

# Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Christmas Celebration," anonymous boy artist, age 10, Indonesia

## LIGIRI

The spirit of Ligiri's grandfather speaks to her from a baobab tree

## THE BASEBALL

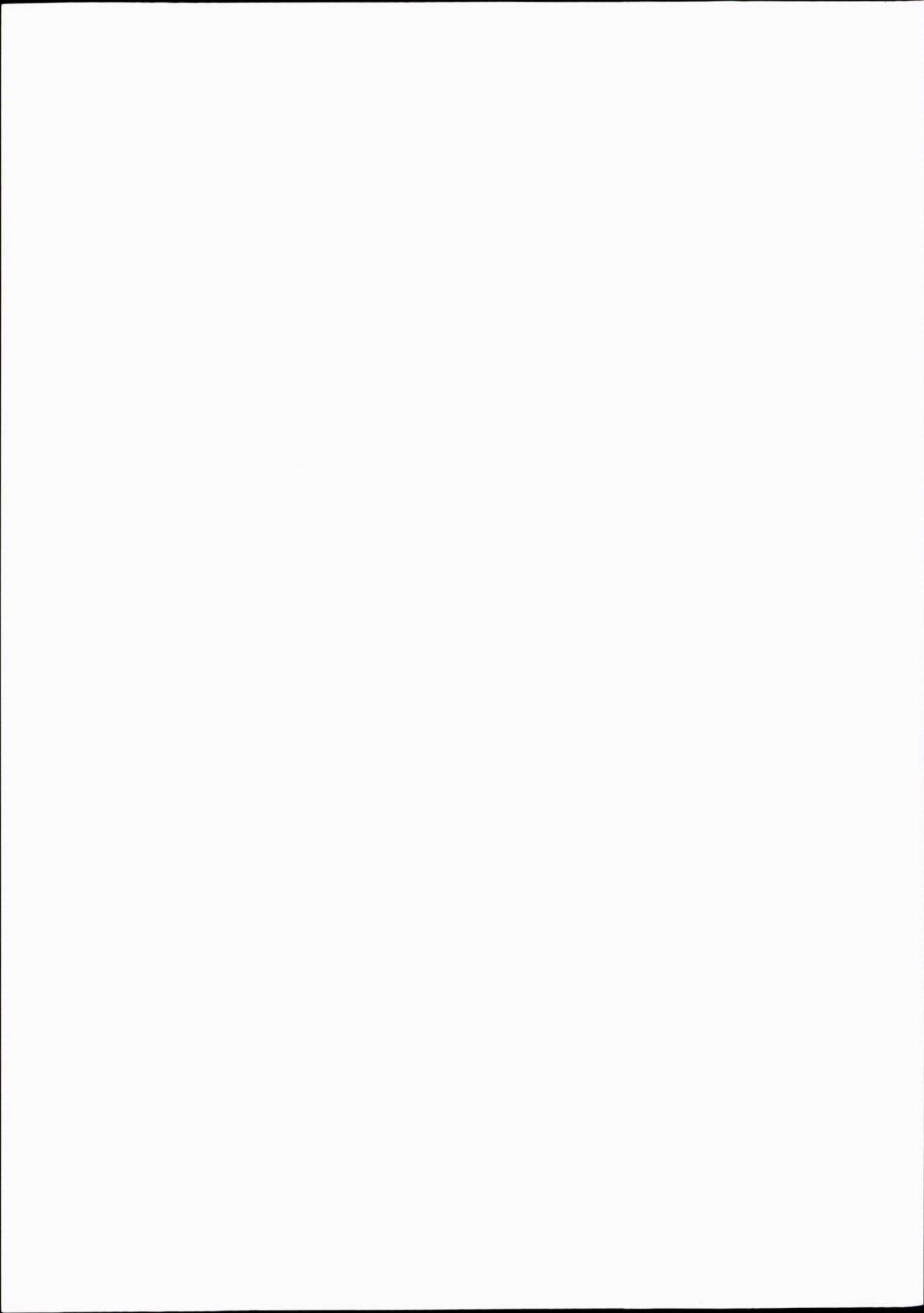
Jenna's brother is like a different person when he returns from the war

**Also:** Queen Qyera travels a great distance to ask a wizard for help  
Illustrations by Valerie Thompson and Ayla Reynolds

A review of a book about slavery

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Volume 30, Number 2  
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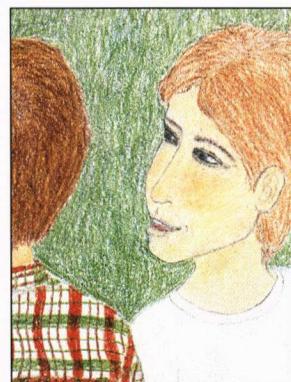
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# Stone Soup

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:** "Christmas Celebration" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Joseph Fischer of Berkeley, California. It comes from the after-school art program at the Sanggar Melati Suci (Pure Jasmine Studio) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



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Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

## The Mailbox

Reading "My Friend the Bull" in the issue of May/June 2001, I became interested in this story. I'm sixteen and a student in Doshisha International Senior High School in Japan, and studying English now. I thought this short story was written in easy words, however, it was a little more mysterious and heart-warming than any other stories I'd read in my textbooks. I became relieved when the boy overcame the sadness of his grandmother's death, and also when he became a man living with Rojo. I liked the illustrations too because they were drawn in soft touch, especially the sunshine flowing tenderly. They helped me to imagine and guess the scenes.

Hiroko Oku, 16  
Kyoto, Japan

I like *Stone Soup* because it provides different styles of writing to read. When I write, I like to think of other people's writing and improve my own using some of the styles I remember reading. Using other authors' techniques in my writing broadens my knowledge and skills. I thank you for publishing the best in children's work as examples to us young writers!

Elle R. Lipson, 10  
Poway, California

My favorite story in your last issue of *Stone Soup* was definitely "Seventeen Years" by Jessica Libor [July/August 2001]. It was so incredibly awesome! The subject matter is so interesting — what would it be like to be asleep for seventeen years and then to wake up? I especially liked the illustrations!!!! They had so much detail and they were so lifelike. My favorites were the one on page 10, of Holly in her nightgown under the tree, and the one on page 14 of Holly reaching out to Henry on the train!

Cassie Hill, 12  
Perrineville, New Jersey

I just thought you would like to know that, in your July/August edition of *Stone Soup*, there was a mistake. In the story "Seventeen Years" part of the story said that Henry's last name was Fitzpatrick and the other part said it was Fitzgerald.

Samantha Cutler, 10  
Great River, New York

I really liked the story "Seventeen Years" by Jessica Libor in the July/August 2001 issue. The illustrations were amazing and the writing was great too! I would also like to congratulate *Stone Soup* for making young readers' and writers' dreams come true!!

Michael Van Antwerpen, 11  
Weston, Florida

I used to think I was a pretty good artist, but when I look through this magazine, I almost faint. You all are so good!!!! I would like to congratulate Ayla Reynolds ["Tiger Prey," March/April 2001] for drawing that really awesome tiger!!! No matter how much I try, I can never draw like that!!!!

Angie Martin, 11  
Coral Gables, Florida

*See page 30 for Ayla's latest illustrations.*

**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.



And with that she took out the most beautiful beads Ligiri had ever seen

# Ligiri

## A Dogon Cinderella\*

by Rita Rozenbaoum

illustrated by the author



IGIRI RAN. SHE RAN with all her might away from the Dama on the third and last day. She dropped to the ground and wept for what seemed hours. The last of the family that cared for her had passed away. Her grandfather had died when she was just a baby, and her grandmother, ten years ago. Now her mother, a Yasigne, which was why a Dama was even held for her death.

Ligiri was now left to her sister Koro, who bossed Ligiri around. Ligiri tried to love her, for she was a kind soul, but she just couldn't love her cold-hearted sister, who was a favorite with her father and had a way of making him believe whatever she said.

The stars were barely beginning to fade, when Ligiri was up. As quickly as a mouse she arose from the hard bed she was given by her sister and put on the only clothes she managed to sew before Koro forbade her to make herself clothes, a torn wrap-around skirt and a slightly damaged top. Ligiri's back was stiff and sore from sleeping in her bed, but that didn't matter. "Chores must be done," she'd say to herself, as she climbed up to the roof of the house where her father and sister were sleeping during the dry season, from the stuffy and irritating inside where Ligiri had to spend her nights whether she liked it or not. A cool breeze hit her in the face



Rita Rozenbaoum, 10  
Arcadia, California

Rita is now 11

\*Rita set her story in the Dogon tribe of Mali, West Africa.

the moment she stepped outside and she felt good to be outside once more. Nevertheless, she was grateful. "I have food and I have a roof over my head, that's all that matters," she'd say to herself, though deep down inside she knew she longed to be treated like she was when her mother was alive.

Ligiri fed and milked the goats and collected the eggs and gave water and some seeds to the chickens, when she realized that Koro wasn't working by her side like she was supposed to. She climbed back onto the rooftop. Careful not to wake her father, Ligiri whispered, "Koro, time to wake up."

She got a reply, "Huh? Oh, it's you! Ligiri, you stupid girl! How dare you wake me so early?"

"But, elder one, it's work time."

"Ha! I laugh in your face! I'll make you a deal. I took your place on the roof, and you can take my chores! Ha, ha, ha!" And Koro's roaring laughter could be heard far and wide at that moment.

Poor Ligiri made her way down from the rooftop where the family was sleeping during the dry season, picking up a clay pot, later filling it at the well and balancing it on her head.

And so, it continued. Ligiri did Koro's and her own work every day, hoeing and weeding in the fields, cooking, and other jobs, though she was the age to be playing and making string figures, while their father, coming back from the Hogon with a usually good fortune, praised Koro, thinking she did all the work. Ligiri's only comfort was a fifty-

foot baobab tree, which reminded Ligiri of her kind grandfather as it loomed overhead.

The years passed until Koro was old enough to marry. "I don't care for marriage. If I did, everyone would want to marry me," she'd brag, though deep down inside she knew that nobody liked her.

One morning Ligiri awoke to the cry of a young boy. "The Griot has arrived! The Griot is here!" Ligiri looked forward to this time. Not because she could listen to exciting stories through poems and songs. No. Koro forbade her to do that. It was because she had free time. Of course she still did all the work, but Koro was not there to make up something else for her to do.

And so, when the day's work was finally done, Ligiri quietly made her way down to the baobab tree. She took out a cleverly hidden piece of pretty bead-work. Call it a secret hobby of which nobody knew, but Ligiri was working on it for over a year.

Quickly and happily she finished it that day, and when she did, she burst into tears. "I know I should be happy for life, and glad that I at least have a roof over my head, but I just can't stand it! I wish Mother were here. Or maybe Grandfather!"

"Oh, but wishes do come true sometimes. Now, don't cry Ligiri!"

Ligiri looked up. "Who said that?"

"Why, I did. I'm your grandfather. My spirit is in this baobab. I know how Koro treats you, and I want to help you.

Tomorrow is market day. Go there and expect somebody special. Now run along."

"Oh, thank you!" and with that she ran back to the village.

The next day Ligiri awoke even earlier than usual. She did all she was supposed to and packed up her goods for trading and selling during market day. She had not forgotten her grandfather's words. Ligiri had taken along a newly started piece of beadwork to work on when nobody was looking.

Ligiri joined a group of women and girls going to the marketplace, and when they got there, Ligiri looked around at the familiar market-day sights: men were sitting under a big silk-cotton tree, drinking millet beer and discussing the latest news, among them her own father, the children playing together making string figures. Ligiri hoped that the "special person" would arrive soon. She expected to see someone young and pretty, so you can imagine how surprised Ligiri was when an old, feeble, yet kind-looking woman appeared in front of her, with a look which told Ligiri that she wasn't there to trade for goods. "I see you like beading," said the woman with a smile.

"Yes. Yes, I do."

"Then I have a little something for you." And with that she took out the most beautiful beads Ligiri had ever seen.

"Are they for me?"

"Yes," replied the woman.

Ligiri could hardly take her eyes off of

her new treasure, but when she finally looked up from her gorgeous beads to thank the woman, she had disappeared into thin air.

The next time the Griot arrived and Ligiri had finished the work, she began to work on a necklace using her new beads. She was so determined that, soon after, she had finished her jewelry. Ligiri knew that if Koro saw it, she'd take it away, so she enjoyed it while she could. Ligiri was so absorbed in her new necklace that she didn't notice how a young man had stepped behind her.

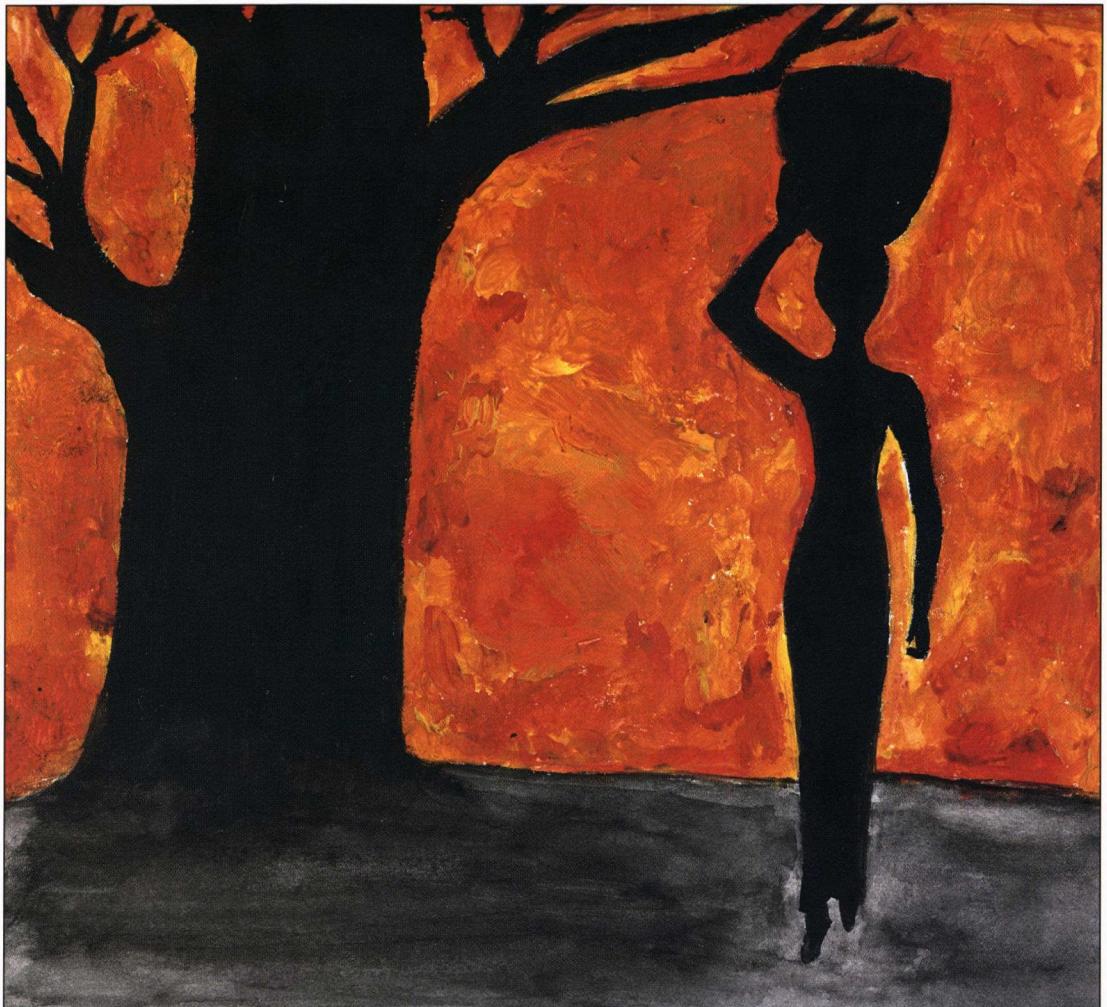
"That's very pretty, I must say, did you make it yourself?"

Ligiri was the shy and quiet type, and never before found herself with such a handsome young man. There was a long uncomfortable silence, which was finally broken by the young man.

"My name is Danu. I'm the Hogon's son in a nearby village. What's your name?"

Ligiri didn't know what to do, so she turned and ran. Unfortunately, Ligiri's lovely necklace got caught on a low-hanging branch in her haste to get back to the village. She wanted to pick it up, but Danu was close behind her.

"Wait! Please! Won't you just tell me your name? I never completely even saw your face!" Very soon he was breathless and stopped. Something glimmered on a branch nearby, and he soon recognized the necklace. A grin spread on his face. "Whoever shall make a necklace just like this one will be my bride!" he yelled, just loud enough for Ligiri to hear it in



Ligiri's only comfort was a fifty-foot baobab tree, which reminded Ligiri of her kind grandfather

the distance.

That night Ligiri went to the baobab with her grandfather's spirit and told him the sad news about the necklace. In reply he threw down a handful of beads just like the ones before.

The next day there was a lot of commotion among the girls. News spread fast that Danu was going to marry whoever made the same necklace as he had

in his possession now, and the Hogon's son was considered a very fine young man. Soon, all the girls in the village were working hard on necklaces, except Koro, who had another plan, as she watched hungrily over Ligiri's work. Ligiri's clever hands worked quickly and happily, and right then and there Ligiri realized that her heart wasn't with her anymore, it was with the Hogon's son,



Ligiri looked up at Danu and their eyes met

but even then it ached. A sigh of triumph escaped Ligiri's lips as she proudly held out her finished necklace, right before Koro snatched it from her.

"Ha! Now he will have to marry me!" Koro yelled as she ran to a place by a baobab where Danu had announced for all the girls wishing to participate to meet. Instead of crying though, Ligiri quietly followed her hard-hearted sister.

Koro and Ligiri looked alike, but nobody saw it, for Koro had a look of jealousy, anger and sorrow mixed together, while Ligiri always carried a smile, and a kind look was given to everyone, which was why everyone liked her. Maybe that was why jealousy haunted Koro all those years.

A line stretching far and wide, reminding one of a snake, was crowding in front of Danu. Four hours passed with no luck, and Danu was beginning to lose hope, when Koro stepped in front of him. He studied the necklace she gave him. "Well, it looks like this one, exact in fact." Then he looked at Koro and studied her face. "You do remind me of her, even though I never really saw the face," he said with a little doubt in his voice, "but something's different. I don't know what."

Koro started to panic. "No. It's me. I'm the one."

"Yes, you're probably right. But before I marry you, will you please put your necklace on? I'm sure that's why I'm having doubts. I remember you with it on."

"Why, certainly!" Koro cried, and a

sigh of relief escaped her. But the moment the stolen necklace touched Koro's skin, it began piercing it and choking her. Koro grabbed her throat and began screaming for help. Instinctively, Ligiri ran up to her screaming sister and took off the necklace, not because it was a chance to get it back, but because she was kind. But she didn't even get a simple "thank you." Instead, Koro yelled at her, "You stupid girl! How dare you make such a necklace and even let me steal it?" (Danu was meanwhile listening to all this.)

Ligiri took no notice of her elder sister at that moment but simply put on the necklace. Ligiri looked up at Danu and their eyes met. Taking no notice of Koro, the Hogon's son took Ligiri's hand, and everyone knew who would be his bride.

Before the wedding ceremony, Ligiri went to the baobab and told her grandfather the good news. Her grandfather had some news to tell Ligiri himself though. "Ligiri, I was privileged to see you once more, and now that you're starting a new and better life, I can rest. I won't be able to speak to you out loud, but I'll always speak in your heart."

A tear ran down Ligiri's cheek. "Thank you, Grandfather, for everything. I'll never forget you!" And at that very moment the tree burst into bloom, though no rains poured. Ligiri turned and walked back to the village. She turned around and looked at the baobab one last time. A branch moved, almost as if a kind human hand was waving for her to go on. ♦

# The Baseball

by Teresa Cotsirilos

illustrated by Valerie Thompson



WAS ONLY EIGHT when Pearl Harbor was bombed. It was so long ago—back when I had fountains of cranberry-red hair tamed into ragged half-ponytails. Back when I had yellow dresses with hems that danced around my legs, displaying scraped knees; I never did girly stuff. No, I broke the sugar bowls at tea parties and tore the silken gowns of dolls. Besides, my idol was no woman. It was Sammy. He was my brother, eight years older than I, and I worshiped him. I always tried to tag along with him and his gigantic friends—he always tried to avoid this by taking giant steps, scaling treetops, running races, playing ball. So I lengthened my strides and walked like him, confident, big, I-mean-business strides. I took a deep breath and gripped the rough limbs of the oak out front, pulling myself into a palace of emerald leaves and sun-dappled branches. I practiced running by the steaming bog and bony cattails over the golden hilltop behind the baseball field, teaching my legs to move and letting the air roar in my ears like a jet plane, feeling at first as if I were going to topple over, then speeding up and finding I had wings. And in the folds of spangled night, I trudged to the baseball diamond with my brother's too-big mitt and my brother's too-heavy bat, and tossed baseballs into the air, watching their vague outline fall where I wanted, then slamming them out of sight.

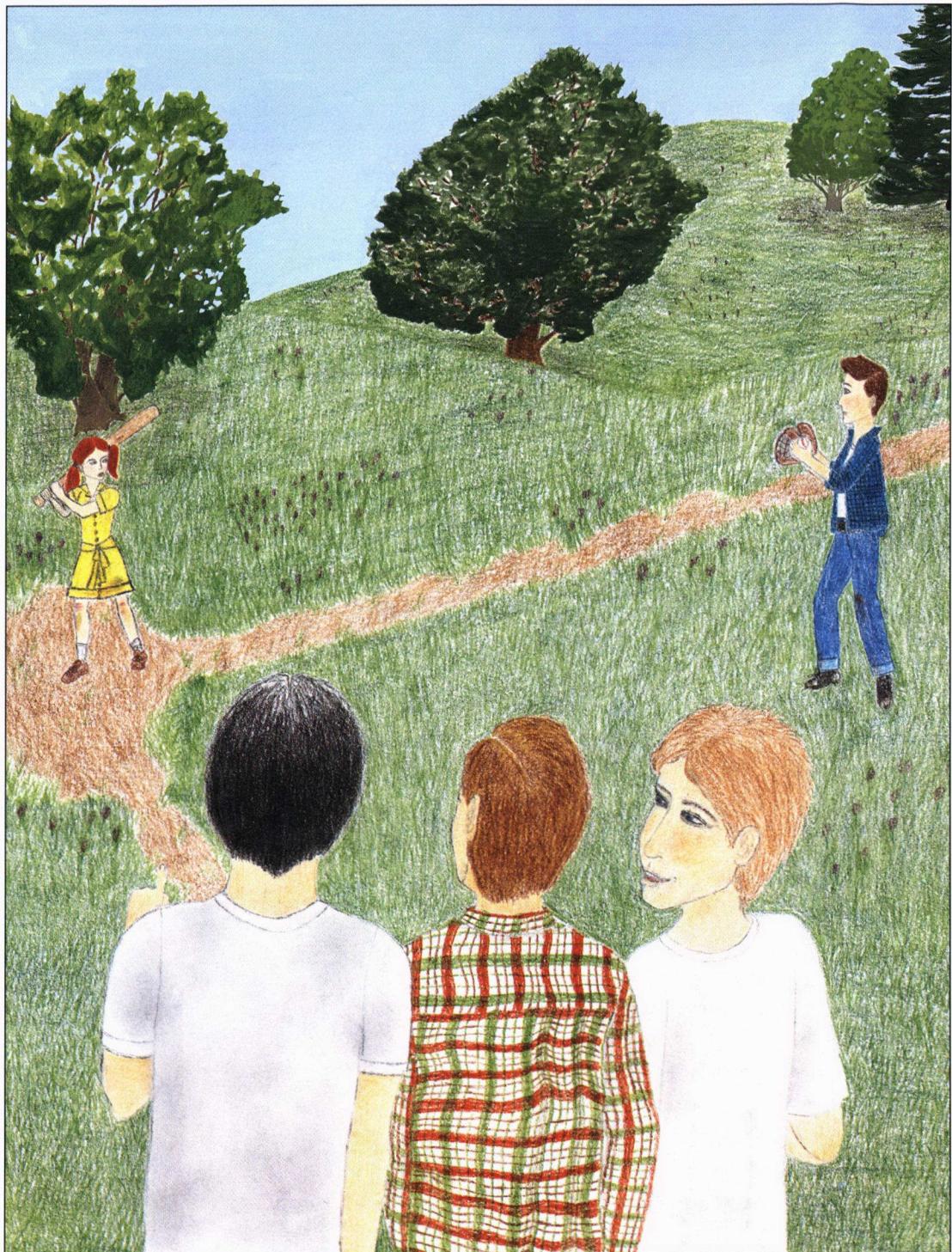
One day, Sammy discovered a gold mine of baseballs bor-



Teresa Cotsirilos, 13  
Berkeley, California



Valerie Thompson, 13  
Barry's Bay, Ontario, Canada



I raced his friends and beat them all. And I showed what a ballplayer I was

dering the outfield and asked his friends in puzzlement about where they had come from. Nearby, following them as usual, I chirped up. I announced my secret rehearsals, then showed him what I could do. I walked next to Sammy with great, joyous steps. I climbed up the maples, the bays, the twining cypress, the keeling willow. I raced his friends and beat them all. And I showed what a ballplayer I was. "You guys are lucky," Sammy snorted to his friends. "You guys don't have a bratty, tomboy little sister that's one hundred percent bad news." But I could see in his eyes that he was proud of me.

Probably the thing I'll remember most about that time was how we played. It was fantastic. We started after our homework was done. School was tough for me—I understood all the subjects, but went around doing them in unusual ways. In poetry I wrote without uppercase letters or punctuation; in math I added up numbers by making faces out of the digits first. My teachers didn't understand, and as a girl who didn't act the way girls were supposed to, I had no friends to help me parry their unconcealed disapproval. But I had Sammy. And every day, without fail, we would hastily do our work, then get bats and gloves and join his buddies, split into teams, and get dirty. We'd play until the darkness of purple dusk fell, until Mom trudged up the hill, battling the wind as it billowed out her skirts and ruffled up her auburn hair. And when her call rang round the

dugout, Sammy would wave good-bye to his friends and drag his feet back home, holding my slender white fingers in his big, warm hand. I still believe today that if it wasn't for Hitler, Sammy Corboy could have become a professional ballplayer.

We found out about Pearl Harbor when listening to "The Green Hornet" after dinner. Sammy and I were wedged together into the same faded, pink armchair, listening attentively to the radio. Then there was a rush of static, and our program was interrupted. "We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. This morning, Japanese planes attacked the American military base in Pearl Harbor . . ." We stared at the radio as if it was going to explode in our faces. The distant war was creeping into our home like a tiger closing in on prey.

**S**AMMY AND HIS friends wanted to fight. They talked of the Japanese and Germans as if they were a cup of something nasty that had spilled and simply had to be wiped up. No need for soap or sponges—just a rag would do. They seemed to think they could just go overseas, kick butt, and be back in time for dinner. One of Sammy's best friends, a tall boy named Rolando, was two years older and signed up immediately. I watched him leave, happy, determined. He never came back. My music teacher, Mr. Phelps, went abroad as well, abandoning the class to a series of frazzled volunteers. I never saw him

again, either, but it never really registered in my eight-year-old mind how grim the situation was and that he was really dead. I guess I thought he had gone away somewhere and, like Rolando, would come back sometime or other. Death is just a word when you're young.

Everything was changing. I grew out of my oxfords the summer following the bombing, and Mom replaced them with some old saddle shoes she found at the "Shoe Exchange" that were much too big and stuffed the toe with newspaper. We collected bacon grease off the griddle in tin cans, and when the cans were full gave them to the fat butcher three blocks away. I was told they were somehow used in the manufacturing of bombs. Gold stars stared from windows everywhere, and adults were tense, stretched thin, looking older, on the verge of breaking. Everything in my world was a roller coaster—except baseball. The sport insisted on keeping the same rules, the diamond still waiting patiently for me every day after school, its popularity never faltering. Hordes of kids would crowd round the makeshift bleachers and watch all the high-schoolers and me play on weekends. The kids my age jeered at me, but it was clear they were just jealous. They'd had baseball training actually, you know, Little League and such; I'd never been allowed on a real team because I was a girl. And yet I was playing with kids nearly twice my age. Then, in 1942, something happened that

brought that stalking tiger right inside my very heart.

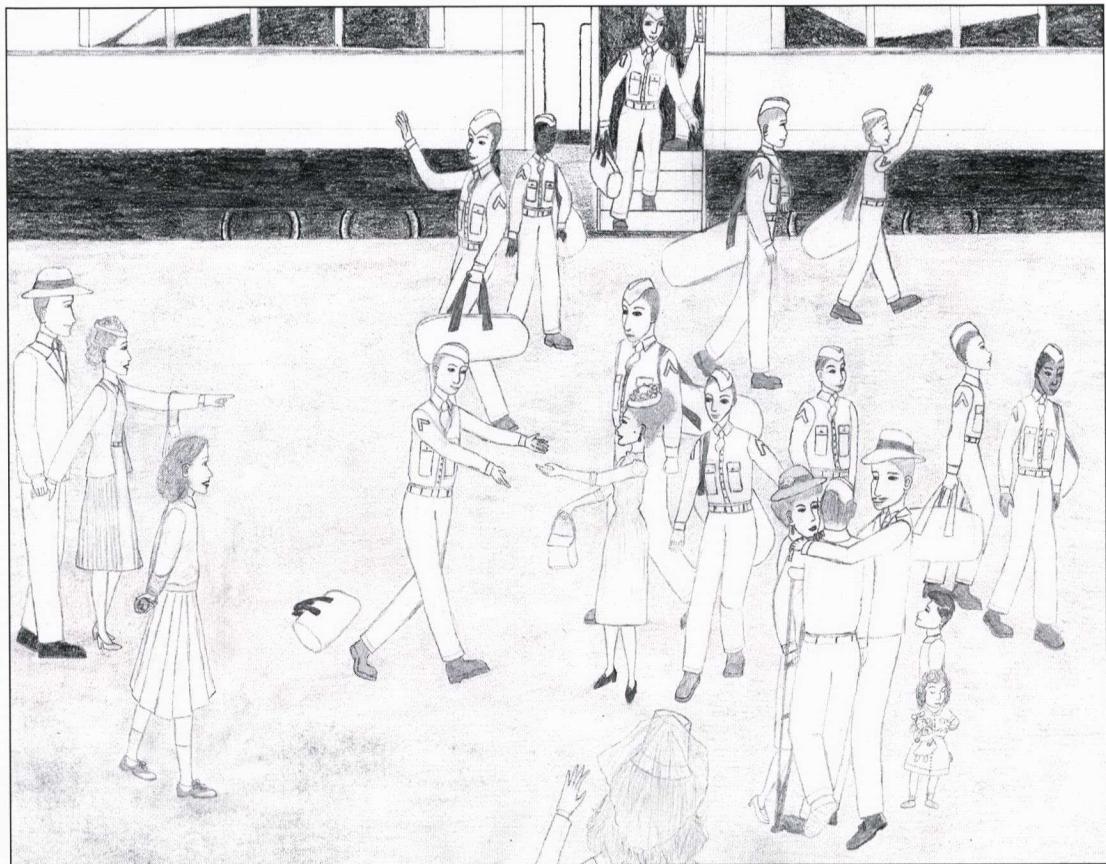
Sammy was drafted.

The day he went to catch his train he was in a smart, khaki uniform, a pallid look on his face. Mom cried as she spoke. Dad didn't trust himself enough to speak much and only said that he was very proud. We all were. I had squeezed Sammy's warm, strong hand tightly during the ride to the train station, and when he tried to get on one of the cars, I didn't let go. I wouldn't let him leave. "Jenna," he said cheerfully. "Don't worry, I'll be back!"

I noticed that he hadn't said when, and this made me even more frightened. "Stay," I whispered, voice nearly inaudible. "Please, Sammy, you're the only friend I've ever had, you've gotta . . ."

It was then that he reached into his leather bag and revealed the baseball. It was neon white with newness, and the stitching wasn't red like it was supposed to be but orange, bright, undaunted orange. He squatted down and peered deep into me with his dark eyes. "Play ball with this one while I'm gone," he said. "A baseball with orange stitching is special, you know. Gets you friends. Makes you feel better. Work on your pitch, OK?"

I buried myself in the safety of his arms, my nose pressed in the fabric of his uniform, the starched smell pooling into my nostrils. Then I took that baseball from his strong, steady hands, and waved good-bye.



...in the thick of the crowd with his eyes on his boots, there he was. Sammy

FIFTH GRADE came and went. I made some friends over that summer by throwing my trusty baseball over fences as an excuse to go to kids' houses. By sixth grade Sammy and his pals had been replaced, and the baseball was worn and unraveling. Despite its age, I never considered tossing it into the trash—the older I became, the more I feared for Sammy's safety, and the more comfort it gave me.

Sammy's letters started out long and funny, but as time progressed they became more cryptic, leaner, like the

words were choking themselves. Soon he stopped writing us altogether. I refused to accept the fact that he might be dead and wrote to him every day about my new friend Shirley, about how well I was doing in school, the way I missed him, the way the baseball helped me. Then, toward the end of sixth grade, we got the best news we'd ever had—the war in Europe was over and Sammy was coming home.

Mom, Dad and I waited at the train station. I wondered what I would look like to him now—last time he'd seen me

I'd been just a stubborn little girl, not a tall, mature preteen. I hid the baseball behind my back, running my hands over the roughened cowhide. A sea of khaki poured from the cars as the train let off plumes of steam. The uniforms were spotless—hadn't they fought at all? I thought. "Look!" cried Mom. I followed her finger, and in the thick of the crowd with his eyes on his boots, there he was. Sammy.

It's hard to describe something so painful, even fifty-eight years later. I didn't recognize him at first—I didn't quite know what he was anymore. He was technically, I suppose, still a boy, still good ol' Sammy Corboy, now twenty. But he wasn't really anything, enough of something to not be nothing, but not enough of something there, something gone. He was not alive, nor was he dead. No, he had one foot on each side of the line. He did not live—he did not want to live—he only trudged, on and on and on forever, everything hazy and faraway. Ghost, yes, now I know that's what he was; a ghost of a child, of innocence, of laughter, of a ballplayer, a flitting shadow that heard and saw but took no mind, numb to the earth, eyes still cast to the terrors of the past. His memories were like knives, stabbing like an excruciating scene in a film played then rewound and played again. They were of dying, they were of trying (and failing). They were of losing, they were of winning (though that was really losing, too). They were of blood-flecked grass and

the charred pages of orphaned picture books. They were of guilt and pain, mounds of it bagged in sacks wrongly labeled glory which he had carried home like an ox. And they were what had reduced Sammy to a ghost.

But I didn't know what he'd seen, then. No one had told me. All I knew was that something was wrong as he caught sight of Mom, Dad, and me, then averted his eyes to the tile floor of the platform and walked slowly toward us. My breath caught in my chest; wasn't he excited to see me after two entire years? He had to be.

"SAMMY!!" Mom screamed, face red and scrunched, thrusting herself around his neck. He said nothing, patting her emotionlessly on her shoulders. She didn't seem to notice.

Dad hugged him next. "Welcome home, son," he muttered gruffly. "We missed you."

It was my turn. I ran a finger down the stitches of the baseball and took a deep breath. "Hey Sammy," I said, grinning broadly. "I've got somethin' . . ." I stopped. My smile faded. His eyes were flat. They were heavy, their brown depths infected with melancholy. This was not the brother that had given me the baseball two years before. Hesitantly, I let myself get wrapped in his arms and was instantly alarmed. They were no longer the safe arms that had hugged me the day he left, hands no longer warm and strong. They were open, too open, vulnerable, exposing, almost. He was no longer the protecting

brother I had known. He was too far gone to protect me.

"So Sammy," Mom said, wiping her eyes. "What would you like for dinner? Chicken? Lasagna? Anything you want I'll make . . ."

Sammy didn't say anything.

**D**AYS PASSED, and Sammy did not speak. He sat by the window, staring out of it, the sunshine gleaming off his wistful face. In the middle of the night he would wake up screaming. He was breaking, a glass ornament thrust from the branch of a Christmas tree and splintered on the floor. At meals, Mom and Dad would try to probe him, push him into speaking. "So Sammy," Mom would say. "I hear George's in town. How about you go play baseball with him?" Sammy batted at his eggs with his fork, concentrating on the yellow globs smeared on the plate. Mom would try again. "You like George, why don't you go somewhere with him? Or how about you get back together with Susie Wong? There's a good movie out, and she's still single . . ." she giggled giddily. In the old days, Sammy would blush furiously and start protesting indignantly that he and Susie were just friends. But now Sammy didn't pink at all. He wiped his mouth perfunctorily with his napkin, got up from the table, and left.

"Son," Dad cried, getting up with a panicked look on his blanched face. "Son, we didn't say you could be excused." Sammy didn't even turn around as he walked through the doorway and

toward the stairs. "I'm speaking to you, son. Sammy!" Dad ran after him. Mom began to weep again. I felt my throat tighten, but forced the tears and anguish into a little jar deep inside of me. I would bottle up my feelings, keep control of myself, of something. I'd keep it all inside.

In a small town, news travels quickly. I learned this the hard way three days after Sammy came home. While Mrs. Petterson was handing out math tests, she approached me and whispered concernedly, "Jenna dear, how're you holding up?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, tucking a strand of red hair behind an ear.

"With your brother . . ."

I blinked hard, swallowed, and smiled sweetly, stuffing more inside that little jar. "I'm fine, Mrs. Petterson. Sammy's doing better—he started up some small talk at the breakfast table today, you know."

Mrs. Petterson beamed warmly. "Good," she said. I couldn't concentrate on my math test.

"Do you want to sleep over tomorrow?" Shirley asked me softly at recess.

As we'd had a sleepover the two nights before as well, I could tell she was inviting me to give me time away from the troubles at home. "It's OK," I said. "Sammy and I are planning to do some stuff."

Things kept getting worse. Mrs. Petterson was trying to be helpful, I knew, but she only made things worse. She would pull me aside and ask about



"Jenna dear, how're you holding up?"

my brother in hushed tones, but sixth-graders have ears trained to pick up the slightest pin drop—everyone heard. I always beamed painfully and said, "Thank you, Sammy and I talked together yesterday."

I could hear parents whisper to their children as I walked by, "Go play with poor Jenna Corboy, love, she's so lonely, and her brother's so addle-brained now, poor thing." Once, I couldn't take it anymore. In the middle of a movie some kid I knew hated me had invited me to out of pity, I ran out. I sprinted

all the way to the bog, the place that I had learned to run so long ago. I waded into the murky water, then collapsed, sitting right in the swamp and biting my lip, trembling all over. Tears were beating at the dam that held them in my eyes so ferociously I thought that surely it would break. My little jar was nearly overflowing, but I nonetheless pushed my sobs inside. I'd hold it all.

**T**HAT NIGHT, as I heard Sammy tossing and turning and moaning and shrieking in his bed, I rolled the base-

ball over in my hands. I'd been afraid to show it to him at the train station. He wasn't my brother anymore—he was vacant, wandering mist, something haunted. He was so crazy now—would he hurt it? It was mine! What had happened where he'd fought? I wondered. Was that what had driven him to this? Having him this weak was like having a rug being pulled out from under me, a foundation shattered. I had leaned on him so much when I was little. Maybe it's his turn to lean on me, I thought. Maybe he just needs someone who understands to help him. But what do I understand? Chemistry, I listed to myself. Hemingway. Fractions. Baseball. Baseball . . .

**T**HERE he was.

Sitting in the same faded, pink armchair in the same dark living room in which he'd sat when we'd learned of Pearl Harbor four years before. He was staring into the distance with a pained look on his face. I approached him cautiously. "Sammy?"

He looked up so suddenly with such a fierce glare in his eyes that I took a step backwards. Then, shaking, I handed him the baseball. "Here," I said. He took it and examined it. "A baseball with or-

ange stitching is special, you know," I remarked, repeating what he had once said to me, voice quivering. "Gets you friends. Makes you feel better . . ."

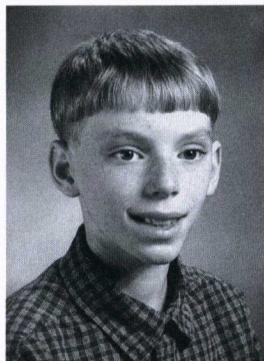
I watched Sammy toss the baseball from one hand to the other and held my breath. My gut was squirming as I prayed that maybe, just maybe, that browned cowhide and unraveling orange string would get him to speak. He stared at it, rubbing his rough thumbs in methodical circles on the worn skin, letting the dirt rub off the ball and onto his fingers. He was thinking. About baseball at dusk with Rolando and his other friends; about dividing into teams and getting dirty; about Mom battling the breeze as she trudged up the hill to call him home for dinner, dress flapping as purple dusk blanketed; about old times. Old times. Before the war, before he went to Germany, before he transformed from boy to ghost of innocence and laughter and ballplayer, weighted down by nightmares he'd had with his eyes wide open.

He tossed the ball up and caught it again, then turned to me. "So Jenna," he began, voice lower than I remembered it, "did you work on your pitch while I was gone like I told you to?"

And I burst out crying. ♦

# A View to Kill

by Bradley Culley



Bradley Culley, 11  
Portland, Maine

When my dad came home  
he was not my father, but a king an emperor  
he had not a gun but a scepter in his hand.  
It had the power to start or stop  
my adulthood.  
He said, "I'm home."

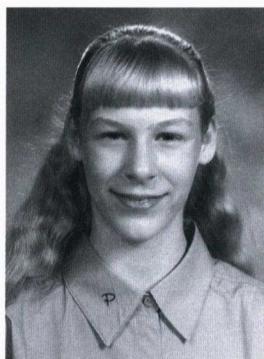
We were in the woods out back.  
I had spent my whole life  
looking forward to this,  
I would spend the rest  
dreading it.  
Then suddenly  
out of the early morning mist  
came the deer in its entirety.  
I saw it  
The deer  
I leveled the gun  
Like dense lead in my hands.  
As soon as I fired the gun  
I collapsed into an endless space.

I remember my last view  
as if it were a movie frame  
(cut to black)  
I saw the deer fall.  
We both went at the same time.  
I still recall that fateful day,  
when I traded a deer's life  
for my own pride.

# The Christmas Realization

by Melissa Smith

illustrated by Rita Lanham



Melissa Smith, 13  
Eagle River, Alaska



Rita Lanham, 12  
Madison, Wisconsin

**B**EN ROLLED HIS EYES as he wiped the sweat off his forehead. His robe was too hot, and the sheet he was *forced* to wear on his head was too tight. As you can probably guess, Ben was in the Christmas play for his Sunday school. As a sixth-grader, he had been in it for the past seven years, and was absolutely sick of it! He was so ready to be in the youth group next year.

"Shepherds, you are in the wrong spot—*again*," the distant voice of the play director droned. "Ben! Get with them. As the eldest, you should be responsible in getting the others to the correct place. I'm ashamed of you!" Ben jolted out of his daze at his name, but he tuned the rest of the reprimand out. The director seemed to be waiting for him to apologize. When he made no effort to do so, she went on.

Whoooooo, Ben thought to himself, survived another one. This happened every practice. Old Mrs. Bruster, though he preferred calling her The Brute, would pick on him. "Don't do that" and "Benjamin, get with it." "Haven't you been practicing?" It was all "Yadda, yadda, yadda!" He dreaded that two hours every Saturday.

Ben heard his cue, "So the shepherds left their flocks . . ." He and the other two kids in rags dragged their feet to the cardboard box to stare at the plastic baby doll. He never got that part. Poor shepherds would leave their sheep, with no one to watch them, to see a baby. Big whoop! To him, it



"Shepherds, you are in the wrong spot—again"

would not be worth the risk. Ben glanced at the clock, relieved to see that it was almost time to go.

**B**EN MARKED the calendar. One week until Christmas, which meant five days till his birthday! He called some of

his friends to make last-minute arrangements for his party on his birthday. After that, he helped his mom make the cake.

Their next-door neighbor was a good friend of Ben's, whom he often visited. That sunny afternoon he ran over to

pay the old man a visit. Ben waited for a long time after knocking before the door creaked open. "Oh, hi, Ben. Come in out of the cold."

"Thank you, Mister Jack. I was concerned that you were hurt, when you didn't answer," Ben said gently.

"Oh. I'm fine. It's just the cold; it gets into my bones. Slows me down a little. Enough about me, how's the play coming?" With a roll of his eyes, Ben made sure that his old friend was coming to see it. "Now don't you roll your eyes. It is a very important happening and story. You know, without the shepherds, who would know what had happened." It was more of a statement than question, so Ben just shrugged. "One day I'll find a way to make you believe me." Jack had no way of knowing how soon that would be.

An hour later, Ben left the old man in happy spirits. When he got home, his mom wanted know how it went. "Just fine. We looked around his attic while he told me stories from the war." He sampled the leftover frosting. Satisfied, he went outside to go sledding.

IT WAS ten o'clock. Ben lay awake thinking about his birthday party the next day. He jumped at the sound of the phone. His mother's muffled words, then steps, reached his ears. She stuck her head into his room. "Hey, buddy, you awake?" she whispered. He lay still, pretending to be sleeping. But curiosity finally overcame him. He turned toward her expectantly. She

came closer and sat on the edge of his bed. "That was the hospital." Ben sat up straight in the bed. "Jack slipped in his driveway a few hours ago. He has a broken rib and arm." The boy was shocked into silence. His mother gently said, "And he wants you to visit him." The first thing that went through Ben's mind was his party. On the other hand, if ol' Jack died in the hospital, he could never forgive himself.

"It is important that I go, for Jack's sake. Tomorrow I'll call everyone to rearrange the party for after Christmas."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. Good night." Ben lay awake a little while longer. Oh well, the hospital could be an adventure after all, he thought.

"**H**APPY BIRTHDAY, Ben!" came the frail voice of the shriveled lump in the hospital bed. Ben gulped at the form of his pal. "Come over here so I can get a look at my favorite boy." He slid beside the bed and put a fake smile on. The smile quickly melted when Jack had a coughing spell for some time. A nurse rushed in to do whatever they do to stop coughs. Ben thought she stuffed a cork down Jack's throat, but he couldn't be sure.

He and Jack talked and laughed, and coughed. They walked down to the cafeteria, just to do something other than sit. After resting and eating in the room they went to the gift shop. There, Jack bought Ben a birthday balloon, while Ben got Jack a get-well balloon. He also bought the old man a rubber-band gun

to shoot at the balloon to pass the time. Back in the room they tried it out. They were having a great time when the nurse came in without knocking. She poked her head in just as her elderly patient pulled the trigger of the rubber-band gun. The two chums held their breath as the oblivious nurse was snapped in the forehead with the band. Her eyes flew open wide when she saw it coming; when it hit her she fell backwards on the floor. Ben and Jack crowded over her till her eyes fluttered open. "I will be right back to help you, sir," the nurse said as she staggered away.

The boy and boy-at-heart rolled with laughter. "How fast do you think it was going?" Jack inquired.

"I'd put it at ten miles per hour," Ben replied.

"Ohhhh, you're wimpy. I think it was going at least twenty!"

"By the look on her face you would figure it was about a hundred miles per hour!" That sent them into another laughing spell.

Exhausted from their excitement, they fell asleep for some time. When they woke up, Ben was sore from his odd position on the hospital chair. Jack was all rosy from the warmth of the bed. He expressed his gratitude to Ben for showing up.

"Hey, no problem," Ben said. "It has been great fun. Don't worry about the party, either. Everyone was just fine with the change."

Jack was quiet for a minute. "You know, Ben," his friend said carefully,

"this is somewhat like what the shepherds did. The angels told them to go, and they did, leaving everything behind. I asked you to come visit me, and you did, setting your birthday off for later. Thank you, it means a lot to me."

Ben thought for a minute about what he had just heard. At the first mention of shepherds he put a wall up. Just then his mom walked in to get him. Ben was still dazed at the connection when he said bye.

"Think about it," Jack winked.

**T**HAT IS JUST what Ben did for the next couple of days: think. His parents were concerned at his non-activity, but their child soothed their fears. The performance night came, and Ben was still thinking about it. The play was going just fine, with only a few glitches, like all kid performances have. When his part came, Ben completely got the metaphor and understood it like he was there at the time. He felt like he was glowing, and from the way everyone was staring at him, he guessed he was. He was in a completely different place. Ben felt so privileged as he sang out "Angels We Have Heard on High."

Jack had always told him that God worked in mysterious ways. Ben had no idea that meant broken bones too. He could almost hear Jack's voice as they bowed before the applauding audience. "See, I told you that you would get it one day." Ben smiled as he looked out the window and saw a large star twinkle in the distance. ♦

# Phyllis and Me

by Abigail Kelly

illustrated by Christina Becos



Abigail Kelly, 9  
Beverly, Massachusetts



Christina Becos, 9  
Los Angeles, California



RAN DOWN THE STAIRS, grabbed my backpack and rushed out the door just as the bus turned the corner. It was the first day of school. I was new. I wondered whether the fourth-graders would like me. What if they didn't?

On the bus, I sat next to a girl who was tall and had long brown curly hair that went down to her waist. She wore a short blue-jean skirt with black platform flip-flops, and a green-and-purple-striped sleeveless shirt. She looked nothing like me. I was short, with straight black hair that went down to my shoulders. I was wearing bell-bottoms with white socks, white sneakers and an orange T-shirt. "Hi," the girl said, "my name is Meagan, what's yours?"

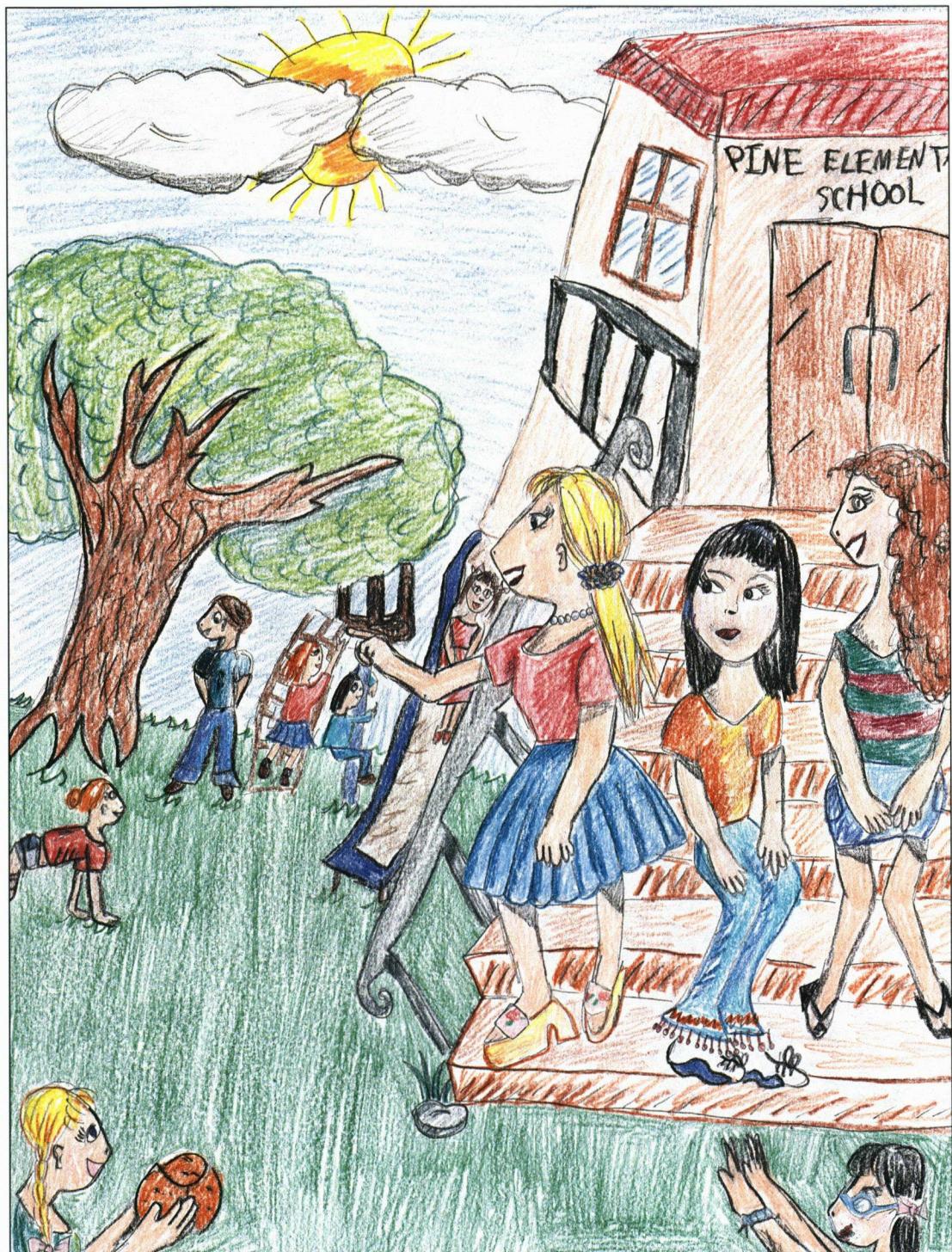
"I'm Elizabeth," I said.

"Well, Lizzie, since you're new, I might as well warn you about Phyllis. She's crazy and she plays baby imaginary games."

I looked down at my lap and remembered the games I used to play with my old best friend Ashley. We would pretend that we were horses running free in the fields, or running away from horse catchers. Ashley never called me Lizzie. She knew I liked my full name, Elizabeth.

At recess, I sat on the cement steps in front of the school with Meagan and her friend Jane.

"Look at that handsome boy over there," Jane said, point-



"Look at that handsome boy over there," Jane said, pointing to a tall boy near a grove of trees

ing to a tall boy near a grove of trees on the edge of the playground.

"Oh my gosh! He's so cute," Meagan said.

All I could see was a tall boy, who looked a bit mean. Behind him, a girl was crawling on her hands and knees and talking to herself. He was teasing her, but she didn't seem to mind. The girl reminded me of Ashley.

At the next recess, I was following Meagan and Jane to the cement steps, when the girl that had been crawling on her hands and knees the day before walked up to me and asked, "What animal are you?"

I was puzzled for a moment, but then I thought I knew what she meant.

"I was born in the year of the monkey," I answered.

"You don't look like a monkey to me," she said, "You look more like a panther. Don't you think I look like a lion?"

I stared at the girl's red straight hair which was pulled up in a bun with the ends sticking up all over the top of her head. She did look something like a lion. She was thin, and she had freckles all over her arms, legs and face.

"Quick! Here comes the hunter!" She pointed to the tall boy who had been teasing her the day before. She grabbed my arm and ran to the grove of trees at the edge of the playground.

"Lion," I gasped, "that was a good escape, but he'll find us soon. We need to go deeper into the woods!"

Lion ran ahead of me, deeper into the grove of trees, and I followed as fast as

my legs would carry me. Then we heard the bell.

Lion raced back through the trees beside me, when a stick popped out from the edge of the path. I had no time to slow down, or stop, so I tripped over the stick and landed on my face in the dirt. Lion landed beside me a few seconds after I had landed. Lion jumped to her feet and shouted, "I'm going to get you this time, Mike." It was the tall boy.

One of the lunch monitors ran over and told Mike to go to the principal's office, and helped me get up. Lion had a bloody nose and a skinned knee. I had a scraped chin, and a mouth full of dirt.

In the nurse's office, Mrs. Smackers, our school nurse, gave Lion a tissue for her bloody nose. "Here you go, Phyllis," she said.

Phyllis? I thought. Lion was crazy Phyllis? She sure didn't seem crazy to me.

When I got on the bus, I sat next to Meagan, and she said, "I'm not going to sit with you until you stop playing with Phyllis. I warned you not to, but you didn't take my word for it."

I had been looking forward to playing with Phyllis at recess the next day, but now I had changed my mind.

The next day, I sat on the concrete steps with Meagan and Jane. Mike came over and apologized to me. I didn't say anything back because I was still mad at him.

After Mike left, Meagan said, "You're so lucky! He likes you!"

Then Phyllis came over and asked,

"Aren't you going to play with me, Panther?"

Meagan and Jane both laughed.  
"Don't you know her name is Lizzie?"

"Her name isn't Lizzie, it's Elizabeth," Phyllis said.

I looked at Phyllis, then at Meagan and Jane, and I said, "Maybe I'll play tomorrow, but right now, I'm busy."

Phyllis looked down at her feet and walked away slowly.

Meagan and Jane gave me a high five, and said, "Great work!" but I felt like I had done something terrible. I watched Phyllis sit down on the path near the grove of trees. I wished I could be climbing trees and running from hunters, instead of talking about boys.

Then I saw Mike walking toward Phyllis with a stick in his hand. I jumped up and ran across the playground. "Mike!" I shouted.

I ran up to him and said in a low

voice, "I have a message. Meagan and Jane want you to go sit with them."

"They do?"

"Well, yeah! Of course. They think you're the cutest guy in school."

He dropped the stick, and started walking toward Meagan and Jane. Meagan put her hand over her mouth, and Jane's jaw dropped. I looked at Phyllis and said, "Hey, Lion, let's get out of here before the hunter changes his mind about those girls."

That afternoon, Meagan saved a seat for me on the bus. "You are so brilliant, Lizzie," she said.

"Hey, Meagan, will you call me Elizabeth?"

"Sure," she said.

"And another thing," I asked, "do you mind if I sit with you on the bus but play with Phyllis at recess?"

"That's fine with me, Elizabeth," she said.



# Roscoe

by Shelley Noel McFatter

illustrated by Ayla Reynolds

## CHAPTER ONE



OSCOE THE RIVER OTTER peered at the glittering stream with bleary eyes. The warm sun had dulled his senses and left him asleep on the bank since noon, but the cooling mists of twilight brought a searing pain to his stomach. Hunger. It was the driving force in all the forest creatures, and Roscoe was no exception. He yawned, exposing a row of gleaming, ivory-white teeth sharp enough to slice an elephant's hide. He stretched, feeling the cords of his muscles draw taut and send tingling waves cascading over all of his body.

A soft patter of feet on the dry leaves startled the half-awake Roscoe; he whirled to face the danger but readied himself to leap into the water at a moment's notice. But it was merely Red, the fox, coming down to drink of the sweet river water before his nightly hunt. He ignored the frightened otter and bent his auburn head to lap up some of the cool liquid. Roscoe relaxed. The fox posed no danger to his welfare and always kept to his own affairs. And, besides, it was time to think of more important things. Like food.

Roscoe dove gracefully into the water, making a series of ripples that warped the peaceful reflection of the woodlands into a six-year-old's crumpled painting. He darted through the stream like an elongated torpedo, his beady black eyes searching the murky depths for the shining scales of the fish his mouth desired. And then began the chase. Roscoe twist-



Shelley Noel McFatter, 13  
Brandon, Florida



Ayla Reynolds, 13  
Juneau, Alaska



Roscoe broke the surface with his prize

ed, circled and sliced through the water, mimicking his prey's every move. Between rocks, under logs, through twisted masses of rotting roots he pursued the tasty morsel, who was fast tiring. And with one last, great effort, his jaws closed on the silvery scales to silence

the fish's life forever. Roscoe broke the surface with his prize. Dragging it onto the shore, he curled up and started to hack away at the juicy pink meat with his scissor-like teeth.

As the smell of blood filled the air, scavengers began to flock around the

fresh kill with lust in their eyes. A mink peered at the fish hungrily from behind a rock, and a pine marten sighed enviously from a green thicket, where he waited impatiently for the otter to finish. But it was quite some time before Roscoe deemed himself satisfied; in fact, he was fully gorged and bloated before he finally turned away from his catch. Curling up on a flat rock, he closed his eyes contentedly and fell into a happy, dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE MORNING dawned smoky. A haze of burning, bluish smoke settled over the forest, smothering the cheerful robin's song and sending many of the animals into cautious hiding. Roscoe sniffed the air warily. There could be no doubt of the scent; man was near. The smoke was from his campfire—a very large one, to be sure—and the deathly silence that hung over the woods was proof that he was very close. Roscoe slid into the water quietly. It was time to go. Man desired his fine pelt, and where man was he would not stay.

He swam swiftly, away from the smoke, away from the smell of man, like an arrow soaring through the blue-black depths to safety. He surfaced for a breath and scanned the shoreline with trepidation. The smell was stronger. Roscoe's whiskers quivered and twitched with fright, and his nose rebelled at the putrid, unpleasant scent. He dove back under. The river widened

up ahead, and the stronger current already began to tug at his sleek body.

Onward, onward. The river was frothy now, and all of his swimming skills were applied to steer a straight course in the roiling waves. He lifted his head for a gulp of air. "Bang, whiz!!! Bang!!" Bullets ripped through the water on his right and left! He yelped and sank beneath the surface, his heart pounding madly. Man was on the shore! He swam toward the opposite bank. Perhaps there was some brush to shelter him. "Bang!! Whiz!!" The bullets hissed as they hit the water, inches away from Roscoe's head. He was a clear target in the crystal-blue liquid. Air! Air! Roscoe's lungs screamed. He surfaced. "Bang!! Whiz!! Bang-bang!!!!" A searing, red-hot pain lashed through the river otter's body. He managed to sink back under the water, but his right side had been viciously scraped by a bullet. He kicked feebly, trying to get up enough propulsion to sail with his usual grace. But it was impossible. He floundered about helplessly, crying and sending bubbles of precious air back up to the surface. It wouldn't be long before the man sent his dog in to fetch him.

But there was other movement in the water. An old, solitary beaver, named One Tooth because of obvious reasons, had seen the entire plight from his small, brush-and-mud lodge and decided to play a part in Roscoe's fate. Now, the beaver and the otter are most certainly not friends—one builds and the other takes extreme delight in tearing down—but old One Tooth hated man



One Tooth was pitying the otter very much as he sank slowly into the water

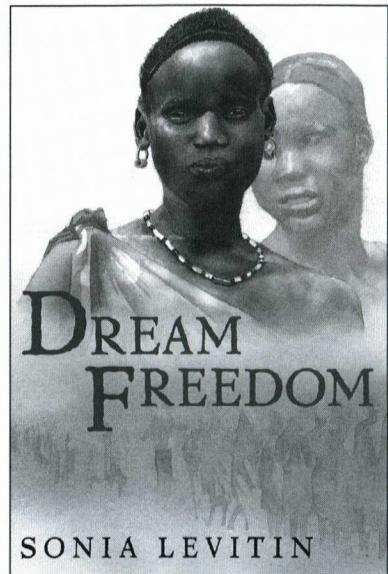
above all other hates. Man burned the forest. Man shot the animals. Man cut down his trees that he needed for his lodge! So, you see, One Tooth was pitying the otter very much as he sank slowly into the water.

Roscoe kicked with the last of his strength and ended up beside the beaver. "Bang!!! Whiz!!!" A red dot began to swell on One Tooth's scruffy hide. He roared with anger and slapped his great tail against the water's surface. Roscoe squeaked as the huge beaver

drew him in, sheltering him with his body, taking the bullets, the pain, the death that was meant for the injured otter. They swam to the lodge, where One Tooth nudged Roscoe inside with a look that said, "Take care, my friend. I go to face my one enemy—my foe—man. You must not be his prey." Roscoe, shaking, bleeding, and trembling, watched the brave, battle-scarred beaver give his life to another in need one last time. And Roscoe the River Otter never tore down another beaver lodge again. ♦

# Book Review

by Kat Clark



Kat Clark, 11  
Racine, Wisconsin

*Dream Freedom* by Sonia Levitin; Harcourt, Inc.: New York, 2000; \$17

**D**REAM FREEDOM is a beautiful book. As early as the foreword you can feel the anguish, the hope, and the love in every sentence:

This book was born from emotion. First came the shock that slavery still exists, in our own time, and that most people are oblivious to its existence.

And those two opening sentences are true. They really are. Slavery *does* exist. It's happening right now, in Africa. While you're playing kickball at recess a child might be taken away from his mother, a brother might be killed while trying to keep his sister from being taken. While you are at a theme park with your parents somebody else's mother might be made to become pregnant with her master's child, when she is already married and has another little one at home. While you're slurping up Pepsi and snacking on Cheetos someone's brother, uncle, daughter, mother, might be lucky to get a taste of the food the hogs eat. What the pigs eat is probably better than what some people are thrown.

One reason this book is so beautiful is that Sonia Levitin, the author, is not African herself. She is white. But she cares. Cares like it is *her* sister being torn away from her. Cares like we all should care. What happens to one person, or one family, or one country, affects us all. And Sonia Levitin is trying to get us all to see that, or at least want to see that.

Besides the parts about the fact that slavery does exist, there are chapters of the book about Marcus, a boy just like some of the children you might know. Marcus lives in America and his teacher is teaching his class about the slavery that's happening, and they are trying to help. You may not believe this, but some people in the book were strongly opposed to their children learning about slavery. A quote from one of the fathers in the book is "I know what Miss Hazel intends! She is using our children to become a national celebrity! Oh yes, you want your fifteen minutes of fame. Well, let me tell you, you're not going to get it at the expense of my son!" Miss Hazel then tries to tell him she couldn't care less about being on television. The father replies that he sends his son to school to learn the basics, not to get worked up about a bunch of primitives who have been fighting and killing each other since time began. If *I* were Miss Hazel, I think I would have about blown my top.

But then in the book you learn that some people might reason with the

angry father. They say buying slaves to free them promotes capturing them, but I think the most important thing is to keep all of the people of the world free. We all have that right, no matter what color skin or what name. Slaves aren't even allowed to *keep* their names! They are given new Arab names! Think about how you would feel if someone stripped you of your home, your family, your way of living and even your name. That would be the most terrible fate on earth.

I would never mean to say all Arabs are bad, because you can't brand a race. Some of them are taking the Sudanese as slaves, but you can't dislike all of them. Most of them are people just like you and me. Like Aziz, in this book. Aziz didn't know what it was like for the slaves his father bought. But then one day he went with his father to buy slaves and he saw a girl being taken away from her sister, the only thing she had left of her own past. Also Aziz's father struck a man because he would not obey him. Aziz can't figure out how he is going to make it through the rest of his life, and sits in his bed thinking, It's a lie. It's a lie. They are exactly like us.

At the end of the book you learn these facts: in the civil war going on in Sudan, 1.9 million people in Southern and Central Sudan have died, and 4 million Sudanese have had to flee from their homes, leaving their houses, jobs, farms, food and toys behind.

Should anyone have to live like this? You decide.



It was said he was the greatest, wisest wizard that ever walked the planet

# Zordex

by Elizabeth Mainardi

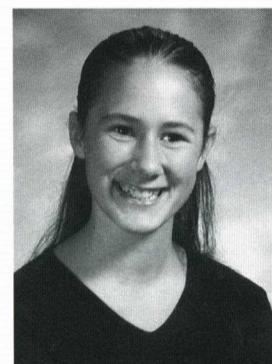
illustrated by Holly Wist



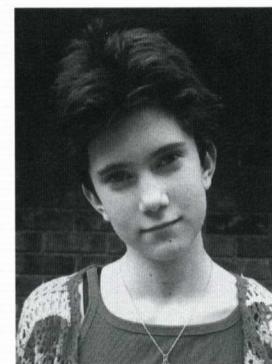
HARSH WIND SWEPT across a great plain of nothingness. Dry, stiff grass bent, giving way to the force of the wind. Nothing could be seen from any direction. Only grass and rolling hills. A cold, white sun blazed just over the horizon, creating a glare on the brown grass. A smell of dry dust and dead weeds lingered in the air. There was no shield, no barrier against the Cold here. The Cold ransacked everything and everyone, leaving no trace of warmth or comfort. The sun was now directly overhead, and on top of the furthest hill in sight, a dark mass was approaching. From the exact opposite side, another mass, though slightly smaller, was coming. Both were approaching the steepest hill in sight.

As they got closer, one could see that it was not a single, immense object, but was made up of thousands of men, striding quickly and confidently toward their destination. Nearer and nearer they got, the wind picking up sounds of the clatter of chain mail and the dull thud of footsteps, tossing them about. Suddenly all noises ceased, and nothing could be heard but wind whipping through loose fabric. A man from each army stepped forward and started up the hill, as was the tradition in this world.

From the smaller army was a tall and lean man. He had warm, dark brown eyes, and short, neatly trimmed, black hair. His face was clean-shaven, and he had no lines any-



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where on his face. He wore a serious, thoughtful expression and had an air about him that drew people toward him. He was greatly respected throughout all kingdoms and was Lord of the most powerful kingdom in the world, Xaveron. People knew him as Zordex. It was said that he was the greatest, wisest wizard that ever walked the planet. His long, blue tunic fluttered in the breeze, and he carried a long, thin, golden staff, with a bright blue sphere on the top.

The other man was short, and made of solid muscle. He had ice-cold gray eyes, and heavy, black eyebrows. He had greasy, black hair that just brushed the top of his shoulders and a neatly clipped goatee. The hatred that was generating out of his eyes was overpowering. He wore a scowl on his face, his eyes narrowed to slits. A blood-red cape fluttered out behind him, and the black robe underneath it rippled in the light wind. In his hands, he held a jet-black staff, with a wicked-looking skull settled on the top. He was called Yoleighwan, and was the leader of a ring of the six most evil, sinister, and dangerous wizards in the world.

The two men stood face-to-face on the top of the hill. The hatred flowing out of Yoleighwan's eyes was potent and unstemmed and would have caused anyone but Zordex to wither. Yoleighwan opened his mouth to speak, revealing chipped, yellow teeth. In a harsh, grating voice, barely above a whisper, he spoke.

"So we meet again, Zordex. This time

you won't be leaving."

Zordex looked directly at Yoleighwan. "Yoleighwan," he said it politely with a small nod of his head.

Zordex's civility and tranquility appeared to infuriate Yoleighwan. "You fool!" he screeched, "Do you not know what we are here over? Do you not know what danger you put yourself and that puny little army of yours in? Today is your last day living, Zordex. This is the last sun you will see!"

Both armies heard Yoleighwan, and both armies reacted. Yoleighwan's army sniggered and snorted, and Zordex's army started forward. They would have attacked their enemy if not for Zordex, who raised his arm and ordered them back to their regular positions.

Still calm and composed, Zordex answered Yoleighwan, "I am no fool, Yoleighwan. If I thought this little gathering would be of any harm to my army or me, I would not be standing here right now."

Soft cheers and hollers were heard from Zordex's army. Yoleighwan's troops retaliated by boisterous boos and curses. Yoleighwan's eyes narrowed to slits and he hissed, "You are a fool, Zordex. And I will prove that to you and your little ninny squad behind you." A puff of wind blew back Yoleighwan's cape and he threw back his head and cried, "Charge!" Instantly, his army started forward, yelling at the top of their lungs. The spears they were carrying soared out of their hands, directed at the hearts of their foe, and would have struck true, if

Zordex had not raised his hand and caused the hundreds of spears to bury their heads into an invisible wall and stay there, handles still quivering. The yells died in the throats of the men, and catcalls and shouts of triumph arose from Zordex's army.

Realizing that he had not prepared his men and himself for this kind of magical defense, he waved his hands and signaled "retreat" to the generals of his army. Silently, his army left. Yoleighwan spun on his heel and strode furiously from sight, his cape streaming out behind him.

As ZORDEX's triumphant army approached the main capital city, Luvrann, cheers and whistles rose up from it to greet them. Although the soldiers relished this attention, Zordex had problems pressing his mind. Once he saw that his soldiers were on their way to their quarters, he magically disappeared and reappeared in his palace.

In his own home, Zordex relaxed. He decided to go to the dining hall for some dinner before he retired to his room. He walked to the great hall, traveling down a long, comfortably carpeted hallway. After passing countless doors, he stopped and turned right into a set of double doors on his right.

He paused in the doorway of a huge room furnished in blue and silver. A long, low, chrome table stood in the middle of the hall. Puffy cushions of blue and silver were scattered about the room and along the table. Many people

were in this room, as it was the main room of the whole palace. Foreign diplomats seeking to be allies, townspeople with arguments or presents, dancers, servants, the list could go on.

Once Zordex passed through the doors, the hall immediately went silent and every person present rose to his or her feet to show respect. Zordex nodded his head and sat on a cushion at the head of the long table, the seat of honor. A servant placed a fragrant soup in front of him, and he started eating. People immediately occupied the cushions to his left and right, and they all started talking to him at once.

Zordex placed his spoon down on the table and looked up. Everyone stopped talking, waiting for him to speak. "I will try my best to meet your needs, but will you please speak one at a time?"

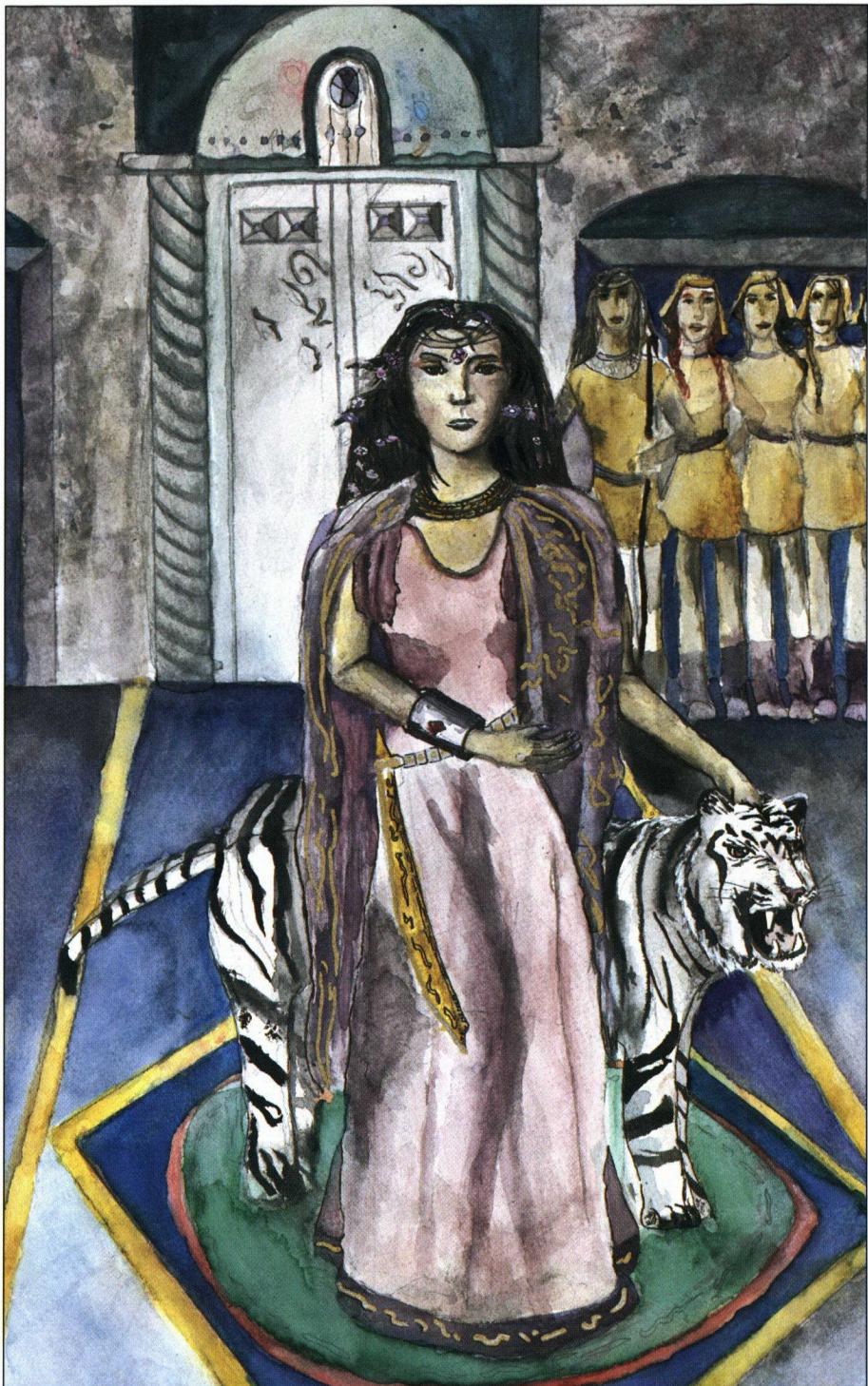
A short man to his right piped up in a high voice, "Sir, may I take the liberty to propose a new plan to the bridge we are planning to build over the moat to the city?"

"We are having a meeting about that tomorrow at high noon in the town hall. You can tell me and all my advisors about it there."

"Thank you! I will surely be there!" He smiled at Zordex, got up, bowed, and left the room.

Zordex felt exhausted by the time he had finished giving advice and solving the problems of the people. He wearily got up from the table and started down the long hall to his bedchambers.

His bedchambers were a mystery to



"So you are Zordex, the great wizard of whom I have heard so many praises"

the city. He let no one enter them, and no one had ever seen what lay beyond the door. People loved to whisper about what lay behind them and make up stories about what he might do when he was locked in there.

Zordex took a large key off the key chain that dangled from the belt on his waist. He fit it into the lock and crossed through the door into his favorite room of the whole palace.

Zordex's chamber was not huge, smaller than one might have expected for a great wizard. It had a fluffy blue carpet on the floor, and silver drapes hung from a huge window next to his bed, which had curtains of silver velvet. The bed itself was a king-sized bed and had a warm, fluffy blue quilt covering it. Zordex closed the drapes, changed quickly into his sleeping attire, which he took out of a large silver wardrobe in the corner by the window, and flopped onto his bed. He fell asleep as soon as he drew the covers over himself.

**B**EAMS FROM the golden sun snuck through the windows of Zordex's room and tickled his face to wake him up. Zordex opened his eyes and grinned at the sun. He heaved a yawn, stretched, flung the covers off of him, and stepped onto the warm carpet.

Ten minutes later, Zordex appeared in the common area, fully dressed and thoroughly washed. The common area was not as crowded as it was the night before, and Zordex was able to eat his meal in peace. As soon as he finished a

delicious breakfast of fried güala (a delicacy made of the feathers of a butterfly's wings), spices, and wheat, he rose from his cushion and walked to his throne room.

The throne room was an enormous marble hall, with sapphires and diamonds glittering from where they were embedded into the walls. A long blue carpet led the way to a large throne at the end of the hall. It was made of silver and had upholstery of fluffy blue velvet. Zordex walked down the blue walkway and took a seat on the large throne. His most trusted general, Omnipuj, stepped right next to him and spoke.

"Sir, there is some paperwork still needing to be filled out concerning our alliance with the Dorrs. Are you up to filling it out?"

Zordex nodded "Yes, bring it here. I will have it finished in no time." He tapped his staff on the cold marble floor, and a large desk appeared in front of him. Omnipuj placed a sheath of papers on the top of the desk. Zordex opened the top drawer and drew from it a quill. He dipped it in black ink and started writing rapidly. Omnipuj left the room and all was quiet for about a half hour.

Zordex finished filling out the papers and tapped the floor with his staff. The desk disappeared, and Zordex leaned back and closed his eyes, thinking. The heavy silver door at the front of the hall swung open. Zordex jerked his head up and looked at the visitor. A tall woman with a flowing golden dress and a purple sash tied around her waist gracefully

stepped in, accompanied by two guards. When she reached the bottom of Zordex's throne, she bowed, opened the scroll, and started reading.

A message for Zordex, Lord of the great kingdom Xaveron. Queen Qyera, Ruler of many great cities on the western coast of Cabella, wishes to make a request of you concerning conflicts with the Six Black Wizards. She will make her entrance tomorrow at high noon and discuss details. Will you have her in your palace?

The messenger finished reading, rolled up the scroll and asked him, "Will you have Queen Qyera in your palace tomorrow?"

Zordex was quiet for a moment. Then he asked, "Where is Cabella? How come I have never heard of it?"

"Qyera expected that you would not know where it would be. It is on the other side of this earth across the Open Plains, across the desert beyond the Open Plains."

"How long of a journey is it?"

"We made the hard journey in five years and four months."

Zordex leaned back onto the cushions, thought for a minute, then said, "Very well, I give my consent for her to come to my palace at noon tomorrow. Go now and tell her." Then he said, more severely, "I warn her that if she tries anything violent or hurtful to me or any person in my kingdom and palace, that I and my army will make sure that she sees not another day."

The messenger bowed gratefully and

strode back down the carpeted lane and out the door.

As soon as the door closed after her, Omnipuj spoke to him heatedly. "My Lord! Are you sure that is wise, inviting an unknown wizardess and queen into your palace? You must be mad!"

"Don't be so judgmental, Omnipuj. I am willing to give her a chance. Get my army on guard in case there is any trouble, though. Thank you."

"Yes, My Lord. Anything else?"

"Nothing. You may go."

Omnipuj bobbed his head in respect to Zordex and left.

The next day, all the servants in the palace were up and working hard at the crack of dawn, Zordex among them. He helped the servants with the hard chores using magic, and checked the rooms, making sure that they were immaculate. By eleven o'clock, the palace was sparkling. Zordex dismissed the servants and told them to take the next hour off. Zordex walked back to the throne room and took a seat in his throne. Unable to sit still, he got up and started pacing around, apparently deep in thought. His eyes turned from dark brown to black, and his brow furrowed. The large clock struck a quarter to twelve, and Zordex once again took a seat on his throne.

The huge clock in the corner of the throne room struck twelve times. Immediately after the twelfth ring died out, the doors on the far side of the throne room swung wide open with a resounding bang.

Soldiers, dressed in gold chain mail, strode in the room, two by two, footsteps perfectly synchronized. Zordex's eyes opened wide. He saw that all these soldiers, every single one of them, was a woman. This was something extraordinary, because Zordex was brought up with the idea that women were to stay home and take care of the men. He had learned that they couldn't do half of what men could do.

The soldiers finally stopped marching into the room. They bowed to him in perfect timing, then got up and stood at attention on either side of the carpet. Entering through the door now was Qyera, dressed in deep purple robes, with a huge white tiger at her side. Her hand rested on the head of the tiger, and they made their way to Zordex.

As Qyera passed her soldiers on her way to the front of the room, they bowed respectfully to her. Finally, she stood in front of him. She curtsied gracefully and looked straight into Zordex's eyes.

Qyera had striking green eyes and long black hair that hung down her back. Amethysts were woven into the strands of her hair, sparkling and glittering in the light. She was a little taller than average and stood straight and tall. She had long, straight fingers and purple painted fingernails. On the third finger of her left hand, she wore a ring with a slender silver band and a gem in the middle. She wore flowing robes of purple, sewn with golden thread. Gold slippers were on her feet, and a big

golden sword hung at her side.

"So you are Zordex, the great wizard of whom I have heard so many praises. I am delighted that I finally have the pleasure of meeting you." Qyera said in a silvery voice. She offered her hand to him, and he took and shook it.

"I am honored to have you in my presence. You have traveled for many years without invitation to speak with me. I am greatly impressed," Zordex replied.

"I have a request to make of you, Zordex. For many generations, the Cabellan people have been oppressed by the dark wizard, Dertte Zohnn. He is a follower of Yoleighwan, about whom we have heard much. We put up with him until he burned our capital city and killed over half the population of Cabella. I want to put a stop to this, and I have come to request your consideration in becoming allies with my army and my people."

Zordex leaned back into the cushions of his throne and thought. Finally, he raised his head and said, "Your army is trained excellently, and I have sensed great magical power from you. I would be honored to be your ally through these hard times."

Qyera felt tears streaming down her face. She fell to her knees in front of him and kissed his feet. "You are by far the most noble person I have ever met, Zordex. Thank you."

Those simple words touched Zordex in the deepest place of his heart, and a single, diamond tear coursed down his face. ♦

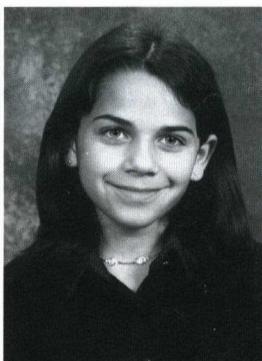
# A Natural Lullaby

by Leah Richmond

illustrated by Jesyka Palmer



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Louisville, Kentucky



Jesyka Palmer, 10  
Blissfield, Michigan



LICK.

Mary turned on the white lamp next to her bed and squinted as her eyes adjusted to the intensity of the bright light. She glanced at the clock on the wooden night table next to her bed; it read two minutes after three o'clock AM.

"Uggh," Mary exclaimed loudly as a wave of anger surged through her.

It was Sunday night—or rather Monday morning—and she had school today. Now that she had managed to get to bed a little bit earlier she woke up again. But it made sense, Friday and Saturday she had woken up at three o'clock and her body had adjusted to the schedule. Then she just stayed up, now she had to get enough sleep to be able to get out of bed at six in the morning.

Well, I'll just go back to bed, Mary thought. She flicked off the lamp and sunk back into her comfortable bed. She turned on her side, pulled the sheet over her shoulder, and tried to relax her mind.

She tried to count sheep, but that didn't work. She tried to think about going to sleep, but that made her apprehensive. She tried thinking about school, but that stressed her out. The longer she thought the tenser she got.

After a while of worrying, bad thoughts crept into her head. I won't be able to concentrate on my math test. I'm



The shining full moon outside threw a blanket of light into her room

going to be so tired tomorrow. I have to get to sleep, I already got to bed late. I won't be able to move tomorrow morning. I could fall asleep in class.

Mary's eyes shot open as she realized that she had been lying there forever and she wasn't asleep yet. She looked at the clock and the green letters read three-forty already. Time always seemed to go so much faster when you were trying to go to sleep.

Mary pushed her thick red hair out of her face angrily and switched on the light as she sat up on her bed. She was frustrated, exasperated, and most annoyingly her adrenaline was running. She rested her chin on her hands as her mind raced with possible solutions to this nightmare.

She could go downstairs and get a drink of water? No, she might wake someone up. She could try to go back to bed again? No, that would just lengthen this nightmare. She could read her book? Yes, that would make her sleepy enough to go to sleep.

She picked up her thick book and studied the cover. It read *Anne of Green Gables* on the front. It had a picture of Anne running across a picture-perfect field. She never had any trouble sleeping.

She plopped back into the bed and turned to where the page was dog-eared. She read, half paying attention and half

worrying if reading would really work. After another eternity she looked at the clock. Four-thirteen.

She bit her lip furiously, and fiercely pressed her palm into her eye. She pushed loose hair away from her face, turned off the lights, and closed her eyes.

She sat there for a while thinking peacefully, very aware of the fast pace of her heart. She opened her eyes gently and looked to the open window next to her bed.

The stars outside twinkled brightly against the black sky; the shining full moon outside threw a blanket of light into her room. Mary studied the moon carefully and made out some of the craters to be the cheerful face of the Man in the Moon.

As the cool breeze blew against her she drew her beige comforter closer to her body. Although it was cold, the wind felt calming on her face. She breathed it in; it felt cold and refreshing in her lungs.

She closed her eyes.

She heard the familiar sounds of crickets and trees swaying in the breeze. She loved the sounds of nature, they weren't loud or abrupt. They were subtle and beautiful. They were a natural lullaby . . .

With that thought and a feeling of revitalization she drifted into a deep sleep.

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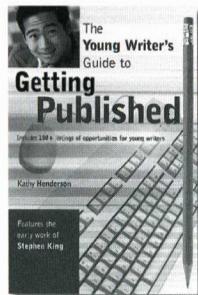
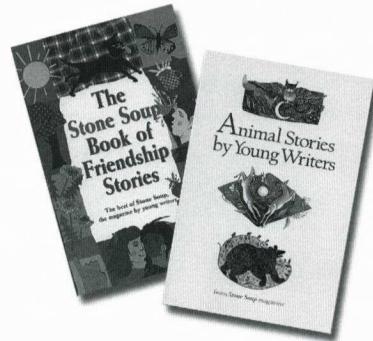
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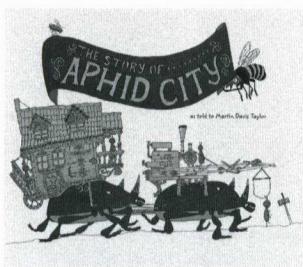
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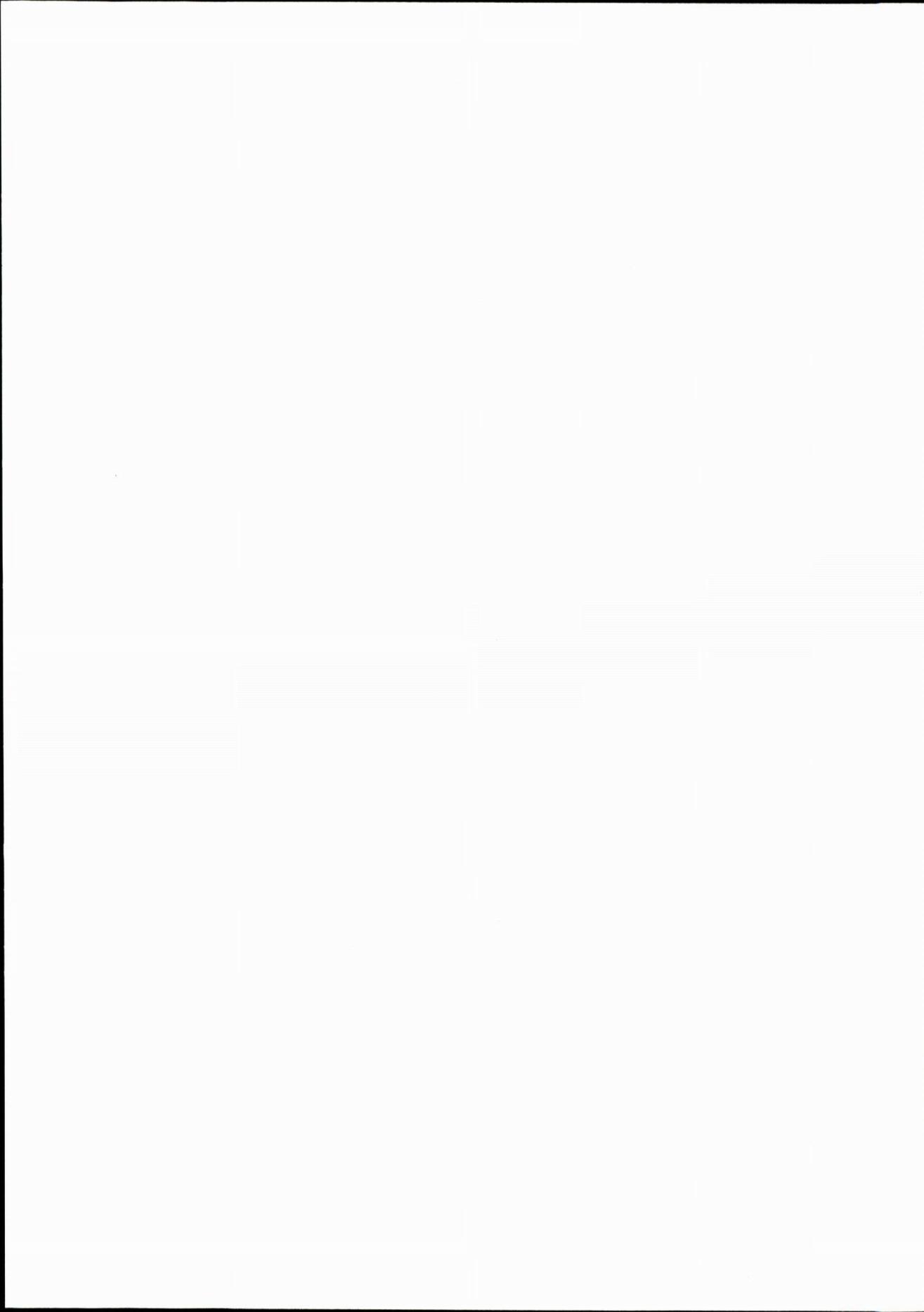
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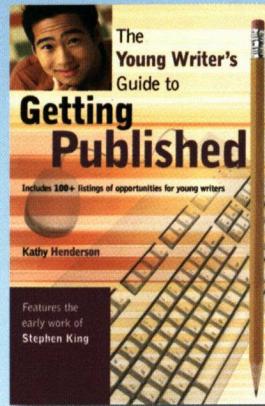
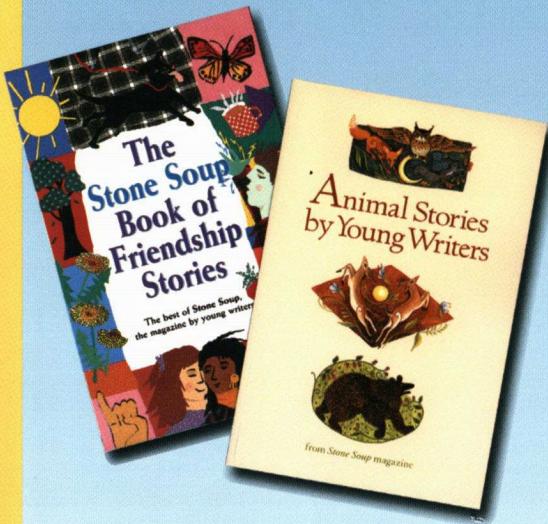
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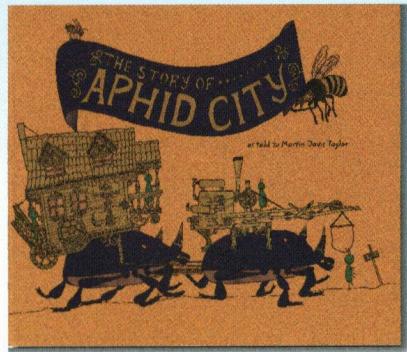


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