

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*Illustration by Kelley Yu, age 13, from "Butterfly," page 13*

## THE LILY HAIR CLIP

There's only one way to appease the dragon

## DAWN

A girl adopted from China wonders if she will ever fit in

*Also:* A review of the Steve Jobs biography

JULY/AUGUST 2012

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 6  
JULY / AUGUST 2012

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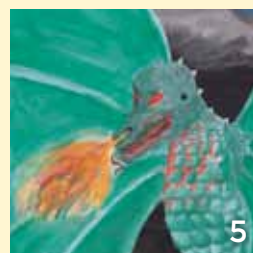
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# Editors' Note

**Welcome, *Stone Soup* readers!** Courage, both physical and moral, is a recurring theme in this issue. Lily is chosen as her people's sacrifice to the dragon in "The Lily Hair Clip." Can she succeed where other children have failed? In "The Most Important Thing" Joshua's best friend, Mike, has a sick dad. Mike needs the reward money from the boat race more than Joshua does, but Josh is a better racer. What will Josh do? Kate, in "Let It Be," has lost her arm in a car accident. Will she continue to feel sorry for herself, or will she find the strength to pursue her dreams, just in a different way? Think about challenges you've faced in your own life. Did you find the courage to overcome them? Try turning one of your experiences into a story to share with our readers.

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## Subscriptions

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## Submissions

Please read our guidelines at stonesoup.com before sending us your work. Send submissions to Stone Soup, Submissions Dept., PO Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. For questions, call our editorial office at 800-447-4569 or email us at editor@stonesoup.com.

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**ON THE COVER** Kelley Yu came to the United States from Korea less than a year ago. She won a silver key in the Scholastic Art Awards of 2012. Kelley especially likes to draw eyes and hair and to convey emotions through her art. Her goal is to be a doctor in Africa one day, helping people and drawing the beautiful sights.



# The Mailbox



**I love *Stone Soup*!** This magazine is a great opportunity for young artists and authors to show their creativity. While I was reading through *Stone Soup*, there was one poem that caught my attention,

and that was “Noire,” by Jonah O’Hara David [March/April 2012]. I thought it was a great ending to February, which is Black History Month. It explained in detail what it was like to be a Negro during the years that they were used as slaves in the South. It was one of my favorite parts of that issue. Good job, Jonah!

**Lauren Benson, 12**  
Brainerd, Minnesota

**I am a dog lover,** avid book reader, and creative writer. I received a *Stone Soup* subscription from my parents for Christmas when I was nine. I never could have imagined how much this gift could change my writing life, and future.

**Alysa Banks, 12**  
San Leandro, California

**I love reading** the works of young writers like me. The pieces are so creative and well written. The stories and poems jump right out of the magazine and into my house! I love the idea of putting young writers’ work into magazines so the whole world can appreciate them! Like right now, I’m sitting down with my dog and trying to think of what to write to you. Frankly, I love that feeling!

**Anna Suh, 12**  
Middletown, Delaware

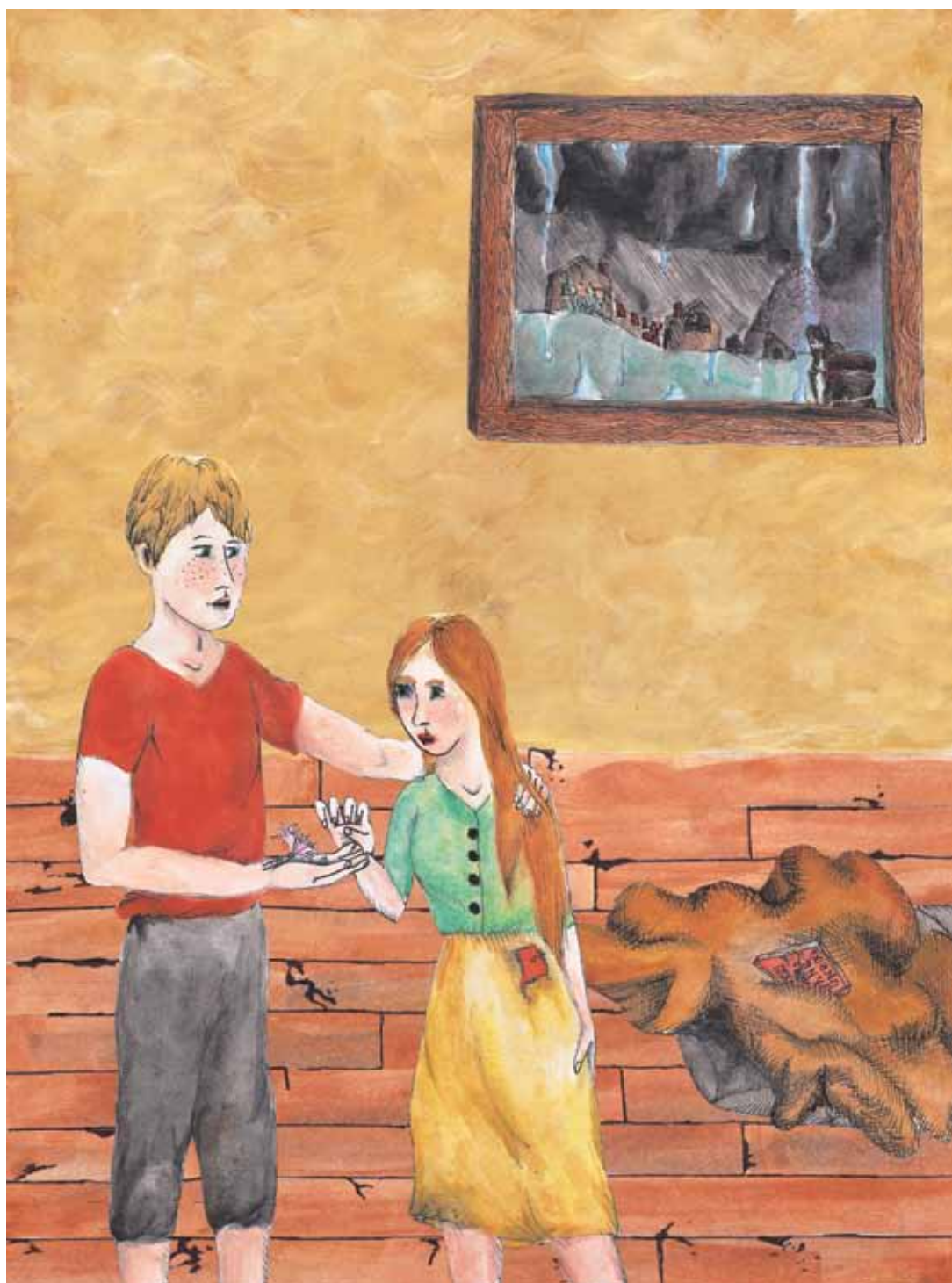
**I absolutely love your magazine!** It is, in my opinion, the very best children’s magazine ever published. You give us such an opportunity to write, illustrate, and review books for you, using our talents to our full potential and truly exploring literature. I have been greatly touched by every story published in your magazine, but (although it’s so hard to choose!) I have two favorites: “Working for Sparkle,” by Allison Armstrong, illustrated by Emma T. Capps [May/June 2011] and “Winter Violin,” by Téa Freedman-Susskind, illustrated by Lydia Giangregorio [January/February 2012]. “Working for Sparkle” is a great story I can relate to. I love cats, and I am, too, just like Suzy in the story, working hard to earn my very own kitten. My parents told me I was too young to care for a kitten, also like Suzy. Now, after months of careful research and planning, trips to the pet store, and convincing my parents, I plan to adopt my kitten this June! In “Winter Violin,” Renee Katz plays in a violin competition. I play piano, and my magazine came on the day of my competition. I opened it up, and there it was on the first page, an amazing story about a girl around my age’s very successful competition. It seemed to bring me luck, as I won first place and a gold ribbon! Thank you so much to all those fabulous contributors, and most of all, thank you, *Stone Soup*, for providing a great chance for all of us young writers and artists.

**Angelina Hanning, 10**  
Portland, Oregon

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*Stone Soup* welcomes your comments. Write to us at The Mailbox, PO Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063, or send an email to [letters@stonesoup.com](mailto:letters@stonesoup.com).





*"I... I want you to have something"*

# The Lily Hair Clip

By Katherine E. All

*Illustrated by Anna Hirsch*

A SCREAM CUT THROUGH the cool night air, but no one was around to hear it. A small boy of around five years old huddled against a tree trunk, crying desperately. His short brown hair was plastered against his brow, tears staining his freckled face.

“Mommy!” he screamed. “Mommy save me!” He stared fearfully at a dark cave from which a deep rumbling resounded.

Smoke billowed from the cave’s mouth, and light flashed from within. The boy’s eyes widened in fear, and he stumbled away from the entrance. A large dragon emerged from the inky blackness, fire spurting from its nostrils. Its scales glowed a dark green, and its eyes flashed red.

The boy screamed, but there was no hope. The dragon slowly advanced, its eyes cold and calculating. Its back legs tensed, and the dragon sprang over the little boy, briefly expanding its wings. It began to herd the boy into the cave, occasionally spurting fire to keep him moving.

The boy soon reached the cave. He took one look at the dragon and rushed into the cave, fruitlessly searching for a chance of escape. The dragon followed him, its intent obviously successful. There was a piercing scream, then silence. The dragon emerged from the cave, blood dripping from its muzzle.

LILY KNEW SHE was going to die the moment she heard her name. She raised her eyes to the center of the village square, hoping she had mis-heard. An old man with matted gray



Katherine E. All, 12  
Greenville, South Carolina



Anna Hirsch, 13  
State College, Pennsylvania

hair and sunken, hollow eyes stared back at her. He stood beside a worn barrel, holding a slip of paper in his hand.

"Lily Joanson," he repeated, "you have been chosen to serve your town in the greatest way possible." Lily knew what would happen next; she had heard that same speech every year, but never directed to her. "Nine years ago," he continued, "a great dragon settled near our town. He raided our village and destroyed our crops. The only way to appease him is to sacrifice one of our children to him every year. This year, you have been chosen."

Lily felt the ground tumble from beneath her legs. The next thing she knew, she was lying on the ground, the taste of dirt on her lips. A woman was screaming in the background, "No, not Lily! My baby, my only daughter, have mercy, I beg you!"

Strong arms lifted her from the ground. She looked up into the face of her oldest brother, Peter. His wavy golden hair hung around his face, freckles splattered across his nose. He gently stroked her long brown hair, whispering words of comfort to both her mother and her. But her mother would not be consoled. "She's only twelve!" she wailed.

Lily couldn't think. She had seen this happen every year. All the children wrote their names on a slip of paper, including her, and dropped it into the barrel. No one really knew where the barrel had come from, but there was a rumor that it was the only object that survived the dragon's first raid. The old man would

draw a slip of paper, make the speech, then send the child on their way. No one had ever returned.

Lily's sharp green eyes filled with tears, but she tried to hold them back for her mother's sake. Lily was not athletic or clever; she knew she had no chance. She stumbled back to her family's cottage in a daze and flopped onto her mat. She fell asleep without bothering to eat and dreamed of gruesome deaths and dragons.

IT WAS STILL dark out when Lily woke. Her mat was warm and comfortable and, for a second, she forgot her despair. But it all came rushing back when she remembered the events of yesterday.

Lily quietly sobbed into her pillow. She didn't want to die. There was so much she had to live for. It was her dream to one day have a family of her own, and have children who could live without the threat of a dragon hanging over their heads. Now, that would never be.

Her older brothers stirred beside her. She had three: Peter, John, and Mark. She loved them all dearly. That was another thing. Her mother would be completely broken if she died. She was her mother's only daughter, the only one who still wasn't grown up. Peter was eighteen, John was sixteen, and Mark was fifteen.

Her brothers rolled out of bed and began to get dressed. Their faces were tearstained. It was all she could do not to start crying again. Looking at them, she realized what wonderful brothers they had been. She rushed over and threw her



arms around them. "I love you!" she cried.

They hugged her back awkwardly, not sure how to respond. The family sat down to breakfast, no one sure how to act. Lily's mother wore a pained expression, like she was trying to hold herself together for Lily's sake. Lily's father had died several years before in a fire. He had previously worked as a blacksmith, and a clumsy apprentice had let the fire get too close to the wood. Lily's father, his two apprentices, and a delivery boy had died in the following fire. Although the boys provided for the family, her father's death created a gaping hole in their lives.

After breakfast, Peter drew Lily aside. "I... I want you to have something," he said in a cracked voice. He silently held out a small hair clip. It was shaped like three lilies, her namesake. They were a creamy white with traces of pink in the middle. He gently clasped it into her hair, then stood back to admire her. "Remember me," he whispered. With that he turned away and walked off.

Lily watched him leave, a lone tear trickling down her pale cheek. She tried to go about her normal business; she wasn't going to be taken to the dragon until nightfall, but it was hard. Around midday, John approached her. "I saw what Peter gave you," he began, "but that won't help you at all. I want you to have this." He held out a bow and arrow. "With luck, you'll be able to kill the dragon, and then no one will have to be sacrificed again."

Lily nodded her thanks. She hoped he was right. She couldn't bear to do any-

thing else, so she huddled by the door, waiting for the guards to come get her. It seemed like she had just sat down when it was time to go. She was about to walk out the door but was stopped by Mark. He silently handed her a knife, motioning for her to hide it in her tunic.

"Thank you," she mouthed as the guards dragged her away. They led her to a small rowboat that contained two more armed guards. She was wedged uncomfortably between them as the boat was pushed off the shore. The river was strong and swift, rushing along the banks. The water was dark and murky, hiding jagged rocks beneath its surface.

"All right," one of the guards said roughly, "this is how it's going to work. When we arrive at the dragon's island, we're going to leave you on the shore. The dragon will come out when he feels like it." Lily nodded, not trusting her voice. She had never been so scared in her life.

The boat gently bumped against the shore. A guard jumped out onto the shore and drew the boat closer to land. Lily stumbled out. The guard gave her a final shove and jumped back into the boat. Lily fell onto the sand, swallowing a lot of it in the process. When she finally managed to get up, Lily watched her last hope disappear into the unforgiving darkness.

Not knowing what else to do, Lily took out Mark's knife and began to draw pictures in the sand. First her house, then her family, and all the other things she knew she would never see again. The moon rose higher and higher in the sky, but still no

sign of the dragon. Lily felt herself slipping into the land of dreams and struggled to stay awake. Just when she was about to give in to sleep, a deep rumbling began.

Lily jumped to her feet. Smoke began to pour from the entrance of the cave, fire leaping through the dark. Slowly, the dragon emerged. It was even worse than Lily had imagined. Fire surrounded it, and its scales were forest green. The worst part was its eyes. They were a deadly red that flashed amidst the smoke and fire.

Lily immediately realized that there was no way she could use the knife against it. She couldn't get close enough. Her only hope was John's bow and arrow. She stumbled away from the dragon and grabbed her bow. With the string pulled taught, she carefully aimed the arrow where the dragon's heart would be, and shot.

Nothing happened. Lily looked up, hoping that, even if she missed, she had still hit a limb or something. To her dismay, she found that the arrow had indeed found its mark, and bounced off the scales. Lily dropped to her knees in despair.

"No!" she wailed as the dragon began to close in. Her loved-ones flashed before her eyes. Mum, Mark, John, and Peter. Peter! She quickly fumbled with her hair, and withdrew the hair clip. Hoping against hope, she examined it, searching for a way to save herself.

She found nothing. There were no sharp edges, nothing that could be used as a weapon whatsoever. In desperation, she

threw the clip at the dragon and huddled against the sand. A sound of retching occurred. Lily looked up, confused. The dragon had swallowed the clip, but it had gotten stuck in its throat! Unluckily, that didn't seem to slow it down.

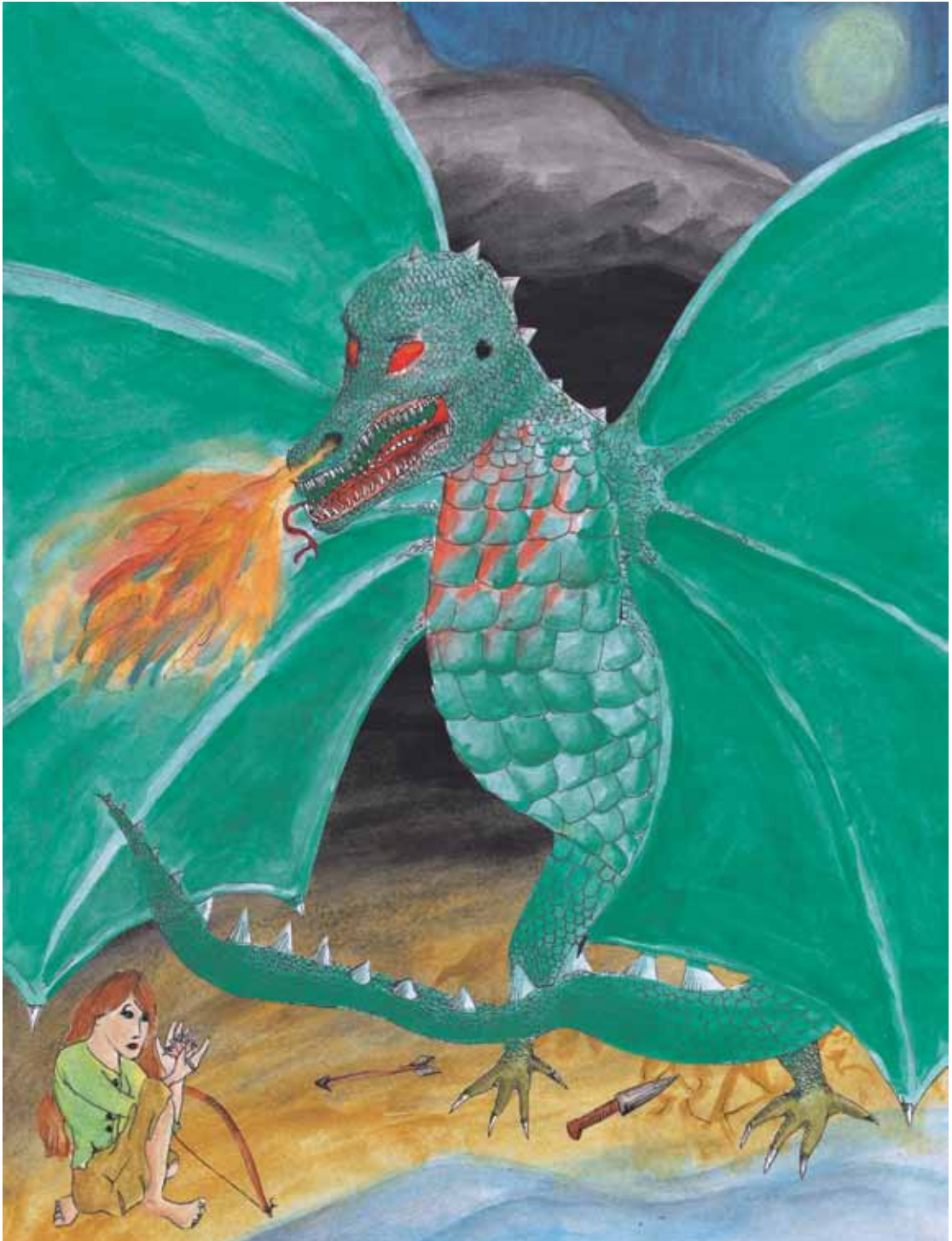
It slowly drew in its breath to deliver the fire that would be her downfall. The fire bubbled up the dragon's throat, hit the clip, and bounced back towards its stomach. A howl of pain and rage tore from the dragon's lips.

It gathered itself the hottest and strongest ball of fire it had ever blown, and let her have it. But the fire bounced off the clip again. This time, it didn't just hurt the dragon. The fire rushed into its stomach, fatally burning it. The dragon let out a terrible, strangled roar and crashed down, dead.

Lily stood up tentatively, not sure what to expect. The dragon lay on the shore, the water lapping at its scales, trying to draw it into its depths. Smoke poured from the dragon's corpse, and Lily dropped to her knees, retching from the horrid gas.

When her throat had finally cleared, Lily stood up again, her eyes still watering. She walked unsteadily to the body of the dragon and shoved against it, trying to shove it into the river. The current helped her, and soon all that remained of the dragon were a few badly scorched scales.

Lily sat on the shore, silently crying. She wasn't sure why she was crying; after all, she had defeated the dragon. But what about all the other lives that had been



*Hoping against hope, she examined it, searching for a way to save herself*

lost? Lily stopped herself; there was nothing she could do about that. But, thanks to her, no one would be sacrificed to the dragon again.

Lily was so lost in thought she didn't notice the thing in the water until it had bumped against her leg several times. Lily groped around in the water until her hand closed around an oddly shaped object. As she held it up in the moonlight she recognized the lily hair clip Peter had given her.

She gave a strangled laugh. Who knew that the hair clip, of all things, had saved her life? Gently Lily clasped it into her hair once more, then curled up into a ball on the shore and fell asleep.

WHEN THE SUN rose, Lily was still sleeping. She did not hear the boat bump against the shore, nor did she see the two guards make their way towards her.

"Is she dead?" one of the guards wondered aloud.


"Nah, just sleeping," the other one replied.

At that very moment, Lily awoke. At first, she didn't know where she was, but it all came back to her in a flash. The guards asked her what happened, and she told her tale as they loaded her into the boat. By the time she finished, they had arrived at the village.

Just as they were docking, Lily asked, "Why did you go to the island?"

"The smoke reached the village, and we were afraid that our offering hadn't appeased the dragon. We had been sent to see if it was still on the island. It's a good thing too. If it weren't for us, you'd still be stuck on that island.

"Thanks," Lily smiled.

Soon word got around that Lily had returned and the dragon was dead. People rushed to the docks, not ready to believe the wonderful news. But Lily had eyes for only four people in the crowd: her family. She rushed into her mother's waiting arms and wept with relief. Her eyes met Peter's, and she smiled. Lily couldn't wait to get home and tell him everything. 



# My Coat of Many Colors

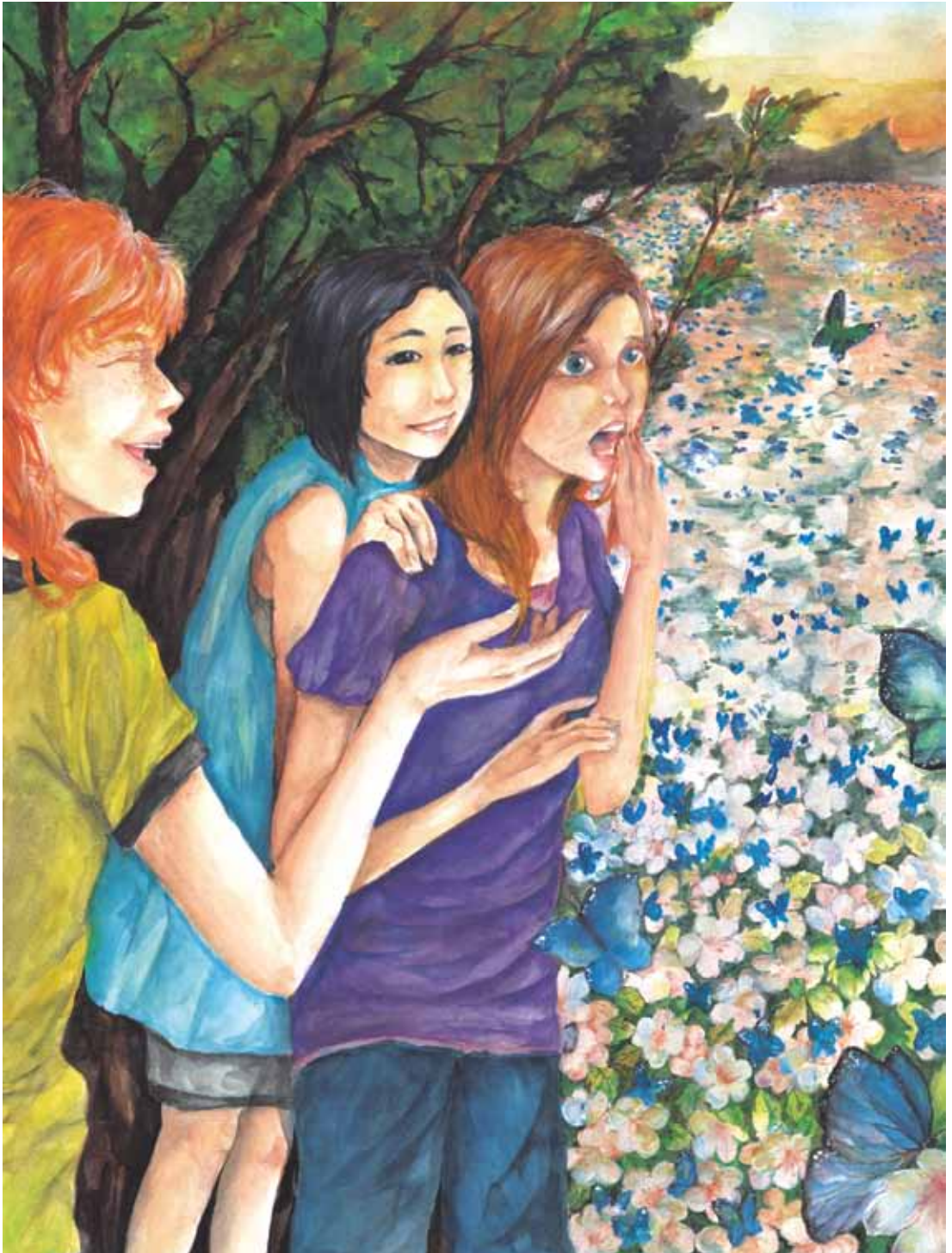
*By* **Matthew Brailsford**

A carpet of sand melts into a sea of blue whipped cream  
I inhale the golden scent of joy  
Like syrup on my tongue  
The seagulls' voices are wind chimes in the warm  
    summer air  
They call to the sea and the sky  
I reach out my fingers to touch the sunset  
And wrap it around my shoulders like a coat



Matthew Brailsford, 11  
Corona del Mar, California





*I stopped in my tracks and just stared, amazed*

# Butterfly

By **Kaitlyn Glenn**

*Illustrated by* **Kelley Yu**

I PLOPPED DOWN on my bed, depressed. I wouldn't ever see this roof again. I looked out the window at the oak tree's shimmering golden leaves and drank in the beautiful view. I wouldn't ever see my yard again, nor any of my friends. I wouldn't be able to play in the giant oak tree in our backyard with Sue and Fiona, and I'd never be able to take Mr. Bones for walks in our neighborhood again. (Mr. Bones is our dog.) I had taken a break in the process of packing and was absentmindedly picking up my walkie-talkie. I looked down at my hand.

I'd better give this to Sue and Fiona. I won't be able to use it anymore, I thought, my eyes filling with tears. They were so upset when I told them I was moving away, and where would I ever find friends like them again? I swallowed down my tears and put the walkie-talkie on the windowsill, where I wouldn't lose it. Then I continued with my packing. I was taking bag after bag downstairs, feeling more and more discouraged with every step I took. When I was packing my books into a bag, I heard a voice calling to me from outside the window.

"Hey Beth? I know you're up there, aren't you going to talk to your best friends before you leave?" I smiled despite myself. Sue was one of the only people that could lift my spirits in a time like this. The only other person was...

"C'mon down, Beth! We have something for you!" Fiona called. Her soft voice sounded rather excited.

I was really happy as I stuck my head outside the window and called out, "I'll be right down!" I fairly flew down the stairs and



Kaitlyn Glenn, 12  
North Bend, Washington



Kelley Yu, 13  
Carmel, Indiana

yelled to my mom as I went down, "I'm taking a break!"

"Be back by..." she started, but I was already gone.

I ran outside and hugged each of them. They seemed really excited about something. "What're you so excited about," I teased them, "waiting for me to be gone so you can have the tree house to yourselves?"

Fiona's face looked much more downcast. "You know we're probably not going to be able to use the tree house, since only adults are moving into your house."

"Besides, it would be pointless without you," Sue chattered away, "and we've got something for you to remember us by." She opened her backpack, which was lying on the ground behind her. "We each got a copy of it, but we wanted you to have the original." I saw her pull out a big book with a purple cover. It looked like a picture book, but when I looked at it more closely, I saw it was a scrapbook, filled with pictures of me and Sue and Fiona. I was so lost in memories when I looked through it that I forgot they were standing there watching me.

"Do you like it?" Fiona asked, pulling me back to reality.

"It's the best present I've ever gotten in my life," I said honestly, and they both beamed.

"And another thing," I said rather sadly. "I'd better give you back my walkie-talkie, in case you want to give it to somebody else..." I trailed off as I saw them staring at me.

"Gee, maybe it's a good thing you're moving, I wouldn't want all that thick-headedness to rub off on me," Sue said in the most sarcastic tone possible. "Honestly, Beth, you don't think we'd take back your walkie-talkie, do you? We couldn't replace you in a million years, and you should know that by now."

"But it won't work so far away—stop it, what're you smiling about?" I laughed at the dopey faces they were giving me.

"Of course they won't work so far away, but what if you move back? What if you're passing by our town and want to surprise us? What if you want something besides the scrapbook to remember us by? What if... well, you get the point." Fiona looked at me seriously. "We'll always keep in touch, remember, all for one and one for all."

I smiled even wider as Fiona recited our motto. "All right, I get it."

"Beth, you have to finish packing! We're leaving tomorrow!" My mother's voice drifted out the window and the grin slipped off my face.

"Well, I'd better go."

I turned to go inside and Sue called after me, "We'll meet you tomorrow at six in the tree house!"

I waved at her to show I heard and trudged up to my room to finish packing.

THE NEXT MORNING, I woke up to the sound of my alarm buzzing. I glanced at it. It was five-thirty. I got up and got dressed as silently as possible, and then I snuck out the window to where the

oak tree's branches swayed in the wind. I clambered down the branches and swung into the tree house. A few minutes later I heard footsteps and whispering below me. "Horseshoes!" I let down the rope ladder and Sue and Fiona climbed up.

"I would have come up before," Sue said with a frown, "but right outside your house I forgot the password, and I decided to wait for Fiona to get it, since I saw her walking up the sidewalk anyway."

I was too sad to be in the mood for laughing. I tried and it came out like a half-hearted snort. They looked at me rather oddly but seemed to understand.

"OK, so we called this emergency meeting because we need to say goodbye, and we have a special way of doing it." Fiona immediately cut to the chase.


"Don't be vague, Fiona, tell us what's on your mind." Sue rolled her eyes and I smiled faintly, rather curious.

"We want to show you something," said Sue. "We don't have much time, and so you'd better hurry." We all climbed down as fast as we could, and I was burning with curiosity.

"It's down in the old forest." We ran down the block and onto the path on the side of the road that very few people knew was there. "We're almost there," Sue murmured. Suddenly we *were* there. I stopped in my tracks and just stared, amazed.

"Wh- when did you find this?" I stammered. There, in front of me, was a beautiful field of pinkish-white flowers, and in it were hundreds and hundreds of baby-blue butterflies fluttering lazily from flower to flower.

"A few weeks ago, when you told us you were leaving," Fiona said. "I was so upset I ran into the forest to be alone, and I stumbled across this. I showed it to Sue, and we agreed this would be a wonderful going-away present."

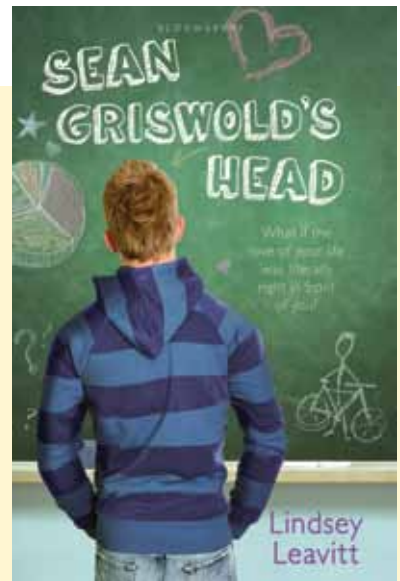
She was right. No one had ever had a better going-away present than I did that day. We sat there for about half an hour, mesmerized by the beauty of it all, before Sue suggested that we go back before our parents started to worry. So we left, and said a tearful goodbye, and within an hour, I was on a plane going to Michigan. A few hours after that, I saw for the first time the house I was going to live in. It was a big, two-story house with lots of windows and three huge pine trees in the backyard. I looked sadly at the house, and then I saw the most extraordinary thing. A small, baby-blue butterfly fluttered past me and I watched it disappear into the trees in the distance. I stared at the spot it had disappeared for a moment, then, clutching a purple-bound book, I went inside my new house with a new sense of happiness. 



# Book Review

By Marcella R. Gerszten

*Sean Griswold's Head*, by Lindsey Leavitt;  
Bloomsbury Books for Young Readers:  
New York, 2011; \$16.99



Marcella R. Gerszten, 12  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

HER PARENTS LIE about her father's multiple sclerosis (MS), a potentially deadly disease of the central nervous system. Her best friend flirts with her older brother. A school counselor wants to meet with her. A boy's head becomes the focus of her life. Payton Gritas, a high school freshman and the protagonist of Lindsey Leavitt's *Sean Griswold's Head*, is experiencing an emotionally difficult time.

Payton, an organized girl who uses different colored highlighters—"yellow for literary devices, pink for plot points, orange for conflict"—finds her life in conflict. Although her parents lie to protect her from the reality of her father's MS, Payton obsesses with her father and his serious disease. To get back on track, she starts a focus journal and chooses the head of Sean Griswold as her focus. After the death of Ripley, my puppy, I looked at Ripley's pictures and remembered our past times together, but I never once considered concentrating on a classmate's head. However, the more Payton studies Sean's head, the more curious she becomes about him. When Jac, her best girl-

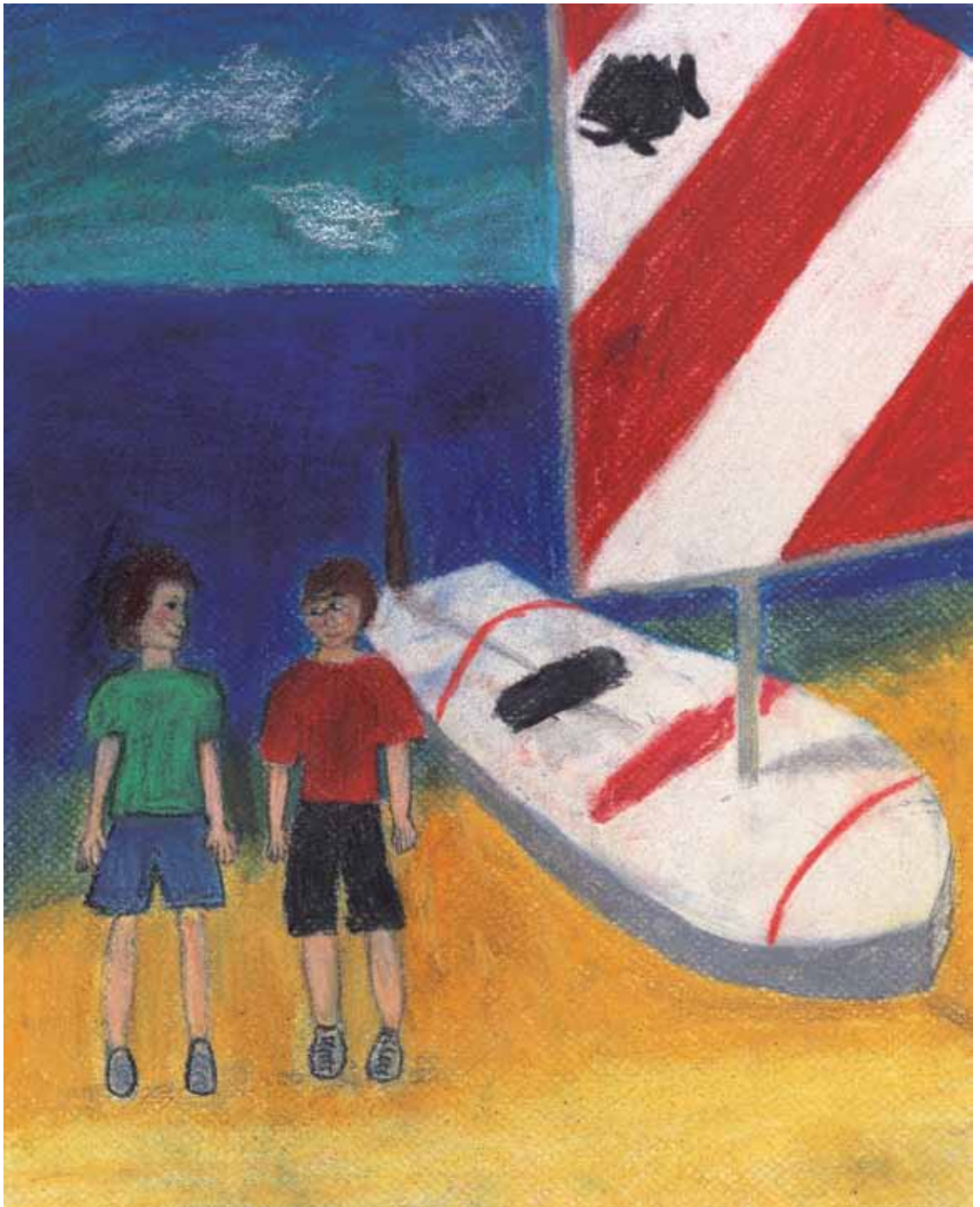


friend, encourages her to stalk Sean, Payton ignores her family for Sean.

As the story evolves, Payton learns the source of Sean's scar, undergoes changes in her relationship with Jac, and starts a bike-riding hobby. Instead of only worrying about MS, Payton now decides to ride 75 miles on her bike to raise money for MS research. Payton's efforts remind me of what I did last May: I jogged five kilometers in the Race for the Cure to help those women I know who suffer from breast cancer.

Although I wish the author had also included titles for each numbered chapter, I do like the way she uses words to paint a picture. For example, to describe the anger of Payton's mother, the author writes, "She's like a pop bottle that has rolled around in a car for a few days." These words enabled me to imagine the mother's rage exploding like a geyser of soda. When exercising, Yessica, the trainer, tells Payton and the other students to imagine a jungle in which they are thirsty and biking away from a jaguar; Yessica's details about the African wilderness reminded me of my trip to Tanzania where I saw the "water and fat antelope" that Payton can only pretend to see.

This book reminds me of the importance of focusing—on my homework, tennis lessons, horseback riding, jogging, and learning to relax. By focusing on her father and his disease, Sean's head, and then Sean as a person, biking, avoiding a best friend, and not communicating with her family, Payton eventually learns to focus on herself and what will make her happy. ❁



*We talked for a while and soon became fast friends*

# The Most Important Thing

By **Grace Manning**

*Illustrated by Julianna Pereira*

**T**HE WAVES LAPPED rhythmlessly against the side of the boat as I hoisted the sail and started slowly out into the bay. Dark clouds were forming on the horizon and drops of rain were beginning to fall. I squinted, trying to see through the increasing downpour, and I realized that I could not tell sky from sea. As thunder started to boom, the waves grew bigger and more dangerous. I sighed with relief as I spotted two tiny pinpricks of light wavering in the darkness. They were the two candles my mother always left out for me during a storm. I guided my boat toward the light and finally bumped it up on the shore. I raced over the dunes and splashed through the river in front of my house. The door slammed shut behind me as I blew in with the wind. My eyes darted around the clean kitchen and settled on a crumpled newspaper lying on the hearth. As I flipped through the pages, my eyes settled on an ad at the bottom of the page. It was a contest. A sailing contest. My eyes widened as I read more. "First prize of \$100 to the winner of the race." My family has always been poor so \$100 would help us a lot, but we didn't have anyone who was sick or dying. Still, I wanted to do it. I knew I *could* do it. But most importantly I knew I could sail.

**M**ONDAY MORNING I was up at first light. I raced to the barn to do my chores, and by breakfast time the Nantucket Island sun was as high as the eye could see. I was just rigging up my racing sunfish, when I saw a boy walking down



Grace Manning, 12  
Westmount, Quebec, Canada



Julianna Pereira, 13  
Pleasanton, California

the beach. Not many people lived on Nantucket Island and I knew all the people that did. As far as I knew, there were no boys here. No young boys at all!!! The figure came closer. When he came close enough for me to make him out, I stared. He was the skinniest boy I had ever seen. His clothes were much too big for him and he was all elbows and knees. He had a mop of untidy brown hair and pale skin. His eyes were hazel and looked kind. I trusted him at once.

"Hi," I said, "my name's Joshua Burne."

"My name's Mike, Mike Brown."

We talked for a while and soon became fast friends.

One day, when we met on the beach, something was wrong. His eyes were red from crying and he spoke softly. Too softly.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.


"It's my father," he answered. "He has a really severe disease and we don't have enough money to pay for his care, Josh, he's dying." I could do nothing but stare in disbelief at Mike's back as he disappeared over the dunes.

**I**T WAS SUNDAY. The day of the race. I woke up early with a smile on my face and determination in my heart. I ate a hurried breakfast and started down to the beach where the race was to start. I rigged up my sunfish and, as the whistle blew,

pushed off and jumped into it. I felt great as I began passing more and more people. The race was from one beach to an island about a mile out to sea and back.

As I hit the island, I pushed off with my hands and turned around. Then I saw a boat ahead of me and realized I was in second place. I slapped the sides of my boat in frustration. I raced over the whitecaps toward the boat ahead of me. Its sails were limp. I stopped as I saw the person in the boat. It was Mike. Tears were pouring down his face and soaking his anorak. "I wanted to do it for my dad," he barely whispered. Though my mind screamed to go, I gave Mike a push and turned around. My heart had said something different. I numbly steered my boat back to the starting line and pulled it up on the beach.

**I**T WAS A RAINY DAY a week later. I was down in the dumps until I saw a lone figure on the beach. It was Mike. But then another figure joined him. A taller, older-looking person. I ran out to meet them. The other figure was Mike's father. He said to me, "I just want to thank you for letting Mike win that race for me. It was the right thing to do."

"No," I said, "it wasn't just that, it was the most important thing to do." And I meant it with all my heart. 

# Farewell

*By* **Sarah Wood**

Our last night was a joyful one  
Yet dread waited, a heavy fog  
As we both knew it had to end.

The next sight of each other  
Would be like  
Pixilated building blocks.

Seated under the rosy sky  
Her laugh the flutter of a jay's wings  
The wind's small sigh.

Her room  
Like a doll's house  
Stacked with boxes, marked

Ireland  
Two years too long  
The wail of my heart

As I look back  
Until she disappears  
And rain trickles down.



Sarah Wood, 12  
Seattle, Washington



# Dawn

By **Olivia Mulley**

*Illustrated by the author*



Olivia Mulley, 13  
Pine Grove Mills, Pennsylvania

“**S**ORRY, SWEETIE, but this is the adult section.” The librarian peered down at Mei. “Children are not permitted to be here without a parent.”

Mei pointed to the blond woman behind her. “My mom’s right here.”

“Don’t play games,” the librarian snapped. “Please go find...”

The woman Mei had pointed to looked up. “Do you need something from my daughter?” She smiled sweetly at the librarian, who arched one gray eyebrow.

“Excuse me,” she said, curtly. She turned on her heel and strode away.

Mei wrinkled her nose in the librarian’s direction while her mother turned back to the shelf. Mei leaned against her and ran an idle finger across a row of books. Her golden skin met her mother’s fair hand for a moment and contrasted interestingly.

“Most people don’t just hang around by themselves near strangers,” Mei grumbled. “Why didn’t she believe me?”

Her mother shrugged. “Some people are just ignorant.” She pulled out a faded blue book. “At last! Let’s go.” She slung her purse over her shoulder and they left the library. On the way out, Mei saw the librarian they had talked to. They locked eyes for a moment before the woman looked away.

**M**EI CLIMBED into her bed that night, the day’s mix-up playing in her mind. Was it just her, or was this happening more and more often? People never seemed to even have the



*Was it just her, or was this happening more and more often?*

slightest thought that maybe, *maybe* an Asian girl could have parents who were white. It happened all the time. *Are you looking for your parents? Where's your mom? Are you here alone?* And her parents were usually not ten feet away.

Mei pulled the comforter closer around her. She tried to give people the benefit of the doubt. But it was so hard when this happened on almost a daily basis.

Mei turned off her lamp and groped around in the dark for answers to her questions. First of all, about her past. She knew she was adopted from China as a

baby by Mr. and Mrs. Portman of New Jersey and from then on was raised as Mei Portman. But what was her original last name? Was she an orphan? She didn't really know anything about herself.

And she stood out too much. At home with Mommy and Dad, she felt just like them. She was an American, and the Portmans were her true family. But outside of home—in school, the grocery store, the library—her inky hair and almond-shaped eyes seemed to throw an unwanted spotlight over her. Everything about her seemed to scream out, *Look, I'm*

*Chinese!* She didn't feel *ashamed* of being Chinese. She wasn't sure if she really wanted to be "just American" or not. She just didn't want to be different.

*So which am I? Chinese or American?* She asked herself that question all the time but never came up with an answer. *I wonder if I'd be better off in China where I'd fit right in...*

*What about your family?* a nagging voice persisted. *Can you really imagine a better one?* Mei had to admit that she couldn't. And she didn't want to ask her parents about her adoption, lest they think she was discontented. Because she *wasn't*. Just confused.

*Chinese or American?* The question echoed once more through her head before she fell asleep. And once more, she was without an answer.

**"H**APPY BIRTHDAY, MEI!" Mei appeared downstairs to a chorus of cheers. The kitchen was bright and warm, and the lilacs outside seemed to smell even better now that she was ten instead of nine. Mrs. Portman bade Mei sit down and set a package in front of her.

"We hope you'll get a lot out of this," she said smilingly.

Mei carefully opened the package and found a book inside. *Lakes and Rivers of China*. She grinned up at her parents. "You know I'm collecting this series! Thanks!"

Careful not to bend the spine, Mei opened the glossy book, and a small bundle fell out. She looked up at her parents.

They nodded eagerly. Mei picked up the bundle and gasped.

Airplane tickets to China.

**"I**'M GOING TO pick up our luggage!" Mr. Portman bellowed above the bustle of the airport terminal. "Meet me back here in fifteen minutes, then we'll find a place to eat!" He walked off, whistling.

Mei looked around her, eyes wide. I'm in China, she thought. I'm actually *in China*. She edged closer to her mother, feeling lost and small.

The family was to stay in Shanghai for a week, led by a guide. After that, Mei knew they were going somewhere else, but she didn't know where.

Walking through the streets of Shanghai, crowded with more people than she had ever seen in her life, Mei felt flip-flopped. Back home, she seemed to stand out because she was Chinese. Here, where everyone looked like *her* and the rest of her family looked different, she still felt like she was in the spotlight. She *felt* too American to truly fit in. She couldn't speak Chinese past the few words the whole family had learned via flashcards on the plane. She fumbled with her chopsticks in restaurants. She got bored of rice after the first day of meals. She despised tea. Try as she might, she just couldn't get around the facts—if she was in America, she was too Chinese. If she was in China, she was too American. Maybe she just fit in nowhere.

Back at the hotel, Mrs. Portman pre-



*Mei picked up the bundle and gasped*

sented Mei with the second part of her gift: more tickets. Mei read aloud, "Children's ticket to the Changing Yangtze Cruise, Three Gorges Area."

"It's a river cruise, Mei," explained Mrs. Portman. "We're flying to Yichang day after tomorrow to board the boat. We'll cruise down the Yangtze, and even see the

Three Gorges Dam. You'll love it!"

Mei slowly nodded and thanked her parents. *Three Gorges Dam... haven't I heard that name before?*

**C**HANGING YANGTZE. The words on the banner seemed to pierce through the air. After gazing at mean-

ingless characters for days, a sign with English on it seemed almost foreign to Mei. The boat loomed above her, the banner mounted proudly on its bow. As the family went to their room on the ship, they were greeted with “Hello’s” and “How are you’s” from all directions. Seeing Mei’s shocked face, Mr. Portman explained that this cruise was specifically for Americans, though the crew was all Chinese. The captain and waiters spoke English. Mei grinned. *This* would be fun. She could be in the company of other Chinese and speak to them, too. Maybe she could piece together some of her history. Regardless, she knew she would have a good time.

“DAD. DAD!” Mei tapped his sleeping figure on the shoulder. “Can you come?”

“Uuuh...” Mr. Portman moaned, covering his head with his sheets.

“Mommy did it last time, Dad, so it’s your turn. *Please?* I won’t ask for anything ever again...” Mei paced in a circle and fiddled with the drawstrings on her sweat-shirt.

“What time is it?” Mr. Portman sat up and pushed his glasses on.

“Um, let me check.” Mei scampered over to the bedside table. “Five.”

“Mei, this is really too early...”

“I know, I know, but it’s just for this once!” Mei headed to the door. Seeing that she would not give in, Mr. Portman forced himself to roll out of bed and follow her, still in his pajamas.

Mei and her father tiptoed up to the empty deck. A light breeze blew Mei’s hair off her face as she ran over to the guard-rail, and her father sat down on a deck chair and opened a book in an attempt to keep his eyes open. Attempt failed.

Mei leaned against the rail, her eyes glowing in anticipation. She always did this. She woke up at dawn once every time she traveled to see the sun rise in different places. Now she had the once-in-a-lifetime chance to witness dawn on the Yangtze River.

It was not yet light, but not quite dark, either. The sky was a subtle gray-blue, and Mei took in her surroundings as her eyes adjusted to the dim light. She was afloat in a reasonably narrow section of the river, fenced in on either side by rocky slopes. On the horizon, where the mountains almost met, there was the faintest glimmer of sunlight. The water mirrored the color of the sky, with extra bits of green and muddy brown. Mist shrouded the mountainsides in a veil of ethereal white, and the boat, anchored in the depths of the riverbed, rolled serenely on the waves.

A blanket of mist swept its way across the boat, and Mei found herself submerged in a whitish haze. When the fog cleared, she looked around again. Startled, she found that a woman was approaching her.

As she neared, Mei was able to make out her features. She was rather tall and eccentric, with gray hair pulled back into a tight bun at the nape of her neck. She had high cheekbones and deep, black



eyes with a certain warmth to them. She looked aged, and very wise. A red silk gown was tied tightly about her waist, and she seemed like she belonged in a fairy tale. She glided silently up to Mei and stood beside her.

"Is this your first time in China?" The woman's voice was rich, like the sound of a cello.

Mei was taken aback. First, because of her forwardness, and second, how could she tell? "Y- yes," Mei stammered. "Well, I was born here, but I've lived in America since I was a baby."

The woman nodded, then spoke suddenly. "Do you like this place?"

"It's very beautiful."

"Not long ago, this place held a different kind of beauty," the woman said. "Now, you see a stretch of river, sometimes sparkling blue, other times muddy brown. A few years ago, you would have seen small houses dotting the banks of the Yangtze, grassy rice stalks swaying in the breeze, farmers out in wide hats digging in the mud."

Mei puzzled that over. "Farmers?"

"Yes," the woman said quietly. "The current riverbed—it was a valley. The Yangtze River snaked its way through, and this valley was a good place for farmers to raise crops, for the soil was wet and fertile.

"But there were floods. Every year, long, deep floods wiped away fields, cities, houses, people. Deaths numbered in the thousands. Despite the floods, people wanted to live here. Their history lay in

this place. But death is too high a price to pay for the sake of the land."

Mei was silent. The woman went on.

"A few years ago, everyone in the valley was told to pack up their belongings and move. The valley became vacant and crops withered while workers built a dam. It was like closing a door on the valley of the Three Gorges. And behind the door, the water rose."

"So..." Mei gulped, her throat dry, "so they flooded the whole valley?"

"Yes," the woman whispered. "Underneath us are houses where people—where I—once lived. We sail over the graves of my ancestors, over cities silenced forever."

Mei was horrified. "But—but that's terrible! You can't just let go of all that! What about the history?"

The woman looked grim. "You *have* to let go of things. You can't have people die in floodwaters every year just so you can have the same roof over your head for your whole life. The dam flooded one place permanently, so the recurrent floods could be stopped." She patted Mei's head. "I know it's hard to understand. But time changes places anyway. Even if I could go back to my childhood home, it would be different. I can't go back to my childhood, and it was the *life*, not the *place*, that made my home what it was to me.

"The dam destroyed a *place*, not the past. A person keeps their memories with them wherever they go, and sacrifices like the evacuation pay off later in life. Before the dam, people died in the floods, and no good came out of it. The floods went



*"The water catches the light and the colors, making the beauty almost double"*

on. But now, the people of this valley sacrificed their land—something they can do without—and now, life is better. Anyway,” she added, “we’re here right now, aren’t we? The place is still here, if in a different way.”

The sky had been growing steadily brighter as they were talking. Then, in one burst, the sun sprang up, spreading its beams over the river. The sky broke into an ovation of color, streaking pink, purple, blue, and gold across the clouds. Mei’s breath caught in her throat. This was by far the most spectacular sunrise she had ever seen.

“Look at that sunrise,” the woman breathed. “The water catches the light and the colors, making the beauty almost double. Dawn wasn’t as spectacular in the valley, without the water being up so high. Like this dawn, beauty can come as a result of hardship. You just need to be willing to embrace the change.” She glided away on a wisp of wind before Mei could even say goodbye.

*Embrace the change...* This could apply to any change in life, Mei thought. Changes in her life, like...


Like adoption.

Mei felt like she was unearthing something. *I’ve been adopted my whole life; I can’t remember any other home than the one I have now. But I did have another home. It could*

*have been right here.* She looked into the darkness of the water and shuddered. *I’m given all my opportunities by Mommy and Dad... but I was given life by someone over here.* She put her fingers on the tip of her nose, feeling the little, rounded shape. *I got this from parents I never knew.* She certainly owed a lot to her Chinese family. Didn’t they give her her current family, so to speak?

*Chinese or American? I guess I am Chinese. This is where I’m from. China is why I look like I do. My Chinese parents are why I have an American family now. American... But I am American... I’m an American girl with American customs, American tastes...*

Mei snapped her fingers. She had it! She wasn’t Chinese *or* American. She was Chinese *and* American. Her Chinese and American halves were equally important in her character. *Embrace the change...*

This was her change. She was going to stop dwelling on her past. Of course, there was a lot she still didn’t know. She didn’t know where exactly she came from, who her birth parents were, her original last name. But she knew all that didn’t *really* matter. What mattered was where she was now. She was done with the questions, the worrying. Maybe she used to be Mei Lin. Zhang. Yi. But that was behind her. Now she was Mei Portman, and she’d build a future from there. 

# Hidden Pools

By Risa Askerooth

*Illustrated by* Amy Yu



Risa Askerooth, 12  
Mililani, Hawaii



Amy Yu, 12  
San Diego, California

**M**Y SHOES TRUDGE up the path, caked with gooey mud. My shirt sticks to my body, and my hair clings to my flushed face. The winding path steeply curves on and on, taunting my burning muscles. My eyelids droop, as my legs become more and more mechanical, moving up and down with no real motivation. I snag a strawberry guava off a tree and stuff it in my mouth to suppress the gnawing in my stomach. Ginger, our dog, runs off ahead through the wilderness. My dad climbs next to me, panting heavily. “If the path doesn’t start curving down to the left soon, we’re going to have to turn back,” he says, exhaustion creeping at the edge of his voice.

I knew he was right. If we didn’t see the pools of this hike soon, we were either lost or on the wrong path. I couldn’t believe that we had hiked all this way for nothing.

Ginger runs toward us, sweat dripping off her tongue and creating miniature pools below her. I grab a drink of water from my dad’s pack and we continue on.

“Let’s turn back in five minutes,” he sighs.

“Sure,” I say, disappointed that even my dad has pretty much given up.

One... Two... Three... Four...

The minutes tick by, until I reluctantly decide that five minutes has come and gone. Even so, I wait for my dad to voice his affirmation that we will have to turn back. As we round another bend in the trail, the path goes out of sight.



*“Did the trail end?” I wonder aloud*

“Did the trail end?” I wonder aloud.

I tentatively take another step, gazing ahead. I break into a grin as I see—finally—that we are on the right path.

The trail descends steeply into the valley, plunging into a forest of strawberry guava trees, mossy rocks, and ferns. I stumble down the rocky path in a delirious anticipation of the thirty-two miles of pools we came all this way to see.

“Whooooohoooo!” I scream when I reach a pool and jump into the water. The achingly cold water chills my bones. I laugh as my dad comes in and Ginger does a belly flop. I gaze up at the sky as a fleck of rain hits my head. When I feel more drops come down, I can’t help but wonder how close we came to turning back. I thank my lucky stars, because I know I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. 🌀



# Morphing into Monsters

*By* **Candace Huntington**



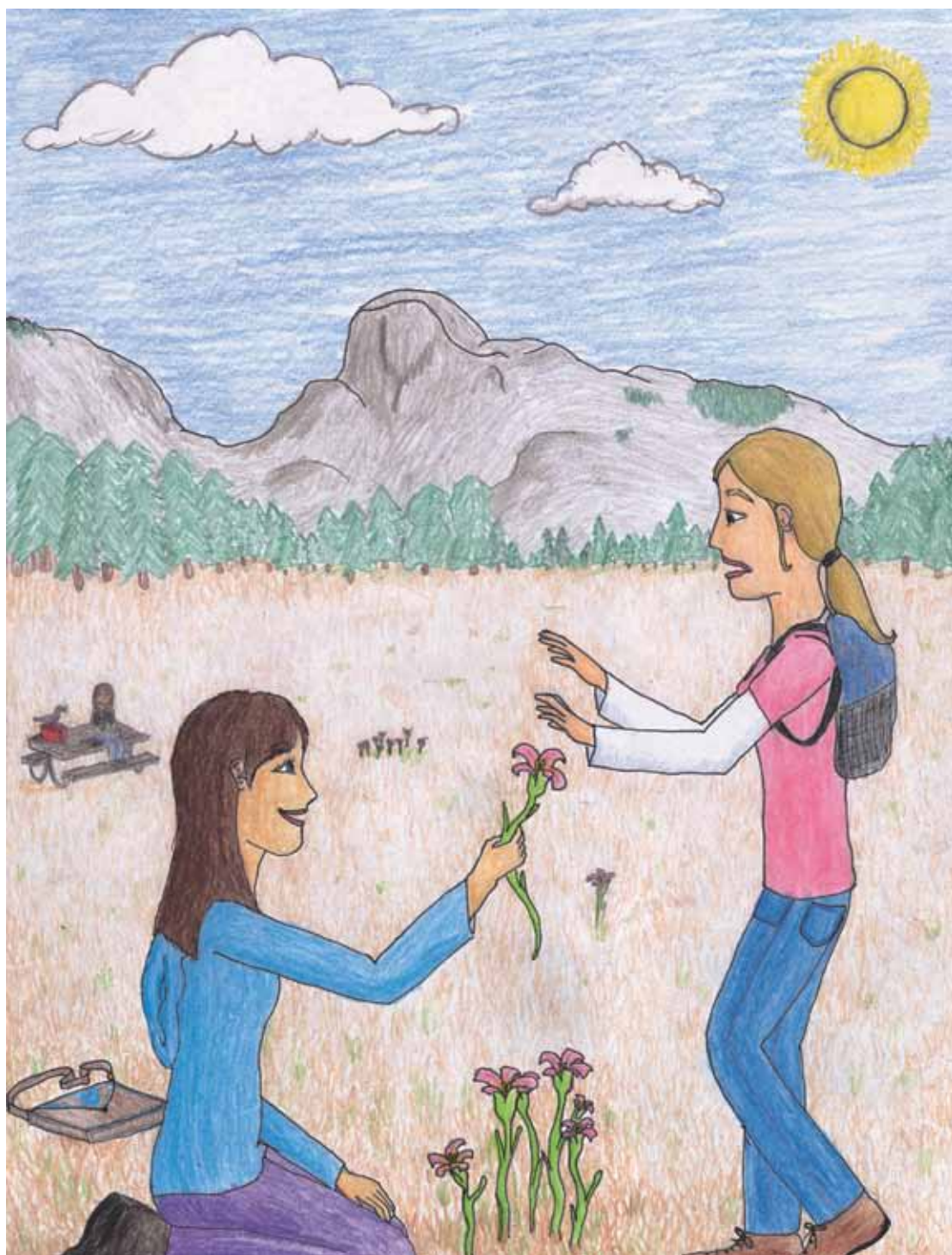
Candace Huntington, 13  
Boston, Massachusetts

A silver van pulls up the desert driveway  
From sliding doors  
Spill three cousins  
Holding teddy bears and swords  
Lonely fields are filled once more  
Screams and hollers absorb the sun-baked summer air  
We stumble together, reminding each other of our game  
Played only near the overgrown grass  
And where Christmas trees grow during summer  
MONSTER TAG.

Skip through the bushes  
Or near the woods  
And find a place where none can see  
If tagged  
You're it!  
The new monster, searching for its prey

Adults cry, "Be careful," as we prance off  
Their words are meaningless in our ears  
Drifting up with the subtle breeze  
We disperse  
Each racing around the house's corner  
Looming fingers creep up the gray walls  
Peering through the bushes,  
I glance across the fields of green

The monster's footsteps slow  
A lion before the deathly pounce  
Grass bowing beneath its feet  
Paw by paw, step by step  
Nervous excitement builds up inside me  
Where to run?  
Where to hide?  
The bush embracing me with its prickly  
Yet protective branches  
I duck out from under my shield  
The chase begins.



*"Isn't this beautiful?"*

# Yosemite Grasslands

By **Meilan Steimle**

Illustrated by **Ciara Carr**

“**I**T’S YOUR TURN, Quasar.”

I was shaken out of my self-induced funk by the lively sound of my mom’s voice. “Huh?”

“Come on,” said my dad. “Is the correct definition of cupidity a) unconditional and unbiased love, b) a type of Italian sausage, or c) greed?”

“Uh... A,” I mumbled.

“Nope,” said Dad. “It’s greed. Your mom wins the Dictionary Game again.”

“Sorry,” I said. “I’m not really in the mood.”

“But Quasar,” said Mom, “it’s Family Fun Friday. You’re really missing out on all the fun! Do you want to play Scrabble instead?”

“Do you think we could maybe... watch a movie?” I suggested tentatively.

“That’s a great idea, Quasar,” said Dad. “There’s a *Nova* on string theory at nine!”

“Ugh, never mind,” I said. “I’m going to go read.”

“Good idea,” said my mom. “Here’s that O. Henry book of short stories. ‘While the Auto Waits’ is a great one.”

“Forget it,” I mumbled. “I’m off to bed.”

Forget self-induced funk, this is seriously parent-induced. I’ve heard all of their rationales about how lucky I am not to have annoying siblings to deal with, but a sibling is also a partner in life. The solitude can be peaceful and relaxing, but sometimes I gaze out the window and wish I had someone to share



Meilan Steimle, 12  
Saratoga, California



Ciara Carr, 11  
Anderson, Indiana

the burden of overly intellectual parents. While lying alone, sleepless in the dark, I long for a companion to talk to, someone to think of quirky nicknames with that aren't related in any way to something scientific, someone to reassure me when I'm scared, instead of my father launching into a monotonous explanation about the physical impossibilities of the boogeyman. So while I nod along to my mother's rendition of an Eagles' song from her youth, my heart is aching for a kindred spirit. Luckily for me, my entire grade is about to embark on the long-anticipated trip to Yosemite. For those precious two days, I will have sisters.

AS I WALKED towards the bus, sleeping bag in hand, my parents waved goodbye. "We'll tape all the *Novas* for you," said my mom.

"We won't play Scrabble until you're back!" my dad called.

"And if you get bored," my mom reassured me, "you can read *The Grapes of Wrath*. I packed it for you."

"Yeah, right," I muttered, and stuffed the book in the trash before we boarded the bus.

By the time we arrived in Yosemite though, my wide grin had slowly morphed into a grimace of disgust. Sitting in the overcrowded bus, I had closed my eyes and attempted to block out all surrounding stimuli, but alas, no such luck. My life for those two hours was a mix of shouts, farts, and the occasional sob of homesickness. I had gritted my teeth together,

though not too hard because it erodes enamel, and waited, like a last-minute stowaway on an overcrowded ship to America, for us to reach our idyllic destination. To my horror, the famous, lush green grasses of Yosemite were brittle, bleached by the sun's harsh rays. Near our campsite, it was a dry savanna, much different from the green, semi-coniferous forest advertised in the glossy brochures I had read before coming. I would have to file a complaint for false advertising. We were then herded out of the bus like flocks of sheep to our respective cabins and left alone to "get organized."

Still determined to have a good time, I was about to ask my cabinmates to join me in a game of Guess That Historical Figure, but they were too busy fighting over the largest bed in the room.

"I call dibs," said Gretchen triumphantly, waving her hand above her head like she had won an Olympic gold medal instead of a sagging, decrepit mattress with rusted springs and chipped paint.

"That's not fair," snapped Allie. "The big one should go to whoever shares a bed, and I'm not sharing."

"Well then, I'm not either," sniffed Gretchen.

Still clinging to my earlier optimism, I chirped to Niota, "Well, I guess we can share."

During the afternoon meeting, the camp leader smiled disingenuously at us, gushing about how overjoyed she was to be introducing us to this "beautiful wonder of nature," while covertly wip-



ing her hands on her olive-green jacket after accidentally touching a child's hand. Despite her discomfort with us, she was right. As we had ventured more deeply into Yosemite to the community center, I marveled at the juxtaposition of the evergreens' prickly needles against the impressive granite mountains and brilliantly blue sky, pondering how such images and textures had inspired poetry and art.

"Anyone want to play a game or tell a ghost story?" I asked shyly after we were all bundled up in our beds with the same bored, oh-my-god-how-am-I-gonna-survive-here-for-another-day expressions.

"No," said Allie, and everyone turned over and went to sleep.

The next day I woke up freezing. "Why is it so cold?" I asked, shivering.

"Because someone," said Gretchen, glaring at Allie, "forgot to turn on the heater."

"Well, at least I don't snore," retorted Allie.

I groaned. This was going to be a really long day.

On the hike, I paused to admire a gorgeous flower, its pale pink petals sprinkled with specks of golden pollen. "Isn't this beautiful?" I said to Niota.

"Eww!" she shouted, face scrunched up into a disgusted expression. "I'm allergic," she said, then sneezed dramatically.

"Do you know what this is called?" I inquired of our hiking leader.

"Look, kid," Jay said, "I'm just here because I want a car, and this is the only job I'm qualified for. So shut up and walk."

I stared at him indignantly. Apparently, I was the only one appreciating Yosemite's stunning flora.

At lunch, we chewed eagerly on our cheese sandwiches and carrot sticks. Perhaps regretting his previous surliness, Jay brought brownies to us but then resumed playing Angry Birds on his iPhone. Afterwards we trekked up another trail, enjoying the chirps and trills of playful birds and the rhythmic drips of water droplets, spherical shapes seeming to float, then splatter on wide, oval leaves, later falling and sinking into the earth.

Unfortunately, these serene moments were punctuated by the verbal sparring of Allie and Gretchen.

"...and those are the ten reasons you are unbearably annoying," criticized Gretchen.

I moaned audibly. "Can you two shut up?"

"I will," said Allie, "if she apologizes."

"No way!" said Gretchen. "She started it."

I sighed. "Let's go to dinner," I said to Niota.

"Food?" Gretchen immediately perked up.

"I suppose I'll go," Allie said sulkily.

Despite the smell of potatoes being deep-fried in trans-fat, I quietly reveled in the beauty of Yosemite. As the vibrantly colored wildflowers swayed in the background, blown to and fro by a cool zephyr, I closed my eyes and inhaled the sweet scents of autumn mixed with the crisp bite of an upcoming winter. Stopping in

the middle of the sidewalk, arms outstretched, I transformed into a shimmering stream of colors, coiling around tree trunks and up and out their branches. Then like a sleek, silvery arrow, I slipped into every waterfall, splashing down the harshly magnificent cliffs and...

"Um, Lia?" Gretchen asked. "Are you all right?"

"Fine," I said, a little wistfully, then started to walk towards the cafeteria.

Halfway through the line for food, Niota stiffened. "Lia?" she began, her voice edging on hysterical. "Where's your retainer case?"

"Oops. Darn. I left it in the cabin in my backpack," I said. "I'll wrap the retainer in my napkin so I don't gross you guys out. Remind me *not* to throw it away like last year at school."

"That is not the concern right now," whimpered Niota. "Your retainer case has touched your retainer, which has touched your mouth. It'll attract bears!"

I rolled my eyes. "Ha, ha." Then I looked at her face. Genuine panic. "Wait, you're not serious, are you?" She was. I exhaled loudly, wishing I had chosen a different, non-paranoid roommate. This was just like the shoes.

The Monday before the trip...

"You shouldn't bring those shoes," said Niota.

"Why not?"

"They'll attract bears. Allie spilled chocolate milk on them."

"Yeah," I said, "three months ago."

Back in the present...

"If there is a bear in our cabin," Niota said desperately, "it's all your fault."

Sure enough, there was no bear in our cabin.

"That was a close call," said Niota.

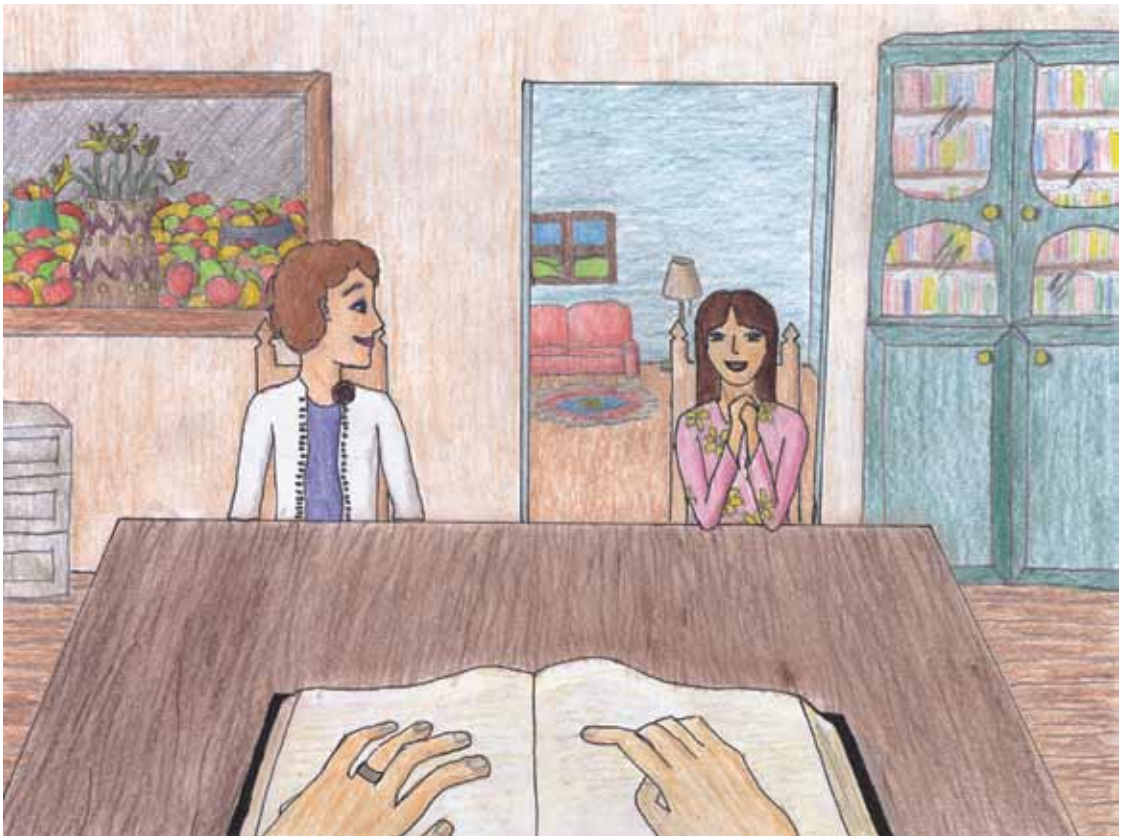
At 1:37 that night, I awoke from a dream in which bears were chasing me around Half Dome yelling, "We want straight teeth, too!" It was a warm darkness that embraced me, the hum of the heater a comforting constant. A lone creature in the darkness, secluded and protected from the bustle and cacophony of the day, I embraced it back. My nighttime reverie was interrupted by a scent, a pungent one that brought me back to fuzzy memories of warm milk and the soothing sound of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto playing quietly, while my mother recited passages from *The Double Helix*. The truth, as immediate and repulsive as cheap literature, became apparent as I thrust the contaminated sheets away from me and screamed, "Niota wet the bed!"

Niota sat bolt upright in our bed. "Did not!"

"There's a big wet spot on your pants," said Gretchen.

Niota's eyes filled with tears. "Please don't tell anyone. I was afraid to go to the bathroom because of the bears. I tried to hold it in, but I guess it just slipped out."

I stared at her with anger, then contempt, then pity, and finally resignation. "That's OK," I said with a sigh, "but you have to help me clean the pee off my legs."



*It was Friday. Family Fun Friday. And it was my turn*

I PULLED THE suitcase down the dusty road towards the bus, trying to avoid various potholes, then slumped dejectedly in a torn, vinyl seat, not even bothering to dislodge the wad of gum now fastening my shoe to the vibrating floor of the bus. As we drove away, I mulled over my trip. With a frown distorting my face, I replayed the trip over and over again in my mind, trying to discern what had made it so disappointing. I had almost longed for *The Grapes of*

*Wrath* during one of Allie and Gretchen's altercations. I was still pondering this when my mother and I pulled into the driveway of our house, wheels scraping on the rough gravel, and later during dinner.

It was Friday. Family Fun Friday. And it was my turn.

"Does epiphany mean a) a ball gown, b) a Middle-Eastern religious leader, or c) a realization?" asked my dad.

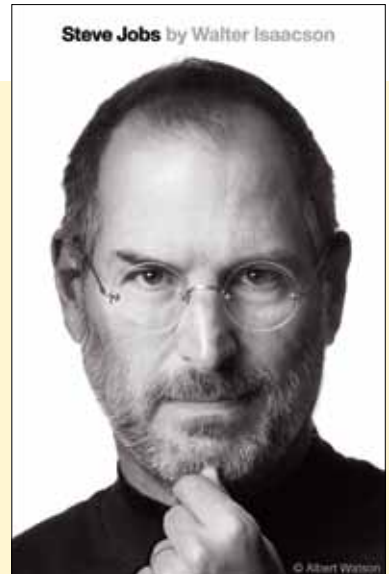
"C," I said, smiling to myself.



# Book Review

By Richard Ma

*Steve Jobs*, by Walter Isaacson; Simon & Schuster: New York, 2011; \$35



Richard Ma, 10  
Kirksville, Missouri

**A**LMOST EVERYBODY USES Apple products these days: the iPad, iPod, iPhone, iMac, etc. But do you know who the driving force behind these great inventions was? Steve Jobs! I am fascinated with technology and want to accomplish great things too when I grow up, so I decided to read *Steve Jobs*, a biography by Walter Isaacson. Reading this book allowed me to take a look into Jobs's flamboyant and complex personality that was so critical for his successes and failures. I suggest you read it too.


Steve Jobs was adopted shortly after birth. In school, Jobs was a restless and precocious child. He dropped out of college and took a religious trip to India in his twenties. Shortly after he returned, he and his friend Steve Wozniak worked on a computer project that led to the founding of Apple Inc. That's when his career took off. Jobs resigned from Apple in the late '80s because of a power struggle with the then CEO, John Sculley. He went on to establish the NeXT company and Pixar. Jobs went back to Apple as CEO in the late '90s. His biggest projects before he died in October 2011 were the iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

*Steve Jobs* is a captivating book with plenty of interesting anecdotes. I did not know that Jobs was a vegetarian and once ate apples, only apples, for one week straight. A person would

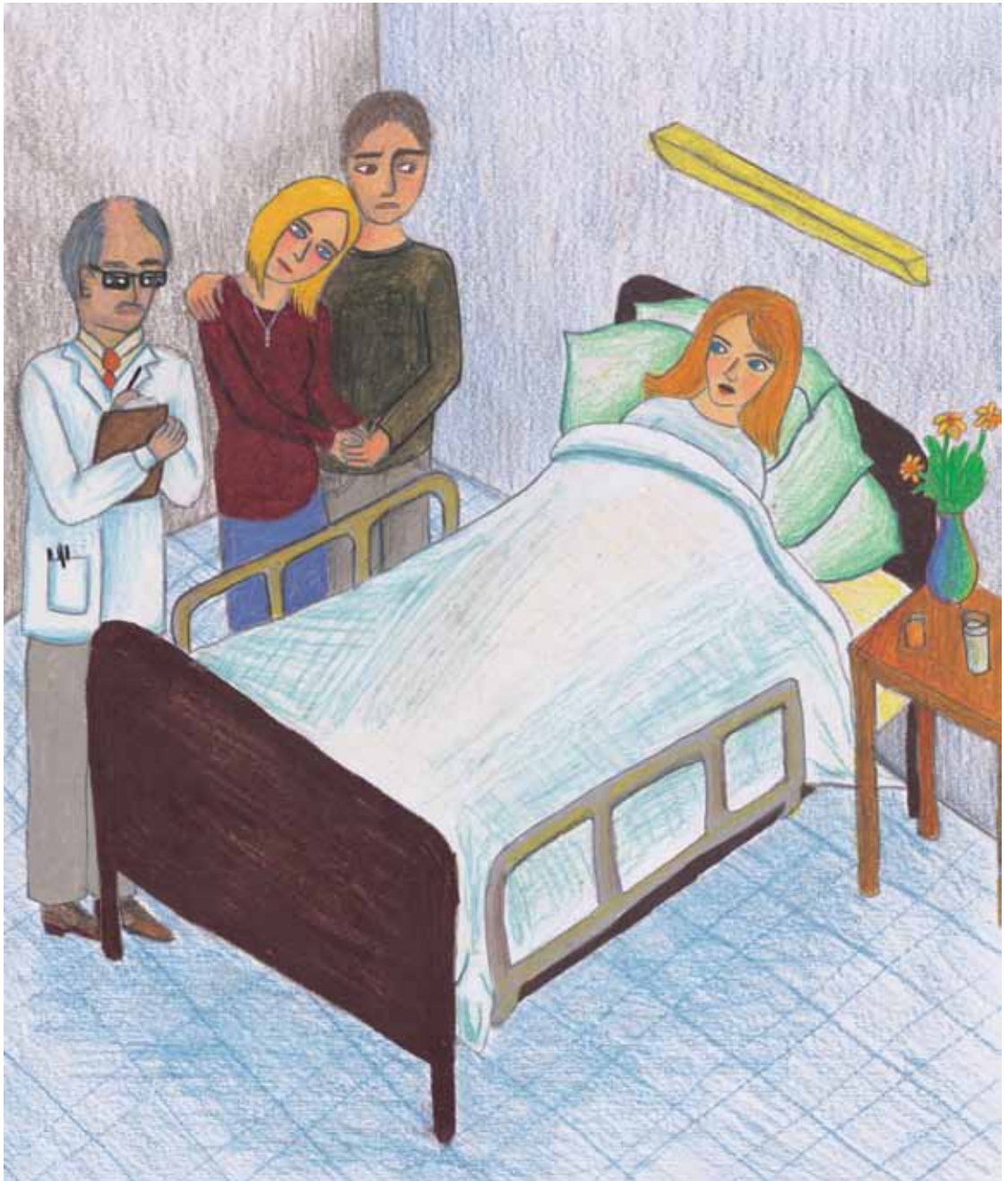
have to be extremely disciplined to just eat one thing for a long time. I found the strict eating habits of Jobs particularly puzzling because the same discipline was not shown at work—he could rarely refrain from shouting at his employees. Jobs didn't like people who were different from him; many ideas were probably rejected because of who proposed them. I find that when I am in a team, we are more productive when everyone listens to each other. If Jobs had been more open-minded and receptive to others, Apple could be even greater.

Steve Jobs was hardworking and dedicated. The large amount of time he spent working really benefited his company. But he overworked himself and sacrificed his health. Another price he paid was very little time with his family. Due to his focus on work and his aloof personality, he and his daughter Lisa did not begin to bond until she was about nine. He was also never very close to his other two daughters, Erin and Eve, although he was quite fond of his son, Reed. I find it sad for a great entrepreneur to not have an intimate relationship with his own children. Steve Jobs must have thought about this too. When Isaacson asked Jobs his motives for a biography, he said he wanted it to be something his children could use to know him better. I feel Jobs wanted this to be his second chance, a way to make up for all those times he wasn't there for his children.

I placed myself in Jobs's shoes and thought, What would I have done? I decided that, although I would be just as dedicated to my work, I would also reserve time to bond with my family and relax a bit. I would play with my kids and leave them with happy childhood memories instead of a biography.

I loved the way the author told Jobs's story with so many actual comments from Jobs's friends and family, co-workers, and enemies. After I read this book, I had a better understanding of Steve Jobs, not just as a great innovator but also as a human being. I learned a few lessons about life and work, and the importance and complexity of human relationships. 





*Nothing would ever be the same*

# Let It Be

By Rachel Keirstead

*Illustrated by* Lydia Giangregorio

KATE HAD FLOATED in and out of consciousness for days after the accident. She would occasionally wake to hear her parents conversing nervously with the hospital doctors. The voices were hushed, the tones grave.

Kate dreamt of car crashes over and over again. She repeatedly saw the impact of the SUV smashing into her side of the car, and she remembered everything going black. Over and over she had the car dream, and she would scream, but no one could hear her. There was nothing she could do to keep from being hit.

After days of drifting in and out of consciousness, Kate finally awoke. She strained her vocal chords, calling for someone, anyone. Her mother was right by her side, stroking her forehead, whispering kind words.

"Mom," Kate struggled to smile.

"Oh, Kate, I knew you would make it, I knew you would!" Kate's mother tenderly hugged her daughter.

"Am I going to be OK, Mom? Is anything broken?"

Kate's mother, Denise, sniffled. "Honey, I... I have to call your dad. I'll be right back."

"Mom, wait! You didn't answer..." It was too late. Denise was gone.

DENISE HURRIED OUTSIDE and got in her car. She didn't start it; she just sat there and stared at the rain rolling down the car's windshield. Denise started to sob, and her hands shook as she dialed her home phone number. Her husband was



Rachel Keirstead, 13  
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Lydia Giangregorio, 13  
Gloucester, Massachusetts

probably asleep, since he had spent nearly the whole night at Kate's bedside. Denise listened as the phone rang once, twice, three times— "Hello?"

"Oh, David, thank God."

"Is everything all right? Denise? What's the matter, honey?"

"Kate woke up."

"Dear, that's marvelous! I'll be there right away. Why are you crying? Is something wrong?"

"I can't tell her, David. She'll be crushed when she finds out her arm was amputated. Her life will never be the same. Kate asked me if she was all right, and I didn't have the heart to tell her... especially after she had just woken up."

"I'll be right there."

KATE WAS HORRIFIED after she heard how upset her mother was. Was something wrong with her? Sure, she felt like she had just been crushed by a tractor-trailer, but that was to be expected. Kate tried to sit up so she could take stock of her surroundings and look at herself, but she didn't have the strength to do it. Trying to hold back her tears of fear, Kate waited for her mother to return.

Kate's parents finally came in, accompanied by a nurse and a doctor. The adults looked somber, and Kate's mom had obviously been crying.

"Katelyn..." The doctor checked something on a clipboard he had with him.

"Kate," she corrected. Kate hated being called by her full name, as it sounded much too formal for a fun-loving girl

like her.

"Kate." The doctor cleared his throat. "You were in quite an accident. You seem to be a fighter, but there was some permanent damage done."

Kate sucked in her breath nervously. "What's wrong with me?"

"Your left arm suffered some horrible damage during the crash. Glass penetrated your arm deeply, and you were bleeding badly. The only way to save you was to amputate your arm at the elbow."

Kate suddenly felt nauseated and dizzy. It couldn't be true, could it? She'd never be able to do the simplest tasks like put on a shirt or pick up a large object. Kate would be an outcast, a weirdo, for the rest of her life. Nothing would ever be the same.

AFTER AN EXTENDED stay in the hospital, Kate was allowed to go home. Although she was glad to be home, Kate felt like she was drowning in a huge ocean with no way out. Nothing seemed fun anymore, and there was no reason to be happy. Some people said she was suffering from depression; others said she was just in shock and would eventually get over it.

Kate felt like she couldn't do anything for herself and that she was a baby again. Her mother had to help her dress, which humiliated poor Kate to tears. Fortunately, it was summer so Kate didn't have to be seen by her peers. She rarely left the house for fear people would see her and stare. Kate felt like a freak, and she would have given anything to change what happened the night of the accident.

One dull day much like the rest, Denise entered Kate's room to find her trying to make a friendship bracelet from a collection of colorful strings. Kate was failing miserably at making the bracelet one-handed, and she was starting to become very agitated at finding that she couldn't do something she enjoyed.

"Why don't you take a break, Kate?" Denise sat on the floor next to her daughter, brushing Kate's hair away from her face. "Go for a walk, and get some fresh air. I don't think being cooped up in this house is good for you."

"I don't want to," Kate mumbled sullenly. Her mother knew she didn't like leaving the house, so why was she making her?

"It'll be good for you, Kate. Just walk around the block. It'll calm you down. Please, honey? Do it for me."

Kate groaned when she realized she didn't have a choice in the matter. She stood and said, "I'll go around the block. *Once*. Then I'm coming in."

Kate left the house, turning left. Her sneakers crunched the gravel, and she realized she enjoyed the scent of the fresh air. Although dark rain clouds obscured the sky, Kate cherished the smell of the rain that was to come. Soon Kate found herself taking a long route around the neighborhood. She was about to turn around and come home when the heavens opened up and rain poured forth.

The wind whipped the rain against Kate's face, which she tried to shield with her right arm. Lightning streaked across

the sky, and a BOOM sounded quickly after. Kate knew that meant the storm was close, and she had to find shelter quickly. With a surge of panic, Kate realized she was too far from home. She'd have to find shelter somewhere else.

As lightning struck again and an even louder boom followed, Kate hurried up the driveway of the nearest house and dashed onto the porch, where it was dry. A moment later, the door opened to reveal a woman in her late thirties. Her brown hair was pulled up in a bun, and she smiled down at Kate.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but I was taking a walk and the storm came so suddenly..."

"It's all right, I understand. Come in." The woman pulled the door open a little wider and let Kate in. The house was beautiful, with colorful paintings on the walls. The walls were made of wood paneling, which gave the house a warm, country look. Kate instantly felt at home. "I'm Sherri," the woman said. "It's nice to meet you."

"Kate." Kate got the odd feeling that Sherri was staring at her amputated arm. She wasn't angry at the woman for it because she had known it would attract attention.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stare." Sherri looked down awkwardly, blushing slightly. "Do you need to call your mom or dad to tell them where you are? You can use my phone."

After Kate had made the call, Sherri ushered her into the living room. They sat

on opposite couches, staring awkwardly at each other. "Well," Sherri said, breaking the silence, "since we seem to be here for a while, tell me about yourself. Do you play instruments? Sports?"

"I used to play violin," Kate said quietly. "I loved creating music. But I can't play anymore." Sherri glanced knowingly at Kate's amputated arm.

"That's a shame, hon."

"Yeah, I guess."

"Do you sing?" Sherri asked.

"Sing? No, I'm not very good at it. Why?"

"I'm a voice teacher and I also play guitar. I just thought that if you still wanted to make music but couldn't play an instrument... It just makes sense. To sing, you don't need arms. Everything you need to make beautiful music is within you."

Kate grinned. Then, she slowly began to nod. "Can you teach me to sing?"

#### ONE MONTH LATER

"**M**OM, DON'T MAKE me go. Everyone's going to stare at me! You could homeschool me, Mom! Would you? Please?"

"Kate, you're being ridiculous. You're going to school."

"I'm afraid."

"It'll be fine. Now if you don't hurry up, you're going to miss the bus! C'mon, get out of here." Denise waved as Kate, sighing, walked down the road. "Love you, honey! Have a good day!"

Yeah right, Kate thought to herself as she offered her mother a nervous smile. I

won't make it home alive.

As predicted, people gawked at the sight of Kate. She knew it was only natural, but she couldn't help shying away from all the stares. Kate could hear the whispers in the halls: "Did you see Kate? She doesn't have an arm! I heard it was a car crash..."

Music class was eighth period. The teacher, an energetic young man by the name of Mr. Evans, led the class with an omnipresent smile. Whenever he spoke, he bounced on the balls of his feet. At the conclusion of the period, the students began to gather their books. Over the ruckus of kids starting conversations with their neighbors, Mr. Evans called, "Chorus auditions next Monday! See me for a paper."

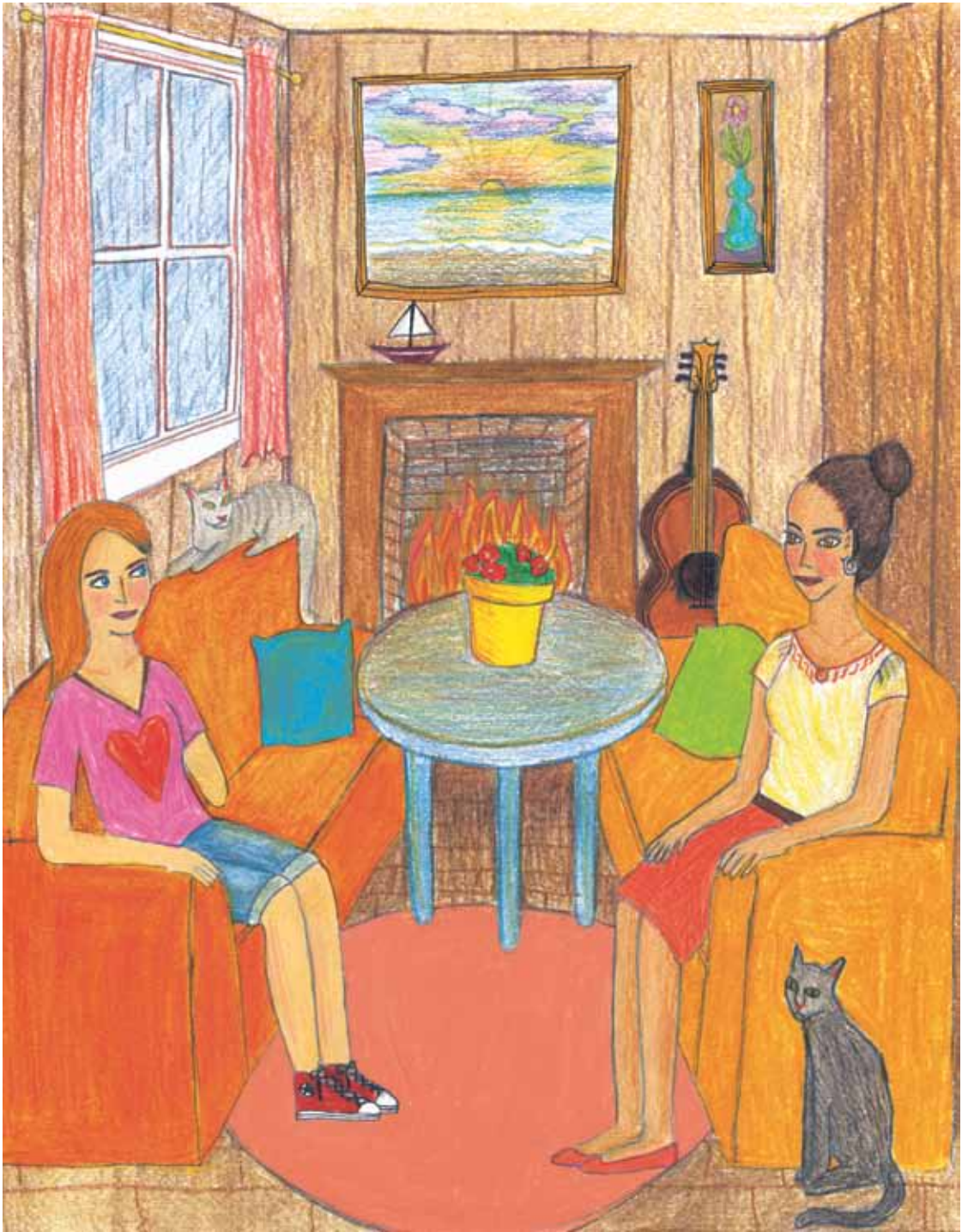
Kate shuffled toward the front of the room, taking the top paper from the stack on Mr. Evans's desk. She stuffed it in her folder as the bell rang. She'd talk to Sherri about this.

That afternoon, Kate let herself in through the garage and called, "Mom, I'm home!"

Denise came hurrying down the stairs and gave her daughter a huge hug. "I thought about you all day, honey. How was it?"

Kate jabbered on about her classes and promising teachers. Then she said, "Mr. Evans seems nice. Oh, that reminds me! I got a chorus audition paper." She dug around in her folder and pulled out the paper. Reading it for the first time, Kate said, "Oh, no. I can't do this. It says





*"Everything you need to make beautiful music is within you"*

we have to audition in front of *everyone*, Mom. I can't get up in front of everyone. They'll all stare at my arm, or lack thereof. I'm not worried about the singing, but I don't want everyone goggling at me like I'm some sort of freak on display."

"I think you can do it, Kate. Talk to Sherri at lessons this evening. I'm sure she'll have an opinion."

That evening, Denise drove Kate to Sherri's home, where Kate took lessons once a week. As always, Sherri opened the door with a smile. Kate could only manage a halfhearted shrug. "What's wrong, Kate? Did something happen on your first day of school today?"

"It's the chorus. I really want to try out, but the auditions are in front of everyone. I can't stand up in front of people; I'll get too nervous."

"Kate, listen to me because I'm only going to say this once. Never feel like they'll judge you just because you have a disability. You are who you are, and you need to be confident in that. Plus, you are a phenomenal singer. It seems like you were born to do this. Are you going to let this opportunity go by? Of course not. Kate Wetherhold, you're going to audition for middle-school chorus."

Kate practiced hard the days leading up to her audition. She and Sherri had chosen "Let It Be" by the Beatles to be her audition piece. Kate thought it perfectly represented the obstacles she would overcome by auditioning. Finally, the fateful day came. Auditions were held after


school in the auditorium, and Kate was the first one there. She sat in the front row, her palm sweaty. The butterflies in her stomach multiplied, and Kate began to wish she had gone home. More and more kids were filing into the auditorium, talking and laughing.

Finally, Mr. Evans strode into the auditorium, smiling as always. "Are you ready for the auditions?" he asked of the large group of singers. Cheers answered him. "I thought so. Let's start with this young lady here." He smiled down at Kate.

The butterflies were going crazy at this point. Shaking, Kate hobbled up onto the stage and took the waiting microphone in her sweaty hand. She took a deep breath and began to sing.

Kate sang better than she ever had; she was intent on making her audience experience her passion as she sang her thoughtful ballad. It seemed as if she was scooping emotion from her soul and infusing it into the words of her song. When Kate sang, she wasn't in her body anymore. She was flying in the clouds where nothing mattered except the music.

Alas, the song came to a close, but the ending was gorgeous. The last note sparkled like a clean diamond in the sunlight. As soon as Kate was finished, the entire auditorium rose, clapping and cheering.

They're cheering for me, Kate realized. By choosing to come up on this stage and face my fears, I've chosen to not let my disability control me. I've beaten my self-consciousness. I'm free. 



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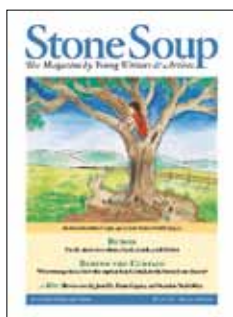
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