

StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Cycling," by Yeoh Su Wen, age 8, Malaysia

MR. LARSON'S LIBRARY

Vines, exotic flowers, lions, monkeys—the magic book has come to life!

LOVE—A CURSED BLESSING

Akash writes a moving memoir of his family life these last few years

Also: Illustrations by Tiger Tam and Zoe Hall

StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

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STORIES

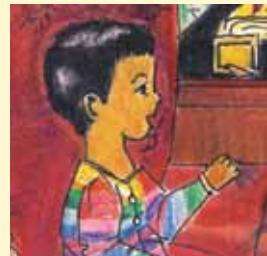
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Available from the Library of Congress in braille for visually handicapped readers. Call 800-424-8567 to request the braille edition

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 35 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heartfelt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site: stonesoup.com.

Story and poem authors: Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us within four weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

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

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

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

Cover: "Cycling" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the International Museum of Children's Art in Oslo, Norway. Established in 1986 by Rafael and Alla Goldin, the museum is a wonderland of floor-to-ceiling art by children from over 150 countries. Special thanks to Angela and Alla Goldin.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I absolutely love the beautiful story by Akash Mehta [page 21 of this issue]. It was such a heart-touching story and so beautifully written that I felt honored to be chosen to illustrate it! Before reading it I knew very little about my mother's side of the family. I knew her grandfather was from India, but I knew nothing about him. Even my own grandmother could not remember the name of the town where her father was born. Now, because of this small story, and the many threads that it has unraveled, I have learned that my great-grandfather was from Ajmer, and my grandmother knows, at last, where her own father was born.

TIGER TAM, 11
Honolulu, Hawaii

When our class went to your Web site and listened to some of the stories from other kids, it gave me a goal to start expressing my feelings by writing. My friends think I'm creative, hilarious, fun, rowdy, and very very I repeat *very* athletic. My dream is to show the world what you can do with your imaginative brain.

HANNAH WILLIAMS, 10
Fishers, Indiana

I enjoyed reading the January/February 2009 issue of *Stone Soup*. The writing pieces in the magazine are all different and have a different feeling after they are read. I really think that *Stone Soup* makes my day! You take it out and read all the wonderful and amazing writing and look at the art. It inspires me to write and draw more and more. All the writers and artists that publish in *Stone Soup* are all so talented. It makes me wonder, can I do that?

JULIAN CHAN, 11
Plainsboro, New Jersey

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

On behalf of my daughter, thank you for all that your excellent publication does to support and nurture the aspirations of young writers. Having discovered your magazine, and your mission, through Alison's quiet, unprompted, and bold decision to send you a story, I wanted you to be aware of how grateful I am to you for the platform (perhaps more accurately the light, air, soil and water) that it provides. Truly, what you are doing is so important—please know how appreciated it is.

KEVIN BUICK, PARENT
Sycamore, Illinois

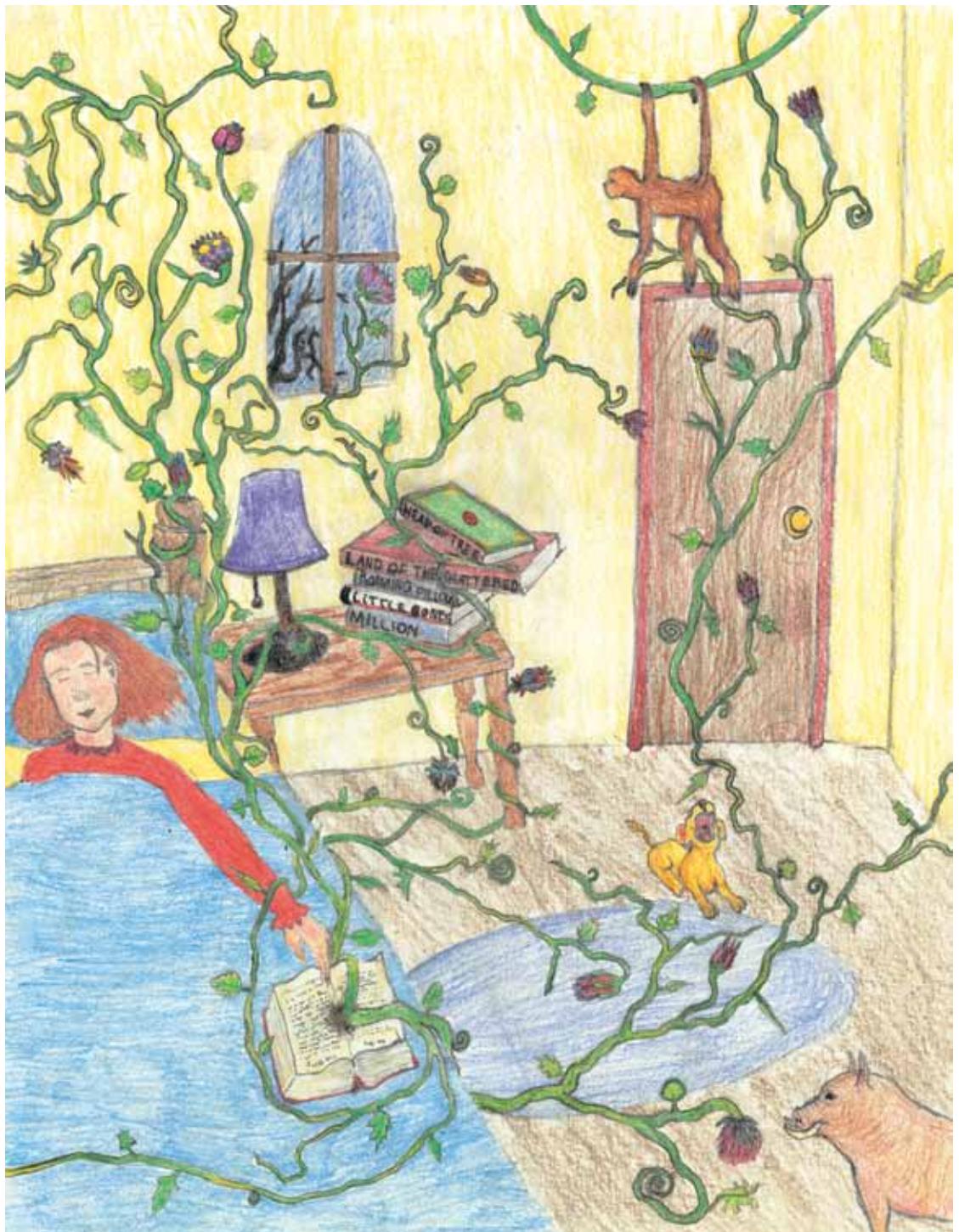
Alison Buick wrote "To Be a Swan" [March/April 2009].

I read your May/June 2007 issue of *Stone Soup* for an assignment. I was skimming through the articles wondering which one to consider when the title "Accusations" caught my eye. Hopefully, everybody who read this story learned a lesson, for Lydia shouldn't have blamed losing her English report on the new girl. As for me, I wouldn't have liked to be the new girl accused of all that nonsense. I've never experienced this and hope I never will. I enjoyed reading this short story with a big meaning.

JULIANA TAUBE, 9
Hanover, New Hampshire

WWW.SECRETBUILDERS.COM

Stone Soup is excited to announce that we are now partners with SecretBuilders, an online world for children offering a variety of creative activities, including an online interactive magazine where young writers can get published. We encourage you to visit secretbuilders.com!



Wiry, leafy vines began to grow from the pages, coiling around each other like a snake

Mr. Larson's Library

By Jordan Coble

Illustrated by Byron Otis

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD EMILY hobbled down the stairs, rubbing her tired hazel eyes. She collapsed onto a chair in the breakfast room, clutching a book in her hand.

"How was *The Lake?*" an old man asked, nodding toward the book. Wispy gray hair adorned the sides and back of his head like a garland, but the top was smooth and shiny as a crystal ball.

Holding back a yawn, Emily swept a lock of reddish-brown hair out of her face and replied, "It was really good, Grandpa. It doesn't have a lot of suspense or action in it, but it was really descriptive. I could picture myself right on the lake in the story."

"I can tell you liked it, Emily, or else you would not have stayed up all night to finish it," Emily's grandfather, Mr. Larson, said, chuckling. Mr. Larson owned a little library on Main Street, and his granddaughter enjoyed previewing books before he placed them on his shelves. Mr. Larson called this job a "book tester."

"Is it really good for Emily's health to stay up so late reading these books?" questioned Emily's mother, her pretty brownish-green eyes the exact image of Emily's.

"Of course it's good for her!" Mr. Larson exclaimed. "Reading is very good for your soul."

Frowning, Emily's mother poured a bowl of cereal for her daughter and handed it to her.

"I got a new shipment of books yesterday, Emily," Mr. Larson said excitedly. Emily suddenly perked up and her eyes sparkled like diamonds. Her cheeks, dusted with freckles like cinnamon



Jordan Coble, 12
Camino, California



Byron Otis, 12
Keller, Texas

sprinkles, glowed with excitement.

“Really?” she asked excitedly. “May I test them out?”

“Of course,” Mr. Larson promised. “The box of books is at the library. We’ll go right after you finish your breakfast.”

Cramming large spoonfuls of Cheerios into her mouth, Emily said through her bites, “I’ll be done in five minutes.”

EMILY AND HER grandfather were walking hand in hand down the sidewalk. Orange, red, and yellow leaves twirled in the chilly November breeze like beautiful ballerinas. Emily’s mittenened hand covered her icy nose as they briskly traipsed through the streets until they reached Mr. Larson’s Library.

Unlocking the glass door, Mr. Larson swung it open and ushered Emily into the building. The cozy, one-room library was filled with hundreds of books on beautiful, smooth oak shelves. Behind the counter sat a large cardboard box. Emily imagined herself riffling through the pages of each one, smelling the crisp scent of brand-new books.

“Pull out the scissors from the desk drawer, Emily, so we can open this,” Mr. Larson said, kneeling down beside the box. Pulling open the drawer, Emily’s hands closed around the scissors. Then she saw *it*.

It was a stunning, maroon leather-bound book with gold lettering on the cover. The pages did not look new, for they were torn in some spots, yellowed, and smelled musty. The title was simply

The Story. Emily thought she had never seen a more beautiful book.

“I’ve never seen this book in your library before. May I preview it?” she asked her grandfather hopefully.

His faint eyebrows frowned in worry. “Pay no mind to it,” Mr. Larson said. “It’s just an old magic book.”

“It’s a magic book?” breathed Emily. “Oh, Grandpa! Please let me read it!”

“Magic books can be very dangerous,” cautioned Mr. Larson. “I cannot allow any harm to come upon my only grandchild.” There was a slight warmness in his voice, but at the same time Emily heard an authoritative strictness in it, too, so she didn’t say another word about *The Story*.

THAT NIGHT, Emily settled down in her bed to read the pile of books she had chosen from the box at her grandfather’s library. The small tower included novels from her favorite author, chapter books from budding writers, and so on. But none of those interested her, for underneath the heap of books sat *The Story*. It had taken some careful maneuvering to sneak it into her selection of books, but she had succeeded, and as she opened up *The Story*, the trouble she had gone to seemed worth it.

The Story was the most amazing book she had ever read. Somehow, it combined all styles of writing: fiction, drama, comedy, and more, into one pleasing paragraph after another. She devoured the thick book, and soon forgot where she was.

The way the words were woven together and the way the author described settings and characters were magical, but the true magic of the book was not yet revealed to her.

HER LAMP GLOWED softly like a firefly, penetrating the pitch-black night outside. Rain pelted down on the roof and the harsh wind whipped the tree limbs around, the boughs making a scraping noise against the window. Eerie shadows from the gnarled, clawing arms of trees cast menacing silhouettes on the walls. It was midnight, and Emily had fallen asleep on her bed, her auburn hair spread out on the soft pillow. *The Story* sat beside her, the light shining on its pages. This is where the magic began.

Wiry, leafy vines began to grow from the pages, coiling around each other like a snake. They climbed up the walls, cloaking the white paint in dark green masses. More plants, including exotic flowers and tiny saplings, began to sprout from the pages, crowding to move out of *The Story* and into the real world.

But plants were only the beginning of the problem. The array of botany was followed by various species of animals, including lions, tigers, and even a few monkeys. By this point, Emily could not have stayed asleep with the grunts, roars, and other noises that filled the air.

When she awoke, her mouth dropped open and her face went pale as she saw what was before her. Her eyes swept the room, looking for the source of this stam-

pede of nature, although she already knew the origin. *The Story* was the only possible thing that could have caused this havoc, and when she looked down at the book, she saw she was right. More plants and animals were erupting from the spine like a volcano, adding more chaos than there already was.

Emily's stomach knotted up in fear, her dread mainly caused by the ferocious-looking big cats. But her anxiety of the punishment for disobedience propelled her on, assisting her to gather up enough courage to slip out of her cocoon of blankets and onto the carpeted floor.

Bravely marching up to a monkey, she ordered in a somewhat quivering voice, "Get back in the book." The little primate yanked her hair and sped away. Emily huffed angrily. The little rascal seemed to be laughing at her!

Trying not to show her frustration at how uncooperative the monkey was, she concentrated her effort on other things. Emily desperately tried to pull the vines off the wall, but they seemed to be tugging against her, leaving painful red marks on her hands. She attempted to carry a baby lion back into the pages, despite her fear. The coarse fur of the wild feline brushed against her hands and she pushed, shoved, and hauled the big cat beside *The Story*, but he simply walked away. Each plan she tried thereafter that didn't work made her feel more and more discouraged.

Her grandfather was constantly on her mind as well. I will get in so much trouble

if he finds out, she thought. She remembered his caution from earlier that day: "Magic books can be very dangerous." He had warned her about the book. Now it was too late.

Or so Emily thought.

The door suddenly swung open. There stood Mr. Larson. Despite her worry about the punishment she would receive, Emily had never been so grateful to see her grandpa. He calmly strode to the bed and picked up *The Story*. Emily watched with great interest as he carried the book to each plant, and individually tore each from the wall or ground with his strong hands and placed it back into the pages. They disappeared. As the plants began to disappear, so did the animals. They walked to the book themselves, as if knowing they had to go back. By simply putting a paw onto a page, they were whisked back into *The Story*.

In only five minutes Mr. Larson had swiftly and easily restored the room back to normal. Emily sighed with relief but then remembered she had a consequence to face. She braced herself, but her grandpa simply closed the cover of the book and left the room without muttering a single word.

As soon as he left, thoughts were swimming in Emily's mind. Why didn't Grandpa punish me? How did he know I needed help? What would have happened if he hadn't come? She sat on her bed, pondering these and other questions, until the sun began to peek over the horizon and she finally fell asleep.

THE NEXT MORNING, Mr. Larson, Emily's mother, and her father were sitting around the breakfast table, drinking coffee and chatting together.

"Good morning, Emily," her mother said as the preteen girl sat down. "Why, you look exhausted!" She frowned at Mr. Larson. "She really needs to stop reading books at night. I am telling you, it is bad for her health!" Emily's mother and father were obviously unaware of the bizarre and terrifying situation that had happened the night before.

"I got a second shipment of books early this morning," Mr. Larson said, ignoring Emily's mother. "Would you like to come over to the library to look at them?"

Emily had never wanted to stay home as badly as she did today. The terror of the midnight experience still haunted her, and she was apprehensive about any other book she might read. But she did not want her parents to know about *The Story*; they'd think she was insane or lying, so she mumbled, "All right, I guess."

A SHORT TIME later, Emily and her grandfather sat in Mr. Larson's Library, each lost in their own thoughts about the situation last night. Silence blanketed the library, and except for the ticking of the clock on the wall, all was calm.

"How did you know I had the magic book? How did you know I needed help? Why didn't you punish me?" Emily suddenly asked, breaking the tranquil peacefulness that hung in the air.

“Well, let’s begin with a short story,” Mr. Larson said, leaning back in his chair. “There once lived a little boy whose grandfather owned a library on Main Street. One day, the little boy found a magic book and read it, despite his grandfather’s warning. The book came to life that night, and the little boy had to figure out for himself how to get his bedroom back to normal. After that, the boy developed an appreciation and respect for magic. The young boy was very curious and inquisitive, not unlike yourself, Emily.”

Even though no mention had been made about him, Emily knew the little boy in the story was Mr. Larson. Emily’s grandfather had obviously been through the same experience as a child. That answered the first two questions. “But why

didn’t you punish me?” Emily asked.

“Will you ever read a magic book again?” Mr. Larson inquired.

Shaking her head, Emily responded earnestly, “No!”

“Then do you need a punishment?” Mr. Larson queried.

“But I disobeyed you,” Emily pointed out.

“I’m not one for punishments, I suppose,” Mr. Larson replied, shrugging. They were silent again for a few more minutes, but then Emily had another question.

“Why do you still have *The Story*?” she wondered.

“Perhaps so my granddaughter can develop an appreciation and respect for magic,” Mr. Larson said, giving Emily a smile and a wink.



Pursuit

By Kym Goodsell



Kym Goodsell, 13
Woods Cross, Utah

Her pudgy feet ran through the grass
Sparkling in the morning dew
Her footprints left a trail behind her
Impressions on the cold ground

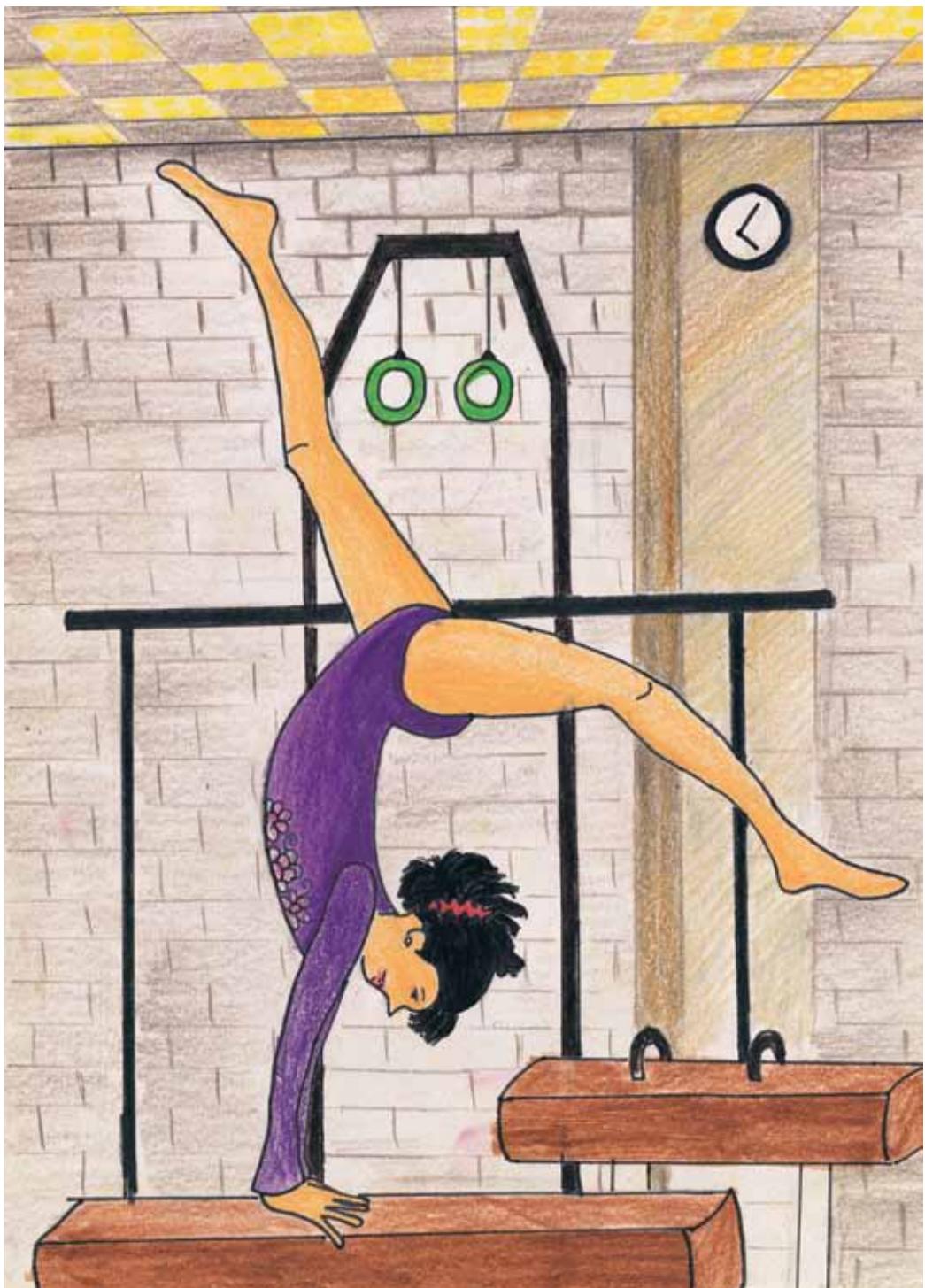
She ran
Her feet stumbling on unfamiliar territory
She tripped and stumbled to the ground
She rose without hesitation and again began her pursuit
Of the beautiful winged creature

Its wings carried it higher
Faster than her little feet could take her
Yet she ran
Willing herself to go faster

She closed the gap
It was nearly in her reach
She sprung from the ground
A single finger brushing a delicate wing
Then it was off and she hit the ground

It fluttered away
Soaring to the sky
While she stayed grounded
Her face misted
Her knees green
But with a smile forming

She accomplished her goal
She touched the butterfly



Reaching back, she kept her focus

Falling Trees and Riddles

By Sabrina Wong

Illustrated by Aditi Laddha

SABRINA HAD BEEN preparing for this for weeks. The small girl, with the statuesque figure and her hair pulled tightly back into a high ponytail, surrounded by a foil scrunchie, looked radiant in her amethyst team leotard. She sparkled, not so much from the glittery rhinestones sewn to her chest in a waterfall formation going off like a thousand shimmering flashbulbs with every move, but from a genuine smile that poured out, "I am happy to be here. This is *my* sport." Her cheerful face and the flame that burned brightly from the depth of her soul could light up any darkened corner. The day of the big meet had finally arrived!

Sabrina loved gymnastics from the very first time she entered the gym as a four-year-old. Back then, she was limited to somersaults, but she couldn't wait to catch up to the bigger, stronger girls who ran in compact, power-packed tumbling passes diagonally across the mat. She loved the meets. Sure, there was a lot of pressure to do well for the team, but pressure aside, the competition made her better than she thought she could be. All the athletes were there, to show off their best skills, and all the hard work they put into the sport. Competition brought out her best. Sabrina loved all the excitement and energy too, particularly at the start of each meet, bursting at the seams with anticipation. She loved hearing the national anthem booming up from the floor and into the stands. She loved standing shoulder-to-shoulder with her teammates, and the invisible, unbreakable bond that linked them together.



Sabrina Wong, 10
Weston, Massachusetts



Aditi Laddha, 12
Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

But soon, all eyes would be on her alone, when it was her turn to mount the balance beam—that four-inch-wide beam that appeared to float high up in the stratosphere among the clouds, although it proved to be only a few feet off the ground. The beam challenged her, looking menacing at times, even staring her down. But Sabrina would not let it get the best of her, not this time.

Using her warm-up minutes, Sabrina pirouetted perfectly on top of the beam, managing a full twist with her arms held high. She practiced her scale, elevating her leg in back of her, pulling her arms back into a wing formation, keeping her chest and chin both high. She was confident and ready. No doubt, this is the day she would get her Level 6 back walkover on the beam in competition. This was the only skill she needed which had eluded her. Some of her teammates of course had no problem with the skill, and others, like her, really struggled, needing to work hard at it. Still, she was proud of herself for taking calculated risks, daring to be better, and challenging herself to learn it. When her time came in front of the judges, she would need to bend backwards and kick one leg first, then the other, over her head, hanging for a second upside down, her legs in a mid-air split, then come up again in a lunge to balance herself, keeping both her fears and her poise in check.

The no-nonsense green pennant flag swiftly went up, signaling it was her turn. When she saluted the judges, her stomach started flip-flopping wildly. Sabrina

wondered if anyone else could hear her heart thumping loudly against her chest wall. First, she managed a first-rate scissor mount onto the beam, pointing her toes into tight arrows. She pictured her mom in the bleachers, holding her breath until she finished the back walkover that had given her so many frustrated practices, the skill that crept into her nightly dreams that seemed too eager to taunt her. This was her moment. Surely, with so much practice and so much coaching, she would do it now. She would taste victory—this time!

The moment snuck up on her. The time which held special meaning had arrived, no matter what the clock mounted high on the painted cinder-block wall announced. Sabrina stretched tall with her arms in the air overhead. Now, she thought. She carefully reached backward over her head, searching for that four-inch-wide strip of varnished wood. She found it. She pushed off on her right foot, keeping her eyes fixed upon the string of glaring lights overhead, trying to keep her position in a straight line.

But suddenly... oops, she could feel her foothold give way, and she was falling... falling... far down below into a deep, bottomless chasm. It would not be today that her spirits would climb to their summit. Her heart slumped and heaved a heavy sigh. She jumped back on the beam though, quickly, defying gravity, so as not to get another penalty deduction, and then finished up, holding her dismount for the required quantum of time. Her

nemesis had won again.

“Better luck next time,” she heard her coach mumble as she faced the disappointment pooling in her coach’s bottomless black eyes where she saw herself in endless free fall. But Sabrina’s own sights were set ahead on the horizon.

AFTER ALL THE shiny medals dangling on thick ribbons had been given out, and with both the tears and thunderous claps now fading back into the background to lurk among the bars and beams, biding their time until their next invitation, Sabrina scanned the floor, hoping the beam was still free. *Yessss*, she cheered in her mind. The next session wasn’t about to start for another eight to ten minutes. There was still a chance. The gym was empty. The crowd had poured out lazily with magnetic feet, bottlenecking at the front door, like spilled sticky soda pop, and the new crowd hadn’t been unleashed yet. Some of the conversation fizz was dying down. She knew she only had a little time to get back to work. She could picture her well-intentioned parents already waiting anxiously for her in the car, trying to find some comforting words.

Sabrina seized her opportunity, not

waiting for any proctor wearing the signature maroon jacket with the pocket insignia to wave her off. Quickly, she did her scissor mount and promptly but gingerly completed the first half of her routine again on the apparatus. When it came to the back walkover, she looked to both sides. The gym was empty. Reaching back, she kept her focus. Her legs knew what to do. They almost seemed to lift themselves over her head, searching for the beam. She came up in a perfect lunge. Sabrina’s heart soared to the rafters. There was no medal around her neck, no witness to celebrate her achievement.

“I did it,” she shouted out loud. No one was there, ready to flash her her well-deserved score. A question bubbled up, taking shape in her mind without hesitation. If a tree falls in the forest, and there’s no one around to hear it, does it still make a sound?

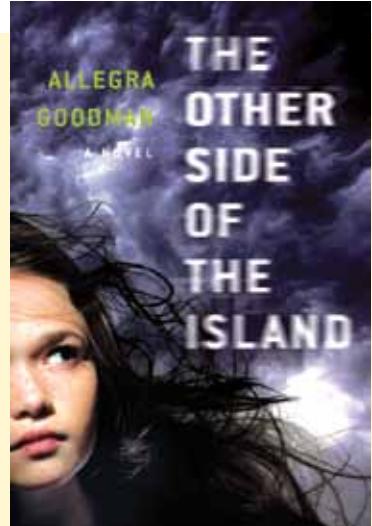
“Yes!” she answered herself out loud, but there was no one there to debate with. She had been puzzled by that age-old riddle ever since she first heard it, in third grade. But now, she knew the answer as sure as she knew her own name. “The tree hears it. The tree knows. Yes, it absolutely does! It does!” And sometimes, that’s enough.



Book Review

By Kelsey Flower

The Other Side of the Island, by Allegra Goodman; Penguin Young Readers Group: New York, 2008; \$16.99



Kelsey Flower, 13
Portola Valley, California

IMAGINE LIVING IN a world of rules—a world where the first letter of your name is chosen by the year you were born, a world where the weather is programmed each day. This is Honor's world in *The Other Side of the Island*, by Allegra Goodman. Honor is born in the eighth year of the Enclosure: a world controlled by the Earth Mother, created after the polar ice caps melted and flooded the old world. There is no visible violence or hardship on the peaceful islands on which the world now lives. As long as one obeys the rules, no harm will come to them. But Honor's parents do not obey the rules. They ignore the curfew, wade in the ocean, and sing songs. They even have another child, a boy named Quintilian, and keep him. Honor is the only child with a sibling.

As Honor goes to school and learns the ways of the island, she becomes more and more ashamed of her parents. She tries everything she can to fit in, even changing her name to one where the H sound is heard. But, at the book's end, Honor has learned her lesson. She realizes that being an individual is OK, and standing out from the crowd is what makes a person unique. She realizes that her parents, who are trying to bring

down the Earth Mother and create a world where everyone can be different, are really the ones to imitate.

I believe that *The Other Side of the Island* has a very important lesson to teach. One must learn to follow one's own heart and be an individual. For example, when Honor realizes that none of the other girls in her class have boys as friends, she quickly abandons her best friend, Helix. When they make up later in the story, Honor realizes that she never should have given up her best friend, despite what others thought.

One of the things I liked most about *The Other Side of the Island* was that I felt like I could connect with Honor's character. At one point in all our lives, we wish to fit in. For example, I used to ice skate. Many of the girls with whom I skated went to the same school and were always talking about something that had happened there. Although I sometimes wished that I had more to talk to them about, so we could become better friends, I knew that I had to be my own person and not spend my life trying to be like them. By the end of *The Other Side of the Island*, Honor too has realized this.

The Other Side of the Island shows what may happen to our world if we do not stop global warming. It is a scary thought and convinced me that we must do something to keep the polar ice caps from melting. *The Other Side of the Island* also does a great job of showing how individuality matters, yet it is still an adventure-filled page turner. Honor's character embodies a determined spirit that I loved, and it made me want to keep reading to see what happened to her. Filled with friendship, love, hardship, and sadness, *The Other Side of the Island* will stay with you even after you have turned the last page.



Racing

By Isabel Sutter

Illustrated by Madeline Helland



Isabel Sutter, 12
Houston, Texas



Madeline Helland, 13
Claremont, California

I WALK OUTSIDE and feel the grass being crushed under my shoe. A light breeze teases the trees. The peaceful yard won't be this way for long.

"Come on, Klaire! Race me!" Sophia cries, grasping my hand and pulling me over to the edge of the grass.

"Only one race," I remind her.

"OK!" she says, itching to start.

"From here to Monica's driveway," Sophia says, pointing her finger at the gravel two lawns away.

"Got it," I assure her.

We take our positions. I crouch, poised, like an arrow about to be released from an archer's bow. My knees are slightly bent and my eyes are on the driveway. Sophia glances at me, and then models herself after my pose. She starts the countdown.

"On your mark, get set, go!" she cries.

We start.

I quickly zoom away, like a tornado whirling. My sandals fly off, but I haven't time to catch them. The world flies by as my feet leap over the soft green grass. It tickles my toes and scratches my feet. The air rushes by my head. My hair is flying in back of me like a banner. I keep my eyes on the ground so I can dodge the pinecones scattered about by the neighborhood squirrels. A smile leaps across my lips. I'd forgotten how happy running makes me. I reach the gravel and turn around. I'm far ahead of Sophia. A moth flies up from the dirt where I have disturbed it. I'm almost to the finish line and I slow down a bit, not a tornado



“On your mark, get set, go!”

but a zephyr now. I reach the driveway and stop, hands on knees and panting.

Sophia halts beside me. My hair is in

disarray and my mouth is smiling, smiling wider than it has smiled for a very long time. “Wanna race again?” I ask. ☺

Ocean Memories

By Eden A. Marish Roehr



Eden A. Marish Roehr,
Venice, California

As the notes take me
I try to remember
The ocean
Mom and Dad stand by me
Deeper we go
Jumping big waves
My parents lifting me up to jump
Dolphin fins out in the horizon
Laughing then
Longing now
For the sea to sweep me
Off the ocean floor
As it did a few years ago
If only I could go back
Into childhood memories
See what I did not savor enough
Be there once more
And I go there
As I fall sound asleep
And my dreams carry me back out to sea

Love—A Cursed Blessing

By Akash Viswanath Mehta

Illustrated by Tiger Tam

INTRODUCTION

FIRST OF ALL, you must know that my story is not unique. It's merely the same tale as millions, maybe even billions of human beings; a few thousand hearts broken every day the same way as my life was shattered. Shattered but able to be put back together, piece by piece.

But keeping that in mind, this narration is not a happy one. It was the worst thing in my short life, and that life was in a ruin for a while. They say that for every good thing that happens, a bad, awful, miserable thing appears in the same story. Same story, same life. That's the way they say it. But I take it the other way. I say the opposite; for every bad thing a good thing appears. I am not responsible for my life, my story, but no doubt I have changed it—after all, a writer is the owner, and the *changer* of his book, is he not? Change. A meaningful word, and rarely used correctly. Change makes things what they are; change creates, preserves and destroys *everything*. Everything except change itself. I have made up a phrase, and it is one of the few things to say and not be heard, only understood. "In every darkness shines a light within it." That simple sentence is so complex because of its truth. I believe that in every life it is prominent. It is there, and in the light in the darkness there is another darkness, a smaller but darker one, in which there is a tiny but dazzling light, in which another even smaller darkness... and so on.

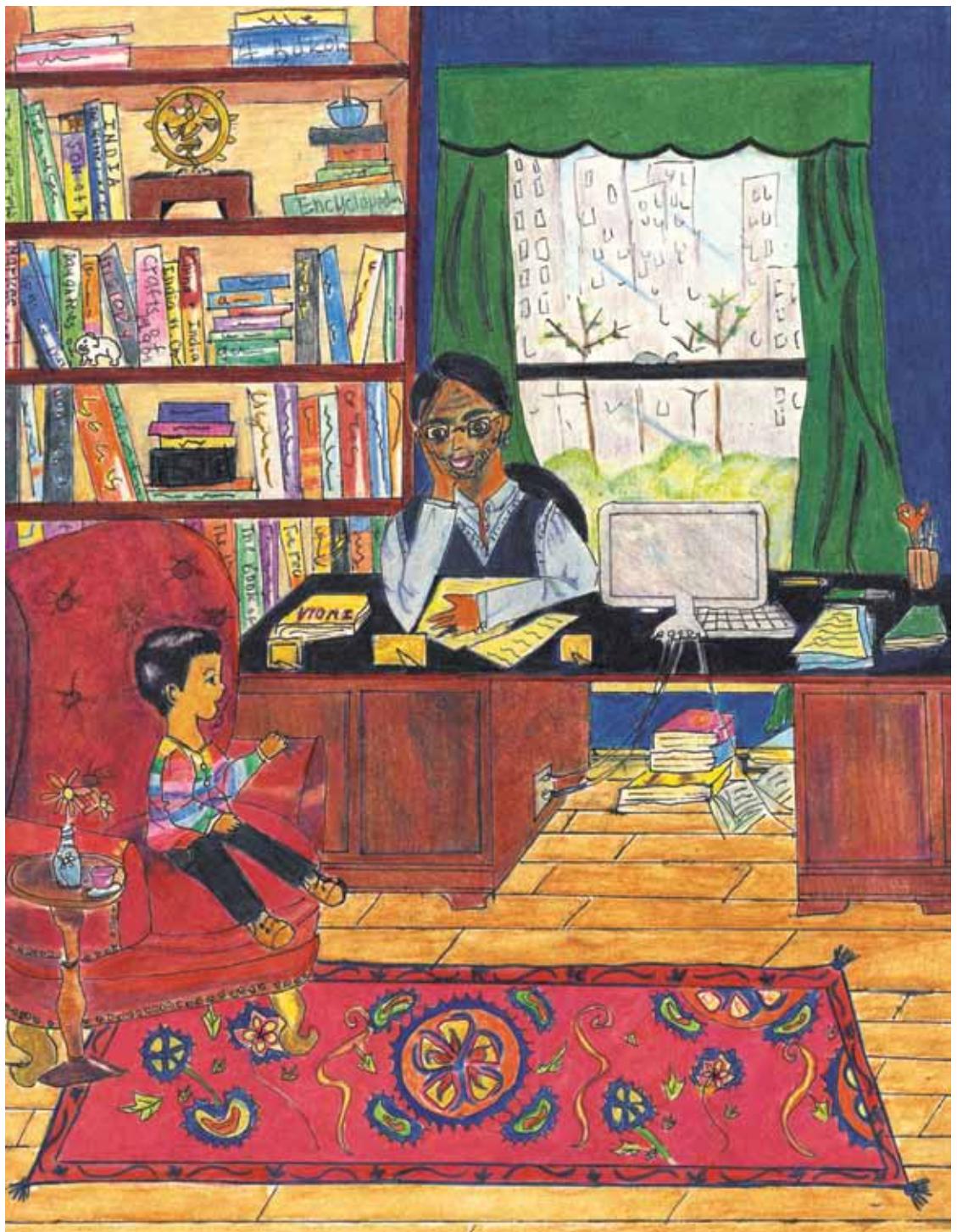
But my story is not just light and darkness. It is also love and the breaking of love. It is, to name the affliction that blessed



Akash Viswanath Mehta, 10
Brooklyn, New York



Tiger Tam, 11
Honolulu, Hawaii



My father had been working on his book for as long as I could remember

my life, my parents' love that broke, and when the love broke, the people broke apart from each other, and that led to the *creation* of many things, including a small baby who is now almost fifteen months, a love between five people that could *never* be broken, even if the previous time my mother had a love that could not be broken it broke. I am sure, with every atom in my being, that the love we have now will be whole forever.

Before I embark on the specifics of my tale, this must be known: I do not know, nor want to know, all of what happened in my parents' marriage that made them miserable. I assume I will find out in later years, and tears will fall from my eyes again, and the grief that I had will be reborn, though I do not know if it will be greater or smaller than my grief when the breaking of the love appeared in *my* life. Because the love had broken before I knew it, but I was unknowing, and ignorance was a blessing. But sometimes I noticed small things, which leaked out like a hole in a faulty pipe, and I wondered. Thankfully, however, my small mind passed those things over without a second thought. But they were still there, and unknowingly I was scared.

CHAPTER ONE BEFORE

MY FATHER HAD been working on his book for as long as I could remember. In total, it took seven years. Much more time than he had been allotted by his publishers. The book had

somewhat shaped my early childhood, and if not that, it had somewhat shaped my father, and of course, I was shaped by my father tremendously. I remember clearly, how he used to sit there in his study all day, how after school I would come home, go to his office, talk to him about my day, and then I would leave, and he would be there for the rest of the day, and he came out at dinnertime, and he would cook, and I would eat, and I would talk, and then go to sleep. In the time after I had my after-school chat with him and before my dinner, I would be with my mother. We might go to a movie, or work on an art project, or go to a park, or do whatever activities a mother does with a child. My father would be uninvolved, and I would wonder what he was doing there, in his study, working all day. But of course, I know now. He was making money, the money which bought me an elite private-school education, the money that paid the health insurance, the day-to-day money that bought me ice creams after school, the money that paid the babysitter, the money that bought my clothes—all the expenses were bought by him sitting in his study, working all day. And often he would go on trips to places around the world, to India, the place where his book took place, for as long as two months. I remember how I and my brother tried to Scotch-tape the door shut, to stop him from going, and the Welcome Back signs we used to make for him. You see, we loved him. He was not very involved with the family, but we

loved him just as much as any son could love a father. And yet, we were scared of him. He was frustrated with money, and money was what he had to sacrifice everything for, and money was a curse. And he had a temper, because a man who is frustrated with what he does, who finds life so hard, a man cannot keep all those rages bottled up inside him. He got mad, and we silently got mad too, but we were too scared to voice our anger. But we didn't know the reasons, we didn't know how hard life was for him, we didn't know how much he loved us and how much he did for us, and we should have known. But we didn't, and anger grew, fear collected. But when I say "we" I mean me and my older brother, but I cannot speak for my mother. My mother knew things that I didn't and I don't, and my mother had reasons which I don't know, and my mother was my father's wife, and I was only his son, so obviously I wouldn't know.

In the few months before the dreaded divorce, my grandparents came over from London. Quite a few times, I and my brother were told to stay upstairs and play—apparently "adult talk" was happening and I was too young to hear it. I didn't know what they were saying, so I didn't mind the instructions. Once I needed to go to the bathroom, and when I went downstairs I didn't understand what they were saying, but I remember very vividly my grandfather's voice asking, "Do you love each other?" No wonder I was scared.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DIVORCE

MY FATHER WAS going to finally release his book to the world! And finally he was going to be involved with the family, finally he was going to be a great dad, finally everything was going to be all right. That day I had come home from school—but why wasn't I picked up from school by my mother? That was how it always was! Instead it was my grandfather, the same one who had asked that accusing question that made no sense. When I asked my grandfather why he was picking me up and not my mother, he told me that she was sick, and she wouldn't even be able to come to the book release.

I don't remember the party that well, all I remember was that there were so many people, all for my father. I was happy, as I should have been, but I didn't realize that it was my last time feeling truly happy for quite a while. Because when I came to my mother's home that night, I realized it was my mother's home and not my father's. At first, I thought it was a joke. Then I wept, and then we all slept in the same bed, crying throughout the night.

But wait. You have to think about how my father felt. He'd spent the last seven years leading up to this day, and it turned out to be the most miserable of his life. He'd toiled harder than you can imagine, he had sacrificed seven years of his life for it, and the same day he had released his book, he divorced. And maybe you can see, now, what the family was. A father

who had given everything he had for a day that turned out to be one of the saddest of his life. Two children who have just been thrust into a world full of fights and agreements and lawyers, whose life had been suddenly broken like a thin pane of glass. And a mother who had just voiced her rage over all the years, with no steady hand to guide and calm her, with two children to take care of. And then, everyone blamed themselves. My father said it was his fault, he broke the marriage, my mother said that it was she who had called the divorce, it was she who had finally said no, and my grandparents said that it was they who had convinced my mother. And then, there was me. Just imagine, for a moment, what it must have felt like. It is hard to put my emotions into words. I felt that I had done something terribly wrong, that I had made a mistake that cost my parents their love. And everyone was right to blame themselves, because it was all of their faults, except mine. I didn't do anything wrong. In fact, I couldn't do anything wrong. Because I was a small little boy whose most terrible act was innocence.

CHAPTER THREE FIGHTS

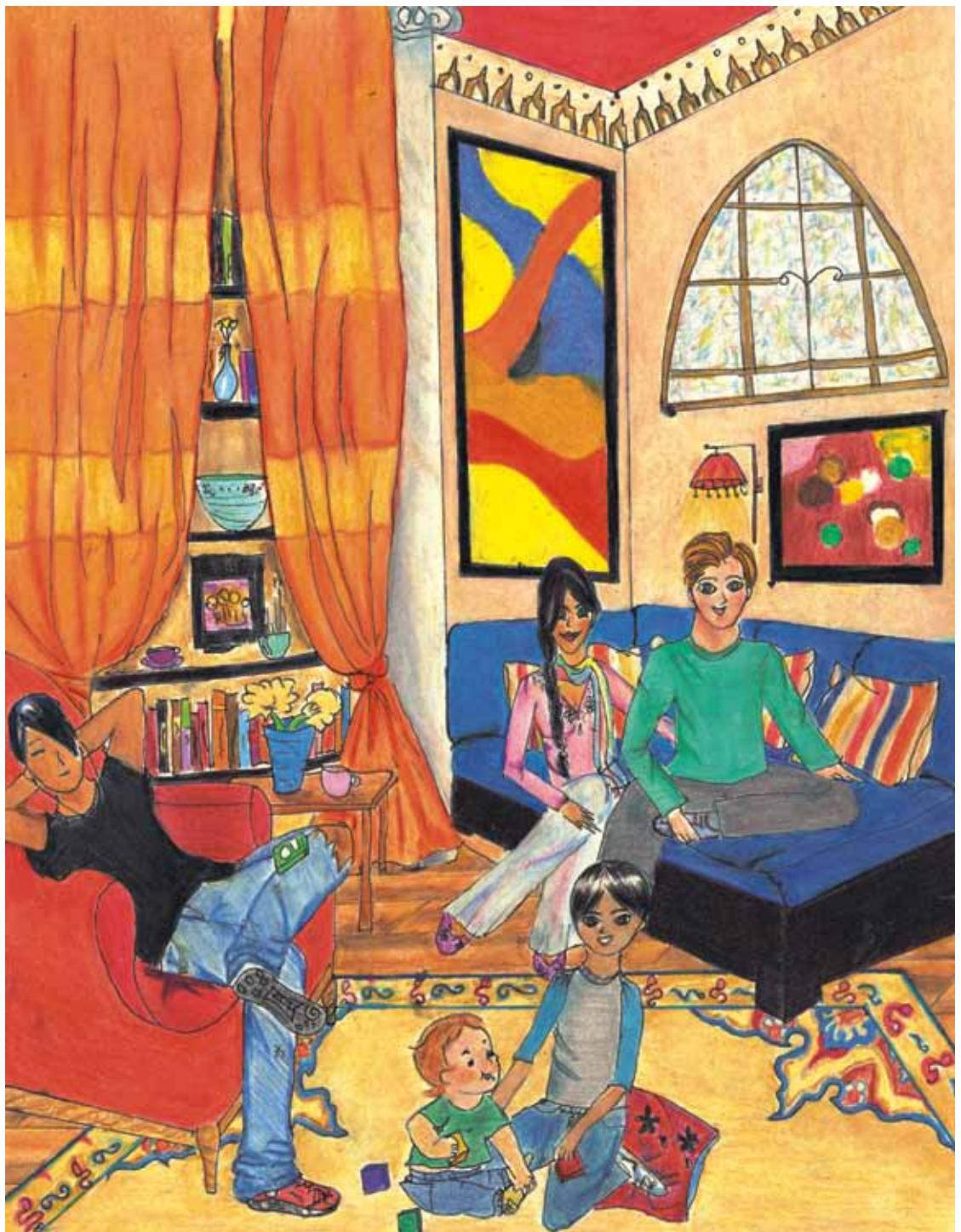
I AM GOING to make this chapter short, as it is very painful to recall these events. But you must know what happened. After the divorce, my parents would have split apart, never talking to each other again. They would have never seen each other again, never commun-

cated again. But I and my brother were the tie between them. We made them talk, and fight, and write to each other. Because they were both our parents, and there was an awful word that applied to law that they had to discuss. Custody. The word is used for prisoners in jail who have to serve a sentence behind bars, the word doesn't show someone's life—it only shows who *owns* the person. Reminds you of slavery.

This was the main fight. When were we at my father's house and when were we at my mother's. Who owned us, and when did they own us? Custody. I and my brother felt as if we were trapped between the two, my mother and father. We were almost like translators, going to one house and saying, "Amma (mother) says this..." and then getting shouted at and then going back to my mother's house and saying, "Pappa (father) says this..." and it would go back and forth. I cannot express how terrible it felt.

My mother wanted primary custody, my father wanted joint custody. My father won. A schedule was made, which luckily allowed me to see both my parents every day. One thing I am glad of is that my parents never had to go to court. The lawyers were there, they did fight, they did hate each other, but they never had to stand in a box and accuse the other parent of being an awful parent in front of a judge who would decide my fate. Thank God.

But it wasn't just fights between my parents, who were always fighting for me. Sometimes *I* fought—because really,



So I gained more than you can imagine

it isn't my mother's time or my father's time. It is *my* time.

CHAPTER FOUR LOSSES

MY PARENTS DIVORCED. So obviously, the world was screwed up. Obviously there were losses. And yet, I didn't lose anyone. No one died, no one left, except the love between my parents. My mother lost her marriage, and she lost some (but not all) of the people on my father's side of the family. I lost being a child with two parents, having a normal life. Also, life is harder because of our commute—we spend so much of our time on the subway. My father lost the relationship that made him a husband. While these losses were permanent, and made a huge impact on my life, they're not the whole story.

CHAPTER FIVE GAINS AND BENEFITS

MY MOTHER REMARRIED to a wonderful man called Stephan. He loves me and I love him. And my mother and Stephan had a baby named Satya. I love Satya just as much as I love my older brother. I have never used the term half-brother for him, and I never will. What an awful name half-brother is. So I gained more than you can imagine. Stephan has a lovely family which is my family too now!

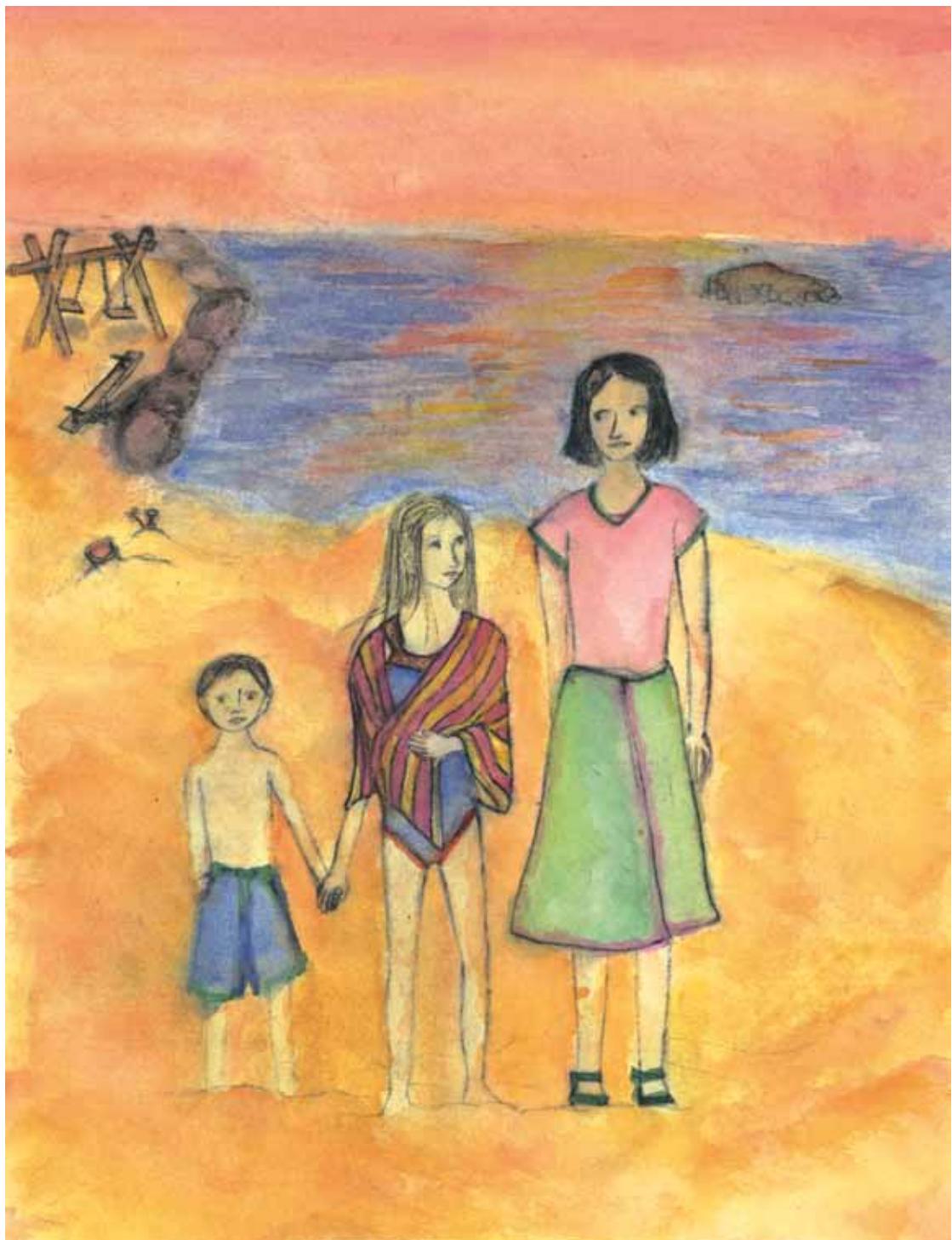
And my father. As I have already said,

before the divorce he was uninvolved with the family. My father's book was very successful. He won many awards, and the book has been published in many languages, and life is good. Most importantly, the divorce lifted a weight from his shoulders that was bigger than the new one it gave. He is a true father, and I love him more than ever. He spends so much time on things that are only for us—his entire life is based around us. He cooks for us, he takes us all around the world, he takes us to plays, he talks to us—he is a full father.

CHAPTER SIX PRESENT TIME

I AM TEN years old. I was six when my parents divorced. You have read the story of my parents' divorce. I haven't gone into detail, but hopefully you get the impression. But now, things have changed. My father is a professor, living in a twentieth-floor apartment in the middle of Manhattan. He is currently writing his second book, this time about New York. My mother is the executive director of a nonprofit organization that helps people with AIDS. She just moved with me, my two brothers, and my stepfather to our new home. My older brother is a teenager. That explains it all! My younger brother turned one year two months ago, and is basically the cutest being ever to live. And I am a ten-year-old boy, who just finished writing this paper.





It was our last trip to the place I'd loved forever

Marblehead, Massachusetts

By **Rebecca Vanneman**

*Illustrated by **Edye Wenwen Benedict***

MY BARE FEET dug into the scorching sand. Racing toward the glistening waves ahead, I sank my feet into sand that now was squishy and cold. The surf lapped at my feet and I wildly plunged in. The frigid water made my spine tingle, and goose bumps popped up on my arms and legs. That familiar salty taste flooded into my mouth. I moved with the tide, in and out, in and out, in and out. The gentle pull calmed me. Still, I didn't stop treading, even when a wave toppled over me. I glumly sighed and disappeared into the water once more. Another wave rolled over me. I scurried out of the icy water and headed for our striped towel, which I draped over my shoulders.

Hurrying toward the now empty playground, I scanned it for Ethan, my four-year-old brother. Spotting him, I dashed toward the swings that overlooked the sparkling water, where he sat playing in the sand. It was the end of another day, when the peachy sun glittered and set the whole sea on fire—oranges, reds, purples. Holding Ethan by the hand, I reluctantly tore myself away from the forlorn-looking swings that creaked in the wind. Staring at my mother sadly, we left. The ride home was a silent one. Ethan didn't understand that it was our last trip to the place I'd loved forever.

We were moving.



Rebecca Vanneman, 11
Lincoln, Nebraska



Edye Wenwen Benedict, 12
Newton, Massachusetts

Mi Abuela

By Anna Lueck



Anna Lueck,
Vashon, Washington

We sat
As it rained and drenched the thirsty soil
We sat
And laughed and talked and drank tea
Seventy-seven years apart
But closer than a mother and daughter
We exchanged simple words
Mine so young, so naive
Hers wise and old and perfect
I scratched the head of her dog
I dreamed
The dog was my brother and she was my mother
But the dream never came true
She was *mi abuela*, my grandmother
Her hands were as crinkled and dry
As the books she so often gave me
Her body was weak
But her heart was still strong
Or so I thought

The day I became old
I learned
of how she lost her will to live
of how she lay there
willing death to take her
I screamed and cursed the earth
And my world clattered down around me
Instead of laughing, now I cried
Why oh why did she want to die?
I cried
Like the rain that covered us
Seemingly so long ago.



Every religion has its not-so-good people and its good people

A Friend Until the End

By Zohra Maryam Chaudhry

Illustrated by Zoe Hall

AMEENA LOOKED AT her reflection in the mirror. Her worried face stared back at her.

"Come on!" Adam, who was Ameena's twin, yelled impatiently.

"Adam's fitting in well," Ameena remarked.

She remembered how, when they had first moved, Adam, who was regularly noisy and active, had been so subdued and unusually silent. Lately though, Adam was a pest as usual. Somehow, a pest seemed better to Ameena. Of course a pest wasn't ideally what you'd want for a brother. If you got to choose your sibling you would probably pick an obedient, well-behaved brother who did all your work for you. But Ameena was relieved when Adam returned to normal. Adam had befriended a boy named Sammy who lived across the hall from them in their apartment on 5th Street in Brooklyn. Sammy was a basketball player. Sometimes at night Ameena could hear the sound of the basketball hitting the floor.

Every day Adam went over to Sammy's house to trade Pokemon and basketball cards, while Ameena stayed in her room chatting with her Californian friends on the phone. There were three of them: Sarah, Amnah, and Maryam. Ameena had pictures of them on her bulletin board above her desk.

Ameena's mom tried to encourage her to make friends, but Ameena refused.

"Move on," her mom suggested.

Since Ameena was incredibly shy, she couldn't even say hi to a



Zohra Maryam Chaudhry, 10
Berkeley, California



Zoe Hall, 11
Rockville, Maryland

girl who had been friendly to her and who was taking residence next door to them at apartment 1B. She had no hope at all.

Now Ameena had another problem: school. Ameena was a practicing Muslim and wore a scarf. Many ignorant people, especially in New York, had a bad image of Muslims. They associated them with 9/11 because those people had claimed to be Muslim. Deep down inside Ameena knew that she was just a normal twelve-year-old girl. She was exactly like everyone else except that she believed different things.

Every religion has its not-so-good people and its good people, Ameena noted.

She wished everyone else realized that as well. The fact was, they did not.

Ameena reflected on all of this as she headed to the door. She slung her backpack on her back and waved goodbye to her mom, who was sorting the laundry into darks and whites.

The city outside was chilly, and Ameena zipped up her sweatshirt. The autumn morning felt crisp.

Adam and Ameena soon arrived at Brooklyn Junior High. The two pushed their way through the crowd of people to their classroom and took seats toward the back. Ameena took in her surroundings. There were about five rows of desks, each containing places for ten students. At the head of the room, there was a large desk with a bouquet of tulips which matched the pale yellow paint of the room remarkably well. On the wall opposite the door, there was a pencil sharpener and below

it, a cheap plastic garbage can. In each pupil's desk drawer were five new pencils and a stack of clean white paper. Some rubbery-smelling erasers were also included. The red-paneled glass door cast a glorious light into the classroom when it was sunny outside. On the front of the door was a nameplate that read Room 12. All in all the classroom was pretty comfortable.

Ameena recognized the girl from apartment 1B. She was sitting next to her.

All of a sudden a hush fell over the class. Everyone's heads were turned toward the door. A woman six-and-a-half feet tall marched into the room. She was brandishing her book as though it was a sword. She searched the room daringly for anything out of place. Satisfied, she stomped to the front of the room and announced, "Girls and Boys!" Everyone jumped. "I am Mrs. Franconi, and I am your seventh-grade teacher!"

No one objected, so she continued, "Open your books and get to work. School isn't just to play around."

Everyone opened their books without a word. Math and Language Arts turned out pretty uneventful, and no one misbehaved even once. Mrs. Franconi barked and boomed all class long, which hurt Ameena's ears. Once, when a girl named Britta forgot how to spell "expedition," Mrs. Franconi looked like a firecracker ready to explode.

When it was time for history, everything went from pretty good to horrible. Ms. Lillian was a beginner teacher. First, she was five minutes late for class because



All of a sudden a bush fell over the class

she was conversing with the other teachers in the lounge. Next, a little brainy girl knew the answer to one of Ms. Lillian's questions and was so excited about it that she stood up on her desk, fell off, and twisted her ankle. Then Ms. Lillian started fretting all over her and gave her a watermelon sucker from a plastic baggie in her purse. A jealous kid called Ike climbed onto his desk, jumped down, and started fake bawling. Pretty soon almost everybody was doing the same. Everyone was just trying to get a lollipop. Finally, class was over. Ameena felt sorry for Ms. Lillian, who had to endure all these disrespectful kids.

After school Ameena and Adam were absentmindedly strolling toward their lockers when, all of a sudden, "Hey, Muslims!" someone teased. Without even looking, Ameena could tell this guy was not going to be friendly to her by his tone of voice.

Ameena whirled around. A boy with flaming red hair and a black T-shirt with red writing on it yanked at Ameena's scarf. Ameena stood there, desperate and totally helpless. She hoped someone would arrive and help them, but no one did. Another boy who had spiky black hair and a plain, bright red T-shirt threw an overstuffed yellow water balloon at Adam and hit him smack in the face. A third boy with pale blond hair, wearing all black, shouted after the two now-retreating figures, "We'll get you Muslims; we'll get you!"

Ameena and Adam ran down the hallway with all their might. It seemed that

there was no other way to get away from the gang.

Abruptly, Ameena stopped. Why are we scared of them? Because we're cowards: that's why! Ameena thought.

Out loud, she stated, although she was scared, "All you Americans fight for human rights, and you can't even respect some harmless Muslims. Shame on you!"

Ameena couldn't believe what she had just done. One half of her was saying, "You go!" and the other half of her was screaming, "What did you just do!"

But the words had an effect on the boys. They all glanced at each other without a word and fled.

Adam looked at Ameena and grinned. No one said anything for a few minutes.

"Whew! I'm glad that's over!" Ameena finally broke the silence.

"Yeah, me too. Wow, but were you brave, Ameena!"

"I didn't really do anything," Ameena modestly protested. But Ameena felt good about what she had done. But now that this spectacular event had passed, Ameena felt weary and tired.

Just then, a girl approached Ameena. It was the girl from apartment 1B. "Hi, I'm Rebecca Paulson. I am the only practicing Jewish girl in school. I know exactly how you feel. Don't worry, after what you just did, I bet they'll probably leave you alone because you actually stood up to them."

It took a minute for all these overwhelming words to register into Ameena's brain, but then she replied, "Thanks for understanding. Not many people do. Hey,



“Don’t worry, after what you just did, I bet they’ll probably leave you alone”

do you want to come to my house tomorrow?”

“Sure,” Rebecca accepted gratefully since her mom was going to be out of town and she would be alone anyway. “See you tomorrow!” Rebecca waved and sprinted away.

Ameena turned to Adam and pleaded, “Let’s get out of here!”

Adam understood, so they trudged out the door of Brooklyn Junior High and

closed it behind them. They started in the direction of home.

It was the first time Ameena had thought of their apartment on 5th Street as home. She pondered the day’s events in her mind. Most important of all, she thought, was Rebecca. Rebecca really cared and understood her.

Friend. The word tasted good in Ameena’s mouth. A friend who would always be with her until the end. ☀

Somersault

By Claudia Ross

Illustrated by Brynna Ziegler



Claudia Ross, 12
Studio City, California



Brynna Ziegler, 12
Boalsburg, Pennsylvania

OUR BOOGIE BOARDS went *bump-bump-bump* over the sand. The tide was high, and the waves were big. Just looking at them made me excited.

There weren't many people out today. Figures. It was two days until s-c-h-o-o-l started, the dry Santa Ana winds blowing in the hazy summer smog. My bathing suit was still sandy and damp from the day before, and oily black tar coated my bare feet.

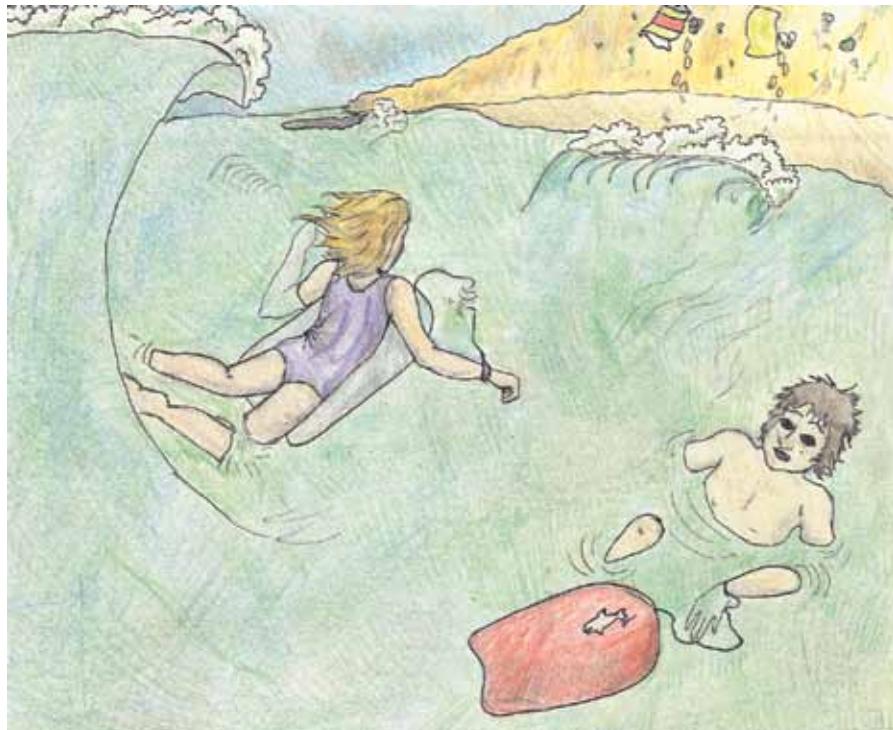
We kept walking. We had to get past the rocks that shredded our feet. The beach wasn't sandy, or smooth. The stretch of coast was empty, and it was far from popular, being near an oil derrick and beat-up resort. This place was only full in the heat of early August when Malibu was too crowded. The beach had rhythm, personality: the happy loner that dallies; the dreamer that didn't care what the little blond gang of Barbies thought.

I could feel the hot sand through my worn black flip-flops. I started to sprint, eager. My blue Morey board, faded and battered, went *bump-bump-bump* in my wake. The string that attached to my wrist pulled down a slope to the hard sand, near the green, murky water. It wanted to be in the waves, just like me.

I threw my towel down, kicked off my flip-flops. I ran down the beach, feet burning, dodging mounds of fly-ridden seaweed.

"Claudia!" my brother called. "Wait!" But then he was sprinting too, his legs matching mine, beat for beat, push for push. We dashed into the waves, a ragged thrill of energy soaring through me.

Shock. "Jeez, that's cold!" I said. *Bump-bump-bump!* my bo-



It rose beautifully behind me, forming a perfect crescent

gie board replied, splashing over the water's ripples. I waded farther in. Jack and I both gasped as the chilling water reached our necks.

We sank in deeper after we'd caught a couple waves. I could just make out a new group of swells on the horizon. Three feet, easy. Good-sized. As they came closer, my Morey slipped out in front of me. Sure, I thought.

"You gonna take it?" I asked Jack.

"Yeah, think so." He spun his board around, both of our backs to the wave.

It rose beautifully behind me, forming a perfect crescent. I kicked out onto my stomach, and the wave jolted me forward.

It all happened so fast: the wave went

down with a crash, and my Morey shot out from under me like a man diving from a sinking ship. I was companionless. My stomach took a wrenching flip. Suddenly, covering my head (the one thing I learned from surfing lessons), I spun, some poor servant of the wave. I tried to force myself up, but white water held me hostage. Lungs bursting, I thrust myself upward. Air!

I stood, dazed and battered. I felt as if I'd gone through spin cycles in the washing machine.

But then my boogie board came floating towards me.

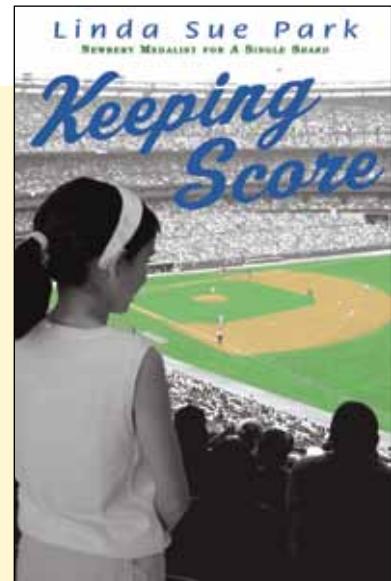
Bump-bump-bump! it said. I stared at it for a moment, and then raced back into the waves.



Book Review

By Eliza Edwards-Levin

Keeping Score, by Linda Sue Park; Clarion Books: New York, 2008; \$16



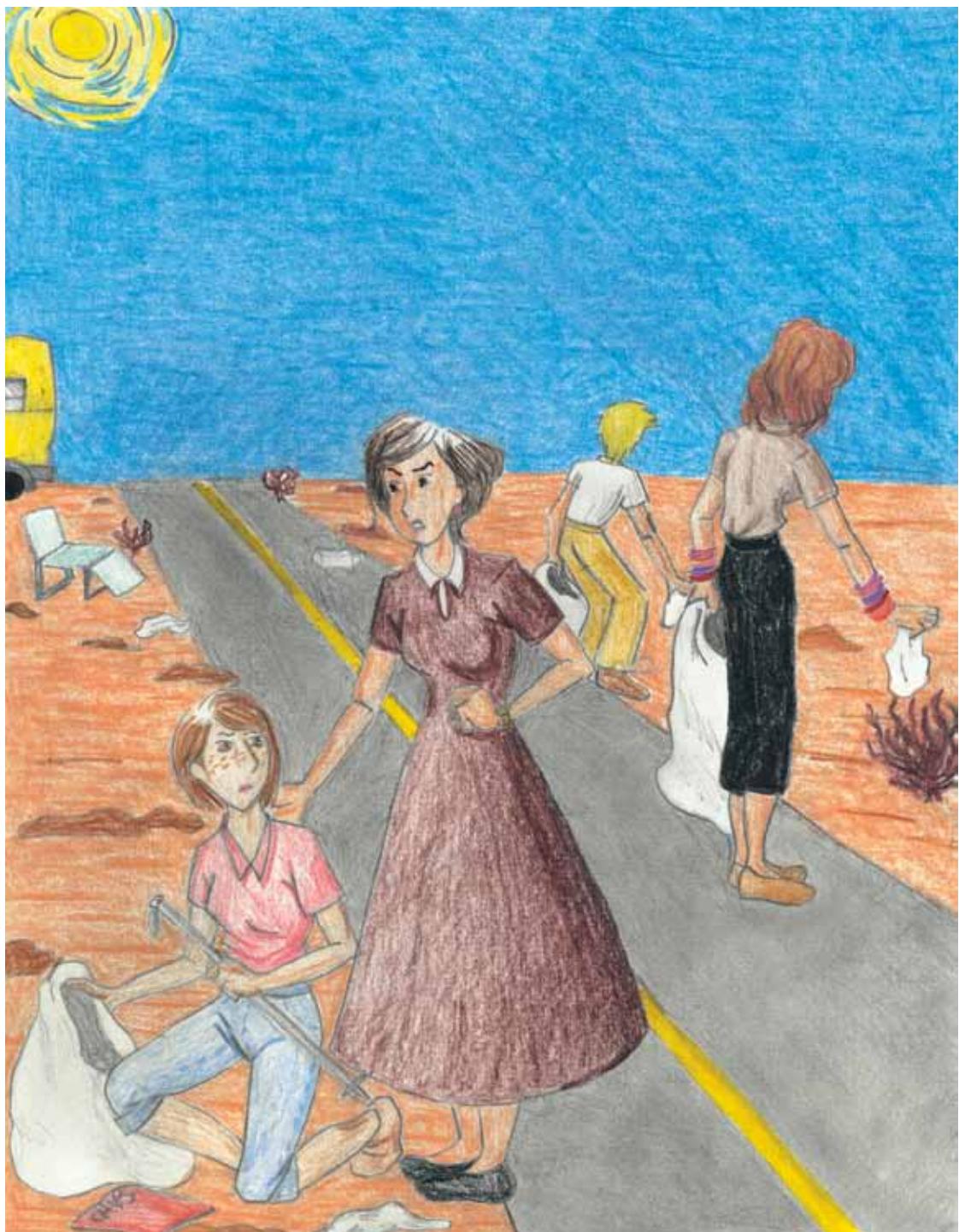
Eliza Edwards-Levin, 10
Chicago, Illinois

BEFORE I READ *Keeping Score*, when I thought of baseball, I thought of boys. I thought the only way people got to know the game of baseball was by playing it. After I read it, I was inspired to learn more about the baseball teams in my area (the Cubs and the White Sox). Before I knew it, I was watching games on TV, and even getting to be a pretty good hitter! Now, baseball doesn't seem so much like a boy thing anymore!

During the Korean War, which is when *Keeping Score* takes place, playing baseball almost always was for boys. But Maggie, the main character, knows the game of baseball like the back of her hand, and she got to know it the hard way: by listening to every single Brooklyn Dodgers game on the radio. She never misses a pitch. In fact, it is while she's listening to a game at the nearby firehouse where her dad used to work that she meets Jim. He's another intense fan, but for the New York Giants. The two talk baseball, compare favorite players, and laugh about most everything. And perhaps most importantly, it's Jim who teaches Maggie to keep score. And keeping score of a baseball game isn't the same as scoring a soccer game, or a football game. Keeping score of a baseball game requires concentration, and a *really* huge knowledge of baseball.

Everything changes when Jim is drafted into the Korean War. But at least sending letters back and forth from Korea to America is sort of fun for Maggie. And while letters are going back from Korea to America, the Dodgers are winning game after game. It means a lot to every Dodgers fan, especially Maggie! You see, the Dodgers had never won the World Series. Not even once. But now, even the Yankees (their main rivals) are being crushed by the Dodgers! There are so many wins that the losses hardly matter. And then, something *horrible* happens. After hours of carrying bodies in from the battlefield, Jim stops walking, talking, and moving altogether. He's suffering from what your parents might call post-traumatic stress syndrome. And right after the Dodgers' huge winning streak, they lose the pennant game! To the Yankees!

Both baseball and life are a cycle of hope and disappointment, and with the Dodgers out of the World Series and Jim sick from the war, it seems like disappointment is all there is. But I think that Maggie's love of baseball really helps her get through all these setbacks. After all, even after Willie Mays strikes out five times, he still has the determination to come up to bat and hit a solo home run. And it really helps me to think about this idea too. Little disappointments happen to me every day, solo auditions I didn't get, the White Sox losing a game, a test I didn't ace. It's important to just keep trying. So Maggie comes up with a plan. She decides that when Jim comes home she will take him to see a Giants game at Ebbets Field. She spends *months* saving up for it. And that's not all. To help Jim get better she decides to do the hardest thing she has ever had to do in her life: pray for the Giants to win the World Series. I will not tell you how this all works itself out—you'll just have to read it for yourself! But what I really admire about Maggie is how she had the strength to sacrifice all of this just to help a friend. 



“Getting tired, Bailey?”

Bailey's Resolve

By Elise Watt

Illustrated by Belma Homsi

THE HOT SUN beat down on us like we were grilled-cheese sandwiches. As I bent down to pick up an empty bag of chips, I fell on the dried-up dirt and a drop of sweat fell to the ground. The thirsty ground sucked it up and I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked up and saw Mrs. Porter standing beside me, sneering.

"Getting tired, Bailey?" she asked. With aching muscles I got up off the ground and wiped the dust from my sunburnt knees.

"No, ma'am," I said triumphantly. As she walked away I stuck out my tongue and hoped that it would rain.

Here we were along the highway, Stacy, Michael, and I, doing our ten hours of community service that were required before our field trip to Hillside Meadows. I thought about how terrible it had been when Mrs. Porter had announced that the class was going to have to work for our trip. Of course, the three of us hadn't done it yet, so Mrs. Porter had taken charge, postponing our much-anticipated field trip and making the three of us do it all in one day. I watched Michael's dirt-streaked pants as they shifted slowly around on the other side of the highway. The community service was bad enough, but my fellow workers weren't exactly the cream of the crop. Michael was rude and seemed never to wear clean clothes. He was one of the worst people to spend a hot Saturday with. Stacy wasn't as bad, but she always wore about twenty bracelets on each arm so you were stuck with the annoying sound of clacking all day long.

I looked down at the cracked Arizona dirt and sighed. I stuck



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my pole into an old plastic bag and then threw it into a torn trash bag. Mrs. Porter wasn't the worst teacher around, she really tried to make class fun, but when it came to the three of us she seemed to have a grudge. I wasn't a bad kid, or at least that's what Momma said. "One of these days, you'll open up and all your wonderful abilities will spill out onto your worksheets and textbooks, and the school will know exactly what Bailey McDowell is truly made of," she used to say; and I believed it. But that was before Dad had gotten sick, and after that Momma only said, "You can do better." After that, I stopped believing in both my ability and Daddy getting better. I angrily punched a milk carton, blocking the stressful thoughts from my head, and threw it in the bag with all the strength I could muster.

"Only an hour left," Mrs. Porter announced happily from where she was resting on a beat-up lawn chair. I heard jingling from across the road as Stacy threw her arms up in celebration.

The hour passed slowly, and soon I saw Momma's tired face from the bus as we pulled into the school parking lot. Momma didn't smile much anymore, and that made it harder for me. She always seemed filled to the brim with sadness. Daddy had pulled me into his bedroom one day about a month after he was diagnosed with his cancer, and he pulled me right onto the bed so my head was resting on his, and he whispered, "Baby, don't you let your Momma's spirits get down, and trust me when I say that she'll get a

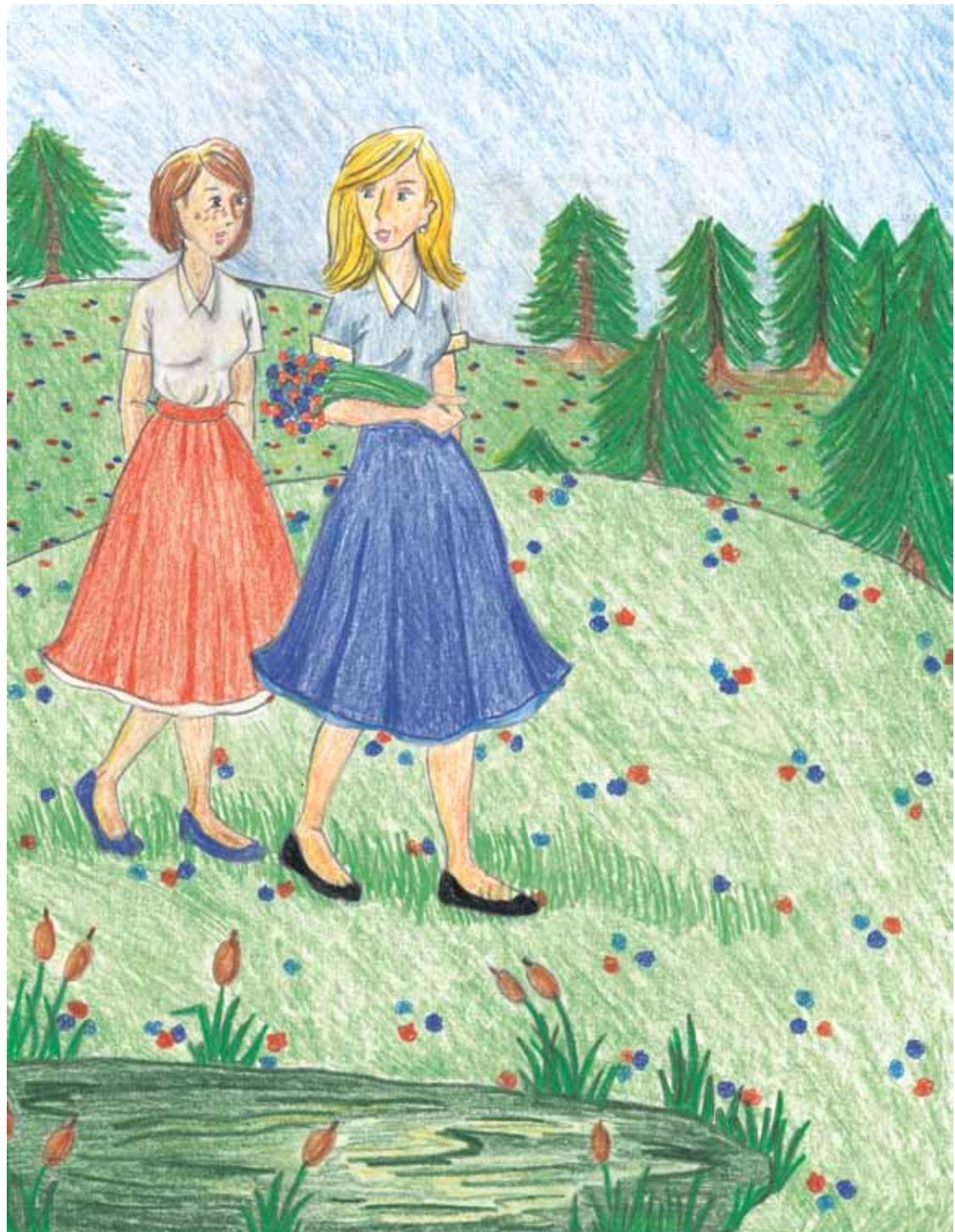
sad sickness worse than my own disease if you do." Then he had patted my hand and I had promised him I'd take care of Momma. So when I saw her, I thought of my promise to Daddy and I put on a cheerful face just for her as I walked to our Cadillac across the dusty parking lot.

"How was your day, Momma?" I said with a smile as I climbed into the front seat.

"Oh good, honey, just fine. Your daddy just had his treatment today, so be careful to be quiet when we get home, he's taking a nap," she replied with a meager smile. I racked my brain for something more to say, but soon the quiet hum of the car seemed to make a canyon of silence between us, and I kept my mouth shut.

I was glad to be home, and glad to see Daddy sleeping with a peaceful smile as I walked down the hall. Our house was made of weathered brown boards and there was a garden in the back. Momma loved to garden, but lately it was overgrown. I didn't mind, though. Gracie, my best friend, and I enjoyed the wild roses that lay tangled on the granite stepping stones. I often snipped stems to put in a vase in the kitchen or on Daddy's bedside table to cheer him up.

Sunday passed in a blur, filled with the quiet thumps of feet tiptoeing down the hall past Daddy's room where he lay asleep. Monday morning, I woke up feeling tired, but I had a little excitement built up for our field trip today, and I had big plans. I had resolved to myself on Sunday that, no matter what, I would



"Beautiful, isn't it?" she asked, more of a statement than a question

make Momma laugh or smile again this week, and keep my promise to Daddy. I ate some toast and orange juice, gave Daddy's white head a kiss, and hopped on the bus with promises for the coming day.

When we arrived at the school, Mrs. Porter fussed about, straightening our collared shirts and swaying skirts. She then lined us up accordingly to get on the bus that would take us the hour ride to the well-known Hillside Meadows. Stacy was there, with a smiling face and four blue bracelets, and so was Michael, with what seemed to be a clean shirt. I gave them a smile and stepped into the noisy bus, ready for the crowded ride.

The bus ride seemed long and was filled with excited chatter as we pulled into the parking lot. I saw a grove of beautiful pines dappled with light as we pulled in. I turned to Mrs. Porter, puzzled, and asked, "This can't be the meadow, there's trees everywhere. Is it farther down the road?"

Stacy laughed. "It's just through those bushes," she giggled. "Haven't you been here before?"

My face flushed red at her laughter and I murmured a reply as we filed out of the bus and into the sunshine. Mrs. Porter led our class excitedly down the path near where the bus was parked and through the bushes. I heard robins singing and the sunlight danced on the moss-covered forest floor. Soon enough we emerged into a broad field. Dandelions and fiery-red, blue, and purple flowers dotted the clearing, swaying in the breeze. A willow tree stood tall and proud on the right, and

straight ahead was a pond, deep green with cattails hugging the edge. The work I had done along the highway seemed like nothing, it was worth it. I let out a little sigh. I hadn't seen something so beautiful in a long time.

There were four picnic tables to the left, right under the trees, and everyone sat and unwrapped their sandwiches and snacks that they had brought along. I sat down next to my classmates and pulled out my PB&J. I ate mine quickly and approached the teacher long before the others were done. "Mrs. Porter, do you think I could go down to the pond? I'll bring a buddy," I asked with a hopeful smile. Mrs. Porter hemmed and hawed but finally sent a kind girl named Melanie to accompany me. We walked across the meadow, and Melanie swept up a bouquet of flowers along the way.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" she asked, more of a statement than a question. It looked like someone put a paintbrush to the flowers and they were vibrant with deep crimson on each petal. I nodded, taking everything in. The pond sparkled as we approached and I found and sat along a rough rock, watching the rippled surface. Melanie walked along the cattails, and I could just see her blond hair glinting in the sun among their fuzzy tops.

I looked around, enjoying the sun on my face, and was startled to find two ducks sitting only six feet from where I sat cross-legged. They seemed to be mates, one had lighter feathers with speckled brown and the other, the male,

had a ring of green around his feathered neck. The female was quacking and making a horrible racket. Her wing was caught in a thistle bush and the male was pecking at it and making strained noises through his beak. He fluttered about, nudging the other in encouragement. I watched as the ducks struggled against the thorny plant, and it reminded me of my mother and father. They were always fighting for his health. After ten minutes the female duck finally was able to peck her way out of the thistles, and the two made such a loud racket with their happy and excited quacks that it sent me into a fit of laughing.

Melanie came running back, breathless. "What's so funny?" she asked, smiling at my happy face. I grinned and shrugged, already too lost in my thoughts. Why, these two ducks could just as easily have been

my mom and dad in duck form. Momma was always fussing around my daddy's bed, and my daddy was always struggling, struggling, to escape his terrible disease. They were different too, though, the un-hurt duck was hopeful, encouraging, and sang with joy, and I wanted so badly for Momma to have more faith, too. I got up, plans in my head, and pulled Melanie along with me. I would make Momma happy. When Daddy was feeling better from his treatment, I would take them both down here. They would get a dose of nature's medicine, a dose of the pond and wind. I'd let them feel the power of the sun and the crimson flowers, and maybe they would feel more hopeful about the future. I knew I could make them feel that way, and I would. "It is a beautiful day, isn't it?" I said, knowing the words rang true.



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