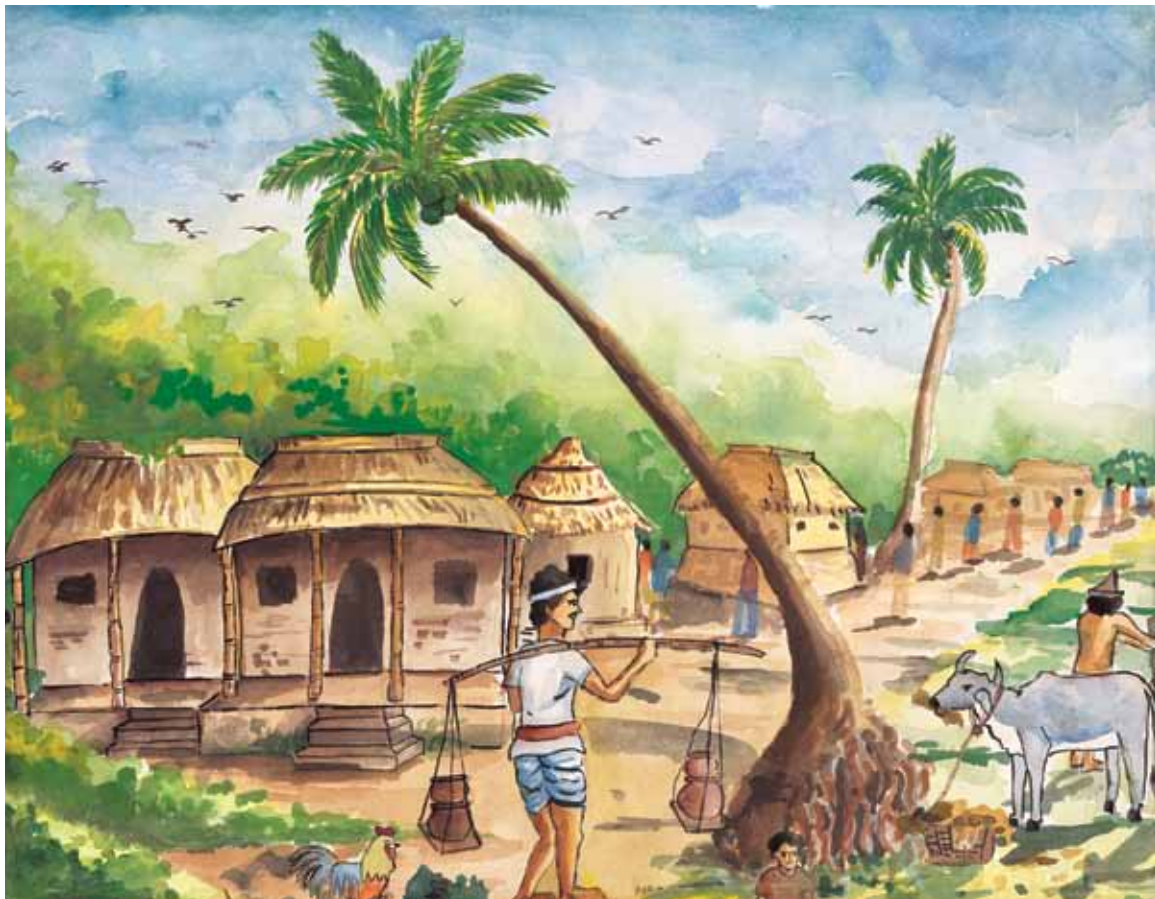


Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Going to Market," by Rajib Roy, age 13, Calcutta, India

MY MOTHER'S LITTLE GIRL

Angie and her mother are as different as night and day

ADRIN'S CHASE

The wolf clan killed Adrin's father; now Adrin's life is in danger

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2012

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2012

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Editor's Note

Nature inspires us and brings us comfort. You may have noticed that we like to publish stories and poems about nature in *Stone Soup*—a special place, the beauty of the seasons, a moment of connection with an animal. We have several wonderful works about nature in this issue. In “Fall Night,” Elizabeth lies in the grass, imagining that she is a falling leaf, floating, twirling in the slow breeze. Billy, in “Tranquility Reservoir,” realizes he can put himself back at his peaceful spot any time he feels overwhelmed. Tanay has a bad day at school, and Ocyin is tired of her routine. In “The Nature Walk,” Tanay is restored by an evening walk under the trees. In “Discovering Opportunities,” Ocyin is inspired by a horse to make changes in her life. Open your door, step outside. What do you see? How do you feel? Come back inside and put your thoughts on paper.

— Gerry Mandel

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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, email us at editor@stonesoup.com.

ON THE COVER “Going to Market” was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy, an organization that promotes peace and understanding through children's art exchanges. Now housed at CSU East Bay, the Paintbrush Diplomacy collection will soon be available for viewing online at paintbrushdiplomacy.org.



The Mailbox



The cover of the past issue, a picture from “The Three Wishes” [May/June 2012], was phenomenal! Illustrated by Leigh McNeil-Taboika and written by Alison

Lanza—I want to congratulate them both on a job well done. Also, I’ve seen several comments on “The Race,” by Valerie Luyckx [May/June 2011]. I found the story in a past issue from the library—and it was great! I loved how detailed and descriptive it was. I hope if possible they will send in more of their work.

Abigail D’Agosta, 12
Waxahachie, Texas

I always jump with joy every time I receive an issue of *Stone Soup*. Even if me and my friend Viveka might be the only subscribers in India, we still feel very happy to be subscribers to the world’s No. 1 magazine. In the May/June 2012 issue, there was a very nice story written by an Indian girl who has emigrated to San Jose [“My Brother’s Smile,” by Namrata Ramya Balasingam]. *Stone Soup* rocks!!

Mriganka Iyer, 11
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

I would like to say how much I appreciate *Stone Soup* for giving aspiring authors like myself the opportunity to publish stories and poems and also to see inspiring works by others my age.

Emma Callet, 12
Scottsdale, Arizona

Emma’s story, “Royal Blue,” appears on page 23 of this issue.

I can’t wait for the next issue of *Stone Soup*, and to read all of the fabulous stories baked into the masterpiece of a magazine!

Katie Goldstein, 13
Hillsborough, California

I must share this as it was a mind-blowing telephone call today from my nine-year-old granddaughter, Lia. She just got her first issue of *Stone Soup* and she was absolutely in awe. She read me a poem, and she read me a book review—she evidently had read the entire issue this afternoon. The book review was about African children, one, a lost boy, and another a girl whose days were spent carrying water for her family and the impact of a well that was dug in her village. Lia was vibrating over what she had read. It suddenly made the service work they do at her school, raising money for the Heiffer Project, real to her, putting faces and their stories on recipients of her fundraising. She could not say enough. Maybe she will think of submitting, but for the moment she, a passionate and voracious reader, has found something that resonates in a very profound way.

Mimi Bull
Peterborough, New Hampshire

Thank you for encouraging us to read, write, and express ourselves in writing. Thank you for pushing us to go places we could never imagine.

Amber McBorrough, 8
Aurora, Colorado

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.



Suddenly an image of my mother as a young girl flashed through my head

My Mother's Little Girl

By **Ella Staats**

Illustrated by **Megan Tichy**

MY MOTHER ALWAYS wanted a little girl. One who would wear frilly pink dresses and bows and barrettes in her hair and would play with dolls and have tea parties with china and have perfect manners and would take ballet and would grow up to marry a fine young gentleman and then have some more lovely children.

But she got me.

At first, when it was announced that I was a girl, she cried with joy. She fitted me with lacy baby dresses and gave me all the dolls a girl would hope for and adorned me with hair accessories. But her happiness didn't last long. I absolutely detested dresses, and I threw a humongous fit when I was forced to wear them. I yanked bows out of my hair and threw them across the room. Once I even swallowed a barrette. By the time we had gotten to the emergency room, it had already ended up in my dirty diaper.

When she gave me dolls to play with, I pulled off their heads and stomped on them. When she tried to put the pink booties that Grandma had sent me on my feet, I screamed and tried to chew on them. More than ponies with manes that I could braid, I enjoyed my older brother's action figures. I would pretend they were invading the dolls' planet and taking it over. That was one of my favorite games.

As I grew up, I didn't become any less stubborn. My mother wanted to grow out my long brown hair so that she could put it in a French braid, but I hated it because it got in my eyes and



Ella Staats, 11
Burlington, Vermont



Megan Tichy, 13
Tower City, North Dakota

interfered with sports, and it tangled easily. When my mother refused to let me cut it, I became angry, so I took a pair of flimsy stationery scissors and snipped it off myself. It was jagged and cut close to the neck, and I knew it looked awful, but I liked it because it was much more manageable. When my mother saw it she clutched her heart and whispered, "Oh, Angel, what have you done?"

And that's another thing that I hate: when my mother calls me Angel. My real name is Angelica, but I think that sounds terrible. If my mother had known what I would really be like when I was born, she would have named me something much more practical, but she didn't know. So now I'm stuck with a name like Angelica. Whenever anyone asks what my name is, I tell them that I'm Angie. It's not great, but heck knows it's better than Angelica or Angel.

On the day before school picture day, my mother went out and bought me a skirt without telling me. It was knee-length and billowed out when you spun around. It was made of brown fabric with pink roses all over it, and it had a little lace bow on the waist. I hated it upon sight, and I refused to wear it. My mother became very upset. When she's mad, worried, or stressed, she straightens her dress over and over and over and fixes her bun again and again, even when there's not a strand out of line. She did this when I wouldn't wear the skirt.

"But Angel, it looks so dear on you," she said, hopelessly trying to explain to

me why I should wear it. "And what's so wrong with it? I think it's perfectly charming." She reached out to stroke my pixie cut, but I ducked away.

"It's ugly," I told her. "I won't wear it. And don't call me Angel!"

"Don't be unreasonable," my mother said. "You will wear it and that is that."

I knew enough not to argue with her, but I wasn't going to be seen in school with that on either. So I went to school early on school picture day and slipped into the school. In the girls' locker room, I changed into my gym clothes, something I knew my mother would never approve of. Sure enough, when the pictures arrived and she saw me dressed in sports shorts and a T-shirt, she totally freaked. She gave me a lecture on responsibility, though I have no idea what that has to do with changing clothes, and then sent me to my room. She always sends photos to Grandma and my aunts and uncles, but she couldn't do it with those photos. So she arranged a photo shoot with a real photographer and made sure that this time I couldn't weasel out of it. But I pretended to come down with a fever, and we had to postpone. My mother never got around to rescheduling the shoot.

NOW IT WAS an hour before my first middle-school dance, and I was picking out what to wear. Of course, my mother was by my side, criticizing my choices.

I pulled out a pair of light capris from my dresser and held them up for inspec-

tion. My mother shook her head and said, "Oh, Angel, you really can't think of wearing that, can you?"

"Why not?" I asked flatly, not really wanting an answer.

"Girls should look nice at dances," my mother argued, taking a flowery, lacy skirt from the very darkest depths of my drawer where I kept all the clothes I swore never to wear. She smiled and shoved it into my arms. "This will look just *lovely* with your thin complexion."

Stung at the comment about my complexion, though I knew she was oblivious to its harm, and even more disgusted with her choice of clothes, I shoved it back. "No thanks, I'd rather have something more practical." I put the capris on top of my dresser and then started looking for a shirt. After some browsing, I chose a dark green T-shirt with a picture of a palm tree on it.

"But dear, surely you don't want to be seen with such dull clothes on at the dance? What will all the other girls think?" My mother tried to tuck my outfit back into my dresser, but I firmly pulled it away from her. She furrowed her brow and straightened her dress.

"They won't care," I said. "They know what I'm like. And besides, it's a *casual* occasion, not the high-school prom. Everyone will be wearing this." I started putting on the capris.

"It's just awful, what this world has come to!" my mother exclaimed, staring longingly at the skirt I had rejected. "When I was a girl, I adored dressing up,

at least when I could. I don't know how you turned out so opposite of me."

I didn't say anything, but secretly inside I was glad I wasn't like my mother. I couldn't imagine wearing anything remotely fancy to the school dance. I finished changing, ignoring my mother's suggestions about putting a bow in my hair or putting on a pink dress. I glanced at myself in the mirror; I thought I looked all right. And honestly, what was wrong with my complexion? It looked just fine to me. High cheekbones, light skin, dark eyes, downward-angled eyebrows. How could my mother always find something wrong with me?

I tramped downstairs and out to the car, merely rolling my eyes when my brother gave me a thumbs-up and flashed me a grin. Outside, my dad was waiting in the Matrix, the engine already running. I hopped in shotgun and buckled my seat belt, and the car rolled out of the driveway. My mother hated the fact that I rode in the front seat; she thought I was going to injure myself. But I was tall for my age, and I knew I could handle it. My father didn't mind anything I did, but whenever my mother was around he sided with her. If she freaked out when I tried to ride shotgun, my dad said, "Sorry, kiddo, it's back seat for now." The only thing he never expressed any opinion about was my choice of boyishness and clothes. He was completely silent on the matter, though sometimes I think he secretly wanted me to defy my mother in the girl-or-boy argument.



How could my mother always find something wrong with me?

My dad pulled the Matrix into the parking lot around the back of the school, and I hopped out. He rolled down the window.

“You all set, kiddo?” he asked.

I nodded.

“OK. Mom’ll pick you up at eight-thirty.” With that, he revved the engine and drove away into the fading light.

I turned and ran down to the school. A mob of middle-schoolers was crowded around the doors, pushing and shoving to be the first into the gym. When it was my turn, I handed the lady behind the fold-out table my five dollars and entered the gymnasium.

Multicolored lights were spinning and twirling all around the floor, walls, and

ceiling. Besides that, it was dark. Groups of kids were dancing and laughing together, and loud music blared from two huge speakers. It pulsed in my ears and I could feel it throbbing all throughout my body. I stepped into a circle of purple light and scanned the room to see what people were wearing. Just as I had suspected, most kids had dressed in casual T-shirts, shorts, capris, and some miniskirts here and there. I grinned. Just wait until my mother got a load of *this*.

After the dance ended, a mass exodus of students streamed out the door and into the dark night. I departed from the scene, making my way around back to the parking lot, where my mother was waiting for me, looking anxious. I opened the side door and started to climb in.

"Not in the front seat, Angel, you scare me to death, the way you do that," my mother told me firmly. I let out an annoyed sigh, slammed the door, and proceeded into the back. I buckled my seat belt and then said, a bit smugly, "Nobody was dressed up."

"I'm sure someone was," my mother said, glancing at me through the rear-view mirror. "Not all girls would go to the dance in something like *that*." By "that," I knew she meant my T-shirt and capris.

"You'd be surprised," I muttered, slouching down in my seat, but I knew it was no use arguing with her.

LATER THAT NIGHT, while my parents thought I was sleeping, I arose from my bed and tiptoed into the hallway

to get a drink of water. Shadows splayed across the floor, and silvery moonlight filtered through the window. No sound or light came from my brother's room, but a faint yellow glow showed under the door to my parents' bedroom. I wondered what they were doing up this late. Usually they were in bed and asleep before either my brother or me. Curious, I pressed my ear to the door.

I could hear voices, and the sound of feet pacing across the floor. I strained my hearing, and finally my mother's worried voice became clear.

"I just don't understand," she was saying, sounding concerned. I could imagine her smoothing her nightgown and patting her bun.

"Don't worry, Grace. She's a growing girl. She's bound to be somewhat rebellious." Now it was my father's voice that I heard.

I drew back instinctively. Were they talking about *me*? I didn't know anyone else who could be stuck with the label "rebellious." I guess it did describe me perfectly, but I never thought about my parents actually calling me that. But why were they speaking about me with such concern? I couldn't help it. I put my ear back to the door.

"She has opportunities that I never had as a girl," my mother said, sounding sad, "and she chooses to just throw them away. I don't know what is going on in her head; I just can't get through to her. I try to help her and she turns me away. What is going on?"

I was surprised to hear that my mother sounded defeated. Did she really think of me like that? Was she not just being a nuisance to me, was she trying to let me be who I wanted to be while still attempting to make me the girl that she never was? It didn't make much sense, but it seemed like the truth.

I had never given much thought to my mother's childhood. I had always just supposed that she had grown up in frilly pink dresses having tea parties with her dolls. But was that really the case? I thought back. I remembered her saying that her father was away at his job a lot and didn't spend much time engaging with her. Her mother, if I recalled correctly, had spent most of the day in her bed with a migraine, not paying much attention to her daughter except to have her get her a glass of water and a wet washcloth for her forehead. Having three older brothers, she was shunned from activities with her siblings and didn't get many opportunities. And her family hadn't had much money, either.

Suddenly an image of my mother as a young girl in a secondhand dress on the

street, staring into a shop window, admiring a beautiful ball gown she would never get to wear, flashed through my head. And that's when I realized what was really happening. My mother was just trying to protect me from the neglect that she had felt as a child, and give me what she had never gotten. All I saw was a pushy woman forcing me to do what I strongly objected to, but on the inside she had good intentions.

I couldn't help it. Even though it was the middle of the night and I wasn't supposed to be eavesdropping, I burst through the bedroom door and ran into my mother's arms, crying hysterically. For a moment my mother looked surprised and baffled, but then she embraced me as I made her nightgown soggy with tears.

"I'm so, so sorry," I sobbed, wrapping my arms around her waist. "I really am."

"No, I'm sorry," my mother said. "I should have just let you be what you wanted to be. But I accept your apology as well."

I had never felt so secure as I did in my mother's arms. And that's when I knew that, no matter what happened, I would always be my mother's little girl. ❀

Fall Night

By Elizabeth R. Herndon

I gaze at the fall night sky
I lie down in the cold grass
Close my eyes
Breathing slowly
I imagine I am a falling leaf
I float in twirl in the slow breeze
I open my eyes stand up I look
Around and all I see are bare
Trees and fallen leaves
I lie back down and stare at the
Fall night sky



Elizabeth R. Herndon, 10
Paradise, California

Tranquility Reservoir

By Billy Liptrot

Illustrated by Victoria D'Ascenzo



Billy Liptrot, 13
Boxford, Massachusetts



Victoria D'Ascenzo, 11
Lincoln University, Pennsylvania


I GAZE AT THE DISTANT SUN reflecting on the lake. I see the loon dipping in and out of the reservoir. Then I see a small ripple in the remote waters. That strikes a vague memory of the days when my brother and I caught frogs in a nearby pond. There are frogs in my memory, jumping, creating small splashes in the water. Now, I dip my foot into the frigid water. When my whole foot submerges, the lake feels warm. It is like there is a blanket on the top of the water to protect it from the bitterness of the outside air. The serenity of the lake calms me. When I am tired or need a break, this cozy spot on the water's edge, where the limb of the tree above curls, unwinds me. I settle myself on the decayed moss where mushrooms grow alongside me. Then a crow perches on the bough above me and makes rain sprinkle on my shivering body. The sudden rain drenches me. I can smell the mildew and wet grass when I go to this setting. I can hear the echo of the crow calling to his fellow feathered friends. I can envision the dam across the lake. It strikes the rocks like powerful hail thrashing the ground.

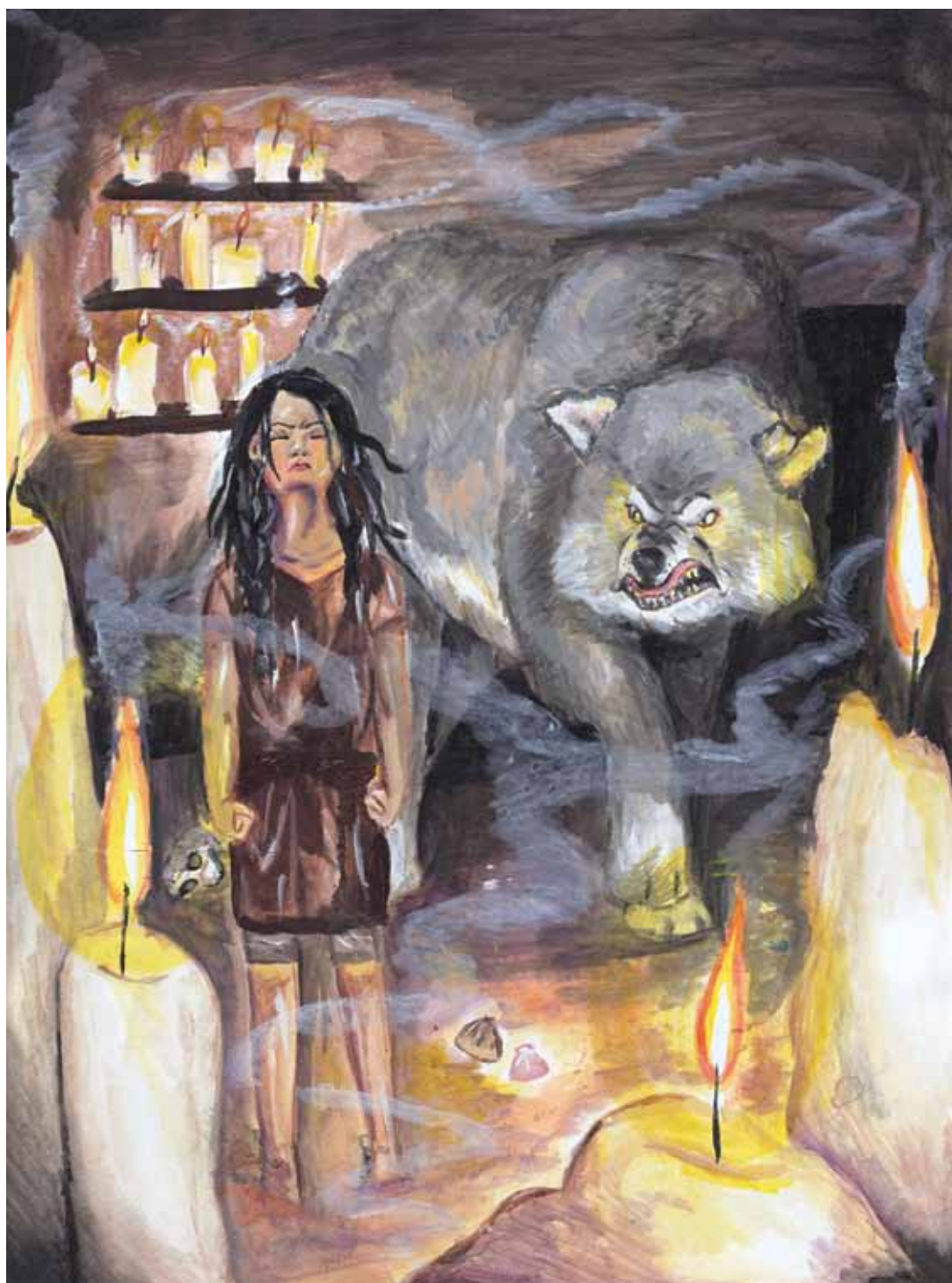
My body shivers in the cold. The shallow water grass blows in the gust of wind, causing the waves to collide into the rocks and on the shore. I can see a sailboat in the distance. The sailor seems as if he is having trouble controlling both the tiller and mainsheet. Gradually, he gains power of the boat as the gust of wind starts to diminish. Now, as I stand up from this home of mine and look around, I get a feeling that there is a vacant spot overlooking the elegant lake. It is independent from all other



I know I will cherish this place my whole life

regions that are in my eyesight. That is why it makes me feel at home. It stands out of the blue and that is how I know it is my place where I can be passive and ponder my thoughts.

Now when I am stressed or overwhelmed and need to find a way to relax, I put myself back at that place, my spot on the water's edge. I know I will cherish this place my whole life. 



"What do you say, Adrin? Do we have a deal?"

Adrin's Chase

By **Arden Bastia**

Illustrated by **Alondra Paredes**

STORM-TOSSED WAVES broke like a thousand glass shards against the craggy black rocks at the base of the cliff. A sleeping girl, curled among the long grasses, didn't hear the storm. She was in the midst of a nightmare, tossing and turning. Suddenly, a clap of thunder pierced the night and the girl woke up, breathing heavily. She looked around, although it was impossible to see anything. The moon was hidden behind dark storm clouds that refused to shed any rain. The girl stood up, a wild, yet frightened, look in her eyes. She knew what the storm meant: Beta, along with the others in the wolf clan, was calling her, and they weren't happy.

The girl broke into a run. She ran away from the crashing waves and the inky sea. She ran through the tall grasses and thorns of the rose hips, never stopping or slowing to catch her breath. Her brown tunic was pressed against her body as the winds whipped her black hair, violently, out of its tight braid. Lightning flashed and thunder exploded, constantly keeping the sky filled with noise. Finally, the girl reached a sand dune that was hidden in beach grasses. Another jagged streak of lightning lit the sky just long enough for the girl to catch a glimpse of the worn wooden door carved with the ancient language of the wolves. This was the entrance to Beta's lair. She waved her hand over the door, mumbling a strange incantation. The next thing she knew, she had the sensation of being squeezed though a tight tube before landing unsteadily on her feet inside the warren. The candles cast ominous shadows onto the floor of sand.



Arden Bastia, 13
Warwick, Rhode Island



Alondra Paredes, 13
Bentonville, Arkansas

Here and there were the occasional carcasses of unlucky animals or a seashell or two. Standing in the middle of the den was a great shaggy wolf with a chunk of fur and flesh missing from his left ear. He had glowing yellow eyes and sharpened teeth. The wolf started to pace in a circle around the girl.

"Where is it?" growled Beta in a raspy voice.

"I don't have it, whatever you are looking for," the girl said, refusing to be intimidated by this ferocious animal.

"Do you dare take me for a fool?" growled Beta, baring his teeth, and his hackles rose.

The girl was tempted to say yes, but she knew Beta wasn't one for humor. He was twice the size of the girl and could spring at any moment, tearing the girl apart. "I don't have it," the girl repeated.

Beta's eyes narrowed. "Don't lie to me, Adrin. Remember what happened to your father?"

Adrin broke her gaze from Beta's. Her eyes grew wide at the memory of how her father had lied to the wolves, just to protect Adrin. She thought back to how the wolves had forced her father out of their hut and started to fight him. Adrin re-

membered her father battling the clan of wolves, but to no avail. She remembered how the wolves sprung at her father, killing him in one leap. Adrin recalled how the wolves pitched her father's limp body off the edge of the cliff and into the dark sea below. Adrin blinked out of her trance and continued to glare at Beta.

"Tell me what you seek and you shall have it in eight days time." Adrin tried to keep her voice from shaking.

Beta sat down and contemplated the offer. "Hmm. The orphaned daughter of my enemy, go and retrieve the lost owl diadem that belonged to every sorcerer and sorceress that ever existed. If she fails, then I'll take her life. Dangerous, life threatening," Beta paused and grinned a wicked grin at Adrin, "just what I like. What do you say, Adrin? Do we have a deal?"

Adrin swallowed and wiped her sweaty palms against her leggings. Her father wouldn't have liked her to work with his enemy. Adrin was fearful for her life. She took a deep breath and nodded slowly. "Agreed. Eight days by midnight, no later. It's a deal." Adrin shook the paw of power-hungry Beta.

"See you then, my dear," said Beta as he disappeared in a whirlwind of sand. ❀



Mission Beach

By **Natalie Bettendorf**

Illustrated by **Emily Considine**

THERE IS ONE THING that always completes my summer. Mission Beach.

Every August, my family either takes the eight-hour drive or the one-hour flight down to San Diego, where my mom grew up. My grandpa lives in a small complex called Stonecrest, and about a ten-minute drive away is Mission Beach, my favorite beach in the whole world. My mom's best friend, Auntie Julia, brings down her entire huge family from Piedmont, California, and Chicago, Illinois, and she rents the same old enormous beach house located directly on Mission Beach.

It's 10:04 AM, according to my sister's watch. Dad is driving the car, singing along to Bob Dylan blasting on the radio. Mom is on the phone with Auntie Julia (occasionally making furious gestures to Dad to bring down the volume), and my sister Anna is announcing the time every four minutes. I finger my bright blue summer dress that I bought from The Gap this past July. All the windows of our minivan are rolled down, air-conditioning is on full blast, and we are off to the beach. I think this is the best way to end my summer.

Dad hasn't even parked or turned off the car when Anna and I unbuckle and explode out of the car. The cool salty breeze tickles my nose and tugs at my hair as a smile breaks on my face. The hot sun beats down as we quickly unpack the trunk and trudge down the alley to the big familiar brown house.

The four of us climb the brick wall. Mom helps me up and I can see the sparkling blue ocean that never fails to amaze me.



Natalie Bettendorf, 13
Berkeley, California



Emily Considine, 13
Half Moon Bay, California

"Natalie! Anna!" A little girl, who is around eight, runs over and gives me a huge hug. "Mommy, they're here!"

"OK, I'm coming!" Auntie Julia rushes over, her spiky brown hair damp, and she has on a cute black dress. Of course, she isn't *really* my aunt. But our families are so close that it is hard not to refer to each other as family.

Julia smiles and embraces my mom in a giant hug, and then my dad. "Welcome back, guys! Everyone's out on the beach."

We follow Julia onto the front porch of the house that faces the bluer-than-blue ocean. There isn't a cloud above in the sky, and tanned teenagers are tossing around a volleyball in the sand across the boardwalk.

"Natalie!" I spin around to see a cute blond girl, freckles sprinkled across her nose, her hair glowing strawberry blond in the sun.

I smile. "Ellie!" We share a hug. She is a year younger than me and we first bonded a few years ago over our love of reading and books. Ellie is Julia's niece. Her mom is Beth, who has two older boys, also: Chase, age fourteen, and Josh, age sixteen.

Kate tugs my hand. "Let's go to the beach, c'mon!"

I grin and glance over my shoulder at Julia, Mom, and Dad. Mom takes my bag, smiling, "Go on!"

It's a tradition. Ellie, Anna, Kate, and I race across the sand and see who can get to the water first. We grip hands as we check up and down the boardwalk to make sure there are no bikers or pedes-

trians coming, then we sprint across the asphalt and scramble over the three-foot concrete wall. I kick off my flip-flops and my feet sink into the warm sand. I can already feel my shoulders starting to get sunburned as Kate yells, "GO!"

We take off, trying to pick up our feet as much as possible so we don't get burned. Running through the sand is hard! It's really different from running over hard, solid ground. If you let your weight sink into your feet for more than two seconds, it's like sprinting through molasses.

We pass a volleyball game as Kate and Anna start falling behind. Now it is me versus Ellie. We flash mock-competitive looks at each other. I look down to see the sand growing darker and firmer, meaning it's wet and we are getting close to water. I could feel the balls of my feet throbbing. Ellie's face is red and she pants. I pump my sore legs faster, now able to run normally because the wet sand is more dense and packed tighter. Ellie and I splash into the refreshingly ice-cold ocean at the same time. We laugh, gasping and panting, as the waves lap at our knees. The hem of my dress brushes a passing wave, but it feels good.

Kate and Anna wave to us as we wade out of the water. They stand at the top of a sandy hill. Ellie and I start towards them, when a bucket of freezing water hits my back; Ellie and I scream.

We whirl around to see Chase and Josh holding two pails of ocean water, kneeling in laughter. With our entire backsides



Kate and Anna wave to us as we wade out of the water

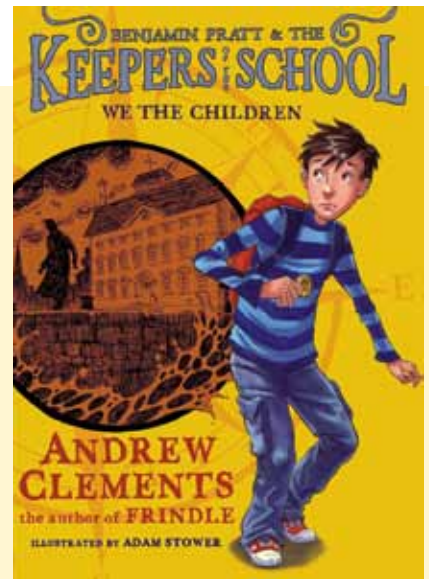
drenched, Ellie and I have found new energy even after the long sprint down to the water as we pursue Chase and Josh into the ocean. A wave rolls up and

splashes around my ankles as I tilt my head toward the turquoise sky and I realize my summer can't get any better than this. ❁

Book Review

By Madeline Hastie

We the Children (Benjamin Pratt and the Keepers of the School), by Andrew Clements; Atheneum Books for Young Readers: New York, 2011; \$6.99



Madeline Hastie, 10
Northfield, New Hampshire

ATHENEUM BOOKS, the publishing company, knew what they were doing when they published this mysterious and wonderful book by Andrew Clements.

I relate to Ben, the main character, a lot. Ben is friendly and outgoing. I am, too. Ben is also brave and nosy, and he likes to know what things mean and what others are doing. He always accepts a challenge and never gives up. He's confident and always knows he can do it.

I also feel close to Jill, another main character. She always is wondering who to take sides with. She knows what she should do, but when she tries she feels like her ideas are criticized. She's negative and overwhelmed sometimes, but then she feels really bad and apologizes. She becomes sweet, energetic, and bold.

When Ben and Jill find out the school they go to is going to be torn down, they feel like they must stop it. I would react the same way. I would feel upset and find a trustworthy teacher, though, to speak to a board meeting about my opinion. I wouldn't start being a detective like Ben and Jill until after the

teacher failed. Then I would look for clues to help me.


When Ben and Jill need to solve the clues, they spend a lot of time in the library to learn about the school's past. I would research the clues on the Internet. Jill did a tiny bit online. I would type in each clue and hope to find how they related to my school.

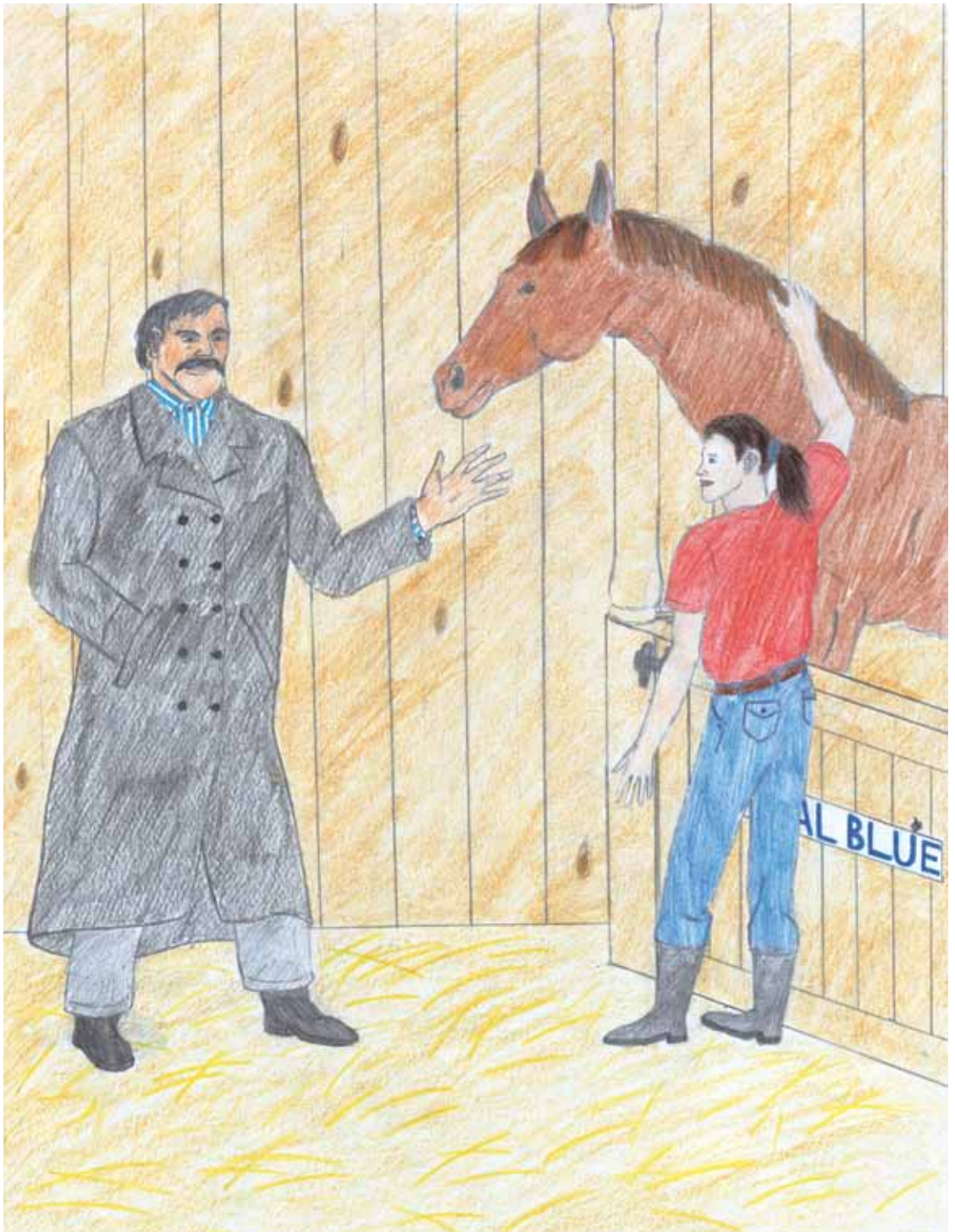
As for when the grouchy and scary janitor, Mr. Keane, stops Ben to give him the coin, I would have done the same. I would take the coin and promise to save the school, but I would not go straight to a friend to find out about a dead person who had their name on the coin. I would Google them.

Once I received the coin, I would feel scared and hopeless. I probably would go and forget about it until I had free time. If I heard that Mr. Keane had died, part of me would feel nervous because now I would be alone, which would make me go recruit a friend. Part of me would feel sad but would tell me that now, if I broke my promise, Mr. Keane would not know. Most of me would feel too sad to even think about the coin.

My favorite parts of the book were very touching. One was how Jill seemed to always understand how Ben felt and would try to make him joyful. The other was when Ben saved Robert's life. That made me think of Ben as heroic and kind.

It always made me angry when Robert bullied Ben. If I had been there, I would have told Robert what a bully he was and I would have stood up for Ben.

Overall, I would recommend this story to anyone who loves a mystery and conflicts that only tightly bonded friendship can solve. This book is heartwarming and touches your soul. 



"We'll see who the better horse is tomorrow, won't we?"

Royal Blue

By **Emma Callet**

Illustrated by **Charles Berg**

I PACED NERVOUSLY back and forth in front of Royal Blue's stall and wondered why Dad was taking so long talking to Mr. Fields. Mr. Fields wasn't going to buy Royal Blue even if he paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for the successful racehorse, I knew, since Dad had told me just that morning that he wouldn't sell. Dad turned down many offers already. Why wasn't he giving Mr. Fields just a flat-out no?

I stopped walking and patted Blue's satin nose, which was sticking out of the stall. The chestnut stallion was scheduled to race in the Kentucky Derby tomorrow, and since he had shown so well in races before, people from all over the country were coming to put in an offer before the race.

"We're not selling you," I said softly to Blue, looking up into his caramel-colored eyes. "You're going to run in our barn's colors tomorrow, boy. You can count on that."

Finally, Mr. Fields appeared from the office and walked down the aisle. He looked a bit disgruntled, which I gathered to mean that Blue was still ours.

"Fine thoroughbred," he commented, giving Royal Blue a small sugar cube from his coat pocket. "Good luck tomorrow."

"Thank you," I replied a little frostily, wondering why Mr. Fields was bothering to talk to me. When he had made offers on some of our other thoroughbreds, he had always ignored me.

"You're going to need it. You know King of the Wind, my prized race horse, will be competing tomorrow, and it is well known that he has won just as many races as Royal Blue!"



Emma Callet, 12
Scottsdale, Arizona



Charles Berg, 13
Los Angeles, California

My heart jumped to my throat. King of the Wind was one of the winningest horses in the Derby, and although I knew Royal Blue was just as fast, he was recovering from a strained tendon. It took months of rehabilitation and training until Blue was fit enough to run again.

"Well, good luck to you, sir," I said, glad that I had a decent poker face. "We'll see who the better horse is tomorrow, won't we?"

Mr. Fields chuckled. "Yes, I think we will." He smiled and left the barn, still laughing under his breath.

I grimaced from his mocking me and wished I thought of a good retort, but I was consoled by the fact that Royal Blue might win, letting us have the last laugh.

Dad strolled over to me at Blue's stall and smiled. "Well, Sam, we still have Royal Blue."

"That's great, Dad," I said, forcing a smile, not wanting him to know I was worried that King of the Wind might breeze ahead of us at the first of the Triple Crown races.

"Don't worry, hon. Think of how Royal Blue has won so many other times." Dad patted me on the back, seeing through my front. I nodded absently, thinking of just the opposite, of how many Blue *hadn't* won without anything to explain for a poor performance.

"Good night, Blue. See you at the track, buddy." Dad stroked Blue's nose once before turning to leave the barn.

"Sleep tight, Blue! You've got a long day ahead of you, boy," I said, smiling

and following Dad.

THE DAY OF the race dawned bright and early for everyone at the track. We arrived at the barn before any spectators were around, yet before we were half-way through with grooming and saddling Blue, people started milling around, wanting autographs from trainers and jockeys and snapshots of the horses. I was Blue's groom *and* the daughter of the owner; so as I walked him to stretch his legs, I had to put up with reporters asking question after question after question.

"Miss Sam Kinsley," one reporter called out, running up to us as we walked. "How do you think your chances of winning are today, compared to your biggest rival, King of the Wind?" I thought carefully, knowing anything I said could be twisted into anything the reporter wanted.

"Well, racing is a gamble, and anything could happen on the track today. King of the Wind will be a threat, but I'm sure we'll be up to the challenge," I replied. The reporter wrote this down, but before he could press me more, another reporter came on the other side of Blue with another question.

"Mr. Fields, King of the Wind's owner, is boasting that his horse can win the Derby, as well as the Triple Crown. Do you think this is so, Miss Kinsley?"

"Every horse out there has a chance today," I said simply, knowing that was the most diplomatic response I could give. Luckily, I returned to the barn by this time and was able to get the door open

and me inside. However, it isn't so easy to fit a thousand-pound animal inside a small crack; so in widening it, a few other people followed me in. Thankfully, it was only Mr. Williams and Mr. Ridge, two friends of my father's, and Jim Crawly, a reporter who respected our privacy and never published anything about us without asking our permission.

"Well, hello, Jim," Mom said. She was dressed in a pretty print dress and a blue floral hat.

"How d'you do, ma'am," Jim politely replied.

"Very well, thank you. I'm sorry I can't stop to chat. I'll save you a seat though."

"In the winner's circle?" Jim quipped back confidently. Mom left, and since everyone else seemed pretty busy, I decided I'd go warm up Blue. I led him to the exercise track and swung up on his saddle.

"Hello, *Miss Kinsley*."

I stiffened at the voice behind me. Carl Davis, the head exercise rider for the horses at Mr. Fields's stable, rode up behind me on King of the Wind. Carl was definitely not my favorite person and, since he always condescended to me because I was just a groom, I avoided him as much as possible.

"Your job is on the ground, not in the saddle," he sneered.

Blue, full of energy, reared up to his competitor, challenging him with a loud call. King of the Wind faced him and neighed back, both horses ignoring the riders on their backs. Carl shouted something incoherent and brought his crop

down hard on his horse's flank, making him whinny again, this time from fright. Blue, shying from the whip, crab-stepped sideways. I steadied myself with Blue's mane and calmed him instantly with my voice, but King of the Wind bolted down the track, and Carl tumbled off into the dirt. Having dashed speedily around the ring, King of the Wind cantered past me. I quickly leaned over and grabbed his reins, stopping him in his tracks.

"Everything's OK, Windy, calm down," I murmured, glancing around at the other riders who had stopped their horses to watch as Mr. Fields had made his way to the fallen Carl and started to berate him.

I rode up to Mr. Fields, and he looked up angrily and confusedly.

"Pardon me," I said, handing King of the Wind's reins off to the red-faced Carl with a wry smile. I quickly rode off before Mr. Fields could recover and start yelling at *me*.

I threw my leg over and dismounted, hurrying Blue along so no reporters could stop me on the way.

"All ready?" Joel asked when I returned to the barn.

Joel Shaw was our jockey and was dressed up in our farm's silks, blue and white stripes. Dad gave Joel a leg up, and I went to Blue's head. It took a lot of persuading to make Dad let me lead Blue to the track, but since I was the groom, he relented. After handing off Blue to the lead pony, I dashed up to the grandstand and looked around for my parents and friends.

"Sam!" Jim Crawly called, waving me over. I slipped into the empty seat between Dad and the keyed-up reporter, who loved writing about Royal Blue more than any other race horse on the field.

"**T**HERE HE IS!" I exclaimed as the horses walked past. Blue held his head high, completely confident that he would sweep the field easily as ever. I wished I could feel as confident as Blue looked, but there was still a twinge of doubt when I saw King of the Wind prance past. Yet when I saw his jockey, I started! What on earth was Carl Davis doing on his back? Jim Crawly answered the question written on my face.

"After the last big race Blue won, Mr. Fields fired his jockey and hired Carl, who just got his jockeying license."

Seeing Carl's arrogant and cocky expression made me want Blue to win even more.

"One back!" the announcer called out, meaning there was only one horse left to load: Blue. Being on the outside gave him a disadvantage, but he was known for coming around the outside to first or second place.

The seconds of silence before the bell were always suspenseful, but this time, the entire stand seemed to be waiting on edge for the clang that would break the tension and send the horses flying.

BBBBRRRRRIIIIIINNNNNNGGG
GGGG!!!!!!!

I jumped from the noise as the gates burst open, and the horses charged down

the field.

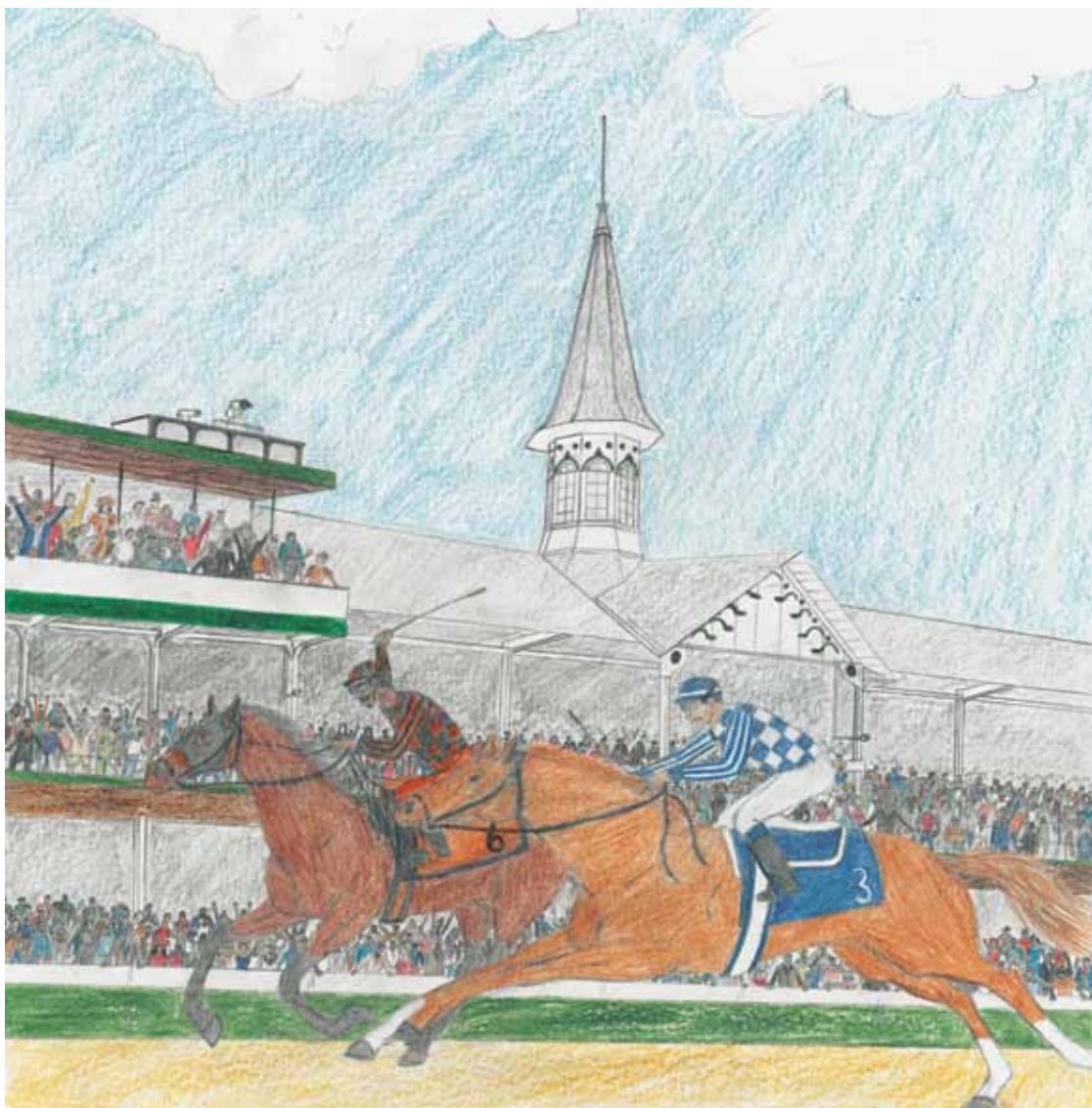
"Night Magic is in first place, holding an easy lead. Ace of Hearts is coming up behind with King of the Wind at his tail. Royal Blue is taking his place at the back," the announcer said with monotone precision. I sat on the edge of my seat, willing with all my might that Blue could hurry and move up! Dad's knuckles were turning white from the strength with which he gripped his seat, and Jim's eyes were open wide, ignoring the pad and pencil on his lap.

"They're halfway around!" the announcer continued, his voice rising in excitement. "Night Magic is losing his lead! Now, King of the Wind is in first! Royal Blue is creeping up to third, but he's pushing for the lead. It seems to be a race between these three, while Ace of Hearts and the rest of the pack are falling behind!"

Royal Blue stretched out his legs and pounded the field with his long strides, pushing his nose ahead of Night Magic's. There was only King of the Wind left, his hindquarters pumping the dirt in Blue's face. Then—Blue drew even. I wanted Blue to win so hard, and I couldn't stand the suspense. All of a sudden, Carl raised his whip high—my heart sickened and plummeted. One horse flew down the rest of the track to cross the finish line by three lengths.

That horse was Royal Blue.

"He won, he won, he won!!!" I screamed, hugging everyone around me in frantic excitement. The released nerves



I wanted Blue to win so hard, and I couldn't stand the suspense

made me so dizzy that everything was a huge blur until we were down in the winner's circle, and Blue's noble head came into view.

"I knew you'd win," I whispered proudly to Blue as the wreath of roses was draped across his glistening, high-carried neck. "I just knew it." ❁

The Jewel Case

By Ruhi Sah



Ruhi Sah, 11
Brooklyn, New York

I see you in a bowl
Tantalizing me.

I pick you up
Your smoothness

Goes unnoticed
As I cut you into quarters

Eagerly trying to get to
Your ripeness.

You are a red jewel case
With red jewels inside you,

Shimmering
Like drops of blood.

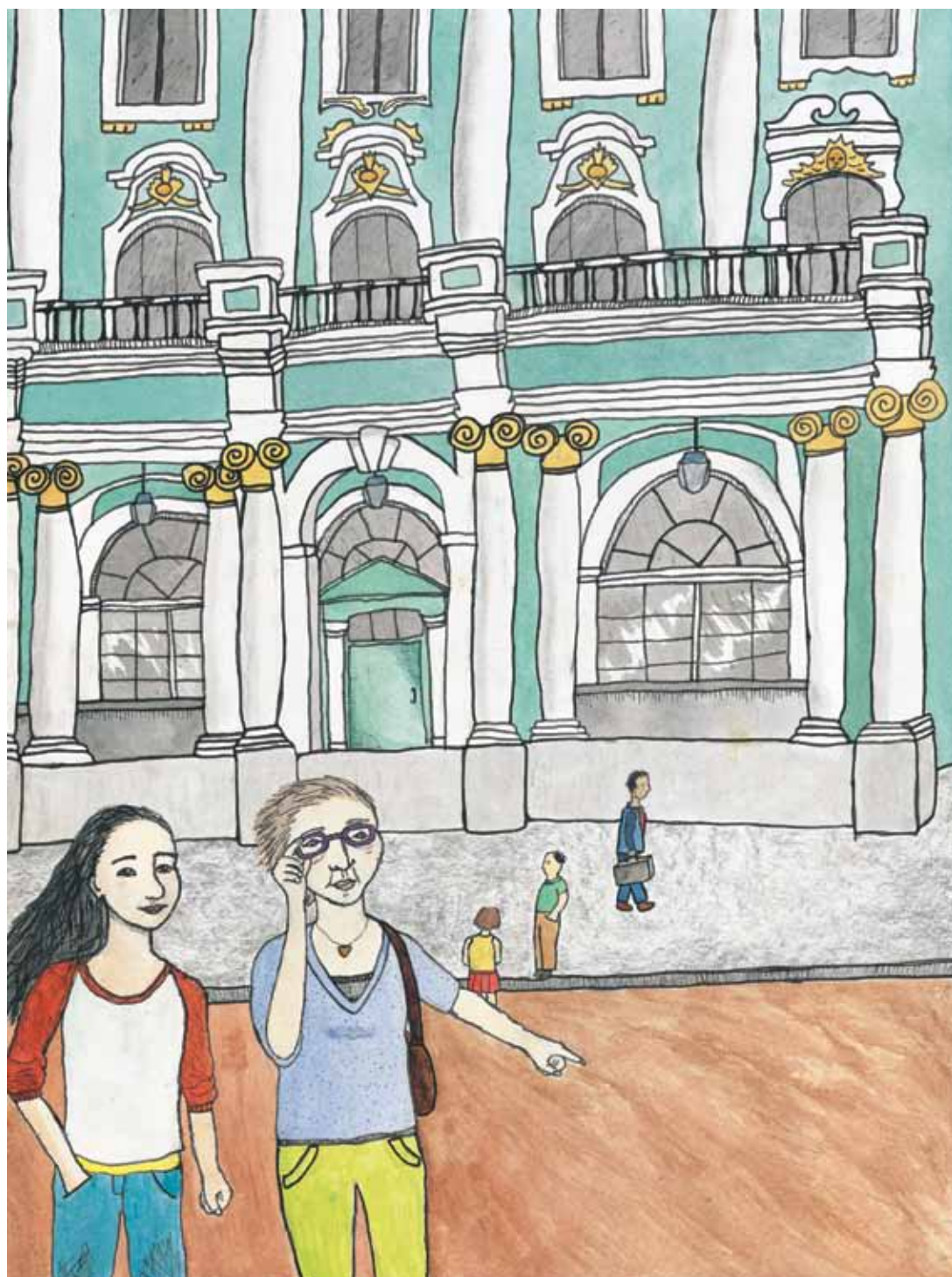
I take one jewel
I put it to my lips

I smell nothing
But taste the

Heavenliness
Sweetness

Deliciousness
Of the

Red pomegranate.



I saw the places where my parents grew up

I'm Home

By Marie-Rose Sheinerman

Illustrated by Ava Blum-Carr

“**L**AST BOARDING CALL for Flight 31 to Moscow, Russia. Last call for Flight 31.” The JFK PA machine was loud and clear, not fuzzy like usual, and I felt pained as I acknowledged that it was time to say goodbye to Dad.

“Dad, promise me that you’ll take care of Mom and yourself. Promise me you’ll see the doctor about that repeating headache problem. Promise me you’ll be careful when driving and call me every day. Do you promise?” I demanded, as if I was a hundred-year-old woman having a nervous breakdown, instead of an eleven-year-old girl about to go on an adventurous trip. I bit my fingernails. Is everything I am saying going straight through him?

My father laughed a bit, but my glum stare forced him to stop. “I promise,” he swore, his tone grim and serious. The corners of his eyes were creased with concern and his face seemed to be asking me, “What about *you*? Will *you* be careful? Do *you* promise?”

“Agreed then,” I answered, matter-of-factly. “In return, I promise to be smart in Russia.”

I kissed him on the cheek and said, “See you in a month,” giddy with anticipation of my upcoming travel adventures. I headed towards my grandmother who was already showing the flight attendant our tickets. I could not believe that in less than ten hours I would be halfway across the world!

A MONTH LATER, I was back in that same airport, getting off that almost-same flight—Moscow to New York. New



Marie-Rose Sheinerman, 12
New York, New York



Ava Blum-Carr, 12
Hadley, Massachusetts

York! I had missed this place too much. I thought of when we had traveled through Russia by boat. I remembered all those hours when I gazed at the serene, seemingly endless surface of the River Volga, in which the trees surrounding it cast their long, dark shadows. I felt the water spray from the fast-moving boat against my skin, heard the seagulls squawking in the air, smelled the soothing aroma of forest pines drifting through the breeze. Yet all I could think about was where my parents were at that moment and how gloomy I felt without them by my side.

How's New York in general? Had the fireworks for Independence Day burst through the night in a flash of beauty? Were the lakes in Central Park beginning to cover with moss-green algae? Had the Con Edison workers finished the construction on Second Avenue? What new exhibits were on display at the Metropolitan Museum? I had wondered.

Most of all, I recalled that first homesick night in Moscow when I couldn't fall asleep no matter what. I tossed and turned all night, looking out the stained, cracked window into the pitch-black street, where shadows fell like creepy ghosts, breathing in my ear, "You don't belong here. You don't belong here." Grandma said I couldn't sleep because of the jetlag, but I didn't think so.

But my trip was far from being a weep fest. In fact, I had an incredible time. I saw the places where my parents grew up. I saw fascinating museums, the cobblestone streets where Catherine the Great

took her morning strolls 300 years ago. I visited the building where all the Russian cosmonauts are trained. I walked through St. Petersburg at one o'clock in the morning during the spectacular White Nights. I stepped into abbeys built in the ninth century. Sometimes, walking from street to street, one memorable experience to another, I'd be too awed to even put my feelings into words.

Nevertheless, when I sat on that plane back to America, I was eager to get back to New York. I couldn't wait to see Dad picking me up at the airport, telling me how much he had missed me.

Therefore, when we got off the plane, it was all a blur—I was too overwhelmed to notice anything. Not the swooshing of turning-on cell phones, not the comforting smell of freshly baked blueberry muffins coming from duty-free cafés, not the rough feeling of people pushing disrespectfully past you. I felt as if Dad was not more than an inch away, as if I could touch him already, as if I heard his voice directly above my head, as if all I had to do was reach up—and there he'd be.

"Come on. Come on!" I told Grandma impatiently. "Hurry up!" We squeezed through the crowds of people heading towards the big traffic jam—the customs inspection. I was still in my daze though—imagining seeing them: my parents and New York. I could almost imagine every feature of my mother's face—and the structure of every tower that scrapes the sky above New York City.

"Next," one of boundary inspectors

called. "Stall 22, please."

"Cool!" I whispered to Grandma. "That's my lucky number."

"OK, kiddo, let's go," she replied sarcastically.

We walked towards the stall. The man sitting in it had a shrewd, wrinkled old face with deep, wicked dimples in his smile. He sneered at us and ordered, "Documents," as if he was an evil king and we, his helpless subjects. My grandmother dug through her purse for the passports and the declaration slips that were filled out on the plane. She handed them over to him. He snatched them from her as though the papers were a gun and poor Grandma was about to fire. He looked through the papers for so long that I began to wonder if he fell asleep. I wanted to ask, Is there a problem? but I didn't. That would be rude.

At last, he sighed as if he could not wait to get off duty and said, "You need a document providing the permission of the parents."

"Yes, yes, I have it," assured Grandma. She dug back into her purse and fished out the neatly folded piece of paper. "Here you go." He grabbed it so fast that I was sure it would rip—but it did not. He examined it thoroughly. As he looked up, I noticed that he wore an enormous amount of hair gel, and sweat covered his forehead—or were those gel beads dripping down his temple? I almost got a feeling that he took pleasure in the conversation that was about to take place, and I started to develop a slight hatred towards him.

"This is a copy. It doesn't work. You need the original," he uttered, his mind obviously elsewhere.

"The Russian consulate took the original, sir. This is the only one that we have. I assure you that there is an original, though. You can call the parents if you refuse to believe the truth I speak," explained my grandmother, rather sternly. She always talks as if she is from the eighteenth century when she is nervous.

He mockingly rolled his eyes, the way bullies do right before they deliver the final blow. At this point, I was terrified and utterly confused. I didn't understand what the problem was. Is he saying he is sending us back to Russia? I readied myself for the torturous news. He turned to me and asked, "What is your name?"

I was bewildered! What is my name? Why didn't he just look at the passport? "Marie-Rose Sheinerman," I answered. By the look in his eyes I could tell that he was wondering about the hesitation in my voice and whether or not I belong here. A horrible thought passed through my mind: I belong nowhere.

"Where is your father?" he asked suspiciously.

"By the baggage claim. He's waiting for us!" I could not help but be irritated.

"And where is your mother?" he continued the questioning.

"At home," I answered. That is so obvious! And why does it matter anyway?

"And when is your birthday?"

This was getting ridiculous! "May 28th, 2000, sir," I hissed.



I ran like I have never run before

"And your father's birthday?"

"January 22nd, 1971."

He rapidly typed something into his computer and said, "Follow me."

"What?" I exclaimed. "Where are we going?!"

He did not respond and just walked on, so I had nothing left to do but shuffle after him. I clung to Grandma's arm. "What's going on?" I whimpered. Although I was afraid and intimidated by this man, I could not help but be curious of our destination.

"I don't know, but be quiet, or we'll never get out of there," she shushed me. Finally, the inspector stopped and motioned us into a room. The gray room. The isolation zone.

"Sit down over there and wait to be called," barked the inspector. I clenched my jaw from the anger at him but said nothing. I glanced towards the room, planning to turn quickly around and ask the inspector why we were here, but I froze and stared at the desolateness filling the air.

The first thing I thought of when I saw it was grief. A woman with three little girls sat in the corner sobbing. Other people were just waiting to be called, their backs bent, their faces smudged from tears, their dignity dented from fear. On the opposite side of the room, customs inspectors talked with the "suspicious individuals." One of the jailers yelled at a person, "Are you kidding me, you went to Cuba? Are you kidding me, you went to Cuba? Are you kidding me? Are you? Please tell me you are." I was only to later discover that

all Americans are forbidden to go to Cuba and this particular person probably had a good reason to be yelled at, but right then I just thought that the horrid inspector must have lost his mind to be shouting so viciously at another human being.

I turned around to ask the inspector how long the wait would be, but he was already gone—left to degrade another poor soul. I could still make out the clicking of his shoes down the hall.

Grandma and I sat down in the gray chairs of the gray room. They had scratchings, graffiti, and looked generally beat up, as though they were about to break. We waited for what seemed like forever. During that time, all I could think of were Mom and Dad. Hugging them and kissing them and the possibility of not being able to do that ever again. From time to time I looked up at Grandma desperately, maybe even expectantly, while she reassured, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. This is just a mistake. Don't look so agitated—don't, don't cry."

All of a sudden, I heard, "Marie-Rose? Marie-Rose Sheinerman?"

"Yes, yes, I'm here," I called. I stood up and headed towards the bald man with a surprised smile across his face. The enthusiasm in my voice amazed even me.

I grinned—this man right away reminded me of the wizard that resolves all of the conflicts at the end of a fairy tale. Suddenly, I felt calm, I felt safe. He soothingly said, "I'm just going to talk to you a little bit, OK?"

"Sure."

"What school do you go to?" he inquired.

"I just graduated from P.S. 6 and will be attending East Side Middle starting September."

"Oh, my kid goes there. That's funny. Do you know Billy Stewart?"

Frankly, I don't remember exactly what he told me, but I do remember the feeling of knowing that everything would be just how I wanted it; that soon, ten minutes from now, five minutes from now, right this second, I would see my father and mother and New York City.

"You can go," he said in the end with a laugh. He must have been thinking that the inspector who brought me there hadn't done his work too well.

"Thank you. Thank you so very much," I exclaimed.

WE'RE OUT! I could hardly believe it! "Let's go, let's go, Grandma!" I shouted. We dashed through the crowds, all of which were rushing to the baggage claim. Dozens of people were waiting there, with signs displaying messages like, "Anybody need a limo taxi?" or "Welcome home, Clare Winston!" I spotted my father, standing in the front row, anxiously searching the diminishing crowds with his eyes, and I ran to him. I ran like I have never run before. Did I care that Grandma was falling behind, disappearing from view in the crowds? Did I care that alarmed people were tumbling out

of my way? Did I care that everyone was staring judgmentally as I leaped into my father's arms? Did I care the tiniest bit? Nope.

I rushed into his embrace and cried and cried. Tears rolled down my cheeks, pushing each other down, getting my father's checkered T-shirt all wet. I cried and cried; I could not stop myself. From time to time I looked up to see his astonished face and stammered, "I missed you so much." I continued crying as we got into the car. Grandma was bewildered by my reaction and I felt guilty for making her feel unwanted, as if I had not enjoyed myself with her, but there was nothing I could do to stop myself.

I sobbed as we passed all the wonders of New York, reliving the discovery of their beauty. I had never appreciated the everyday New York-ish circumstances as I did then. I realized that before I had taken everything significant in my life for granted. I thought about the customs officers. They didn't do anything terrible. They were just doing their job—making sure that no criminal gets into my country. Why had the experience bothered me so much?

"Oh, the Brooklyn Bridge. Oh, the Chrysler Building. Oh, Uno's Chicago Grill!" and tears kept welling and rolling without my will as I stuttered out exclamations. But most often I would falter—and this sentence brought the most tears and the most joy—

"I'm home."



The Nature Walk

By Tanay Kumta

I shut the door behind me
Exasperated and overwhelmed
And start walking briskly
As I walk
I hear crickets chirping like a marching band
I hear leaves crunching under me
Soothing me over my bad day at school
I feel the cool, fresh air across my face
As I walk forward
I smell the sweet smell of the nighttime dew
Just like after a rainy day
I slowly inch forward daydreaming
Feeling like I am on the top of the world
I cannot describe it
It is simply the feeling of a nature walk



Tanay Kumta, 12
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Discovering Opportunities

By **Ocyin Davis**

Illustration by **Onalee Higgins**

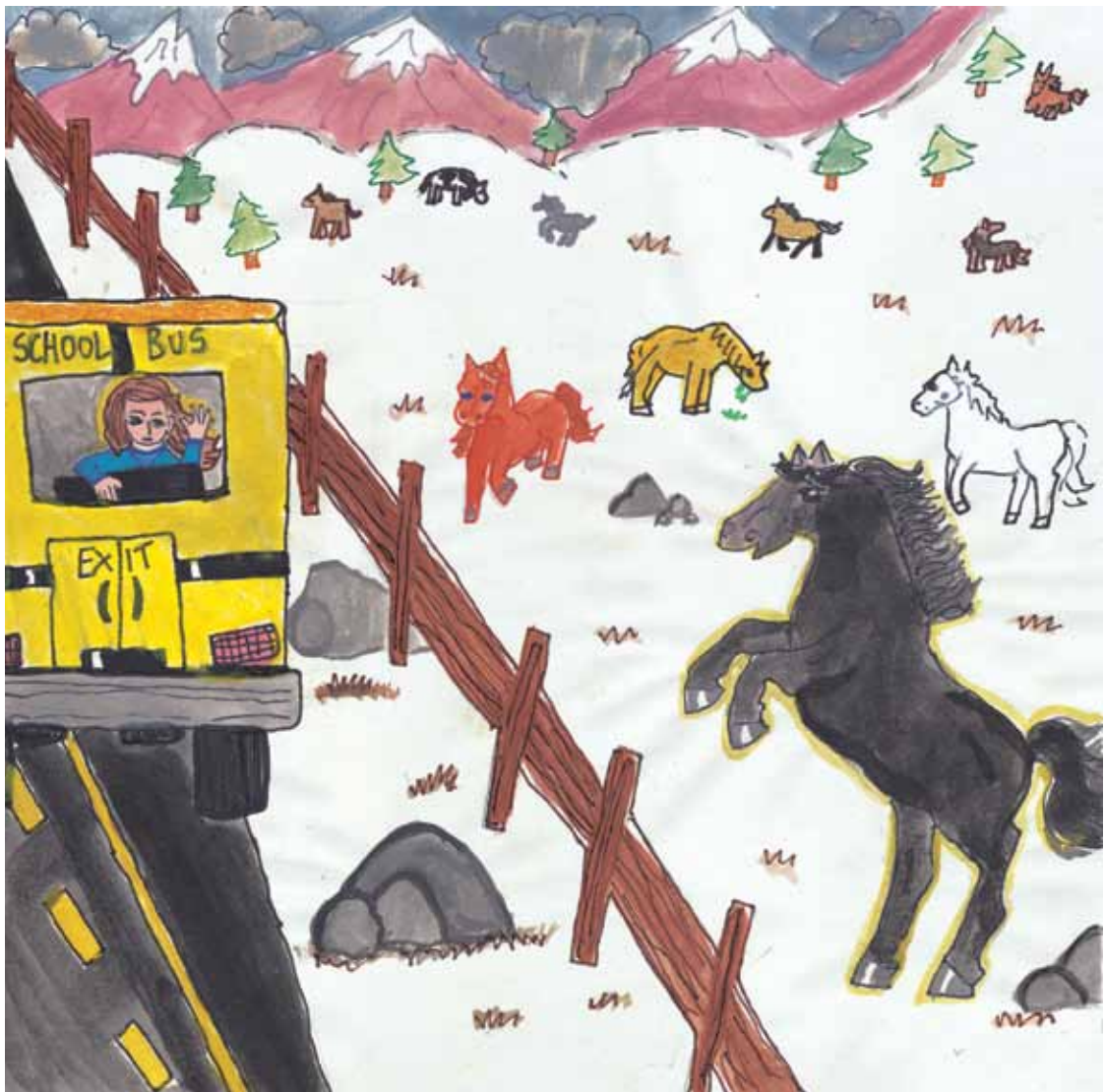


Ocyin Davis, 11
Satellite Beach, Florida



Onalee Higgins, 11
Galesville, Wisconsin

WHERE I LIVE, the seasons come and go as they please, along with the day and night. Everything has been the same for as long as I can remember. The daily routine of waking up, brushing my teeth, and getting on the bus only to be disturbed by teenagers seemed like a part of my life now. After getting off of the bus to go in to my school, no matter what grade I was in, it never seemed to change. Whether I was in primary school, or middle school, everything always seemed the same. After school finally had ended, I would board the bus once again and look out the window. Everything passing by in such a blur made me wonder if anything would ever change. As we passed by the once lush field of grass that was now reduced to nothing but brown stubble due to the snowy winter, I saw a few horses. Some of the horses' coats were as white as the cleanest alabaster fabric. Others were as red as rustic bricks on a café's wall. They always seemed so peaceful, so carefree. It was like they didn't care about what was coming tomorrow. Whether it was a blizzard or excruciating heat, they didn't care. Oh, how I would love to be a horse. Never going back and doing the same annoying routine thing, always moving along and never looking back. These horses were the only thing keeping me going for the next day. They made me think to myself, that no matter what challenges I faced the next day, I would see the horses. There was one in particular that inspired me more, though. It was different from any other horse in that herd. Its hair was as jet black as a clear night with a new



This is the horse that inspired me the most

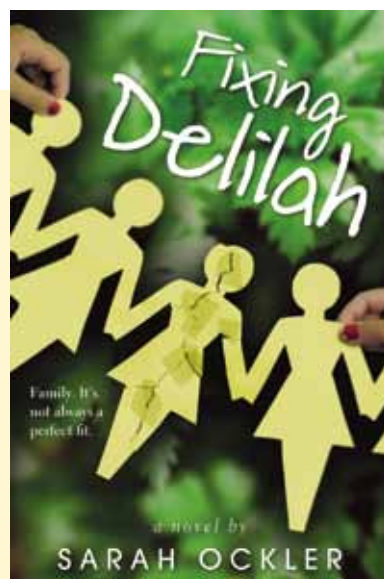
moon. It just seemed so wild, so free. It was so carefree that, compared to every other horse in that herd, it seemed like it had just drunk seven Monster Energy Drinks. This is the horse that inspired me the most. It made me think that maybe I needed to make some changes and be-

come as carefree as the jet-black horse that stood out in the crowd of alabaster and red horses. And then I realized that all of the other horses were me, and the jet-black horse was just an opportunity, somewhere inside of me, waiting to happen. 🌀

Book Review

By Anna Vinitsky

Fixing Delilah, by Sarah Ockler; Little, Brown and Company; New York, 2010; \$16.99



Anna Vinitsky, 12
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania


SARAH OCKLER's *Fixing Delilah* follows Delilah Hannaford (a sixteen-year-old girl) as she discovers her family's secrets and learns the true importance of family. The novel starts with Delilah and her boyfriend, Finn, who do not like each other but are dating. Delilah, a slightly arrogant girl, is going back to Vermont to bury her grandmother. She hasn't seen her since she was eight (because of a fight between Delilah's mother, Claire, and her grandmother). While in Vermont, Delilah starts digging up secrets that Aunt Rachel, her grandmother, and her mother, buried deep. She learns the cause of the fight that split the family apart, the true story about why she didn't have a dad, and the mystery behind Aunt Stephanie's death at eighteen. She also meets her old friend Patrick, and Sarah Ockler surprises us with some pleasant romance. The book deals with three main themes that are relevant to most teenagers: secrets, love, and the true meaning of family.

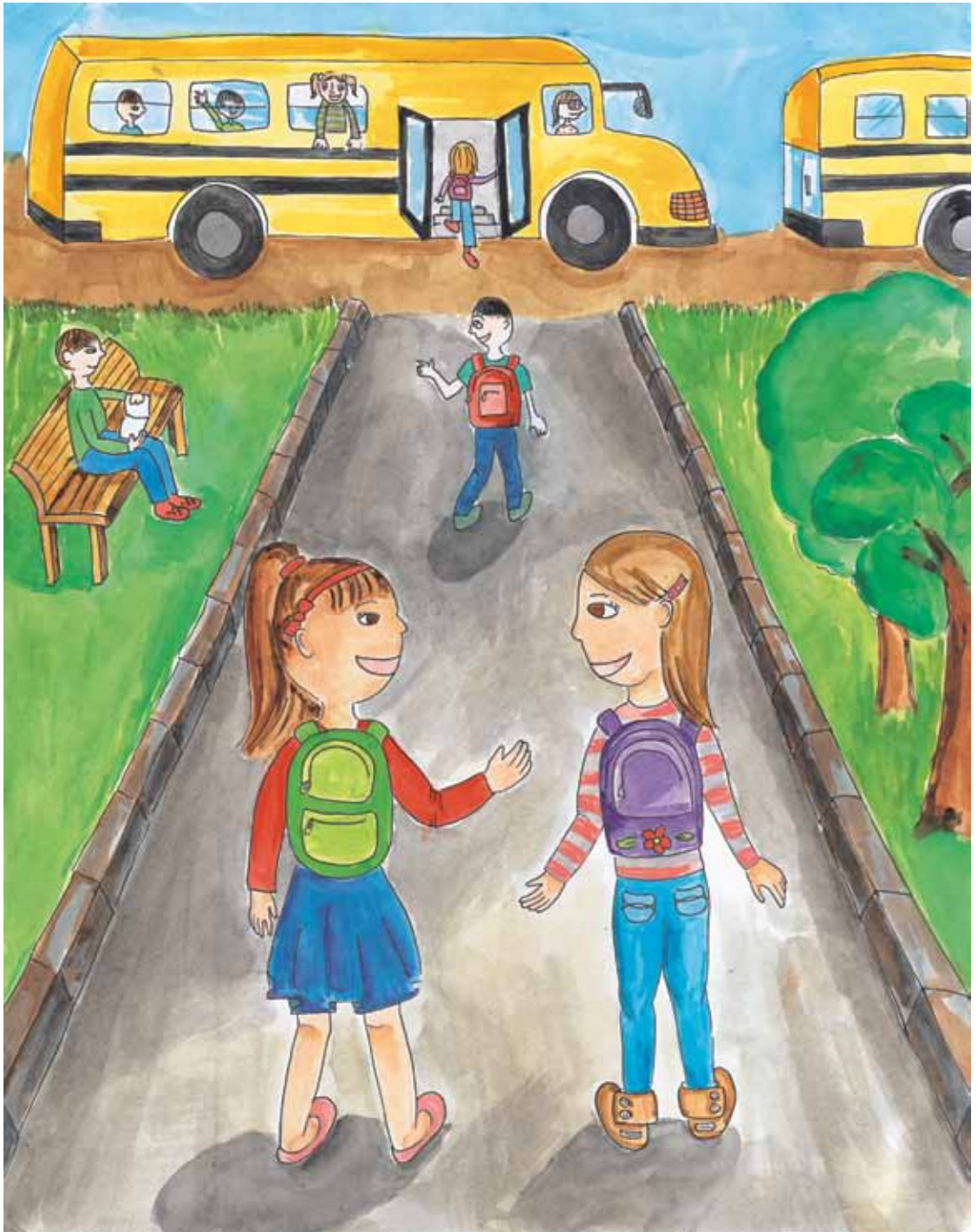
I think most readers of *Fixing Delilah* can relate to Delilah growing up without a father. Unfortunately, I know a lot of kids whose parents are divorced, and I can't help wondering about how hard it must be for them to adapt to their lives. Also, I'm

sure there are those who experienced a similar situation to the Hannaford Family Fight because, as it says on the cover of the book: “Family. It’s not always a perfect fit.” Sometimes family members just don’t get along. My only problem with the fight was its length (eight years is half of Delilah’s life!), and even that was clarified when I learned more about the grandmother.

I could relate to Aunt Rachel because she reminded me of the bystander. She knew about the secrets and wanted to tell Delilah because it was the right thing to do, but Claire had told her not to. I was like Aunt Rachel once when a boy in my class was being bullied. I knew that the right thing to do was to speak up for him, but I was silent. In addition to seeing myself in Aunt Rachel, I saw myself in Delilah sometimes because I can be selfish and uncompassionate. It made me realize how unlikable I must be during some occasions. I didn’t always like Delilah, so I imagine my parents don’t always like the way I act.

As for the love theme, Sarah Ockler was clever to include Finn, in order to contrast Delilah’s relationship with him with her later relationship with Patrick, an eighteen-year-old boy and a childhood friend of Delilah’s. At some times during *Fixing Delilah* I was almost crying because of the beauty of their romance and the sweet innocence of it. I didn’t think their romance was cheesy. I found the author’s descriptions unique and touching, and I felt like this was the time her writing truly stood out and shone.

I went through many emotions while reading *Fixing Delilah*. At times I wanted to cry because it was sad, at times because it was beautiful, and at times because I was laughing my head off. The themes were very easy to relate to. Here’s one of my favorite quotes from *Fixing Delilah*, which proves the author’s remarkable humor. “‘I’ll go,’ Rachel says. ‘Need anything specific? Milk? Toilet paper? Compassion, maybe? I’ll get a bunch. I probably have a coupon.’” 



I never knew that I could be so worried about my brother

Missing

By **Ruby Dietz**

Illustrated by Isabel Won

LITTLE BROTHERS are so annoying. Sure, you usually care about them when they're hurt or crying or something like that. But in my opinion, they're just crazy little things that claim to be related to us. I never knew that I could be so worried about my brother.

THE SMILING SUN shone brightly down on my back as I walked happily down the sidewalk. My friend Audrey strolled along beside me, chatting cheerily. The sunny sky was a beautiful, brilliant blue. We reached some tall, black steps and climbed them. But I wasn't fully ready for the scene inside.

Sounds of laughter and loud voices filled my ears as I stepped into the vehicle of madness. Feet were stuck out as Audrey and I hurried to our seats in the back. Someone grabbed my backpack, and I shook him off. I ignored a shout of "Hey Ruby!" that was quickly lost in the tumultuous land of chaos surrounding me.

This place is also known as the bus.

Kids lounged on seats, talking and laughing. Windows were opened wide, and arms hung out of them. KISS FM blared from the speakers.

I reached my assigned seat, following close at Audrey's heels. I couldn't stay in the front of the bus any longer. I plopped my backpack and water bottle on the floor at my feet with a *clunk* and collapsed. There was always a wait of about two or three minutes before the bus started moving.



Ruby Dietz, 12
Austin, Texas



Isabel Won, 12
Belle Mead, New Jersey

Audrey and I sit in the second-to-last seat on the bus. My other friend, Ulan, usually sits across the aisle from us with a fourth-grader named Katherine.

"Is everybody on the bus?" our driver, Ms. Toni, yelled in her low, scratchy voice over the hubbub.

"Yes!" several kids yelled back.

I decided to do my duty as an older sister. "*Abraham!! Are you on the bus?*" I hol-lered.

There was no answer. The other kids kept talking.

"Abraham!" I shouted again, my voice softer and more worried than before. He still didn't respond. I sat on my knees and scoured the rows of kids. There was no sign of my brother's curly black-haired head.

Panic surged through my veins. "Abraham isn't on the bus," I told Ulan and Audrey. They looked almost as panicked as I felt.

"We have to tell the bus driver," Ulan insisted. I rose from my seat, but Ulan was ahead of me. She had already taken three steps toward the front of the bus. "Excuse m..." she shouted, but was immediately cut off. There was a loud roar of the engine and a hiss of exhaust. The bus lurched forward, almost making Ulan lose her balance. We had started moving.

"No!" I half yelled. I looked frantically out of the back window at my school getting farther and farther away each second and leaving my brother behind.

"Oh. My. Gosh. I can't believe that she *left*," I said, partly to myself and partly to

my friends.

"I know!" exclaimed Audrey, trying to be supportive.

The bus rounded a corner just then, and even though my school was out of sight I looked out of the back window again like a girl in some sappy romance movie, waiting for her soldier to come home.

The whole bus ride my friends tried to convince me that Abraham would be OK. I tried to convince myself, too.

Abraham will be all right, I thought. People have talked about what to do if you miss the bus. He knows to go to the office and call our parents. He'll be *fine*. But that didn't make me feel any better. I was still worried.

Audrey and Ulan gently urged the topic of conversation away from my brother missing the bus until we were talking about something completely different. I knew that they were trying to distract me, make me forget about the problem at hand, and for that I was grateful. How could the beautiful day have gone so wrong?

The sun, which was usually smiling, seemed to frown upon me. The clear blue skies showing through an open window mocked me as I slumped down in my seat. "You lost your brother, you lost your brother." My stomach felt hollow and my heart felt heavy. Anxiety possessed me like a hidden devil. For some odd reason, everything around me seemed silent, like I was in my own personal underworld of anxiety.

It's OK, Ruby, I told myself. It wasn't your fault. You didn't know that Abraham would miss the bus. That was his responsibility. But criticizing my brother just made me feel worse. Even though I was eleven and Abraham ten, and I usually act like I don't like him very much (and sometimes I actually don't), I can be very protective of him, even if I'm the one doing the criticizing.

Every now and then I would glance out the back window of the bus without really realizing I was doing it, as if my brother would magically appear behind it, yelling for the bus to slow down so he could climb in. But the logical part inside me knew that would never happen.

Finally, the bus lurched to a head-spinning stop on King Street. This was where Audrey and I got off. I gathered up my stuff, hurriedly hugged Ulan, and rushed down the aisle. Some kids said goodbye, but I ignored them. I jumped down the last few steps of the bus and ran to my mom, who was waiting for me.

"Mom!" I said urgently. "Abraham didn't get on the bus!"

My mother's expression changed into

one that she used when I was kidding about something.

"Oh really?" she asked, her eyes bright and smiling like they always were when someone joked.

The anxiety and worry I had recently felt inside me quickly turned to anger and frustration. Why didn't she believe me?

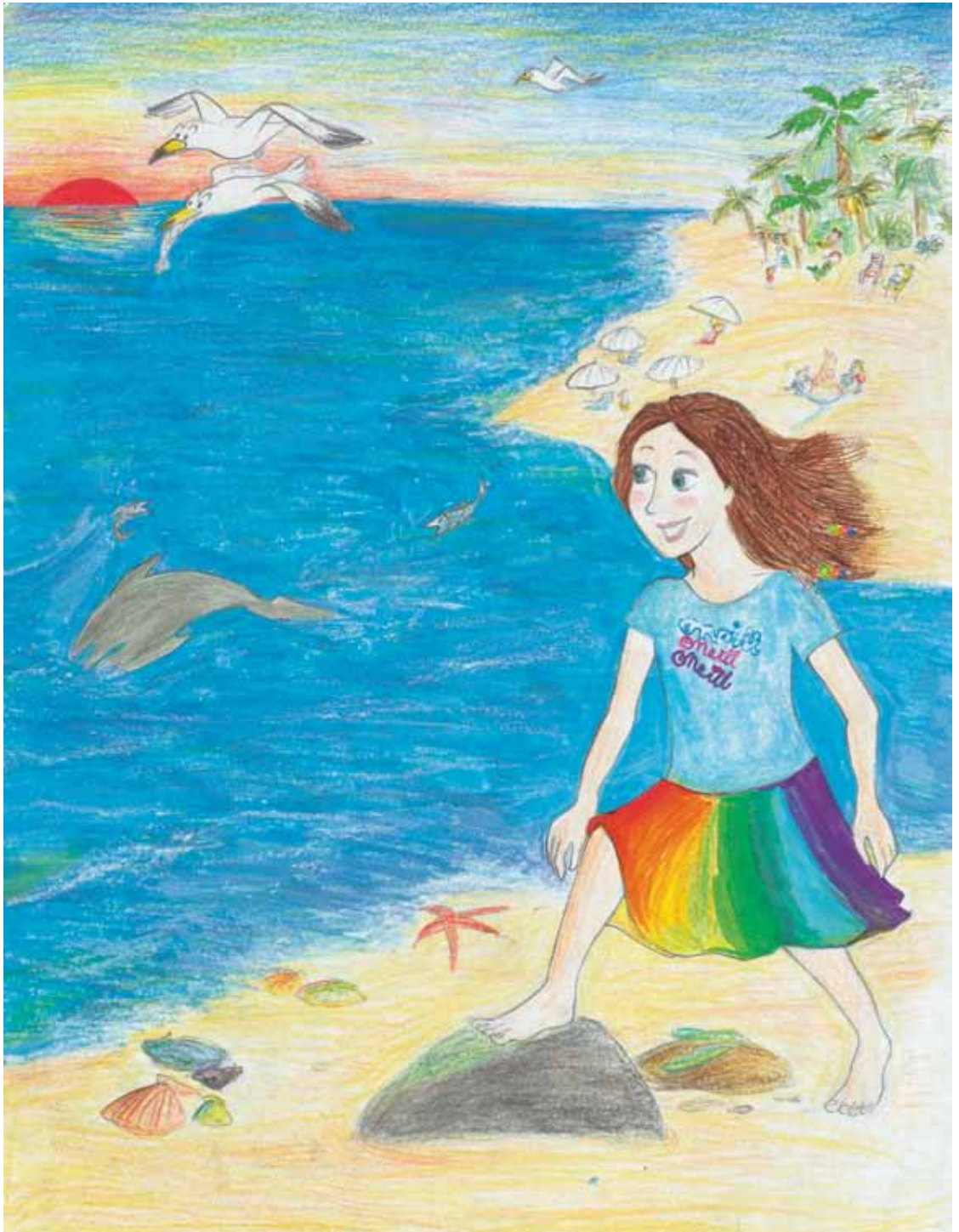
"I'm not kidding!" I said hotly.

"I know," my mom replied. "He went to a friend's house with some other boys. He wasn't supposed to get on the bus."

For a moment I was surprised. My mouth hung half open. Then all the worries I had cooped up inside me were let out as if I had just exhaled after a deep breath. The hollow pit in my stomach disappeared. Every particle of my being felt light and cheerful.

LATER, I FOUND it hard to believe that I was really so worried about my brother. But I have to admit, that day the world did seem a little happier after I found out where he really was. I stared up into the clear blue skies, and the sun smiled and greeted me like an old friend. ❁





It was a dolphin!

A Walk Down the Ocean

By **Abby Lustig**

Illustrated by **Audrey Zhang**

MY FEET SLAPPED against the wet sand, and waves lapped at my toes. White umbrellas blossomed like flowers all over the beach, teetering and threatening to fall down in the salty ocean breeze. I crossed over to the dry, sugar-powdered sand, and I could hear my heart pounding as I sprinted through mounds of shells. Colorful sun hats bobbed in the big, salty ocean and popped in and out of the rolling waves.

The rough rocks felt tough against my bare feet as I clambered over them, headed toward the ocean. Sea foam clung to the grainy sand, and heaps of beautifully detailed shells lay in jumbled piles where the ocean had washed them up. The roar of crashing waves drowned out the animated chatter of seagulls and the contented babble of people draped lazily over sun chairs. A light, salty breeze blew the hair out of my eyes as I sprinted down the humongous ocean.

Pelicans made acrobatic dives and swoops into the ocean as they searched for their lunch beneath the gushing waves. They greedily gobbled silver fish, which were flailing and panicking as if they were on land. The pelicans gulped, and you could still see the fish struggling and thrashing in the pelicans' bulging pouches. The ocean glistened and shimmered in the sun's blistering beams of light, and golden light gushed over the horizon. I heard excited shouts ahead, and I dashed over to where crowds of people were standing. They were gawking at the ocean breathlessly, and at first I thought they were just gaping



Abby Lustig, 11
Westmount, Quebec, Canada



Audrey Zhang, 9
Levittown, New York

at the humongous waves, but then I saw it. A gray-blue fin, slicing the water like a pizza. It leapt out of the water like a gymnast, not its whole body, only its back. It curved gracefully, forming an arc before splashing back under the waves. It was a dolphin! I called my siblings over to catch up to the graceful animal slipping through the ocean's grasping hands.

I sprinted down giant sand dunes, splashing in tide pools and dashing through puddles. I was far ahead of my brother and sisters, and they were also struggling to keep up with the playful creature. My heart raced, and my legs carried me across the beach of their own accord. I kept up with the dolphin, and every time it disappeared, I felt anxious. I leapt over half-ruined sand castles and heaps of rocks and pebbles. Its fin popped out more and more, daring me to follow it and teasing me if I couldn't keep up. It dived in and out of the waves playfully, and wherever it went people cried out

in amazement. I followed it until I was gasping for breath, and I sat down on a heaping, golden sand dune to take a short break.

After a while, I jumped up to start my chase once again. I couldn't see the dolphin, but joyful shouts up ahead told me it wasn't too far. I sprinted faster this time, spraying wet sand in every direction as I tried to catch up to my teasing friend. Finally, I caught a glimpse of it once again, leaping through salty waves in a show-off way. I reached it just as it dived under the angry ocean.

When I reached the scratchy rocks and the bright orange caution tape, I gazed longingly at the beautiful creature. A hand pulled me away, and my mom whispered, "We're headed to the airport now. We'll stop for dinner on the way, 'K?" I glanced back quickly at the dolphin, still diving with easy elegance, and knew it would be my good luck charm for the long trip back home. ❁



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