long, bony fingers were trembling. I had no idea of what was to come. Dad started to speak, but Mom cut him off. It was quite easy to feel the nervousness in the room. The air was stagnant, and nobody was breathing. Mom mumbled, "Tobey, your father and I are getting a divorce."

"A divorce!" I blurted, shocked. I had heard about divorces but I never thought it would happen to this family. It was clearly important because Lucky, my golden retriever, was sitting very still at my feet. She is very good at sensing feelings around her.

"Well, your mother and I both agree that it would be best for



Benjamin Halperin, 13
Hastings-on-Hudson, New York



Kyle Trefny, 13
San Francisco, California

the two of us to no longer live together. That means we won't be fighting," my Dad stated.

"I know what a divorce is, but why?"

Neither of my parents answered. That was the end of the conversation, and both of my parents got up to do their own separate things. They both love me, but they didn't know what to do to comfort me. Comforting people wasn't either of my parents' strong suit, and this was really hard on them. It was the first time in what feels like forever that they finally agreed on something. But I didn't agree. I wanted them to stay together no matter what. The last three months finally made sense, like gears clicking into place. I should have seen it coming. My parents fought at every chance they had.

I was left alone in the kitchen, just staring out the window. I started to realize that this divorce isn't a good thing. It means that I won't be around both my parents at the same time. Lucky came up to me and licked my hand. I felt that she was the only one who cared about me anymore. I got her just last year and she was a rescue. One of her ears is much shorter than the other, and her tail is crooked. Her soft furry ears on her head always gave me comfort. I gave her a pat on the head and whispered to her. I told her that it would all work out in the end. As I sat there, the cold winter air blew through the door as my mom left to go out to dinner. The sun was still just peaking over the horizon. I felt a tear drop onto my lap, when I realized that my dad

tried to sugarcoat it by saying that they won't fight anymore. But I could care less about that; I just wanted my parents to live together.

My dad came into my kitchen to get dinner started. Mom went to her friends for dinner and to stay the night. She was doing that more and more now. I asked him, "Will I get to see both you and Mom after you get this divorce?"

Dad said, "Well, we will work it out, maybe." He said it in a way so he was hard to understand. I think he was trying to block out this divorce in his head and move on. The house was shockingly quiet. All that you could hear was the sausage sizzling in the pan and my dad whistling as he cooked dinner. He truly loved to cook. The smell made my mouth water and I could tell that Lucky would much rather have what we were having for dinner, not her dry pellets.

After dinner, I bawled in my room. It finally set in: Mom and Dad don't love each other anymore. Did they ever love each other? Do they still care about and love me? How could they leave me to fend on my own? At least I would have Lucky. She stuck by my side through everything. She licked my hot, red face, and I patted her head. She was the only dog I could ever hope for. Her golden fur kept me warm, and she was always there when I needed her to calm me down. I could hear her breathe deep, as she fell asleep on my lap, and I tickled her under her ear, her favorite spot.

"We won't ever get a divorce, will we,

Lucky,” I whispered to her, as I drifted off to sleep. She smiled, as if to say, “No. We won’t.”

LAST NIGHT I had the worst nightmare I’d ever had. Our family was going on a vacation to a tropical island. The boat ride over was pleasant and stunningly gorgeous. I could just barely see the white sand on the picture-perfect beaches over the sides of the boat as we approached. I could never see anything coming, being so short. When we got to the island, we played on the beach with Lucky. The warm sand under my toes was pleasant and soothing. The next morning, I woke up and my parents were nowhere to be seen. Lucky was still on the foot of my bed, snoring away. I had been abandoned on an island. I came with both my parents. Then they left me, left me alone. That’s all I remember from the dream.

WHEN I WOKE UP, the new day’s sun was poking through the window. Lucky was still there, her face lying across my lap. “Hey, girl,” I whispered. Her eyes cracked open, and she looked at me.

I could tell that she smiled and put her head back down as if to say, “Ten more minutes,” if she could speak. I picked up my book.

I was reading *The Big Field*, by Mike Lupica, about a baseball team. All of his books are amazing. There hasn’t been a bad one yet. The stories are great, and I can imagine myself being each and every

one of the characters. Mike Lupica can take me to another world. A world where parents don’t get divorced. Where sports are the problem, not family.

Just before lunch, my mom came home to drive me to the baseball game. It was the weekend, and I was going to see the San Francisco Giants with my best friend, Eli, and his dad. This would be my first time inside of AT&T Park, and I was almost jumping-off-the-walls excited. It was opening day, and somehow Danny, Eli’s dad, had gotten tickets. I know how hard that is because for the last three years I had been trying to get tickets, but my dad always said, “They’re too expensive,” or, “They are already sold out.” The Giants were playing the Arizona D-Backs. When we entered the stadium, I got to see the fresh-cut green grass and smell the popcorn and hot dogs.

The players were warming up in their crisp, white uniforms. In these moments, before the game started, anything could happen. The air felt different. It was filled with joy and excitement for our defending World Champions. I could feel the hot rays of the sun on my pale skin. Normally, I’d be worried about burning, but today, today I was going to bask in the sun of this magical place. This is what I wanted to do. I wanted to live here in this world, where my troubles had vanished, where I didn’t need books to be transported to Mike Lupica’s world. I was in his world, right then, and there were no troubles of family. In this world, there was no such thing as divorce. ❁

Book Review

By Sophie Beatrice Cooper

Playing for the Commandant, by Suzy Zail;
Candlewick Press: Massachusetts, 2014;
\$16.99



Sophie Beatrice Cooper, 12
New York, New York

WHEN SUZY ZAIL, author of *Playing for the Commandant*, details how Hanna, our young Jewish protagonist, was shipped with her family to the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, I couldn't help but remember Anne Frank, whose life after her diary ended was very similar to Hanna's. But Hanna, unlike Anne (who later died in a German camp), survives the horrible ordeal. How does she manage to live in such a place, with exhausting labor, barely any food, and brutal captors? She plays piano.

Before the war, she had been an accomplished concert pianist. At the camp, she is forced to play for the commandant, the merciless warden. It promises her a break from labor and a few extra morsels of food but is just as dangerous as the camp. The punishment for a wrong note? Losing a finger. Any other offense? Death. Staying alive won't be easy, but Hanna will make it somehow. Thrown into the mix is the commandant's moody son, Karl, who spends his time slouched in a chair, secretly admiring Hanna. Talk about unlikely love.

Zail's gruesome descriptions of life in Auschwitz are moving and inspiring. Hanna's first-person narration is a great choice,

because it makes the horrors even more vivid and heart-wrenching. When Hanna smuggles a broken piano key into the camp, it is clear to the reader that the key is a metaphor for her comfortable middle-class life back home in Hungary. A tale of woe is transformed into a tale of resilience when it is narrated by Hanna.

Yet even more riveting than the details of the killing, the starvation, and the pain are the stories of friendship at the camp. In Auschwitz, it's a dog-eat-dog world. But where there is dark, there is love, and hearing about Hanna embracing her older sister, Hanna comforting her ill mother, and Hanna being comforted by a servant girl in the commandant's house is Zail's way of promising light at the end of the tunnel.

Throughout the book, Hanna gradually finds ways to rebel. First, it's giving her sister a morsel of extra bread. Then, it's sneaking stolen food from the commandant's kitchen into the laundry delivery to Auschwitz. A startling (and to the reader, unsettling) crescendo to this is the secret romance she shares with Karl. Hanna is also unsettled by this, and it is an interesting look at how little we can control our emotions. Although Karl's father is responsible for the gas chambers, the killings, and the horrific cruelties at the camp, Hanna still loves him, though not without a bit of guilt.

This concept of emotions taking over is something that Zail handles deftly, never once stumbling on any aspect. It makes for a very readable, beautifully written, hard to put down book that should be required reading for anyone interested in World War II or Anne Frank, and even for those who have never heard of the Holocaust. It mixes pain with love, romance with suffering, and survival with history in a book where life conquers all. 🌸

The Seabird

By **Sandra Detweiler**

Illustrated by **Ruby Bledsoe**



Sandra Detweiler, 12
Eugene, Oregon



Ruby Bledsoe, 12
Austin, Texas

IN THE SHADOW of a low stone wall on the edge of a forest, two sisters lay sprawled in the grass. The younger one turned to look at her sister.

"Lindsey, is this really the last time?" she whispered.

Lindsey nodded miserably and continued to look at the sky. She remembered only too well the day her parents announced they were moving. The weeks after that had been a flurry of packing and goodbyes. Now she and Sara had come to their favorite place in the world to say goodbye.

They had been coming here ever since Sara was a baby to watch the clouds. They had always wanted to see one shaped like a bird, but they never had.

And now we never will, Lindsey thought.

"Lindsey, what would happen if we ran away?" Sara asked. "We could hide in the forest until Mom and Dad leave and then we could stay here forever."

"We'd starve to death," Lindsey answered. "Anyway..."

But her words were cut off by the voice of her father.

"Sara! Lindsey! Where are you? It's time to go!"

"Coming, Dad," Lindsey groaned. "Come on, Sara."

Lindsey pulled Sara to her feet and together they climbed over the wall and got into the waiting car.

As they drove away, Sara began to cry.

"Oh, be quiet," snapped Lindsey, but she felt like crying too.

Three hours later they reached the new house. Lindsey went out on the back porch and watched the sun setting over the



They had always wanted to see one shaped like a bird, but they never had

ocean. Just as the fiery orb sank below the horizon, Lindsey heard someone else come out onto the porch. A moment later, Sara was standing beside her.

“Look,” Sara whispered.

Lindsey looked where her sister pointed and saw, just above the place where the

sun had gone down, a cloud shaped like a bird, its wings spread wide in the afterglow of the sunset.

Lindsey put an arm around Sara. “No wonder we never saw one before,” she whispered. “We were looking in the wrong place.”





Akemi had never known that you could miss your old home so much

Miss Kagawa's Gift

By **Megan Lowe**

Illustrated by **Caitlin Tynanes**

1928

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

AKEMI WAS TAKING a while to adjust. Her father, mother, and sister had made the trip to Japan a few weeks before to finally complete the adoption process and bring her home. She was overwhelmed. There were so many new faces and personalities to learn. Everything was so different here in America. The day-to-day life was nothing like she was used to. Akemi had never known that you could miss your old home so much—even if you were in a new home. She'd owned next to nothing back at the orphanage in Japan, so she didn't even have anything to remind her of her native land.

Her mother, Rachel, understood the way her new daughter was feeling, for she had been adopted herself when she was eleven years old.

Her sister, Grace, was fourteen years old and understood that she was simply to comfort her sister. Akemi had definitely taken to Grace. She still wouldn't speak to anyone but would stand by her sister whenever she could and sit next to her at the dinner table.

Her father, Chris, knew that Akemi was still trying to get used to her new surroundings. He was concerned for her, though. All of the adoption guidebooks instructed him to just keep loving her, and he tried to do that as much as he could. He only wished that there was something he could do, even a little something, to make her feel a little more at home.



Megan Lowe, 13
Lake in the Hills, Illinois



Caitlin Tynanes, 12
Kapolei, Hawaii

Chris knew he had to return to work the following day but couldn't even begin to think about that. He was absolutely exhausted from their long journey to Japan and only wanted to rest. He knew that wouldn't be happening in the next few days, though. Chris worked at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, where he set up and removed exhibits. He also assisted with some of the cleaning occasionally. All of this took place before and after museum hours, so Chris had early mornings and—sometimes—late nights. He was usually around to help his daughter with her homework, though. Soon Akemi would be going to school, too, and he could help her with her homework as well.

The orphanage that Akemi had lived in for the first twelve years of her life had given her basic schooling and English lessons, as most of the parents looking to adopt from that orphanage spoke English. That made Akemi's transition much easier, as she would have had much more to learn had she not spoken the country's language.

CHRIS HEADED up the stairs to the girls' bedroom to say good night to them. The family had a three-bedroom home, but Akemi seemed most comfortable sharing a room with Grace for the time being. Before adopting Akemi, the family of three had spent much time and effort putting a room together for her. The beautiful purple and gray designs painstakingly painted on the walls, the

desk and dresser all ready to be used. But, if Akemi wanted to share a room with Grace, no one was going to upset her.

Chris said good night to his daughters and then headed back to the family room. He pulled out his folder of work assignments and sat down to review. The task summary described a doll to be put on display.

"A doll?" thought Chris. "Why on earth would we put a doll in an exhibit?" As he read on, the instructions outlined a bit of the doll's history.

The doll to be put on display has been christened Miss Kagawa. As some will recall, in the early months of last year, our country sent around 12,000 dolls to Japan as a gift of friendship because of the discrimination being placed on Japanese immigrants here. Eiichi Shibusawa from Japan organized a "thank you" gift and led the creation of fifty-eight Japanese "Friendship Dolls" to be sent to the states.

The dolls traveled across the U.S., and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences has the opportunity to house one of these dolls. Miss Kagawa has in her possession a ticket for a steamship, a passport, and various accessories and furniture. You will place and position these items as shown in the diagram included. This exhibit will be set up on the morning of October 5th, 1928. Please report to the circulation counter at five-thirty that morning for further details.

Thanks,
Tom Highton
Museum Exhibit Manager

October 5th was, unfortunately, the fol-

lowing day. Chris decided to turn in early, for he had a big day ahead of him.

CHRIS WOKE to his alarm at five o'clock the next morning and, begrudgingly, readied himself for work. He ate a quick breakfast and climbed into the car. The drive to work wasn't too long, and Chris was there in a matter of minutes. Chris would have walked to work, but the air was surprisingly biting for October.

Pulling his key out of his pocket, Chris opened the museum's side door and proceeded to the circulation desk as the directions instructed. There, the exhibit manager, Tom, stood waiting for him.

"Morning, Chris," Tom boomed. Tom was a very loud man, but he was always smiling. Chris had discovered that no matter how tired he was, Tom's smile was usually effective in fully waking him up.

"Morning, Tom," Chris replied. "Do you have the details on this doll exhibit?"

"That I do," Tom said as he reached over the counter and grabbed a folder. Tom then showed Chris everything he would need to know to set the exhibit up that morning. There were diagrams, handwritten notes, and photos of exactly how the case was to look when it was completely set up.

Chris thanked Tom and went to find the empty display case he was to use. The doll and her accessories would be inside this case, which would be on top of a table. Finding the case in a back room, he set to work.

Gently, he lifted the box she was in to

the floor. Sliding it open, he was greeted by much packing material, no doubt meant to ensure her safety across the ocean.

The doll was fragile, he could tell that much right away. Her hair was soft and flowing and felt incredibly real. The kimono that adorned her was a deep blue that faded into a peach color. The top section was bright red. He set her in her stand that had been made especially for her and placed her gently on the floor at his side. He then turned once again to the box.

Miss Kagawa did indeed have many accessories, as Chris had been told. Finding a cloth bag nestled in the packing material, Chris's curiosity rose. Opening it, he found many little packages. Upon opening them, he discovered that he had stumbled upon one of Miss Kagawa's tea sets. The pieces were beautiful, each of them intricately painted and designed. There were tiny cups to drink out of, hot pads to put under hot dishes, and containers to store the tea in.

Glancing at the diagram and pictures he had been given, Chris began placing accessories where they were supposed to be. There were many items to be unwrapped and displayed, and it took Chris a few hours to finish the job. Each piece had to be thoroughly inspected for any possible damage that might have occurred.

As Chris worked, his mind drifted to Akemi. She was supposed to begin attending school the following week. Based on her current behavior, he wasn't sure that



As Chris worked, his mind drifted to Akemi

she would be ready to meet so many new people in just one week.

Chris and Rachel, his wife, had been discussing ideas for how to make Akemi feel more comfortable in her new home. They certainly hadn't come up with any stellar ideas, and Chris was extremely concerned. He was desperate for a plan. Maybe something that would remind her of her home would make her feel better...

Chris was just finishing up when Tom came around the corner. "Are you all finished?" Tom asked.

"Just about," Chris replied.

"Make sure you lock up the display case. We have requirements to keep her as secure as we can. Don't want anything to go wrong with this exhibit," Tom said.

"Already done," Chris assured him. He then carried the now empty box back to the storage room and locked the door behind him. Dusting off the top of Miss Kagawa's display case one final time, Chris headed out the museum doors to his car.

On the drive home, Chris smiled, hardly able to wait to arrive home. When he did reach the house, he quickly ran inside to the storage closet and grabbed the supplies he would need.

He emerged from the closet with wrapping paper, a small box, and filler paper. He set to work in the living room, completing his task as quickly as possible, before the rest of his family awoke.

He wrapped it in the filler paper, being ever so careful. He put a bit of filler paper

in the box, too. Gently, he lifted it into the prepared box and sealed it shut. He then wrapped the box in the solid purple paper and tied it with a white bow.

Chris hurriedly reached the breakfast table and placed the parcel at the seat next to Grace's. Now all he had to do was wait.

ONE BY ONE, his family members stumbled down the stairs around nine-thirty. Everyone had enjoyed sleeping in. After all, they'd had a big week. Slowly but surely, they reached the breakfast table and sat down to eat. When Akemi spotted the box sitting by her plate, her eyes filled with curiosity. "Good morning, Akemi," Chris said. "That's for you from the rest of us. You can open it, if you'd like."

Akemi hesitated slightly. After a few seconds, she reached out and picked up the gift. Carefully, she unwrapped it, the paper crinkling as it fell to the table below. Chris watched as his daughter opened the flaps on the box and began pulling out the filler paper. He knew to let her take her time, but he was excited to see her open it.

Akemi couldn't imagine what might be in the box. She had only received a gift at one other time in her life, and that had been a washcloth at the orphanage.

Ever so slowly, Akemi pulled out the wrapped item. She pulled the paper away and gazed at the delicate piece of art.

The tiny tea cup was doll-sized.



Gabi's Poem

By **Gabrielle Mott**



Gabrielle Mott, 8
Lenox, Massachusetts

When I feel peace,
it's like my whole body
is on fire,
with a dim,
yet warm glow.

Soft,
like moonlight,
peace creeps in my open window,
sunlight glows.

Somewhere,
A mountain stream
rushes down a cliff.
A pool at the bottom
sits there,
unbroken,
Like glass.

Somewhere,
in a field
grass grows,
velvet soft,
doves coo,
sweetly.

Somewhere,
so peaceful.

Bravery

By Alexandra Plombon

Illustrated by Madeleine Alexander



Alexandra Plombon, 12
Portland, Oregon



Madeleine Alexander, 12
Keller, Texas

I LAY ON MY BACK, gazing up at the sky above me, a clear aquamarine, disturbed only by small wisps of white, scattered here and there as if the master of the sky had tossed flower petals over his shoulder to give flair to the expanse of endless blue. When I closed my eyes, the soft dappled butter of sunlight oozed over my eyelids, filling me up to the brim with the honey-like warmth. I don't know how long I would have lain there, letting the sunlight engulf me, if a shadow hadn't fallen over my golden repose.

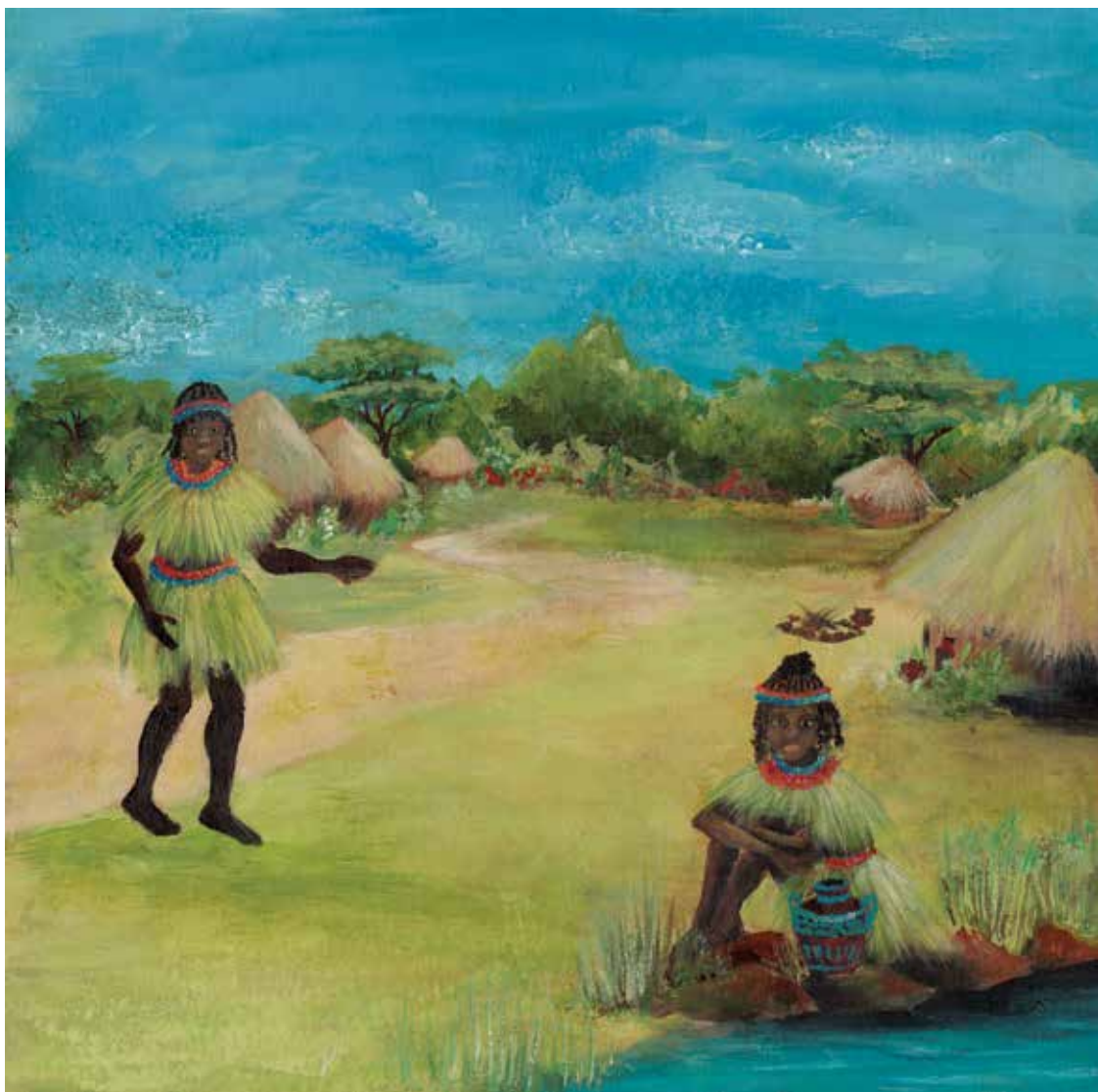
The sudden cool in the air made me open my eyes and sit up. The shadow belonged to a face full of fear and the air of a gazelle, ready to flee at the first sign of movement. That face belonged to my mother. "Tapiwah," she began, her voice tight and full of terror, "we need to get into the house. Now. It's a matter of life and death."

That stunned me. My mother was never one to use her words lightly, so I knew this was not something to be pushed into the back of my mind. Without another word, my mother turned and started toward our small village, not running or walking, but a combination of both. I sat there for another moment or two and then leapt to my feet, dashing toward my mother.

"What's... the... matter?" I asked her, gasping, once I'd finally caught up to her. Her face still bore the resemblance of a gazelle—attentive and on edge.

"It is the White Demons. They are here."

I stopped in my tracks. I tried to breathe, but no air filled my



"Tapiwah, we need to get into the house. Now. It's a matter of life and death."

lungs. I swallowed once, then twice, trying to rid my throat of the rock that had taken up residence there.

"H-here? They're *here?*" My voice sounded tinny and frail, even to my own ears, nothing like the courageous and calm image I tried to project to every-

one—others in the village, my brothers, even my mom. They needed the strength from someone ever since Father had been taken away. It did them good to have someone to look to for confidence.

"Yes. That is why we must hurry to hide. They must not find us." My heart

was pounding so loudly I thought the White Demons must hear it from whatever far-off corner of the universe they came from. I sent a prayer up to that blue, blue African sky and followed my mother into the house.

Our small shack consisted of one room. My three brothers were already there, casting worried glances around the room as if the White Demons were hiding in some nook or cranny, ready to jump out at any second. As soon as she closed the door, my mother walked over to our small reed-constructed rug and lifted it, revealing a petite trap door, which she removed.

"In you go," she proclaimed, gently but firmly plopping each of my brothers into the dank hole underneath our floor. She then turned to me, but I stepped away from her.

"I'm not going in there."

"*Not now*, Tapiwah. Not when I need you to stay safe. Staying in there is the sensible thing to do."

"Father wouldn't have done it." The words came spilling from my mouth the way a coconut falls from its leafy perch.

"No, he wouldn't have. And look where that got him." Each word she said was strained and I knew that I had said the wrong thing.

"Father was brave."

"This isn't about Father! This is about..." She froze, and suddenly I knew why. The clack of heels on wood was sounding outside our door.

The next few seconds were pande-

monium. I was flung into the pit and the trap door was sealed above me. I heard a crash. The clack of metal on wood filled the small room, accompanied with voices that demanded and scolded in a harsh language that sounded like gibberish to me. Then the noises were gone, and I sat with my brothers in the black darkness.

I sat there, a statue, until I was prodded in the back by a small fearful hand. I turned around and could just make out my brothers in the darkness. "Where's Mother?" one of them asked. Instead of answering them, I reached above me and pushed up the trapdoor.

I was hit in the face by a ray of blinding white light. Shading my eyes, I blinked until I could understand what I was seeing. The source of the light was a hole in the wall, ragged in form. As I stared at it, I could clearly picture what had happened when I was crammed under the trap door. I saw my mother flinging me into the small hole and slamming it shut, then looking for an escape route and finding none, she had flung herself through the back wall just as the White Demons barreled through the door. There was no saying what had happened to her next. She could be gone forever. A sob of desperation welling up in my throat, I launched myself through the hole in the wall and out onto the African plain.

The White Demons were easy to track. The spikes on their shoes left impressions in the earth and there were a fair number of them. I started running, my senses alert, half expecting the White Demons

to jump out of the bush and capture me.

Long after I had started panting for air, I found the White Demons. They were positioned halfway up a small hill that ended in a cliff sloping down to the sea. I surveyed the scene more closely and, with rising horror, saw that they were advancing on a lone figure with its back to a cliff overlooking the sea. That figure was my mother. She was staring at me with the same look of horror I suspected was on my face. Suddenly, her facial expression changed from terror to one of someone who had made up their mind. She gave me a warning look, then turned around. Her legs bent, and she propelled herself off the face of the cliff. For a second she hung there, as if held aloft by millions of tiny strings, but then the strings snapped, and my mother dropped downward like a rag doll being tossed aside by someone grown too old for childish habits.


I was frozen, uncomprehending of my surroundings. My mind was being ripped apart. I wanted to fling myself against the White Demons, inflicting as much harm as possible. Father would have shown them what for. But I had seen the look on Mother's face, and, for the first time in my life, I didn't want to be like Father. Yes, he was brave, but how would being brave by fighting help my brothers or even Mother, if she could be helped. So it was that I found my footsteps leading me

back the way I had come. I let my tears and sorrow flow through me, so different from that of the sun filling me up. But in a strange, mixed-up way, I felt complete, despite the terrible, awful things that I had witnessed, because I had stepped out of Father's shadow that had been on me so long I had forgotten it was there.

For a second
she hung there, as if
held aloft by millions
of tiny strings

My feet led me to our village, where I walked to the front step of my house. The door had been ripped from its hinges and I stepped through the space where it used to be. In the small room, my brothers sat huddled close

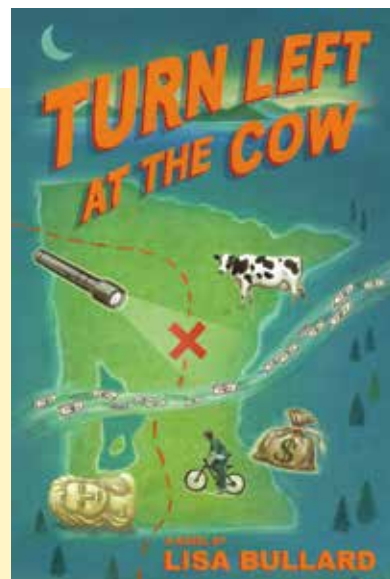
to one another. They brightened when they saw me, but then realized the worst had happened by the tear lines streaked across my face. I sat down and pulled them close to me, mingling their tears with my own.

We sat there for hours, letting the sorrow of loss flow between us, but after the sky had receded to blackness, I wiped the tears from my face. Knowing I had to tell them sometime, I started reciting the story of what happened while I was away. I told them everything, from the way the White Demons walked to the way I had walked away without revenge. I spoke with calmness and certainty, letting the words wash over the house, the village, and the plain. I spoke with newfound strength, for in stepping away from my father's bravery, my bravery in myself had grown. 

Book Review

By Max T. Smith

Turn Left at the Cow, by Lisa Bullard;
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York,
2013; \$16.99



Max T. Smith, 10
Evanston, Illinois

WHEN I READ THIS BOOK, I realized right away how it got its name. In the first part of the book, when the main character, Travis, is describing the setting of the book and how rural it is, he says, “I stared out the window, wondering how this place could qualify as a state. How would GPS even work? ‘Turn left at the cow?’” The book never refers to “turn left at the cow” again, but I think the title symbolizes that Travis doesn’t know the environment very well and he thinks that there is not a lot of fun stuff in this boring town.

So now, you might be wondering, why would Travis come to this town? It doesn’t seem like he really likes it. I should probably explain a little more. Travis’s mom divorced his dad just before Travis was born because his dad had committed a lot of crimes. So Travis had lived with his mom all his life and had gotten quite used to it. Then, out of the blue, his mom announces that she is going to get married and that she and Travis are going to move to L.A.


Travis does not like this plan, so he decides to run away. He uses his mom’s credit card to buy a plane ticket and a bus ticket to his grandma’s (on his dad’s side) house in Minnesota. When

he arrives, he calls his grandma and asks her to pick him up. She says yes, but she will have to call Travis's mom and tell her that he is all right. Have you ever not wanted to tell your parents something, but someone says that you have to? I have. It made me worry that I would be trusted less. That is what Travis feels like. But he says OK.

This is where it gets exciting. A boy and a girl who live in town visit the house to welcome Travis. They tell Travis a news story from years ago that he never knew: after leaving Travis, his dad had robbed a bank and the money was probably hidden under a lake. The boy and girl are looking for the money and Travis agrees to help them. But what should Travis and his friends do when there is someone else looking for the money?

And the other person looking for the money is... I'll leave that for you to read.

Before sharing my final thoughts about the book, let me tell you something: authors do *not* need to put any romantic stuff in a story. None. If I were you, I would just skip all the romantic parts of the story. Don't worry; they are not part of the plot.

To conclude, I thought that this book would be like *Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, which I didn't really like, but it is in a class of its own. It is like a mystery, but without a lot of clues. At first, I inferred that this book took place in an old-fashioned city because it had weird games like a chicken pooping on a number to determine the winner of the lottery. But this is actually a weird city in a modern time. This book is funny and a quick read. 

Wild Wolves

By **Nina Oliva**

Illustrated by **Elena G. Delzer**



Nina Oliva, 12
Raleigh, North Carolina



Elena G. Delzer, 12
Suamico, Wisconsin

ELICE WAS THE KIND of village that was surrounded by thick and tall trees. The people of Elice were both frightened and relieved that they were surrounded by forest. Predators could come in from all angles; on the other hand, anyone who tried to find them would get lost. This meant that they were lonely. They were so lonely, in fact, that they were desperate for companionship. Angelina was a ten-year-old villager with long and straight blond hair. She always got up early in the morning to see dawn rise. She loved seeing the colors being painted on the sky each morning as she lay on a grassy hilltop. Each day, as she lay there, she saw the same deer and thought to herself, *Why do animals live in the woods?*

Early one morning, as the sun was beaming down on the village of Elice, Angelina's peace was disturbed by the frightening sound of howling wolves. The wolves that lived in the woods had been curious about the people of Elice. Angelina stood up on the hilltop and turned to see a wolf pup caught in a net. Angelina sprinted as fast as she could over to the wolf pup. She saw two figures where the wolf was. As she got closer, she realized it was her friend's parents, Julius and Jenna. Tears were running from her eyes like water running from a waterfall as she screamed, "Wolves are meant to be in the woods, not in houses!" This was the third time she had seen wolf pups being captured and she couldn't stand it anymore. Without thinking, she grabbed the net to free the wolf pup. As she did so, she thought back to a conversation with her mother.



"Wolves are meant to be in the woods, not in houses!"

Angelina asked her mother, "Why are all of the wolf pups being taken away from their parents?"

Her mother replied, "Because everyone has been so lonely lately. The wolf pups are a new member of the family to keep them company."

Julius pulled Angelina back, but she had

hold of the net, setting the wolf pup free.

Even though she saved one, many more were still being held captive. Angelina noticed that the newly captured pups had sharp and long claws, but the next day she saw them they were short and dull. On the fifth day of wolf pups being captured, the wolves that lived in the woods

came to attack. They attacked Julius and Jenna's house first. Angelina witnessed them circling the house and sniffing the air for a scent of a wolf pup. If they could not smell or see a wolf pup they would move on. But once they found a wolf pup they would use their sharp and pointed claws to break down the door. House by house the wolves attacked. One by one villagers were killed.

The wolves were now circling Angelina. Even though she did not have a wolf pup, she carried the scent of one that she had saved. The wolf pup's scent was newly applied. Before she knew it, the glowing eyes of predators that live in the woods were hovering over Angelina's face. The colors of the sky flashed before her eyes. Blended in with the orange, red, blue, and light pink was the face of Clementine, the goddess of animals. Clementine wore a robe of white scattered with animal prints. "I have seen what you have done and would like to reward you," declared Clementine. "You have been granted the powers to be able to speak to wolves." Angelina smiled with triumph, knowing the wolves would get off of her. "But, with great power comes great responsibility, Angelina. If you succeed in saving your village, then you must have all the wolves understand why the


people of Elice are capturing their pups and you must set them wild," explained Clementine. "Another thing that will happen is you will need to tell your people that the wolves should no longer be disturbed."

After Clementine faded back into the

colors of the sky, Angelina could now hear what the wolves were saying. The wolves were discussing why Clementine, the goddess of animals, gave this ten-year-old girl the power to speak to them.

Angelina explained what

happened earlier that morning, when she saved the wolf pup. The wolf pack leader held a meeting with the lower-ranking wolves, and they decided what would happen next. The leader gave Angelina the guidelines: 1) "All wolf pups must be returned," boomed the wolf pack leader, 2) "No person of Elice shall ever try to capture one of us again," and 3) "We must never be disturbed again by any mankind!" exclaimed the wolf pack leader.

Angelina always keeps her promises, so for as long as she lived no one in the world went near any wolf pack. Because of her promise, wolves remain in the wild to this day. Every wolf today is living their life in peace with no one to disturb them. They howl at the moon every so often in remembrance of Angelina. 

**"I have seen
what you have done
and would like to
reward you."**

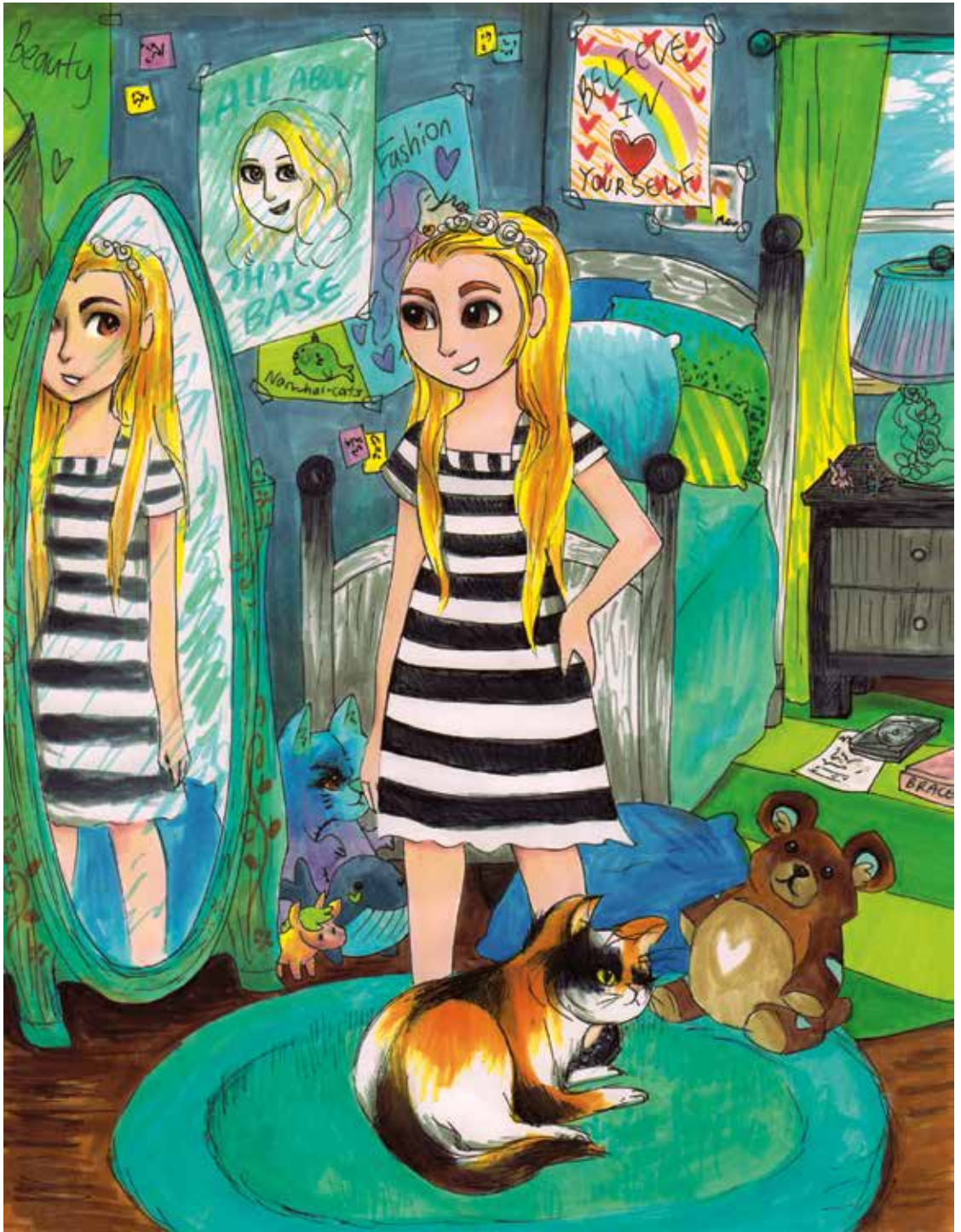
Unexpected Action

By Anne Brandes

Past the field
Through the briar
By the breaths of people lingering in the light
Past the smoke
Into the mill
Creeping closer
With the stealth of a cat
Up the stairs
And onto the windowsill
Like a hawk in its nest
A pencil and paper
And a breathtaking view
With an idea
And new perspectives
She put the pencil to the paper
And as though the paper was a ballroom
And the pencil a dancer
She wrote.



Anne Brandes, 12
New York, New York



"I do have good fashion sense, don't I?"

Join the Fun

By **Elia Smith**

Illustrated by **Audrey Zhang**

VERONICA CAISSE, age ten, stood in front of the mirror, her arms out to the sides. “What do you think?” she asked her cat, Aphrodite, turning so she could see the full extent of her outfit. Aphrodite gave a tiny, indifferent meow.

“Thank you!” Veronica told her. “I do have good fashion sense, don’t I?” She admired herself again. Cute knee-length dress with a black-and-white stripy pattern, sparkly ballet flats, long blond hair pulled back with a flowered white headband.

“Ronnie!” Her dad bellowed from downstairs. “Get down here! We’re gonna be late!” With a final glance in the mirror, she walked out of the room with a goodbye to Aphrodite.

Veronica found, when she got downstairs, that her family hadn’t taken nearly as much care and time getting dressed as she had. Her mom was looking nice but normal in a maroon turtle-neck sweater and black pants. However, Veronica noted the pearl earrings and slight coating of lipstick. Her dad wore jeans, a plain blue jacket, and a lighter blue polo shirt. Hmm, that was what he wore every day. Her older brother, Jared, was attired in a pair of ripped jeans, a faded T-shirt, and a well-worn USC jacket. Disgraceful.

Jared burst out laughing. “Ronnie, you are really... wow...” Veronica tried to figure out what his deal was. Did she have a lump in her hair? Or were her shoes on the wrong feet?

“Sweetie,” her mom said hesitantly, “do you think you are a little, um, overdressed for an informal family gathering?” Her



Elia Smith, 11
Santa Monica, California



Audrey Zhang, 12
Levittown, New York

mom emphasized the “informal,” as if Veronica hadn’t heard that description five million times already.

“Ron-Ron,” Veronica’s dad intervened. “There will be games and running around. You can change, or not. It’s your choice.”

Veronica pretended to consider, but honestly, it was a no-brainer. “I’ll wear this,” she said decisively. After all, looking good should be everyone’s top priority. “And don’t call me Ron-Ron!” she admonished her dad. “It’s so babyish. I’m ten, you know.”

Her mom and dad exchanged what-can-we-do looks but said no more about the matter as the whole Caisse family walked out the door and into the car. As Mr. Caisse revved up the engine and began driving down the street, Veronica arranged herself comfortably on her half of the back seat. Headphones, check. iPod, check. Markers, check. Pad of paper, check. Jared was sprawled out as much as he could in his amount of space, earbuds stuffed in his ears, though Veronica thought she could hear a very soft echo of the pounding heavy metal. Sighing, Veronica put her headphones on and began working through her playlist, humming along as she carefully designed outfits on the outlines of the people she had drawn.

About an hour into the drive, as she was mumble-singing the lyrics to “All About That Bass” and filling in the shirt on her newest figure, Jared nudged her.

“Look up, Ron,” he said, “we’re nearly there.”

Though slightly miffed to be interrupted in the chorus of her favorite song, she pulled off the headphones and looked out the window. Sure enough, there was Aunt Mattie and Uncle Rob’s house. “We’re there!” she nearly squealed.

Jared grinned. “We’ll get to see all our cousins! Nina and Josh and Kymmie and Gryffin and Joe...”

Veronica and Jared waited impatiently while their dad circled around, looking for parking. “Come on, Daddy!” Veronica urged. “We need, need, need to get in!” Both Jared and Veronica were appropriately excited for their once-every-two-years family gathering with all their cousins and uncles and aunts. The place where it was held varied from year to year. This time, they were lucky, since Aunt Mattie and Uncle Rob lived relatively close to them. However, many of their cousins had to fly in. But the luckiest by far were Lucy and Gryffin, who didn’t have to go anywhere at all this year.

Finally, finally, they parked and the kids leapt out of the car.

“Race you!” called Jared, sprinting down the block.

“I can’t run!” Veronica yelled after him. “My flats...” He didn’t notice, and with a sigh she began to walk with her mother at an annoyingly slow pace.

By the time they reached their aunt and uncle’s house, Jared was already leaning coolly against the doorway, with an expression that said, “What took you so long? Awesome people always get places fast.”

Rolling her eyes, Veronica reached up and rang the doorbell. Almost instantly, it swung open, and there was Aunt Mattie, a big grin on her face. "Hello hello hello!" She gave them all crushingly warm hugs, and with several more greetings and hugs to other relatives, Jared and Veronica escaped to the backyard where the other kids were all gathered.

"ROOOONNNNNIIIIIIIE!" A little pint-sized ball of energy hit Veronica full in the stomach, sending her falling back into the grass.

"Hey, Kymmie!" she grinned. Kymmie was seven years old, tiny for her age, with wide, intelligent brown eyes and soft red hair. Veronica had been the big sister Kymmie had never had, as the latter had grown up in a family of boys.

While Jared was greeting the other boys (Josh, Gryffin, Tyler, and Joe) with a series of fist bumps, back slaps, and "Hey, man!"s, Veronica's other girl cousins had come over: Nina, Lucy, and Emmy.

"Hi, Ronnie!" Emmy said, helping her up. Emmy and Lucy were the closest in age to Veronica, the former being eleven and the latter nine. Nina was the same age as Kymmie, and they would've looked very much the same except Nina's eyes were a striking blue, in contrast to Kymmie's brown.

The boys had wandered over. "Hey, girls," Joe said. Joe's real name was Sasha, but he thought it was a girly name, so had spontaneously changed his name to Joe. "Pop brought a bunch of potato sacks. Is anyone up for a race?"

It was unanimous. As they distributed the sacks, Veronica suddenly remembered. "Oh, my God, I totally forgot, I can't."

Emmy looked startled. "Why not, Ron?"

"My dress and my shoes..." Sadly, Veronica went and sat on the garden bench. She watched as her laughing cousins all started bounding across the yard. Emmy tripped and did a silly head-over-heels somersault, which got everyone giggling.

In the end, Gryffin won, and to everyone's surprise, Nina placed second. Joe, indignant, declared a rematch, and Veronica decided to head back into the house. It was too painful to watch her cousins play without doing so herself.

There was already a smear of mud on the front of her dress where Kymmie had tackled her. She couldn't risk it getting worse...

"Hey, Ronnie!" her dad called from the edge of the kitchen. "Having fun?" Veronica halfheartedly nodded an answer. She trudged over to the snack table and grabbed a handful of Doritos. The cheesy chips turned the tips of her fingers orange.

Uncle James swept by. "Hey, Veronica-Harmonica! Why aren't you out playing with the kiddos?" Usually Veronica loved being called Veronica-Harmonica. James was her favorite uncle and had silly, creative nicknames for all the kids: Go-Joe, Mini-Kymmie, to name a few. But today, Veronica was feeling a little depressed.

She shrugged. James raised one eyebrow. "You sure you're OK?" Veronica nodded, and her uncle moved on. Two more handfuls of chips later, she left the house. Maybe her cousins were playing something that couldn't ruin a dress or ballet flats.

Yet they were playing tag. Lucy ran over to Veronica. "Hey, Ron, why aren't you playing?" Veronica unhappily explained the situation. Lucy considered this, tilting her head back and forth, her blond ponytail swishing.

"You could borrow my clothes," Lucy suggested. "I have a lot of jeans and sweatpants and stuff."

"I'm OK," Veronica shrugged for the second time in five minutes.

"Suit yourself," said Lucy, running back to join the game.

Veronica did want to play, but the truth was, she really didn't want to ruin her dress, and Lucy was a total tomboy, such a different style (some of her clothes were actually bought in the boy's department: yipes!).

Veronica decided to get her iPod to busy herself, but the truth was, it wasn't as effective as she'd thought. She couldn't focus on the tunes, again finding herself watching her cousins running and laughing. She even cracked a smile herself, as Nina ducked under Tyler's legs to avoid being tagged.

Come off it, Veronica! she told herself

chidingly. *You* chose to wear this. It was your decision to look pretty. You do, you know! But even that happy fact seemed to mock her. She was saved, however, when Aunt Mattie called everyone in for lunch.

Emmy, Lucy, Kymmie, and Nina ran over, cheeks flushed and grinning. "I never ever got it!" sang Nina, doing a funny sort of pirouette jump.

"That was super fun," Emmy said happily, wiping her forehead with a sleeve. "You should've played, Ronnie! The dress can be washed." That was

true, but what Veronica hated more than wearing something unfashionable was wearing something cute that was dirty. She shrugged.

Lucy yanked open the screen door and all the girls filed in. Fortunately, there was a large table, so all the kids fit when Uncle James smashed in some extra chairs. Veronica enjoyed lunch immensely, laughing and talking. There was some commotion when Gryffin made a dumb boy joke and Tyler laughed so hard milk flew out of his nose and right on Lucy's sandwich across the table. Veronica couldn't believe Lucy still ate it.

But lunch came to a close, and the kids rushed back outside, Veronica at the end. When she got outside, the kids were discussing what to do.

"Horse?" Veronica suggested, as it included no running, except chasing after

**"I'll wear this,"
she said decisively.
"And don't call me
Ron-Ron!"**



Two minutes and five outfit trials later, the girls emerged

the ball. No one seemed to hear her.

In the end, they decided to continue on their game of tag! Veronica was fuming, but not at them, at herself. Tag was her absolute favorite game to play with her cousins, and here they were, ready to play, while she couldn't, because her stupid dress would get soiled!

Suddenly, she realized she really didn't care about what she was wearing anymore. Veronica tapped Lucy on the shoulder.

"Hey, Luce? I've changed my mind. Can

I borrow some of your clothes after all?"

Lucy smiled. "No problem." She grabbed Veronica's arm and led her into the house.

Two minutes and five outfit trials later, the girls emerged, Veronica in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt with a decal of a pink electric guitar.

"Come on, Luce, Ronnie!" called Jared from the field. "Kymmie's it!"

And with a feeling of elation that was so much more fulfilling than a pretty dress, Veronica sprinted to join the fun. 🌀



Bonus Materials

On Our Website

- Editor Gerry Mandel blogs about the featured story from each issue.
stonesoup.com/blog
- A feature about child composer Jahan Raymond, including video and sheet music.
stonesoup.com/jahan
- Hundreds of stories, poems, and book reviews from past issues—FREE in the *Stone Soup* Archive!
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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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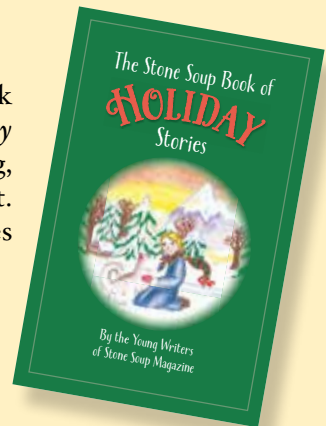
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