

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Birdhouses," by Anya Agapitova, age 10, St. Petersburg, Russia

SEVENTEEN YEARS

Holly wakes up in a hospital bed—how long has she been asleep?

SKATE DISASTER

A fun day at the skate park turns scary when an earthquake strikes

Also: Illustrations by Alicia Betancourt and Hannah Richman

A review of a book about slavery

A poem by Mark Roberts

JULY/AUGUST 2001

\$5.50 U.S. \$7.50 CANADA

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Volume 29, Number 6

July/August 2001

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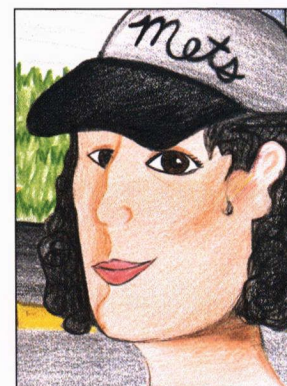
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Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists

Welcome to all our readers, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 28 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.



Contributors' Guidelines



Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. If you want us to respond to your submission, you must enclose a business-size self-addressed stamped envelope. If you want your work returned, your envelope must be large enough and have sufficient postage for the return of your work. (Foreign contributors need not include return postage.) Contributors whose work is accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope will hear from us within four weeks. Mail your submission to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, home address, and phone number. If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write Gerry Mandel for more information. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what kinds of stories you would like to illustrate. Here's a tip for all our 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.



Jessie Moore, 12

Cover: "Birdhouses" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the Albany-Tula Alliance in New York and the Children's Art Exchange in Vermont. Both organizations promote exchanges of children's art between the former Soviet Union and the United States. Special thanks to Laura Chodos and Renee Wells.

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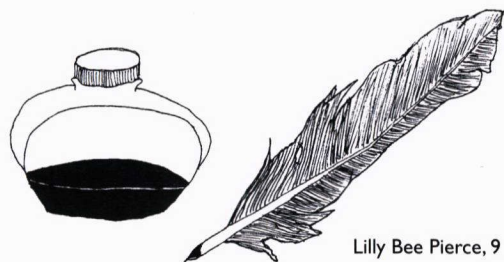


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Stone Soup (ISSN 0094-579X) is published six times a year by the Children's Art Foundation, 765 Cedar Street, Suite 201, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Phone: 800 447-4569. It is published bi-monthly in January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. Volume 29, Number 6. Copyright © 2001 by the Children's Art Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduction of the whole or any part of the contents without written permission is prohibited. *Stone Soup* is mailed to members of the Children's Art Foundation. Eighty percent of the membership fee is designated for subscription to *Stone Soup*. In the United States, a one-year membership costs \$33, two years \$54, three years \$74. Rates to Canada and Mexico are an additional \$6 per year. Rates to all other countries are an additional \$12 per year. Please remit in U.S. funds or the equivalent amount in your own currency. Send SUBMISSIONS, SUBSCRIPTIONS, and ADDRESS CHANGES to: *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Preferred periodical postage paid at Santa Cruz, California. Printed in the United States of America.



Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

The Mailbox

I loved the issue of January/February 2001. I thought that the story about the car accident was very good ["Together"]. I also like your magazine because I think that showing kids' work is very good. Another story that I liked was "Good-bye Jack." I read it on Valentine's Day and I thought it really was amazing how much a ten-year-old can write on that subject. I think it showed how much of a bond there was between the boy and his foster brother. At the end of the story I was sad just as Jack was to leave the home he had stayed in for so long. In your issues to come I hope to see more stories like these. Your magazine is good work.

Gabe Sistare, 11
Simsbury, Connecticut

I was surprised when I read "Christmas Miracle" by Vanessa Coakley in the January/February 2001 issue. The writing was great and the picture by Alicia Betancourt was stunning! It was so well done with all of the cut-outs and materials. I could not believe how amazingly good it was! Great job Vanessa and Alicia!

Ellie Moore, 11
Northampton, Massachusetts

See page 27 for Alicia's latest illustrations.

I just wanted to say that I loved the story "Catalina, My Friend" in the January/February 2001 issue. I think Francisca Thomas did a great job writing it and Max Strebel's pictures were beautiful. I love stories about animals, especially birds. The story reminded me about how much my pets mean to me.

Corinne Somers, 12
Orangeville, California

Hello *Stone Soup*, my name is Ivette. I am writing to say what a wonderful thing it is to be a young writer and to be acknowledged for it. Your program and magazine are very inspirational for young kids that need the motivation to pursue a dream in storytelling. I had the privilege of this experience when I was just seven years old; I am now twenty-five. My inspiration to keep writing comes with the accomplishments of my poems being published in *Stone Soup* [March/April 1984]. For this I thank you. Keep making small dreams into big ones.

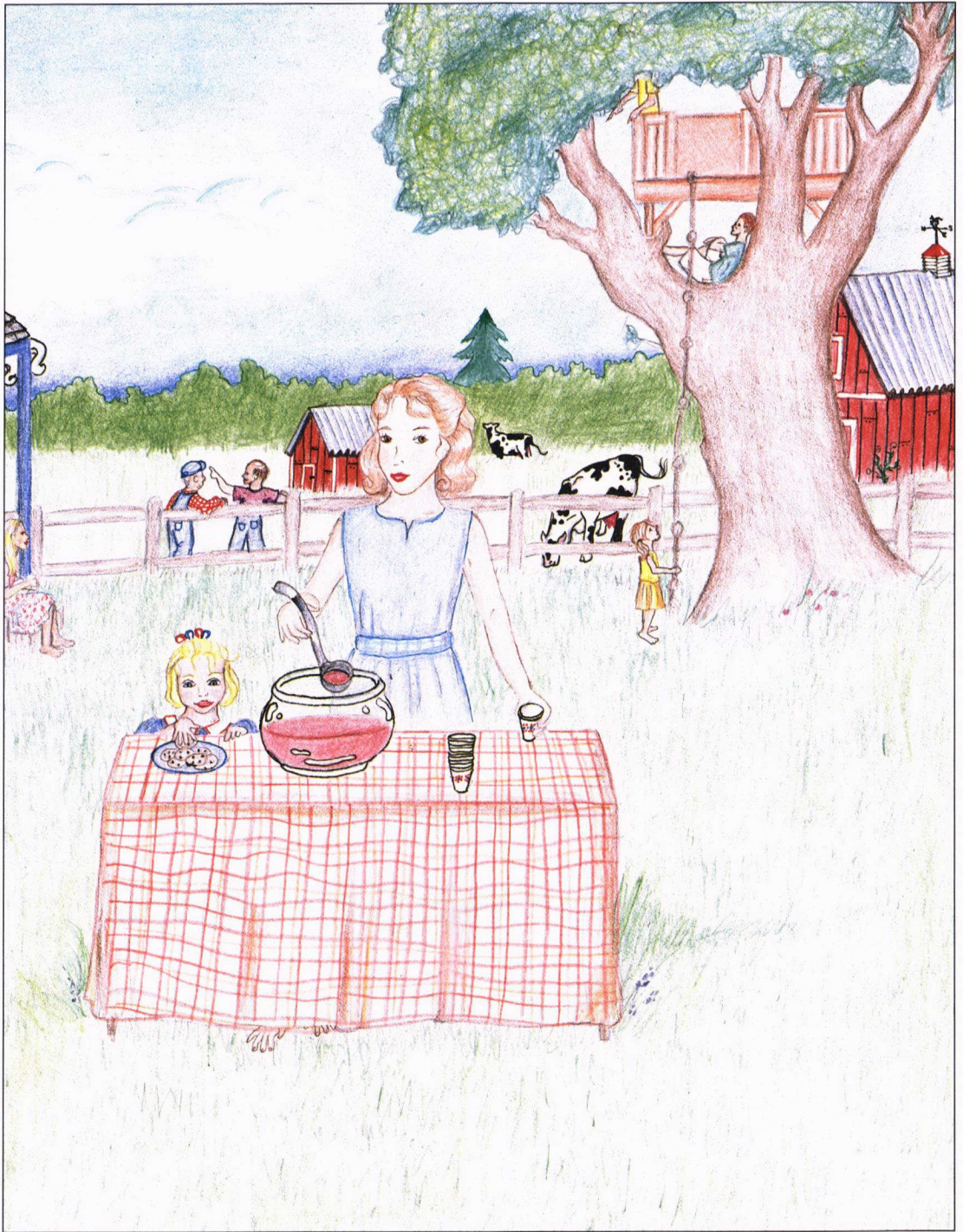
Ivette Marin
Sevierville, Tennessee

I love to write and illustrate! That's why I think this magazine is perfect for me. I found out that I really liked writing when I was in second grade. I wrote a story about a snowy owl. I loved the feeling of my hand flying across the page, a pencil clutched tightly in my hand. Before I knew about *Stone Soup* I would always ask my dad about publishing my stories. When I found out about *Stone Soup* I was overjoyed! I really like the story "A Christmas Wish" in the November/December issue. The illustrations look so real, and I really like the story plot!

Eve Bernhard, 9
Elizaville, New York

"A Christmas Wish" was illustrated by Jessica Libor. See page 5 for Jessica's new work.

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



I was under the rope now, gazing at it. I had to do it now

Seventeen Years

by Jessica Libor

illustrated by the author

AS I SIPPED the sherberty punch, I gazed about the Fitzpatricks' sprawling farm for a comfortable spot to sit. It was the Fourth of July, and summer heat waves rippled across the cow pastures behind the barns. The Fitzpatricks, our neighbors, were giving a party. I could see my older brother Wesley trying to climb up the knotted rope that hung from a newly constructed tree house. I could do that, I thought. Easily. That is, if I ever got up the nerve to climb fifteen feet above the ground.

I glanced about the party and spied my best friend Tracy, sitting on the porch steps. She waved to me, and I started toward her.

"Holly!" someone shouted. I jumped. Oh, it was only my brother Wesley, calling me from the tree house.

"What?" I shouted back.

"Why don't you come on up here? You wouldn't believe the view!"

I said nothing. Suddenly another person popped up beside Wesley, grinning freckledly down. My punch got caught in my throat somehow. It was Henry Fitzpatrick. He was wiry and freckled, maybe one or two years older than my fourteen-year-old brother, with a head of thick red hair. I looked hard at my paper cup. "C'mon, Holly, give it a try," he urged.

"OK," I said as nonchalantly as possible, setting down my trembling cup. After all, I didn't want to look like a sissy. My



Jessica Libor, 13
Collegeville, Pennsylvania

loose chestnut curls bounced against my shoulders as I crossed the distance between the porch and the giant maple. I was under the rope now, gazing at it. I had to do it now. Oh, how had I gotten myself into this thing?

I looked up. Both of them were staring down at me. Henry smiled encouragingly. I simply couldn't mess up in front of him. "Don't worry," Wesley yelled. "You'll make it. Everybody else did."

I took a deep breath and swung onto the first knot. It wasn't that hard. Getting up the second one was a bit more difficult. I was on the sixth knot, almost done, when I glanced down to make sure my feet were secure. I didn't even notice my feet. All I saw was how far away the ground was. Was the rope whirling, or was it just me? "Holl, are you OK?" Henry had asked me something, but I wasn't thinking clearly. I felt someone grab my hand. I forced myself to look up, and felt my feet giving way. I wanted to scream but I couldn't. I felt for the rope, but it wasn't there. I felt my hand slipping rapidly out of the hand that was holding mine. I let out a scream as our hands parted. The last thing I remember were two very white faces, one of them with freckles, getting farther and farther away.

I opened my eyes. They felt strangely heavy and hard to open. All I saw was white. Maybe I'm in heaven, I thought vaguely. Slowly my vision was clearing. No, it wasn't clouds I was seeing. It was

a clean, sterile, flat white—one that reminded me of hospitals. Hospital! Of course. That would make sense. I had probably hurt myself falling from the tree house, and had been taken to a hospital. Strange that nothing hurt on me. I felt tired, though—very tired. I wondered how long I had been lying here. Probably since yesterday.

My vision was now sufficiently cleared to take in my surroundings. There was a window, but there was a blind drawn on it. There was a bulletin board, on which there was a very yellowed card that said "Get Well Soon, Holly, with love, Mom, Dad and Wesley." There was a clock over the door, which read 1:34 PM on its plain face. It was then that I noticed the machines. There were a lot of them, lined up next to each other in complex rows. They were connected to . . . me!

I looked cross-eyed at my nose. There were tubes coming out of it. Eeuw, I instinctively thought. I tried to move my head. It took some energy to do it, and I lay back on the pillows again, exhausted.

There was nothing to do. I wished there was a magazine left on the cot. I slept.

I wakened to the sound of a door creaking open. I glanced at the door. A nurse was coming in with a needleful of clear stuff and a clipboard. She stopped in front of my cot and wrote something down on her clipboard. She looked nice, about twenty years old. She raised her eyes for the first time to mine. I

made an effort to smile, though it was difficult and hurt a bit. What followed was very unexpected. The nurse gasped, and she dropped her cargo with a resounding clatter. She backed quickly out of the room, staring at me all the time. I frowned slightly. What was the matter with her?

The next moment a doctor entered, looking very confused and flustered. Behind him the nurse who acted so oddly followed. "Y- you see, doctor, she is alive and awake and she even smiled a bit at me—see for yourself, doctor! And after all these years!"

The doctor stared at me for what seemed like an eternity. I cleared my throat. Finally, he told the nurse to bring him a folding chair. When she got back he lowered himself into it. He looked at his hands for a long time. Then he spoke. "Holly, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?"

"Sure," I said. My voice sounded deeper and raspier than usual. "My name is Holly Fullbright and I'm thirteen years old. I have one brother Wesley, who's fourteen, my mom and dad, three cats and my pet parakeet Phoebe. Can you tell me why I'm here?"

The doctor looked at me weirdly. "This is going to be hard to explain, Holly. You remember when you fell out of the tree in 1949?"

"Yes." I was beginning to get scared. Wasn't it 1949 now?

"Well, Holly, when you hit the ground, you went into a coma. Do you

know what that is?" I nodded. I had learned about it in health class last year. The doctor shifted in his chair. "Well, some time has passed since you fell out of that tree. I just wanted to let you know that so you won't be . . . shocked . . . at some of the differences."

This was getting way too weird. How much time had passed since I had fallen? It couldn't be much, I assured myself. And yet, I had to be sure. But before I could ask, the doctor was at the door whispering something to the curious nurse.

He leaned into the room. "Be sure to get lots of rest," he said, with a synthetic smile.

Later in the day a different nurse came in with a bowl of gruel. "Don't you have anything else? I'm hungry!" I complained. And I was. My stomach felt more empty than it had in my entire life.

"Doctor's orders," the frowdy nurse replied primly. "Says your stomach can't handle it yet."

I looked dubiously into the brown, murky depths of the gruel. Oh, well, I thought. It was better than nothing.

The next day I woke expecting to find myself in my own bed in my cheerful pink room. Instead, the blank hospital walls greeted me. Why hadn't anyone come to visit me yet? The card on the bulletin board reminded me that at least my family had cared. It was the only object of interest in the room. I heard footsteps and voices in the hall. Maybe . . . yes! Someone was opening

the door. I craned my neck to catch a glimpse of the visitor.

I caught my breath when I saw him. "Dad?" He looked the same, but somehow different. There were more lines and wrinkles. He looked too old. Someone else followed him. It was . . . my mom! She had streaks of gray in her shoulder-length, bobbed hair, and looked more aged than my father. She had tears running down her cheeks. After all the greetings and emotions that cannot be put into words, they found a seat and began talking.

"How long has it been?" I asked quietly, searching their faces.

My dad cleared his throat and my mother looked at the ground. "The doctor . . . Dr. Diffenbaugh . . . said not to let you know right away."

"Um . . . where is Wesley?" I asked.

My mother's face brightened a bit. "He'll be here tomorrow afternoon," she said.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fullbright?" A nurse appeared at the door.

"That's us," my parents said, standing.

"Visiting hours are now over for this morning, but you may come back tomorrow if you wish."

"All right. Bye, honey," said my mom, smiling. I smiled back. It was becoming easier and easier to use my facial muscles, but I could barely move my legs and arms. I wished that I could. It was annoying to have someone else do everything for you.

"It's time for your exercise," said the

frowdy nurse. I didn't like her. I wished that I had the twenty-year-old one. She looked nicer. The nurse helped me into my wheelchair, and for the first time, I noticed how skinny I was. I resolved to get fatter right away. I wanted to get well in time for the new school year. Or had I missed a year lying on a cot in a coma? Oh, well. I still wanted to get well.

In the hallway there were other patients being taken for walks in wheelchairs. I smiled at some of them, but only one smiled back. People were not very happy in hospitals, I decided.

We passed a mirror, and out of curiosity I turned to see myself. What I saw I didn't even recognize. My face was more mature, but gaunt, and with no wrinkles. My usual thick, curly chestnut mane was replaced by thinning wisps of brown. I turned away, not knowing what to think. I was shocked. How long had it taken for me to get like that?

After the walk, the nurse made me do some sort of leg-strengthening exercises before letting me go to sleep.

The next morning Wesley visited me. The doctor announced him before letting me see him. I figured that I could guess how many years I'd been in a coma by seeing how he had grown.

A man and a woman walked in. Something was vaguely familiar about both of them, as if I'd seen them in a dream or something. When the woman saw me, she ran up to the bed and threw her arms around me. I didn't know what to do. Who was she? When

she finally released me, she looked into my eyes and saw no recognition. "Oh, Holly, don't you remember me? I'm Tracy Whitman, your best friend. Or Tracy Fullbright, now." She smiled at the man. Wait a minute! I had seen that man's face so many times before, but where?

Involuntarily my jaw dropped and left me staring at the pair rather rudely. "Wesley!" I managed to choke out. Yes, it was him, every bit. The same straight nose, dimpled chin and green-brown eyes. A lot older, more weathered and with a taller stature, but it was Wesley. I did my absolute best to keep from crying. So many years had passed since that accident in the tree. But how many?

And this, too, was Tracy. I could believe that very easily. The same long, straight, blond hair, turquoise eyes and nice face. "Are you married?" I asked for the sake of breaking the silence that ensued. That seemed to clear the air.

"Yes, and very happy about it. I hope you don't mind, Holl!" said Wesley in his straightforward manner.

"Oh, definitely not," I assured them both. "Congrats!"

"Oh. Holly, you should've seen the wedding! It was a dream. My theme was blue, of course. Baby blue. You know it's my favorite color . . ." Tracy told me all the details, but I was only half listening.

"Whatever happened to Henry?" I asked. I was genuinely curious.

"Henry who?" blundered Tracy, looking confused.

"Henry Fitzpatrick, of course."

"Oh, him. Well, right after he finished college, he went out west somewhere. Everyone says it's because he felt guilty about letting you fall. But he's been gone sooo long. Everyone's just about forgotten about him. The last news I heard was a couple years ago. He's doing really well in his business."

"Oh," I said. A pause. "How long has it been—I mean, since I fell?"

"You mean they didn't tell you?" said Wesley. "Seventeen years."

It hit me like a brick wall. Seventeen years! What year was it now? Let's see . . . it would be 1967. That was scary. I needed some time to think. What would happen to me? I had missed my whole life. Tracy elbowed Wesley and hissed, "She wasn't ready for it yet!"

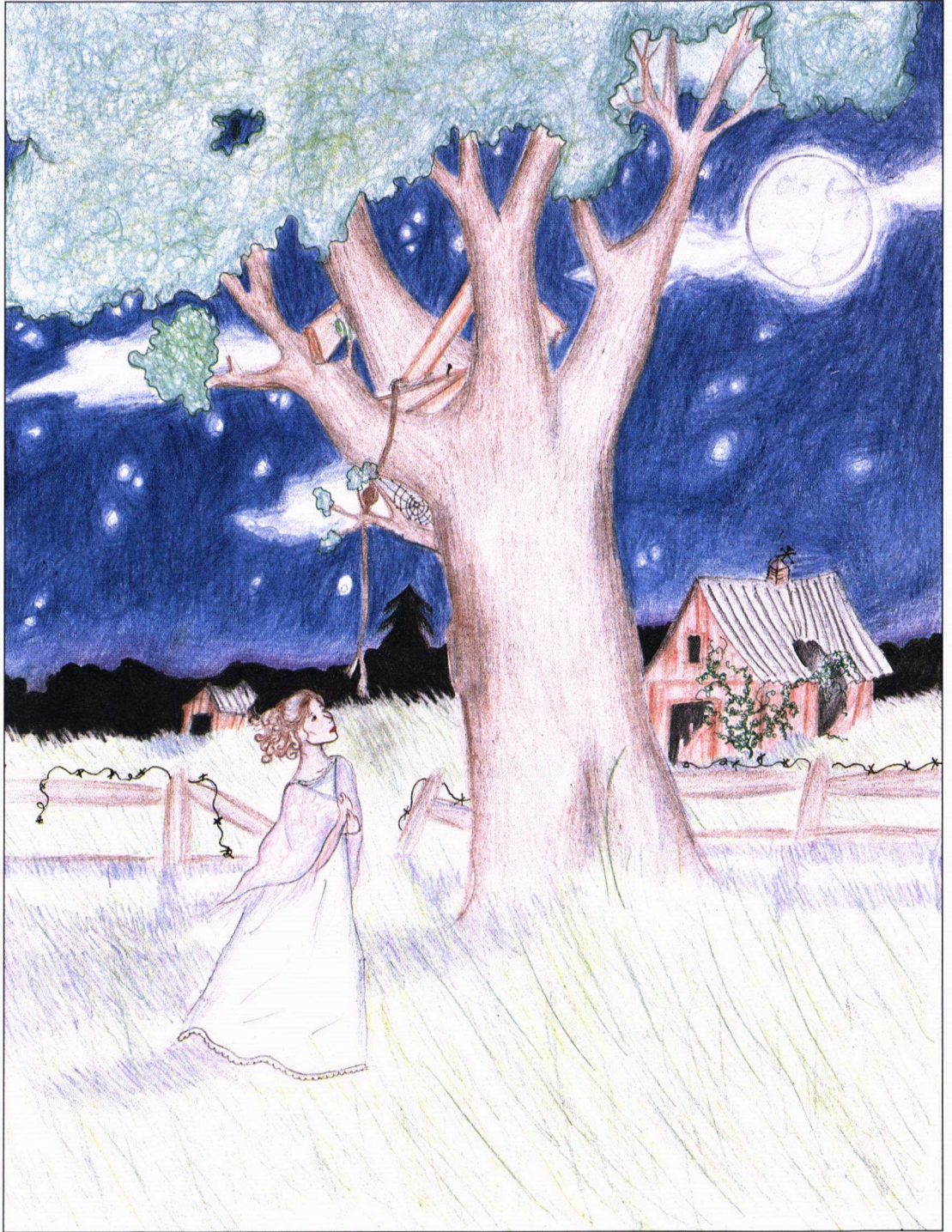
"Ooops," Wesley apologized sheepishly.

"It's OK, Holly," he said, putting his hand over mine. "You can catch up on school at home, and become a painter like you always wanted to. You can still do it." I took a shaky breath. This was going to be hard, catching up on seventeen years.

"I really appreciate you guys coming, but . . . could you leave now? I need to think things through."

"OK, Holly, no problem. Get well soon." Tracy left softly, and Wesley, too. I was alone. Why had this happened to me? When the door closed, I had a good cry. It felt wonderful. I hadn't cried in a long, long time.

After a while the nurses began to give



I shivered, and drew my shawl around me closer

me real food to eat, for which I was grateful. I was getting awfully tired of brown gruel. Every day the nurse made me walk at least ten to twenty steps. It was good for me, and my legs were strengthening rapidly.

And then it was spring. I was glad it wasn't winter. Spring gave me hope, as did the image in the mirror I passed each day on a walk. My hair was growing back into short curls, and I was starting to notice that I was not the skinny skeleton I had been when I first woke up.

In the dull hours with nothing to do, the nurse brought me magazines. The styles had changed dramatically from the 1940s. Instead of quaint, delicate dresses, I saw tie-dyed shirts, bell-bottoms, long, unkempt hair and the weirdest makeup I had ever seen.

I prayed a lot, asking God to help me through these times and pursue the dreams I had had before I fell. I had wanted to be a veterinarian, have a big stone house in the country with lots of animals, and paint country scenes to sell in art shows. Wesley had told me it was still possible. I believed him and tried my best to get well.

I had many sleepless nights, lying still in that cot with the silver moon shining serenely on me. Many times I wondered about Henry—where he was, what he was doing. Would he have gone out west if I hadn't fallen? Tracy said it was because of guilt . . . for letting me fall. I was troubled by that.

A month after Wesley's visit, the

nurse came in and told me I was going to be moved. The machines were taken off me permanently, and I was moved to a more crowded section of the hospital. As we left, I passed the sign "Intensive Care" and knew that I was making progress. Now that I was out of intensive care, I would get to go home soon!

A week later I was released, and given directions to exercise every day, eat heartily and not strain myself too much. They were rather loose guidelines, so I didn't worry about them too much.

At eleven AM my mom drove up. I got in the unfamiliar car with her, and she drove along the familiar roads to where our house stood. Aside from a change in the color of the siding, the house still looked pretty much the same. The trees were much bigger, and my favorite crab apple tree had been cut down. Too bad. I had liked that tree.

Beyond our house I could see the Fitzpatricks' deserted farm. I saw it all right, but I wished I hadn't. It gave me a weird sensation—like I had just stepped out of a time machine.

"Well, here we are," said my mom, opening the door for me.

"Thanks," I mumbled, and stepped out. It was a crisp, spring day and the warming air felt good.

"I'll show you in," she smiled, and we went in the house together. The furniture was the same, but in different positions. A new painting. A new desk. Those were the only new things in the

room. I went straight upstairs. New carpeting. Hmm.

"I'll fix you something to eat," my mother called from below. Somehow, I didn't feel exactly hungry.

The last door on the left was my room. On the opposite side was Wesley's. I peeked into his room first. It had been converted into an office. Nothing surprising about that; I had expected some sort of change now that he was out and married. Next I turned to my own room. The door swung open under my gentle push . . . everything was the same. I mean everything! Two navy-blue socks were still crumpled by my bed where I had left them the morning I had fallen. The invitation to the Fitzpatricks' party was still on my dresser, the red and blue flag softly faded. I opened my dresser drawer . . . oh, thank heavens! My family had thought enough to buy me a whole new wardrobe in the size I was now. They were certainly different enough. How could I bring myself to wear pants? Ladies always wore dresses. At least, I thought they did. I slid open my closet, thumbing my way delightedly through new dresses. I came to the last one and held it at arm's length. It was light blue, sleeveless and faded so the blue hardly showed at all in spots, with a grass stain or two smudged on the back. I remembered that dress all too well. I had carefully chosen it for that fateful Fourth of July party seventeen years ago. Tears sprang to my eyes.

Suddenly contempt for the past

welled up in me. What was I doing? I couldn't weep over dresses and socks on the floor just because they happened to be seventeen years old! I was dwelling too much on the past. With a savage impulse I ripped the fragile ghost-dress from top to bottom. Stuffing it in the trash bin, I snatched the haunting invitation from my dresser; into the trash that went, too. Over the next ten minutes, everything connected to my past went. I was starting over, a new person. I was no longer thirteen, but a woman.

The rest of the day I spent rearranging furniture and getting settled into a new life. I was grateful to sink into my bed when the sky darkened.

I slept. Around one AM I awakened. The moonlight was shining over my pillow like a laser beam. I couldn't sleep. Everything was so deathly quiet. The air was stuffy. I had to get a breath of fresh air. I slipped out of bed and into my slippers. Careful not to wake my parents, I treaded softly downstairs to the back door. When I was outside, I leaned against the glass door, taking grateful breaths of fresh, living air.

I looked across the field to the Fitzgeralds. How beautiful the deserted farm looked in the moonlight. I felt drawn to it, and found myself moving toward it. The fields were silvery and rippling in the gentle May breeze, and the barns like ancient temples now in ruins. I felt hopeless. I had wasted my life. What was I to do with it now? "God, show me what to do," I whispered. I was underneath a huge maple

tree. In its branches, farther up than I remembered, were pieces of old boards and timbers. I shivered, and drew my shawl around me closer. I was tired. I crossed the fields slowly and slipped back into my bed.

I dreamed. When the sun finally rose to greet the coming day, I yawned and stretched. "Blessed sun, hello!" I said, thinking how ridiculous I sounded. But it was a blessed sun, so much more cheerful than the pale, eternal moon from last night. Last night! I remembered my night walk with a jolt.

Downstairs Mom was still having breakfast. "Dad's already gone to work," she explained. "Said he wanted to see you. He waited as long as he could, but you got up too late," she smiled.

I smiled back. I felt so wonderfully normal as I scrounged the cabinet for cereal. I poured myself a bowlful of Cheerios and sat down to read the morning paper. "Oh, look, Holly, here's an advertisement for Henry's business. Henry Fitzgerald, custom contractor and architect. Come to Arizona: we help make your dreams come true. Or call us at . . . why Holly, what's wrong?" I suppose I did look rather shocked at that moment. The dream I had had last night had just come rushing back. It was about Henry. He was in terrible danger. I didn't know how or why, but I knew I had to help him right away.

"Mom," I said tremulously, rising. "Can you drive me to the post office? I need to get there right away."

"Sure, honey, but can you wait till we

get dressed for the day?" she laughed, and I followed her upstairs. I threw on a sweater and some jeans, then ripped the advertisement out of the paper. I had been waiting in the car for five minutes before my mom came out.

"Why do you have to go this early? This is ridiculous!" she muttered.

"Can you drive a little faster?" I urged. When we pulled into the parking lot, I ran out and into the square, blue building.

"Hello, ma'am, may I help you?" asked the nondescript worker.

"Yes, please," I said breathlessly. "I need to send a telegram."

"Why not just call?" he suggested.

"Oh, no! I ripped the telephone number off. Only half of the numbers are here!" I cried after searching in vain for them on the advertisement. Panic gripped me. What if I couldn't reach him in time? Then something caught my eye. "But the address is!"

"Well, then, you'll just have to go with the telegram," the worker said, digging in a drawer under the counter. He came out with a slip of paper. I took it greedily and snatched a pen from its holder. What to say? Something short, since these were expensive. I put my pen to the paper. When I was finished, it read:

Henry, I'm alive. I woke up.

Somehow you are in danger. Take care.

Holly

The worker took the telegram to write down the address. He glanced at the



"Henry, wait!" I called

message and looked at me like I was crazy. "Thank, you, ma'am," he said as I paid for it.

I rushed back to the car with a smile on my face. How good it would be if he came back! The next day I applied for a job in a flower shop, and got it. I was happy there, and since it wasn't too busy, I could paint when there was no one to serve.

At the end of the week a letter came for me. It was written in strange handwriting. Could I even dare to hope? I tore it open. The contents were short:

Dear Holly,

When I received your telegram, I could hardly believe my eyes. I received it on the day you had been scheduled to be taken off all lifelines! I hope you are not still angry with me for letting you go, though I will always hold it against myself, and won't blame you a bit if you never forgive me. This is also a thank-you. Though you probably do not know it, you saved my life when you sent the telegram. I stopped and picked up the telegram right before I was about to get on a train to a business conference. While

I was reading it, the train left. I was angry. The next day it was all over the newspapers. That train crashed, killing all the passengers. I don't know how you did it. Thanks, Holly. I'm coming on the Friday evening train, if you don't stop me again. I'll be staying at a motel. Hope to see you soon.

Henry

I let the letter drift to the floor. "Thank you, God," I said breathlessly. Henry was coming! I could hardly believe it. I wanted to shout my joy to the skies. Oh, life was good again!

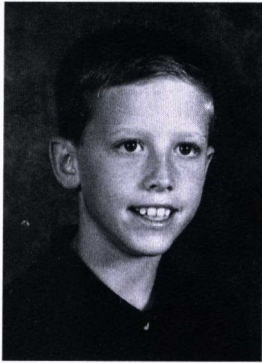
When had he said he was coming? Friday. Why, today was Friday! The evening train would be coming in fifteen minutes! Mom wasn't home to drive me. I would walk.

I arrived out of breath at the train station at one minute to five. The train was right on time. As the passengers filed out, I searched the stream of people for one familiar face. Several red-haired people got off, but I knew that none of them were him. I was beginning to lose hope, when the last person stepped off the train. He turned his face my way. It was Henry, all right! His freckles were faded, and his hair was salt-and-pepper now. He had grown a little goatee. I let myself laugh for the first time in seventeen years. How funny it looked on him. He was going the opposite direction now. "Henry, wait!" I called. He turned around, and our eyes met. I knew everything was going to be all right. ❖



Grandma

by Mark Roberts



Mark Roberts, 10
Windsor, California

I saw a hot air balloon this morning
And immediately thought of you

Every time I am on the hill
I yell "Hi Grandma!"
As loud as I can

I look at the ancient hilltop tree
How its branch is pointing
To all the land you loved

I look at the vineyards
And I remember
How much you treasured them

When I climb the hill
I still remember
Scattering your ashes
How they blew on me in the wind
And I didn't brush them off

I think of you quilting
Even in intensive care
When it was hard for you to breathe
And when you wanted off life support
But stayed alive until we were ready

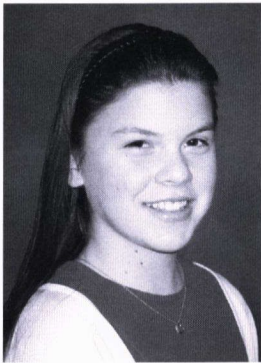
I remember playing cards
Listening to classical music and
Spending Christmas mornings with you

Now I can listen to your voice
On the life story tape
And sleep under your quilt
Whenever I want
But that is still nothing
Compared to your love for me

A Narrow Escape

by Rebekah Carbajal

illustrated by Emily Kawachi



Rebekah Carbajal, 11
Mission Viejo, California



Emily Kawachi, 10
Sudbury, Massachusetts

“**W**HAT A LOVELY PLACE for a summer vacation,” sighed my twelve-year-old cousin Allison, as we stood on the bluffs of the Maine coast.

I nodded as my eyes swept over the glass-like water in the bay with numerous islands scattered beyond it. My gaze rested on the lighthouse erected on the edge of a steep rocky cliff connected to the mainland.

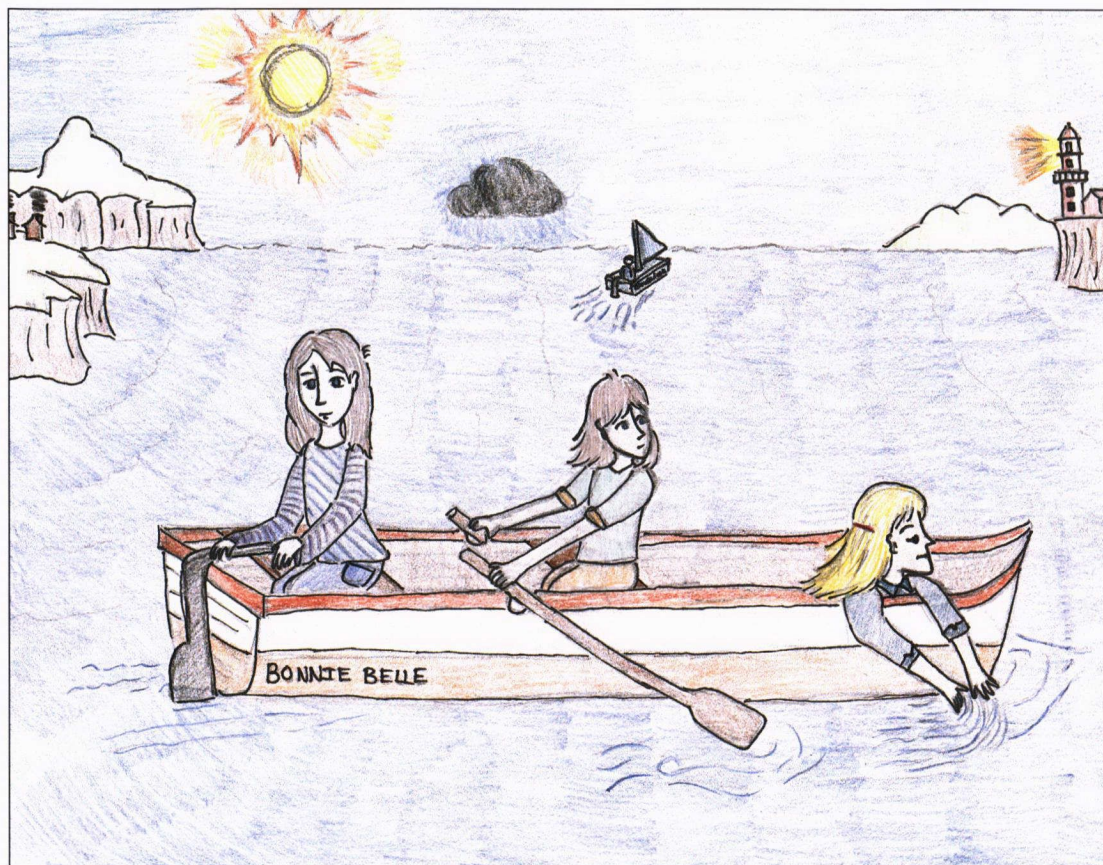
A clatter of stones above made us turn to see Allison’s sister, ten-year-old Jenny, skipping down the slope to meet us.

“Good morning!” she cried. “I thought I would find you here. Whatcha want to do? We have the whole day free.”

“What about rowing our boat out to the lighthouse?” I suggested.

The idea was met with favor and we descended the rest of the way down to the beach. There a sleek red-and-white boat, the Bonnie Belle, lay pulled up on the beach. Allison and Jenny quickly clambered into the boat as I shoved it into the calm waters.

Grabbing the oars, I set out at a leisurely pace toward the lighthouse. Allison manned the rudder and Jenny sat at the prow of the boat. The lighthouse was about two miles away and it was hardly a chore to row the boat. All the same I readily consented to Jenny’s request to row the boat “just a little distance” as she had said because, for her age, she was great at handling the oars. I leaned over the front of the



I leaned over the front of the boat, not at all expecting the nightmarish experience that was to come

boat, dangling my fingers in the water, not at all expecting the nightmarish experience that was to come.

We were about one-fourth of a mile away from the lighthouse when, to my surprise, Allison began turning the boat back the way we had come.

Jenny let out a wail of protest and I said sharply, "What do you think you are doing, Allison?"

"I'm turning back, Rebekah!" she said, just as sharply as I did.

Jenny, hoping to avoid a quarrel, said, "You're not afraid of a little wind,

are you?" for a gentle breeze had been blowing.

"No," answered Allison. Then pointing southeast she continued, "But are you afraid of that?"

We looked and my heart almost stopped beating. An immense black cloud was forming out at sea and rapidly heading our way. I yelled at Jenny to get out of the way and, grabbing the oars, began rowing for shore at a pace which would have won any race I ever entered.

"Why not head for the lighthouse

and beach the boat? We would be safe there, wouldn't we?" questioned Jenny.

"No, Jen," I answered. "There's no place to beach the boat because the lighthouse is on a cliff. Remember?"

Jenny didn't bother talking anymore. Foamy whitecaps danced on the sea which had been so calm barely an hour before.

"Better put your life vests on!" Allison advised.

Without hesitating Jenny reached under her seat and pulled out three life vests. She buckled one on, then handed one to Allison who, putting the tiller between her knees, quickly did the same. Rowing feverishly, I couldn't stop to put mine on. Jenny performed the task.

I rowed for all I was worth, but with waves crashing against the boat it was no easy task.

The storm hit with all its force. Buckets of rain poured on us from all directions.

"Do you think we will tip over?" cried Allison's voice above the wind.

How I wanted to say no. Instead I told the truth. "We might, so prepare to swim for it."

Jenny didn't say anything, but I knew she was scared. Suddenly she cried out, "Big wave off the port side!"

Allison tried to turn us so we would hit the wave head on, but it was in vain. The wave smacked into us, tipping the Bonnie Belle over. I tumbled into the sea and thought we were goners as the icy waters of the Atlantic closed over

my head.

I came up choking and gasping for breath. To my surprise I wasn't dead, nor were any of the others, for I could see them a little distance away. Swimming to Jenny's side, I grasped her life vest and yelled into her ear, asking if she was OK. She nodded. Allison came struggling over. She, too, seemed all right. I calculated we were about a hundred yards from shore. I knew we had better reach land before we froze in the 54-degree water.

"Is the boat lost?" asked Allison.

"Yeah," I answered.

The Bonnie Belle was already far from us, heading toward the jagged rocks. I told Jenny to grab my shoulder straps and Allison to hold Jenny's. In that way we were together. I used my arms and swam toward the beach. Allison kicked and we made good progress going with the current. I was sure that I had swallowed half the ocean, since every time a wave washed over my head I would swallow some of it. I was thoroughly exhausted. First rowing, and now swimming, my arms felt like they were going to fall off.

We were about twenty-five yards from shore when my strength gave out and I could go no further. I begged my cousins to go on. They would not.

"Listen to me!" I cried. "Go on! If one of us doesn't make it there's no need for all of us not to!"

Through salt-filled eyes I saw them battling the waves. Dimly I remember being unmercifully washed back and

forth by the surf. Once I felt the ground with my hands and I tried to hold on to it, but I was pulled away by the strong undertow. Totally giving myself up for lost, I vaguely realized someone was pulling on my shoulder strap. I felt the water trying to wrench me away, but my rescuer hauled me onto the beach. Dragging me to the side of Jenny, Allison (for it was she who had rescued me) flopped by my side. Everything went black and I knew no more.

When I awoke I didn't know where I was. Finally I realized I was lying in my bed, and Allison and Jenny were sitting next to me.

"Gosh!" Jenny cried, when she saw I was awake. "I thought you would sleep forever!"

I smiled rather weakly. "What happened?" I asked.

"Well, as soon as we were on shore, Jenny fainted," Allison began.

"I did not!" Jenny cut in angrily.

"OK, lay on the ground with your eyes closed," continued Allison, winking at me. "After I got you on shore I ran up to your parents' cottage, and they carried you and Jen up—'cause she fainted, you know," she added hastily.

Jenny pushed her off her chair and,

laughing, said, "The funny thing is that our parents weren't worried a bit. You see, our parents thought Allison and I were here at your house, and your parents thought you were at our house!"

"So you see," finished Allison from the ground, where Jenny made sure she stayed, "none of our parents knew the wonderful adventure that befell us."

"Wonderful adventure!" scoffed Jenny. "It's OK for you, but Rebekah nearly died and I fainted and . . ." she stopped suddenly. She had admitted fainting.

"Oh, ho!" Allison laughed, climbing onto her chair. "You did faint after all!"

"Well," I said, "it's a good thing we forgot to tell our parents where we were going."

"Huh?" Jenny and Allison said questioningly.

"Don't you see?" I went on. "If they did know they most likely would have had a heart attack."

"I never thought of that," Allison said. "But I still say it was a wonderful adventure."

"Well, I say it was a pretty narrow escape. Don't you agree, Jenny?" I asked.

"Yep," she answered, pushing Allison off her chair for the second time. "It sure was a narrow escape!" ❖



The piece climbed and turned and shimmered, each note brighter than the last

Year of Pain and Year of Glory

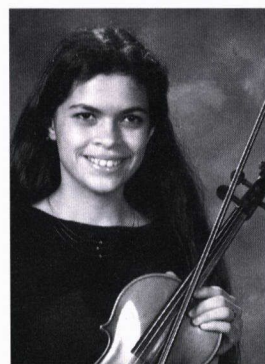
by Alissa Escarce

illustrated by Hannah LeVasseur

“**A**LISSA ESCARCE . . . Alissa Escarce,” I muttered to myself, my finger moving slowly down the long list of names taped to the scratched wall. “Eugenie Cha . . . Jennifer Li . . . here we go, Alissa Escarce,” I whispered, half glowing with pride, half shaking with nervousness. I was standing in the music room at John Adams Middle School, waiting for my turn to play the violin as a finalist in the Kiwanis solo competition. A week before, after spending hours practicing and perfecting my solo piece, I had played in the preliminary round of this competition. I had been chosen as a finalist, one of the eight best musicians at my school. I remembered, before the performance, the terrible jelly-like feeling in my legs, my fear and pounding heart, and afterward the glory and pride that came with being chosen as the only sixth-grade finalist. In a few minutes, all these feelings were going to repeat themselves, only more intense and frightening. Still, through my nervousness, I felt a need to prove myself, to win.

Ten minutes later, I sat on the railing outside the auditorium, waiting for my chance to show off my musical skills. I was in my own world, separated from everyone else, especially Mrs. Taylor, my accompanist, who was chatting away happily and unconcerned beside me.

“So,” she asked, with a huge, toothy grin on her face, “how’s school?”



Alissa Escarce, 12
Santa Monica, California



Hannah LeVasseur, 12
West Chester, Pennsylvania

"Good, I guess," I answered dully and distantly, a chill running through my anxious body.

"That's great!" she replied cheerfully, oblivious to my lack of excitement. "I hope you're not nervous. I'm sure you'll do a great job! You played wonderfully during our rehearsals!"

"Yeah—thanks—I hope so," I muttered abruptly, now chewing on the side of my cheek, trying in vain to calm my nerves.

"You know, my daughter . . ."

Suddenly, her animated speech was interrupted by the squeaking of the auditorium door. My school acquaintance, Jennifer Li, emerged carrying her cello and looking at the floor. A woman walked out briskly after her, turned toward me, and asked, "Alissa? Are you Alissa?"

"Yeah. Yeah, that's me," I stammered, my heart pounding like a drum in my chest. "My turn?" I asked cautiously.

"Yes, you can go in now," she assured me, smiling, "Good luck!"

Unable to answer through the gigantic ball that was forming in my throat, I nodded stiffly and proceeded into the auditorium on quivering legs that threatened to collapse, Mrs. Taylor right behind me. I finally found my place beside the piano, alone and small before the judge, the small crowd that had accumulated at the back of the building, and a few music teachers, including Mr. Park, my orchestra director. He looked at me piercingly, freezing my brain under his hard stare. In those few seconds that

contained an eternity, his cold, emotionless eyes made me realize that winning this competition might take more than I had to offer. I was suddenly completely absorbed in my thoughts and worries, oblivious to the world around me. Then, as suddenly as my mind had been distracted, I was brought back to my senses by the judge's booming voice, which said, "Tune." I fumbled to pick up my violin, tuned my strings to the piano notes with shaking hands and played a few scales, embarrassed and shy before my small audience. I waited once again, staring at the clock in the back of the room, as the judge filled out my entry form. The clock was acting strangely. Its second hand seemed to move first slowly, then extremely quickly, then sluggishly again. My terrified twelve-year-old mind assured me that it was broken.

When the judge finally finished writing and said, "Play," I picked up my instrument once more and played the first note of the piece. It rang out, crisp and clear. That first note cooled my tense nerves and fed my wavering confidence. The piece climbed and turned and shimmered, each note brighter than the last. I nailed all but two notes, the difficult sections and fancy twists sounding more beautiful than ever before. As I played the last vibrating, shining note, the back of the room exploded in applause. A shy smile forced itself onto my face no matter how hard I tried to subdue it. I put down my violin and looked around the room to see Mr. Park clapping lightly, looking at me and smiling

his vague, indecipherable smile. I walked out of the room, proud but unsure of myself, hoping that the judge had thought that my performance was as good as I imagined it.

The next morning, as I sat down in orchestra, I was uncertain whether to look forward to or dread the announcement of the competition results. Finally, when Mr. Park stood up on the podium to announce the winners, I sat back and looked up at him hopefully.

"First place, Rebecca Beasley, from John Adams Middle School," he announced blankly, looking around the room. "Second place, Ilana Summers, from Lincoln Middle School," he continued, as all eyes snapped toward the tall blond girl sitting next to me. My heart sank, so heavy I thought it would just fall through me. I had hoped to beat her, the only obstacle between my current position and being the best violinist in the school. Still, I sat, now hoping for a different prize.

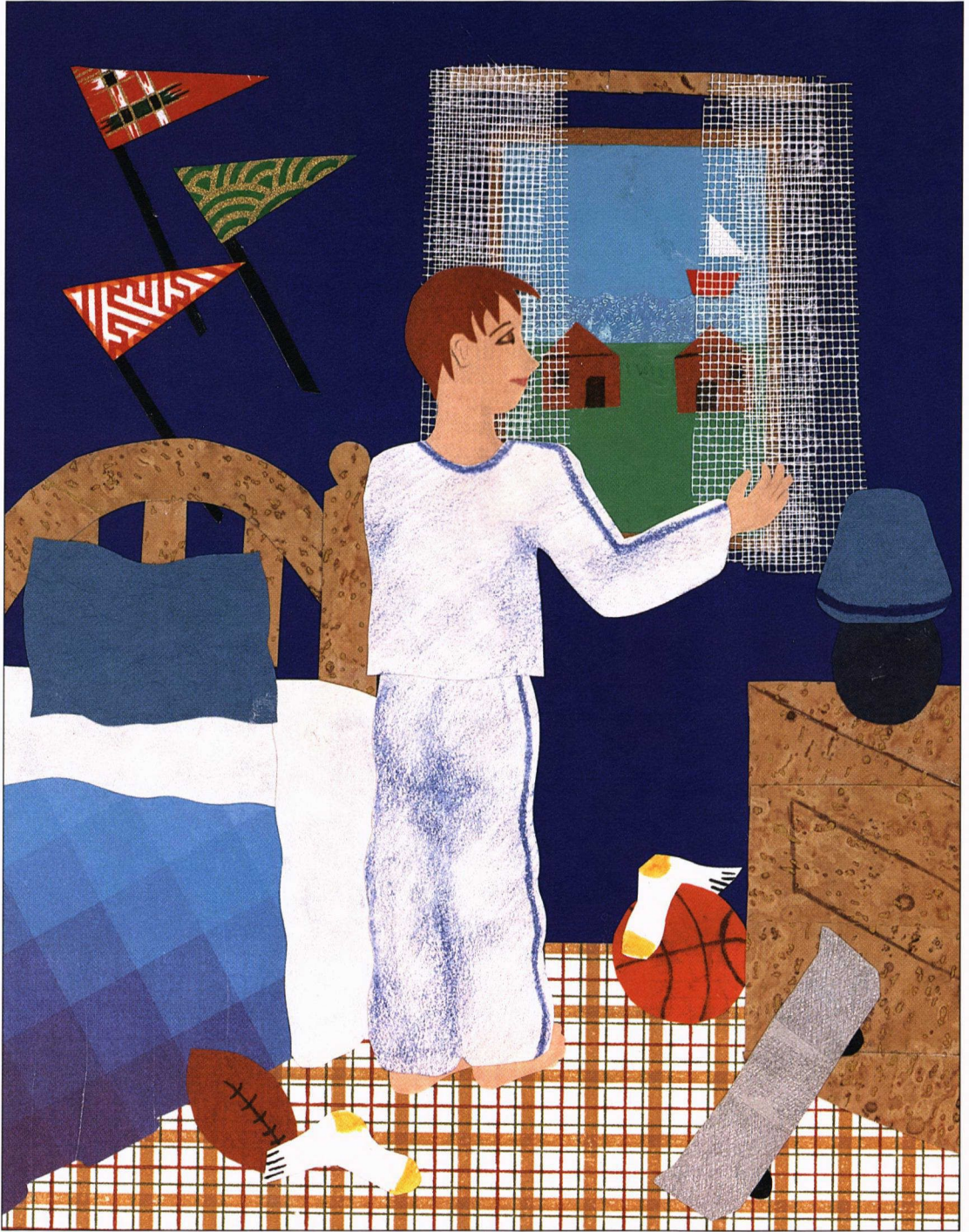
"Third place, Heather Peterson, from John Adams Middle School," Mr. Park said quickly, when most eyes had left amazed Ilana. "And fourth place, Daniel Cooper, from Lincoln Middle School." I sat back in my chair, my vision clouding with tears.

Suddenly, Ilana turned to me, wide-eyed, and whispered, "Oh, my God! I can't believe that judge! Yours was the best!"

"Yeah, well, I guess not," I mumbled hoarsely, forcing a small, sad smile of congratulation. I looked down, sighed heavily, and began to unpack my violin.

"Oh, well. It's OK, you know. You can't always win. And there's always next year," she said, a proud smile on her face.

"Yeah, next year," I whispered, more to myself than to her. I knew that what she had said was true, that I had tried my best, and that if I kept on working, next year would surely be my year of glory. ♦



As I continued to stare out onto the empty street, I noticed something very strange

Skate Disaster

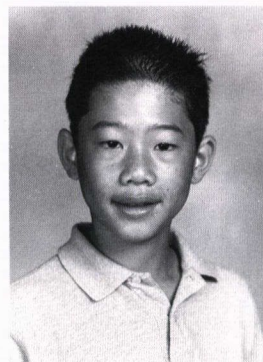
by Alex Chan-Kai

illustrated by Alicia Betancourt

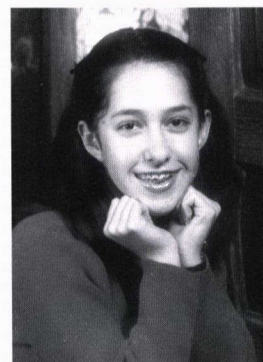
I WOKE UP as a small gap of light beamed into my eyes from a hole in the curtain. I opened my bedroom window to see what kind of a day it was. The sun was radiating on my face, but the only thing I could feel was the heat. There was not even the slightest breeze in the air; it gave me a strange feeling. My house is near the ocean, so I was accustomed to early morning breezes. But today the air was as still as a stagnant pond. I continued to look out my bedroom window, and I was pleased to see that there was not a cloud in the sky. I knew that it would be a perfect day for skateboarding. Even though the day was nice and sunny, something tugged at my mind, but I could not put my finger on it. I had an uneasy feeling that seemed to consume my thoughts.

As I continued to stare out onto the empty street, I noticed something very strange. Usually on a Saturday morning, all the dogs on the street are barking, wandering around, or even terrorizing a few cats. Today, not a bark could be heard, or a single dog could be seen. I could not imagine where all the dogs could be hiding. It was almost like something was going to happen, but I could not figure out what. Despite my uneasy feelings, I was determined to have a good day.

I jumped into my favorite pair of cargo pants, threw on my blue Tech Deck shirt, and slipped into a comfortable pair of black Emericas. I tossed the cat over my shoulder, and we



Alex Chan-Kai, 11
Aptos, California



Alicia Betancourt, 12
Silver Spring, Maryland

both bounced down the stairs to get a bite to eat. As I was shoving a bacon-and-cheese breakfast sandwich into my mouth, I flipped on my favorite television show, "Junkyard Wars." I was just getting settled into my chair when a news flash rudely interrupted my program. A reporter appeared and announced that several small earthquakes had rattled a town, just twenty-seven miles away. He said that these quakes measured 4.1 on the Richter scale, and that not much damage was done to the local structures. I watched the news report and thought about the last time a quake had hit our little town of Aptos. We hadn't had one since 1989. But that quake shook the area tremendously and caused a ton of damage. It was measured at 7.1 on the Richter scale. I was only a few months old, so this quake did not even faze me. But believe me, I heard all about it from my parents. They won't ever forget the rocking, rolling, and rumbling of that quake.

The blaring ring of the telephone interrupted my thoughts. I jumped up from the couch and grabbed my cordless phone. "Hello," I blurted into the receiver.

"Hey, Alex, what's happening?" said my best friend Tim.

"I am not up to much, except for watching a dumb news report about an earthquake. Do you want to go to the skate park today?" I said with enthusiasm.

"Sure, I'll drop by at around ten," Tim confirmed his plans.

"I will see you then, dude," I answered and quickly hung up the phone.

Tim showed up a few minutes early. I knew he was ready to get going because he didn't even notice my new PlayStation 2. Tim never passes up a chance to play a video game, but today his mind was on skating. Tim just got a Zero skateboard for his birthday, and he was dying to try it out.

We were both out the door in a flash and started our one-mile trip to the park on our skateboards. A slight breeze kicked up and brushed against our faces as we rolled along the sidewalks. We noticed that there weren't too many people outside, and the dogs weren't chasing us as usual.

When we got to the skate park entrance, we noticed a huge line of kids waiting to get inside. The line wrapped around the block, so we had to cut across the Kmart parking lot in order to get to the end of the line.

"How long is it going to take us to get into this park?" I said to Tim with a frustrated look on my face.

"We could be out here for hours, Alex," complained Tim.

After about an hour, Tim and I finally made our way through the entrance gate of the park. There were skaters everywhere, and we were having a hard time finding a spot to skate on the half pipe. Every time we come to this park, Tim and I always skate on the half pipe, but since there was not room to skate there, we proceeded to a small, enclosed area where we could grind. We could

spend hours grinding on our skateboards, so I knew that we'd be in this area of the park for quite a while.

Tim and I were having a blast, and we didn't want the day to end. I knew that I had to be home for supper at six, so we only had an hour more of skating. We left the grinding room and ran over to the skating bowl, which is a large metal bowl that is enclosed by a cement wall. The skaters like to do tricks in the bowl—nose grinds, 360s, 180s, hard flips, and bumping.

I looked at the clock. It was 5:05 P.M. A strange feeling came over me, but I didn't know why. I ignored the feeling and glided up the side of the bowl to show Tim how well I could do a hard flip. Just as I was ready to turn, I lost my balance and fell to the ground. I got up off the ground, stood on my board, but something strange was happening all around me. The other skaters were moving back and forth, the cement wall was swaying, and I could feel the ground trembling beneath my feet. At first I did not know what was happening, but then it dawned on me that an earthquake was taking place.

I could hear all the skaters scream, and most of them were trying to run for the exit. I looked around for Tim, but he was nowhere to be found. I was scared half to death, because the tremor shook harder, and I could hear wood snapping and metal crashing to the ground. I ran for cover and crouched under a small cement ramp. I did not want to run for the door, because I was

afraid that a beam or one of the walls might come crashing down on me. I was so worried about Tim; I wondered what could have happened to him.

"Get the heck out of here, now," screamed one of the employees. "The building might collapse at any moment," he continued, as he motioned for the skaters to leave through the exit.

I slowly moved my body from underneath the ramp and crawled on my hands and knees to the center of the room. Just as I was getting ready to stand, a huge beam from the ceiling crashed down and fell on my leg. I was trapped, and the pain pierced through my body like a million stabbing needles. I could not move; I was paralyzed with fear.

I was lying in the bowl, and I knew that I was very hurt. One thought kept running through my mind. How will I survive in this bowl if no one finds me for such a long time. I need food and water, but there is no way to get it. I was so hungry at this point, I even thought about eating my board.

I couldn't hear a soul around. The building was empty; I could have heard a pin drop. As I was looking up at the ceiling and wondering what I could do to help myself, I suddenly realized that I had a few chocolate peanut-butter cups in my pocket. I grabbed for one, but left the other one in its place in case I was stranded for a long time. I quickly popped the savory nugget in my mouth and savored the goodness of the rich peanut-buttery chocolate. It did not re-



I glided up the side of the bowl to show Tim how well I could do a hard flip

ally quench my hunger, but anything tasted good at that moment.

Suddenly, I heard a faint knock on the side of the bowl. I could barely make out the quivering noise that followed, but it sure sounded like, "Help! I need help!" The voice sounded a bit familiar, but I didn't think that would be possible.

"Who are you? Are you in trouble?" I responded back to the voice.

"It is Tim. Please help me get out of here," said the voice frantically.

I suddenly felt a warm rush of happi-

ness fill my body, because I knew that my friend was safe from harm. "It is me, Tim. This is Alex, and I am very hurt. A beam from the ceiling fell on my leg, and I cannot move. If you can, Tim, try and use your skateboard to chisel a hole through the bowl," I said in desperation.

"I was just knocked out by a falling beam, so maybe I can help you. I will try and chisel my way over to you, so I can help the two of us get out of here," Tim reassured me.

Tim worked for hours on his chiseling and smashing the bowl. This was

the only way he could make his way over to me, since we were both trapped by the bowl.

I was beginning to lose hope with Tim's efforts, when he finally made his last crashing blow to the side of the bowl, and the last piece fell to the side to open up a crawl hole. Tim slid through the hole and collapsed by my side. "I am exhausted, Alex. That took such a long time to get through that bowl. Now what do we do to get you out of here?" said Tim hopelessly.

Tim pulled and tugged at the beam, while I pushed with all my strength to help him. Our efforts worked, and I finally was able to dislodge my body from under the wooden obstruction.

Tim and I trudged tediously through the fallen debris and tried our hardest to find a glimpse of the exit sign. A faint light shone dimly about ten yards away. We kept plugging away through the rubble on the floor: broken windows, chunks of wood, scraps of metal, slabs of cracked cement, smashed ramp boards and ramp parts, and fallen beams.

Finally, Tim yelled at the top of his lungs, "Look, Alex!! There is the exit sign, just a few more feet ahead. Keep going. We have to get out of here," said Tim, out of breath.

We made it to the exit sign, and just

as we were walking through the door, an aftershock rocked the building once again. Tim and I made our way and turned back to look at the rocking building. Within seconds, the skate park building crumbled down to pieces, and not a single bit of the structure remained standing.

"Wow!! Did you see that? We barely made it out in time. We would have been killed in there," I said in a sigh of relief.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my mom running over across the park lawn. She was waving her hands and yelling to me. "Alex, we have been looking for you for the last four hours, and we have been so scared," she told me, trying to catch her breath.

"Mom, we are OK. We finally made it out of that building. I have never been so scared in my life," I said, with a scared look on my face.

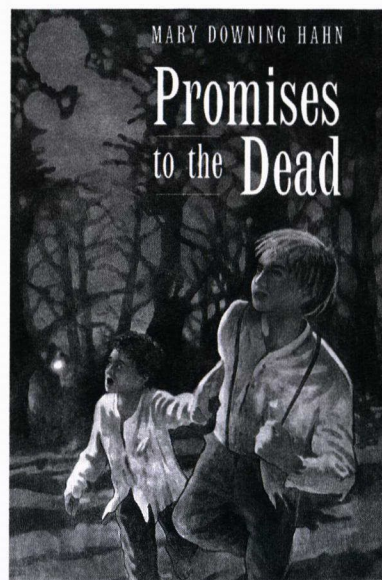
"Let's go home and get something to eat," my mom suggested.

"That sounds like a good idea," I responded to my mother.

I turned around and looked at the destroyed building and thought to myself that I should listen to the news more carefully. The next time a news reporter warns me about an earthquake, or any disaster, I will stay at home for the day.❖

Book Review

by Reed Gochberg



Reed Gochberg, 13
St. Paul, Minnesota

Promises to the Dead by Mary Downing Hahn; Clarion Books: New York, 2000; \$15

PROMISES TO THE DEAD is a very interesting book. On the surface it seems simple, but scratch beneath the surface and you will find a unique story that obviously took some work.

In *Promises to the Dead*, a young boy named Jesse happens upon a pregnant slave woman and her son. As the woman goes into labor, she sends Jesse to fetch an abolitionist midwife who lives nearby. As her condition quickly deteriorates after delivering a dead child, she makes Jesse promise to bring her little boy, Perry, to her dead master's sister in Baltimore. Then she dies, leaving Jesse stuck with his promise, since you can't break promises made to the dead. For the rest of the book, Jesse and Perry have to evade a slave-catcher, as well as Perry's master's widow. Because Perry was his master's illegitimate son, his mistress would like to get rid of him as fast as possible. Finally the two boys manage to find freedom, despite the hardships along the way. I thought the plot was unique, because it dealt with normal people having to help runaway slaves. The only people that

one usually hears about are the names that are now famous, like Harriet Tubman. Mary Downing Hahn shows the reality of the normal abolitionist. That was my favorite part of the plot.

I really enjoyed how many ideas she was able to rope into one plot and be able to make it work. However, I didn't think the plot was very plausible. It seems like there are many things that are hard for Jesse and Perry, and yet somehow there are many things that miraculously happen so that they are able to keep going. I would have enjoyed the book a lot more if Mary Downing Hahn had kept things agreeing with what she had said earlier in the story (i.e., what would happen if Perry's owner got him back).

I also thought the book was a little too easy to read, so I wouldn't recommend it to anyone aged twelve and above, or with an above average reading level. However, all in all, the originality of the plot made it a light read that made up for unlikable details in the plot.

There are many things in this book that are phenomenally well done. Not only does the plot have certain intricacies that keep the pages turning, but

also the characters are extremely well drawn. Mary Downing Hahn knows how to make the reader like the good characters and hate the bad. She has successfully mastered the art of character creation, which I, as a writer, often struggle with. Making characters with multi-dimensional personalities of their own is a hard task. I commend her for making it seem easy.

I also appreciated the honesty in this book. It is very hard to write a book on slavery and abolition (trust me, I've tried) and make it seem real. Mary Downing Hahn showed that it was the common people and not just those known as conductors on the Underground Railroad that made the real difference in eliminating slavery. I think that it produces good lessons to all of us out there today: keeping promises is important, and no matter what you do, it's important not to give up along the way, because you are somehow making a difference. Jesse remembered that when he was taking Perry to safety, and he fought to keep going. I try to remember that whenever things seem pointless, that no matter what, I need to keep going until I succeed. ❖

Message of the Conch Shell

by Anna Hagen

illustrated by the author



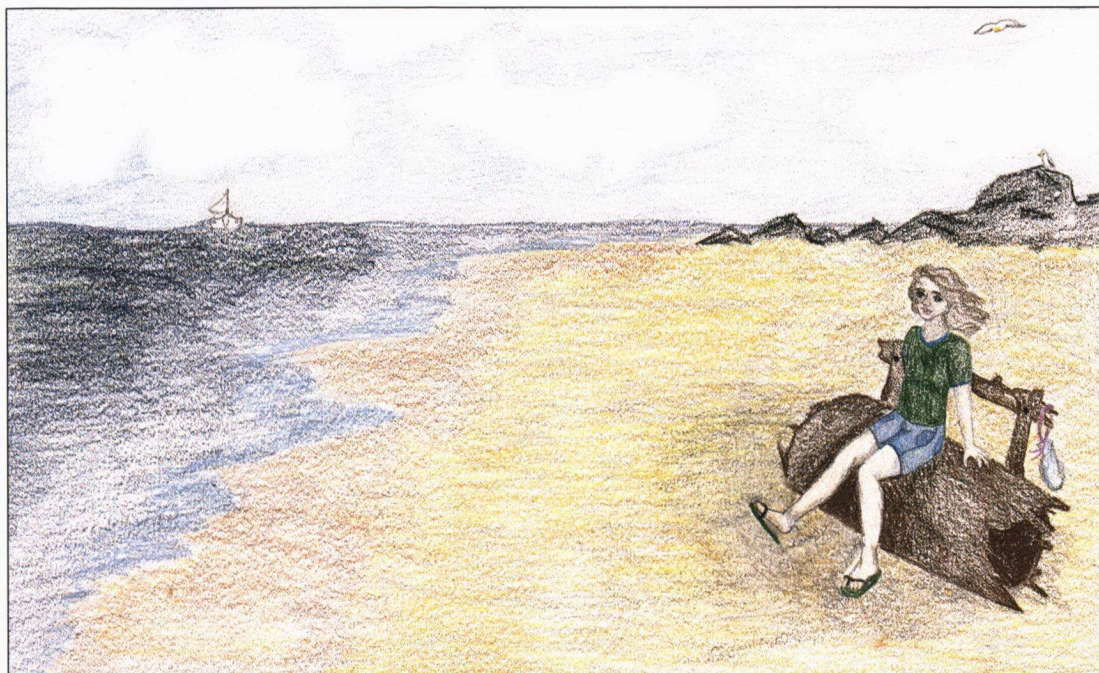
Anna Hagen, 11
Lake Oswego, Oregon

SALT SEA SPRAY BRUSHED against my cheek as I paced placidly along my beach. Well, not my beach, technically, but that's what I fondly call it. My adoptive mother, Elnore, says every time it's a nice day out, "It's a day for your beach, Shayla, go and capture it." So that's where I am now, on a beach where your thoughts break loose from a cage called your mind, and take off into the sky.

While my thoughts are off scanning the horizons, my green eyes stay close to the beach, seeking out shells. I always look for additions to my shell collection, which are easy to find, for I practically live on the beach. My eyes spot a dark gray shell poking out of the soft sand. I trot over and squat down by it, taking a piece of my short, curly brown hair and tucking it behind my ear. I carefully pick up the shell and turn it over. Sure enough, the rainbow colors of an abalone shell shimmer back at me. I smile and place the shell in the pocket of my battered old shorts, then skip off along the shoreline.

After a few minutes of poking along the beach, I find the driftwood bench that I crafted myself. I plop down on it and think about my life, what I always do on this unique bench.

I was adopted, or rather I was found. See, Elnore found me on the beach, which is, of course, very odd. Elnore told the police about me, and the police did their job and investigated to see if anyone had a missing child. No one claimed me, so Elnore took me under her wing. I have lived with her ever



After a few minutes of poking along the beach, I find the driftwood bench that I crafted myself

since, twelve years. I love Elnore's cozy old beach house, and I love Elnore, but I would like to know about my past.

A ship bell rings faintly. I look out on the ocean. Old Mr. Flint waves at me from his equally old fishing schooner. I wave back. Mr. Flint points to the cove that he usually docks in. I nod and he turns back to his wheel.

Lifting myself off the bench, I make my way down to Fisher's Cove. I usually help Mr. Flint unload his catch in exchange for stories of what he saw in the ocean that day, and a buck or two.

"Aye, little Shayla!" Mr. Flint greets me with a toothy smile.

"Hey!" I grin back. "Any fish stories today?"

"Jest unusual happenings. I swear I

saw a whale jest off the mainland. Gray-colored one it was."

My eyes open wide with surprise. "But it's not time for whales to migrate by here yet!" I exclaim.

"Yeah, I know. That's what's so strange about that whale. Help me with this net, wouldja?"

I bend down and help him with a net full of fish. I still am very curious.

"Was there anything strange about the whale, besides the obvious?" I enquire eagerly.

Old Mr. Flint wrinkles up his nose, thinking hard.

"Eyah . . . it were tossin' around a trinket thing, mayhap a shell. I don't think that that's what's causin' um to act this way though." He pulls out an-

other net, and I help him with it.

"Nothing else?" I ask hopefully.

"Nothin' 'cept the sunrise," was the disappointing answer.

I stay through the usual sunrise bit, I finish, he thanks me, and hands me the regular paycheck (a dollar-fifty). Finally I trudge home, with darkness setting over the ocean.

"I suppose you will be enlightening the beach with your presence today, right?"

I smile at Elnore's obvious question, and reply enthusiastically over the tink, tink of spoons against breakfast oatmeal bowls. "Of course! Going to the beach is one of the many privileges of this off-school vacation! How could you ever doubt I would spend a day without my beach?"

"Oh, just a wild guess." Elnore picks up my satchel, and tosses it at me. "Go find some seashells!"

"Aye, aye captain!" I rush happily out the door.

It is foggy when I get to my beach, and the waves crash steadily against the jagged rocks. I shrug my shoulders and continue on my way. A few sand dollars are all I can see in the sand, broken ones at that. I suddenly decide to walk on the western part of my beach, a part that I don't acknowledge much.

The wind starts to whip around violently, and strands of hair keep blowing in my face. Frustrated, I search my satchel for a rubber band, and come out with a piece of string. I turn in the direction of the ocean and tie my hair up.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see something move out on the ocean. I know it isn't the waves; the thing I see is an object. Something plops down in the sand right next to me and I jump. I come to my senses and look down. A large shell sits comfortably in the sand, as if it had been there a million years. I stoop and take a closer look.

The shell is a conch shell, and definitely excels in looks. It is glossy, and the surface is a mixture of cream and white colors. It is delicately rounded and has a curlicue on the top of it. Excited, I pick up the pretty shell and put it in my satchel. I walk home quickly, eager to show Elnore my lucky find.

How little I knew then.

"ELNORE, ELNORE! Look, look! Look what I found!" I burst through the door, wet from the now falling rain.

Elnore glances up from her sketch pad, and puts on her wire-rimmed glasses. "What do you have there?"

I hold up the conch shell.

Elnore's eyes are like tennis balls. "Wow. That is the biggest shell I have ever seen! Where'd you find it?"

"On the west beach."

Elnore nods. "Could I borrow it sometime, just to sketch it?"

"Yeah, sure." I start to go up the stairs, but Elnore's voice stops me midway.

"Isn't that one of the shells you can hear the echo of the sea in?"

I shake my head up and down. "I'll try it." I hold the shell up to listen.

A series of high-pitched squeaks and whistles fills my ears. Where'd the sea sound go? I ask myself. Suddenly I realize something that makes me double up with confusion. I can understand the squeaks and whistles. I know what they mean to say. I start to translate. "I . . . am . . . at . . . the . . . cove . . . meet me . . . there?" Who's I? What's happening? I start to panic.

"Shayla . . . ? Uh, are you OK? Your face is sort of white." Elnore's voice is worried.

I snap back to the real world. "Um, yeah, I'm fine." I teeter, but catch myself by leaning on the banister. Elnore catches my subtle movement. Her brow furrows in confusion.

"All right . . . whatever you say." She turns back to her sketch pad.

I continue up the stairs with a little difficulty. I finally reach my bedroom. I barge in and plop wearily down on my fluffy bed. I start to do something I thought I wasn't capable of at the moment: think.

First of all, how could I understand all that whistle stuff? What language is it anyway? I ponder those and many other questions, coming up with no logical answer.

Then out of curiosity, I decide on something daring, something the real me wouldn't have done. I decide to do what the shell told me to do; I would go to the cove. I reason that the cove the shell talked about is Fisher's Cove, the only one in walking distance.

I put the shell in my satchel and

creep quietly out the back kitchen door.

IRACE ALONG the sand; a sense of excitement and urgency fills me from the top of my head to the tips of my toes. The fact that I am running along the beach with the crisp wind blowing in my face makes me shiver with sheer pleasure.

I slow, breathing fast and hard. Ahead is Fisher's Cove. I check my watch: 4:46 PM. The sky is already darkening into night. I take a deep breath and trot toward the black-watered cove.

The cove's silence sends a chill down my spine. I situate myself on a dark gray rock, zipping up my thin jacket to seal in as much warmth as I can.

Minutes go by, and I start to think I am crazy. The time on my watch reads 5:15. I pick up my satchel, ready to leave.

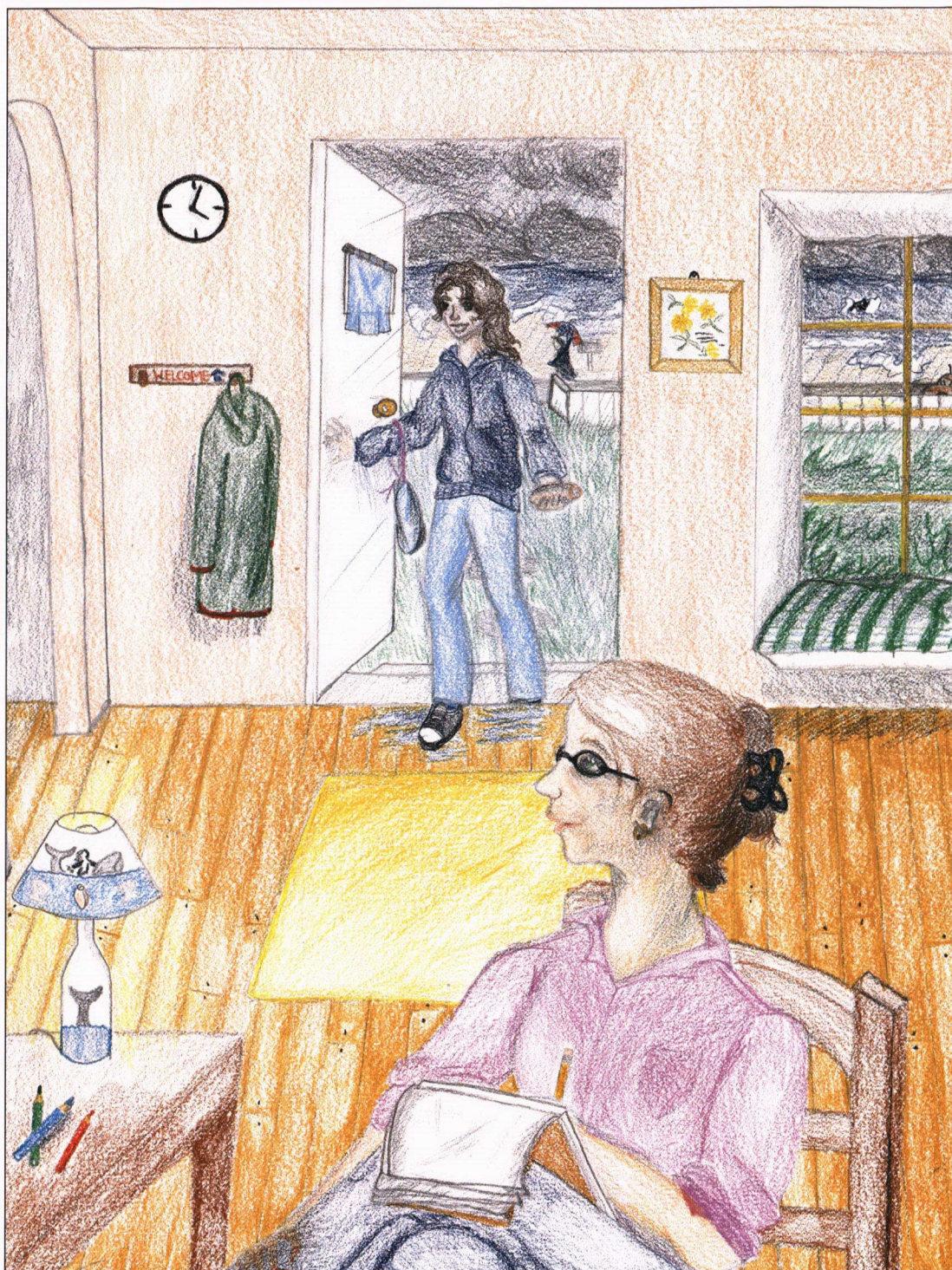
"I have come a long way, human Shayla, your presence I have also long awaited."

"Omigoshwhoisthere?!" Terrified, I whirl around, my voice so full of panic that the words I want to say come out fast and slurred.

I expect to see a murderer, or a kidnapper, but what I come face-to-face with is anything but that. The so-called murderer is a whale.

The majesty and beauty of such a marvelous and magnificent wild creature dumbfounds me, and the size awes me. I can't utter a word.

I look out onto the waters of the cove. I can't believe it. A whale is talk-



"Elnore, Elnore! Look what I found!"

ing to me.

I gather myself up and turn my eyes down at the massive head, which looks up expectantly. "Do I know you?" I ask, my voice quivering only the slightest bit.

"Oh, I believe you do, only you were a young calf when I rescued you."

I try not to believe what is happening. "No one can talk to animals . . . you must be a phony . . . or something."

"Well, I suppose someone can talk to our kind now. It makes sense; you were exposed to our language from an early age."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, human Shayla, that is the purpose of my journey. Sit, human Shayla, for I have a long tale to tell."

As if in a trance, I sit down on the soft sand.

The whale takes that as a cue. She begins, "My family was migrating. I was a young calf then, but old enough to stray far from my mother. Our family was making their way down the coast of your home, Amer- . . . Amer- . . . America?"

I nod.

She continues, "A harsh storm struck. This we were not expecting, so one calf died. My mother and I were very lucky. The next day we continued our long journey. It was then that we discovered you. Apparently, your mother and father's ship had capsized during the storm. Your parents were dead, but you were floating in your cradle. My family knew that no calf, whale or not, should

be floating alone on the ocean. We took pity, and pushed you in your cradle to the nearest mainland. There, a human woman found you, and took you as her own."

I have turned as white as a sheet.

The whale goes on, "I was chosen to risk the cold waters to bring you this message, and now you have received it." She pauses. "Perhaps now you understand why you can translate whale."

"Y- yeah . . . thanks." My hands are knotted into fists.

"Would you like a ride?" asks the whale slyly.

"Um, sure." Anything to get the attention off me!

"Hop on my back." I do as she told.

The water is glorious. We spin, we leap, we swim, and the whale is careful not to throw me off her back. Cool, crisp water engulfs me, and all of a sudden I feel like sleeping. As I doze off, I hear the whale whistle a melodic, haunting tune.

And then I am on my bed, conch shell at my side. And somewhere out on the ocean I hear a whale whistle farewell.

EPILOGUE

SHAYLA SPENT the rest of her life promoting animal rights. She was especially known for her work with whales, such as helping to stop whaling in Japan and other places. As Shayla says, "Whales are special. They have a beauty and majesty that one should do as much as possible to keep alive and well." ❖

In the Land of the Basketball Hoops

by Felicity Slater

illustrated by Sarah Dennis



Felicity Slater, 12
Cambridge, Massachusetts

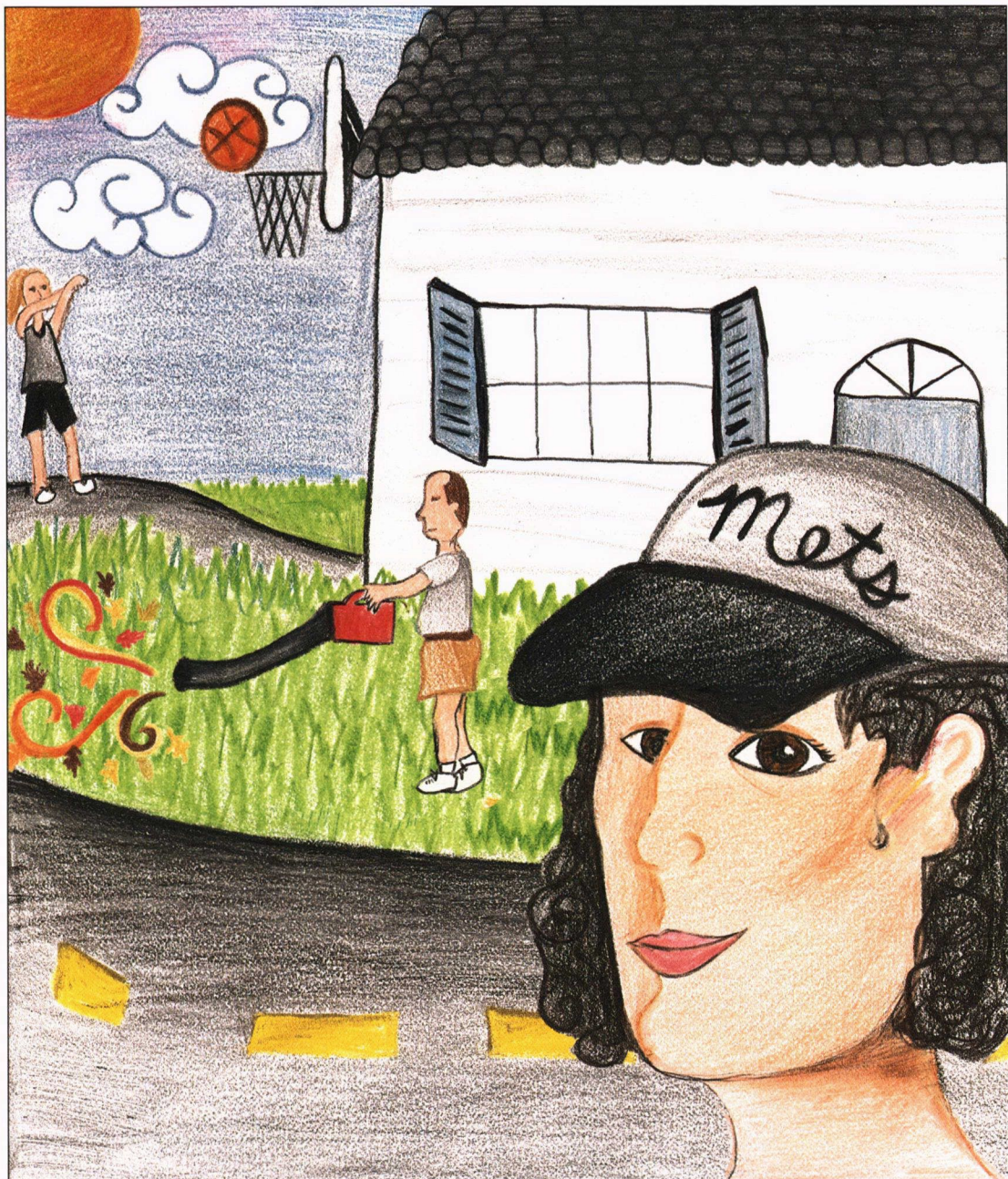


Sarah Dennis, 13
Nashville, Tennessee

SHE SLUNG HER LEG over the side of the hammock and sighed. It was the sigh alone that told the story of her boredom, the story of being dragged out to visit an aunt and uncle she barely knew; then of finding that her relatives and their neighbors were about the duller people who ever walked the face of the earth. Then just as she sighed again, the actress in her searching for the best pitch to portray most complete and utter boredom, the screen door opened and quietly closed and her aunt stepped out and squinted in the sunshine.

"Carmon, honey. I'm afraid this must be rather dull for a city girl like you," she tittered. "Why don't you take a little stroll. I'm going to be off to the Ladies Society." Her aunt stood awhile, expectantly waiting for her niece to jump up and scamper down the road calling, "Have a nice day, Auntie!" like the niece she had always imagined. Carmon only raised one eyebrow and twisted a short black curl around her finger. Reluctantly Aunt Angela walked down the manicured sidewalk toward the dark red minivan in the garage. A minute later she was backing out of the graveled driveway.

Carmon watched and wondered, momentarily, why people drove in parkways and parked in driveways, but she soon dismissed the thought, telling herself that it was much too hot to think. Her eyes followed the minivan in a lazy sort of



At each house there was a girl with blond hair, shooting hoops and hoops and hoops and hoops ...

way, the way you might imagine a large beetle who, having just eaten his fill, lay watching a slow, fat fly. Carmon got up and pulled her soccer shorts from her sweaty skin, then gave up because they replastered each time. A gnat flew into her hair, and she flicked it away. "I guess anything would be better than this, even a walk," she said to the mosquito on her arm before squashing it. Carmon grabbed her faded New York Mets cap and put it on, then began to walk toward Maple Street, which was three houses down from Aunt Angela and Uncle Fredrick's house.

On the corner of Maple Street and Eve Street there stood a large house. Carmon stopped to pull out her water bottle from a Barbie fanny pack that her little sister Melissa had insisted she bring and wear to remember her. Carmon took a long drink, then replaced it and looked up at the house. It looked like an imitation of the houses she'd seen along Brattle Street in one of her many visits to Cambridge, mixed with an imitation of a villa in Switzerland that she had stayed at for a year. Carmon shook her head and smiled. The imitation was certainly bad.

Thunk, thunk, thunk—her head turned automatically toward the sound. In the driveway there stood a medium-height girl with medium-length blond hair. She was shooting baskets at a hoop almost rhythmically. Carmon gazed at her for a moment, then noticed the lack of emotion on her suntanned face. She showed no sign of having any fun, yet

every time she shot the ball it landed neatly in the basket. Carmon shook her head, then walked on.

As she came to the driveway of the next house she heard dribbling again, and *again* Carmon turned her head to see a young girl shooting baskets. She seemed totally unaware that right next door, a girl was also playing. Their houses were just far enough apart that neither of them could see each other. Carmon wanted to run up to the girl and tell her that right next door a girl was shooting baskets too, and that they could play one-on-one, but the girl's dad was on the lawn blowing leaves in a circle with a leaf blower. Every few minutes he would stop and watch his daughter's endless, perfect shots, then give her a thumbs-up. She would smile, toss her blond hair, then continue to shoot and dribble, perfect synchronized dribbling. Carmon walked on and on, and at each house there was a girl with blond hair, shooting hoops and hoops and hoops and hoops . . .

Carmon began to be mesmerized by the endless perfection. She looked around her and realized she had no idea where she was. Her head seemed to be throbbing in perfect, synchronized beats, almost the same as the thunk, thunk, thunk coming from the driveway ahead. She couldn't seem to remember where she'd turned or how long she had been walking. She looked around and realized you couldn't give directions around here. You couldn't say "turn left at the house with the leaf

blower" because every house had one, prominently filling the natural silence.

You couldn't say "turn right at the house with the fake jockey statue" because every house had one.

And you couldn't say "make a U-turn at the house with the minivan" because every driveway seemed to contain one.

You certainly couldn't say "cross the street at the house with the basketball hoop." Even in her present state of mind Carmon knew that.

Carmon turned yet another corner with the desperate hope of ending up on her aunt and uncle's street, though the street sign clearly read Twilight Park. In front of her, about five houses down, stood a Man, a Lady and a perfect little Boy. They were calling her name and beckoning to her. They seemed to know her, though she was certain she'd never seen them in her life. She seemed drawn toward them,

closer, closer, her head throbbing with the repeated cries of "Carmon, Carmon, Carmon . . ."

She walked on, the monotonous, coordinated sound of the voices merging with the ever louder thump of basketballs. The people stood in front of her smiling. The man held a basketball which he placed in her outstretched hands. She walked forward, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror on their minivan. Carmon wanted to scream as she stared into the mirror—her curls had straightened and her raven hair was now brightly blond—but her face seemed frozen. She wanted to stop and run, run far away from her appalling situation, but she was externally helpless to the calling. And as she began to dribble, the last sound she heard before the thunk, thunk, thunk of the basketball completely enveloped her mind was the sound of the man turning on the leaf blower. ❖



I gently picked up a starfish and felt its hard top, like rough sandpaper

Summer Days Beside Cannon Rock

by Katey Storey

illustrated by Hannah Richman

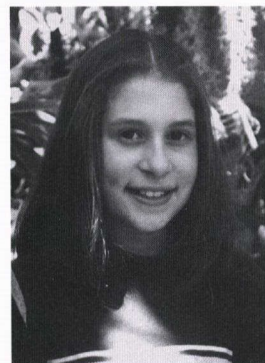
THE OCEAN, ROCKS, and cool sea breeze are what awaited me every July at our old summer house in Maine. The living room, dining room and two bedrooms upstairs had the most beautiful view in the whole house. It was of the glistening teal ocean and huge rocks on which one could climb. They were all along the seaside, like a barrier separating the water and land. These midnight, cloudy-day rocks were simply called "the rocks," and one in particular was shaped like a cannon pointing out to sea; we called it Cannon Rock. It was the largest, and if one were to climb to the top of it, the whole world would seem like it was before her eyes.

As I walked down our worn-off, soft, charcoal-color porch stairs, I passed beach flowers that looked like mini-hibiscuses. I was heading toward the rocks. Waves crashed up against the rocks that sounded like a hard crack of a whip. I climbed on all fours and watched out for the razor-sharp barnacles. They were stuck on like a baby calf clinging to its mother in its early stages. Above me the sun was blazing, and I heard the screeching of seagulls soaring through the clear blue sky. I breathed in the salty sea air, which reminded me of Cape Cod salt-and-vinegar chips, my favorite.

Around and inside the rocks were tidepools and areas to search for the little treasures the ocean brings. The foamy water from the open gap in a rock shampooed my cool bare



Katey Storey, 13
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts



Hannah Richman, 13
Kittanning, Pennsylvania

feet. As I kept exploring the watery world, sudden shimmers caught my eye. Sea glass was sparkling on small moist stones and rocks. The pieces were frosty colors of midnight-sky blue, emerald green, and baby-boy blue. I used to drop them in a jar, making a collection to admire. I searched around more, observing different motionless creatures. I gently picked up a starfish and felt its hard top, like rough sandpaper. It looked like pores on a grapefruit. I scooped up several multicolored periwinkles, and saw a crab scuttle across and hide under a big rock. He was the color of the setting sun. Next, I saw stringy strands of slimy cucumber-colored seaweed. I also glimpsed some other seaweed that looked like the packaging bubble wrap that covers fragile things.

When I was finished examining the various animals, I headed up to the sizzling hot rocks, baked by the afternoon sun. I sat down and peered out onto the horizon; here I could see Stratton Island and Bluff Island. These islands looked like small blots propped up by the water against the sky. Sailboats floated along the skyline, even though it didn't look like they were moving at all.

I think of the times I spent on the rocks and in Maine. Once we had a family cookout, several times we packed picnics to eat, and one evening we

roasted marshmallows against a fire. My dreams at night here were about my different adventures I had, and new things I learned. I think of how I wished to be a marine biologist, because of my love I had for the ocean and the wonders inside of it. I was never afraid to touch some "gooey-gross" seaweed like others would say. I could only admire it, and other things. I remembered a night when I heard two seals barking outside of my bedroom window. They were moving black figures, swimming the dark sea. That was my last night there; it was like they were saying good-bye.

In the movie *Peter Pan* the mermaid lagoon and the islands reminded me of Maine. So many things did. For example, when I ate plain Pringles chips or Rice Krispies treats. Whenever I held a large seashell up to my ear, the rushing of the waves reminded me of the water slapping against the rocks. Even when I smelled a bit of salty sea air, it just tingled me inside and the memories went through my head.

I had grown attached to our house and rocks on the sea, just like baby calves come to bond with their mother. The time I spent there gave me a chance to view the whole world, just as I could do at the top of Cannon Rock. Memories could be cherished forever from the events that don't always last. ❖

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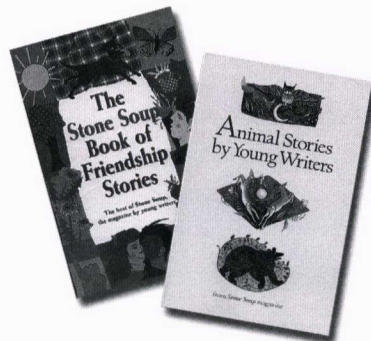
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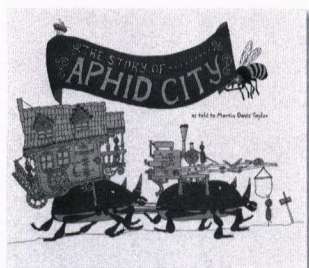
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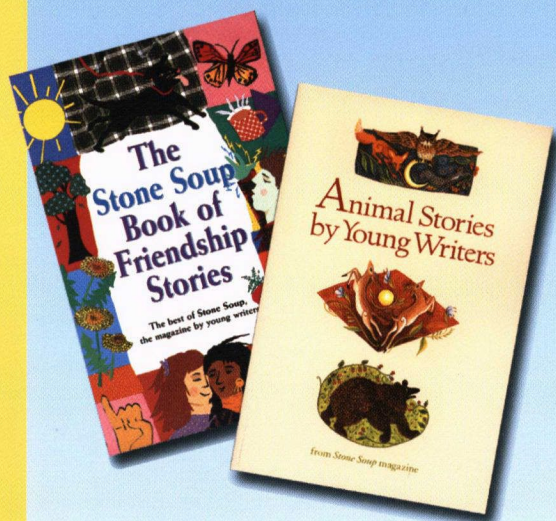
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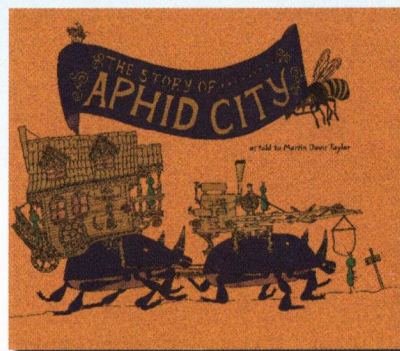
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