

StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

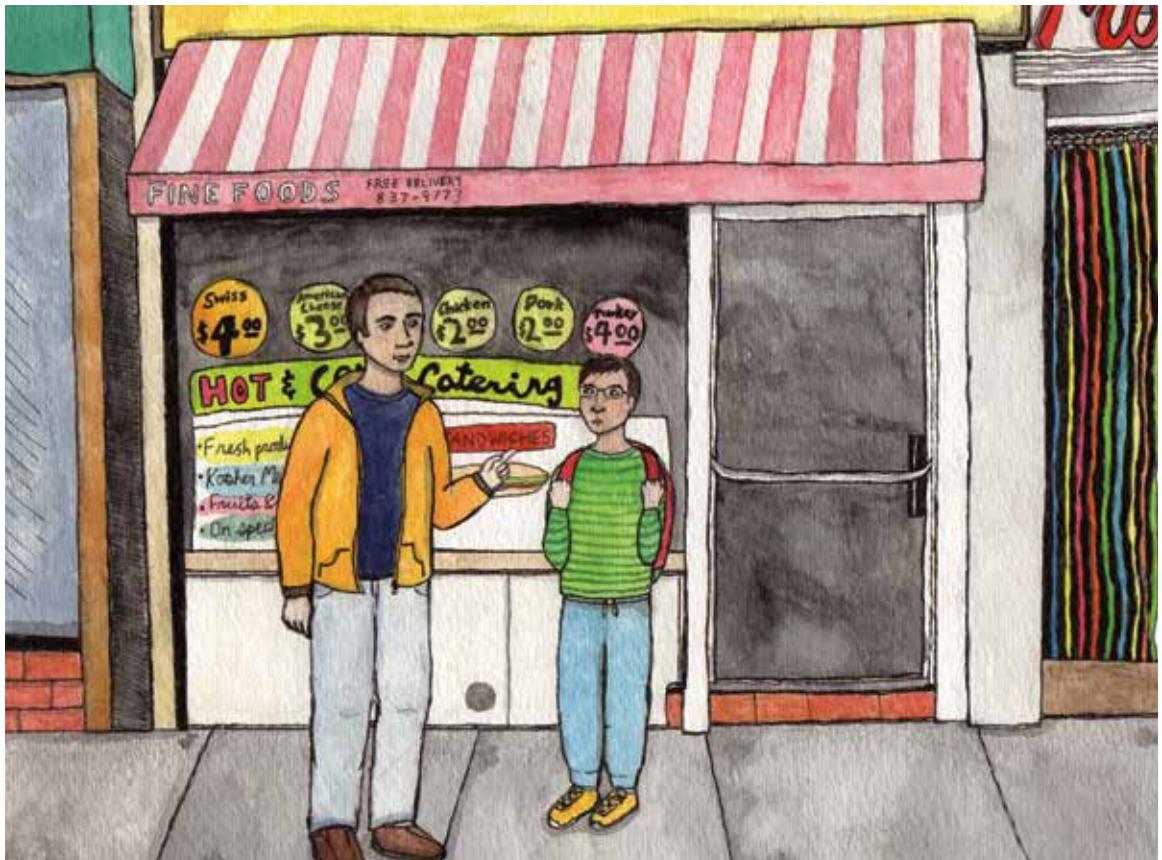


Illustration by Ava Blum-Carr, age 13, for "Filling the Jar," page 13

CURTIS FREEDOM

Curtis can't endure another day of slavery

THE OWLS OF MOROVIA

Annabelle discovers a portal to another world

Also: Ana Sofia Uzsoy weighs in on a popular book about parenting

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VOLUME 42, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2013

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StoneSoup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

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Stone Soup (ISSN 0094 579X) is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November, by the Children's Art Foundation, 765 Cedar Street, Suite 201, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Copyright © 2013 by the Children's Art Foundation. All rights reserved. Subscribe at stonesoup.com.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Stone Soup, PO Box 567, Selmer, TN 38375. Periodicals postage paid at Santa Cruz, CA, and additional offices.

Printed in Canada by Hemlock Printers on FSC-certified paper.

Stone Soup is available from the Library of Congress in braille for visually handicapped readers. To request the braille edition, call 800-424-8567.

Stone Soup is indexed in the *Children's Magazine Guide*.

Editor's Note

It's funny how a theme can crop up in an issue of *Stone Soup*, even though we didn't intend it to. In this issue you'll find a recurring theme of fathers—what they mean to us, how they help us, how much we miss them when they're gone. In "Curtis Freedom" a slave boy longs to see his father again and sets out to find him. Matt gains maturity and learns to appreciate his dad in "Filling the Jar." Elizabeth's dad practically jumps off the page from her loving description of him in "The King of San Marino." Check out the ending to "The Road Home," when Allie's dad lets her know that everything will be OK. Think about your dad. Nobody's perfect, but I bet your dad has lots of good qualities. I remember how my dad used to come to my room after my mom yelled at me about something, just to tell me, "Mommy didn't mean it." He always made me feel better. Was there a time your dad helped you? Tell us the story.

— *Gerry Mandel*

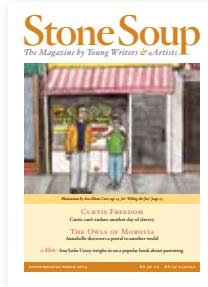
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Submissions

Read our guidelines at stonesoup.com. If you have submission questions, write to editor@stonesoup.com. No email submissions, please.

ON THE COVER Ava Blum-Carr says, "I love painting, sketching, writing, and really anything creative. I get excited about finding things in books or mysterious abandoned old buildings—anything that I can imagine some kind of story to go along with it." Visit Ava's blog at popcorncadence.blogspot.com.



The Mailbox



A few other friends and I have been trying to come up with stories to send to you as soon as I discovered your magazine at my library! We all let each other read each other's stories: editing them, etc. So I'm soon going to send in a few stories I hope you'll consider for publication! My grandmother got me a subscription for Christmas, and now I can never wait for the next issue!

Abigail D'Agosta, 13
Dallas, Texas

"This Summer," written by Abigail and her friend Kendra Sommers, appeared in our July/August 2013 issue.

On your website, I enjoyed reading many spectacular stories by students for students. Two of my favorites would have to be the heartwarming realistic-fiction piece, "To Be a Swan" [March/April 2009], and the intriguing instrument mystery, "A Sour Note" [March/April 2003]. Therefore, I was inspired to submit my writing to you because it would be an honor to know that my writing is as good as theirs.

Chloe Jiang, 13
San Diego, California

Thank you for providing such an eloquent literary magazine with living, breathing, and moving artwork which appeals to youth and even adults like me.

Suzanne Troll, parent
Somerset, Pennsylvania

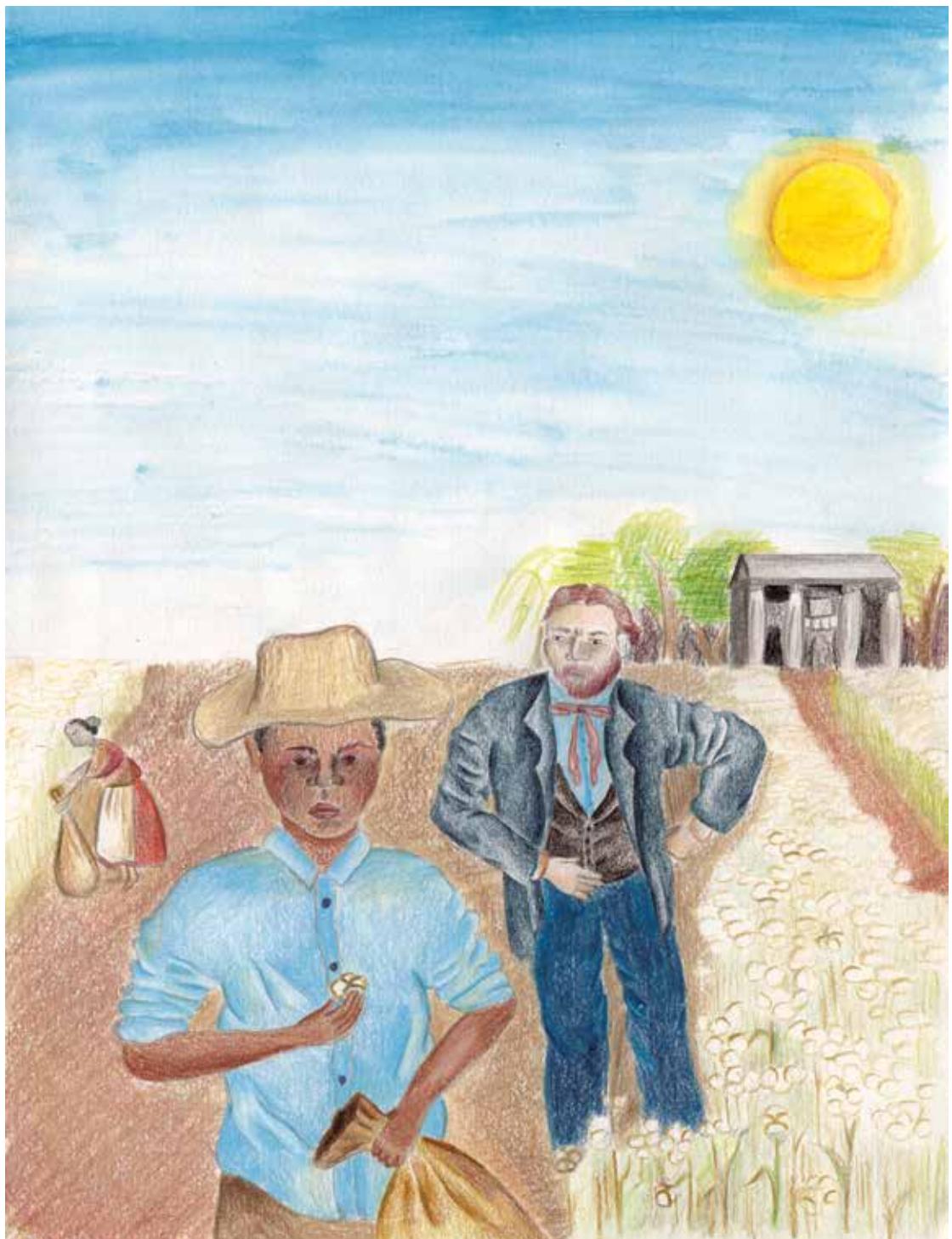
"The Bright Star" [November/December 2011] is about a kid who was growing up in South Africa when white people were trying to take control of the black people. A boy named Sereto was protesting to gain freedom from the whites. Sereto's father had been killed from protesting against the whites so Sereto knew it was a risk that he might get killed but he kept on protesting. I think it was unfair that the whites were kidnapping, killing, and trying to take over the blacks. I think that black and white people should get equal rights. I now understand why Sereto was protesting. He knew it was important to fight for freedom and equal rights. I enjoy reading *Stone Soup* because everything is so interesting.

Annika Milliman, 9
Hanover, New Hampshire

I would like to take this time to thank you for your magazine and all you do. While I am beyond the age of writing in, as a writer I respect and admire your goal to get children published. For so often in the world of writing, kids are judged by their age and not by their skill. Indeed, *Stone Soup* is awakening kids to both write and to attempt to get their work published, which is possibly the start to a new life passion. Your magazine is also interesting to read, and lets kids fill their brains with stories instead of other magazines with shallow articles. I hope you continue what you do as it is absolutely wonderful.

Neely Moore, 15
Knoxville, Tennessee

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.



“My name’s not Boy! It’s Curtis!”

Curtis Freedom

By Anna Haverly

Illustrated by Samira Glaeser-Khan

THE HOT JULY SUN beat its fiery rays down on the heads of the slaves working in the shelterless Carolina cotton field. Tall, twelve-year-old Curtis, dragging his cotton bag behind him, paused to steal a moment to soothe his aching back. Straightening up, he winced as his back stretched. His hands, rough and scarred from picking cotton day after day, twitched at his decrepit straw hat. Glancing over the field, he spotted the Big House, standing out starkly against the darker forest behind it. “You! Boy! Keep working!” The order was shouted out in a harsh, thick voice from behind Curtis.

Resisting the urge to shout back, “My name’s not Boy! It’s Curtis!” he bent over his work once more. Curtis what? he wondered, disgusted, to himself. It didn’t really matter, of course, but still, the lack of a last name galled him. Stop worrying about it, he told himself. No one even calls you by your first name, let alone an appendage like a last name. Curtis couldn’t forget it though. He sometimes wondered where his parents were. All he knew was that he had been born in the hold of a slave ship somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. He had no memory of his mother or father, let alone a last name. Oh well. Who needs a last name? he tried to satiate himself. It didn’t work.

“Sing!” the overseer ordered roughly. “Sing and be cheerful!” If slaves were quiet, overseers took it for a sign that they were plotting escape. Singing was a popular way to keep them “happy.” One of the slaves struck up:



Anna Haverly, 13
Mancos, Colorado



Samira Glaeser-Khan, 12
Chicago, Illinois

Gonna jump down, turn around, pick a
bale o' cotton,
Gonna jump down, turn around, pick a
bale a day.
Oh, lawdy, pick a bale o' cotton, oh, lawdy,
pick a bale a day.
Gonna picka, picka, picka, picka, picka
bale o' cotton...

The overseer smiled at the swingy tune.
Curtis scowled again.

That night, in the hut he shared with several other slaves, Curtis listened to the talk of Harriet Tubman. Most slaves called her Moses, after the way she freed slaves, like Moses had freed the Israelites. She had been to Canada already, but she came back to bring other slaves out of "Egypt."

"They say she's headed this way. If she comes to us, I mean to go. I'm sick of slavery." A young black man tossed a stick into the fire. "I'm ready to ride the railroad to freedom."

Me too, thought Curtis, sitting in his dark corner, listening, but unwilling to join the gossip. But will "Moses" ever come?

ONE WEEK LATER, as the slaves sweated in the fields, Curtis caught the sound of someone singing. The song almost seemed to be coming from the woods beside the field. He knew the words. They were part of a popular slave hymn:

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,
Comin' for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me

Comin' for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to
carry me home...

That's odd, Curtis thought. Why would someone be singing that song on a weekday?

Then a faint memory flashed across his mind. Hadn't he heard that slave rescuers sang that song to let other slaves know that it was time to escape? It had to be Harriet. Curtis began to sing the words too. Soon other voices joined in. The others knew; tonight was their escape. Curtis thought about escape for the rest of the day. Could he make it? Was slavery really worse than the unknown? Doubts assailed him. A moment later, hearing the crack of the overseer's whip, Curtis glanced up. He glimpsed the unfortunate slave's face twist in pain. In that moment, Curtis knew he had to go. Anything was better than slavery.

That night, five of the slaves, three men, a woman, and Curtis, packed their few belongings. Stealing as softly from the little quarter as possible, the five walked towards the woods. They would have to pass the Big House, where lights still blazed, to reach temporary safety. Curtis was almost having second thoughts again. If they were caught, they would be flogged and probably sold down south. The thought chilled his blood. There were such stories about the South... Curtis, clenching his teeth, forced himself to keep walking. I can't endure anymore. I don't care what they do to me, he told himself. Still, he glanced back fearfully as

he slunk along behind the others. There. It was past.

Once in the woods, they were able to breathe more freely. Uncertain what to do, they halted. After a few moments, an owl called softly, and a figure glided out to them. Even in the dim light, Curtis was able to recognize Harriet Tubman from the posters he had seen of her. With her were six other slaves from a neighboring plantation.

“By dawn, they’ll have discovered our absence. We must put as much distance between ourselves and them as possible,” Harriet said, as she counted noses.

They started the long hike. The whole journey seemed odd and dreamlike to Curtis. The only noises were noises they themselves made. Harriet led her Israelites to a creek. “We’ve got to throw the dogs off the scent, so we’ll walk in the stream,” she explained, stepping into the chill water. The slaves followed her lead. Curtis shuddered as the water closed around his ankles. When they could finally climb out of the stream, Curtis could hardly feel his feet. Still they kept on. At last they came to a road. Here they could travel more quickly. The numb feeling had moved on up Curtis’s legs by the time when, at dawn, Harriet led them into a barn at a little distance from the road. The slaves collapsed, exhausted, on the warm hay, too tired even to worry about whether it was safe.

All the next day, the slaves rested in the barn, eating food that was brought out to them. The Quaker couple who

owned the barn hated slavery and often helped Harriet bring her slaves through. That night, the man came and hitched his horses to the wagon. As he handed the reins to Harriet, Curtis stepped forward.

“You haven’t seen anyone who looked anything like me come through, have you, sir?” he asked hopefully, wondering if maybe, just maybe, his father had ever come through the railroad. The man stroked his beard thoughtfully.

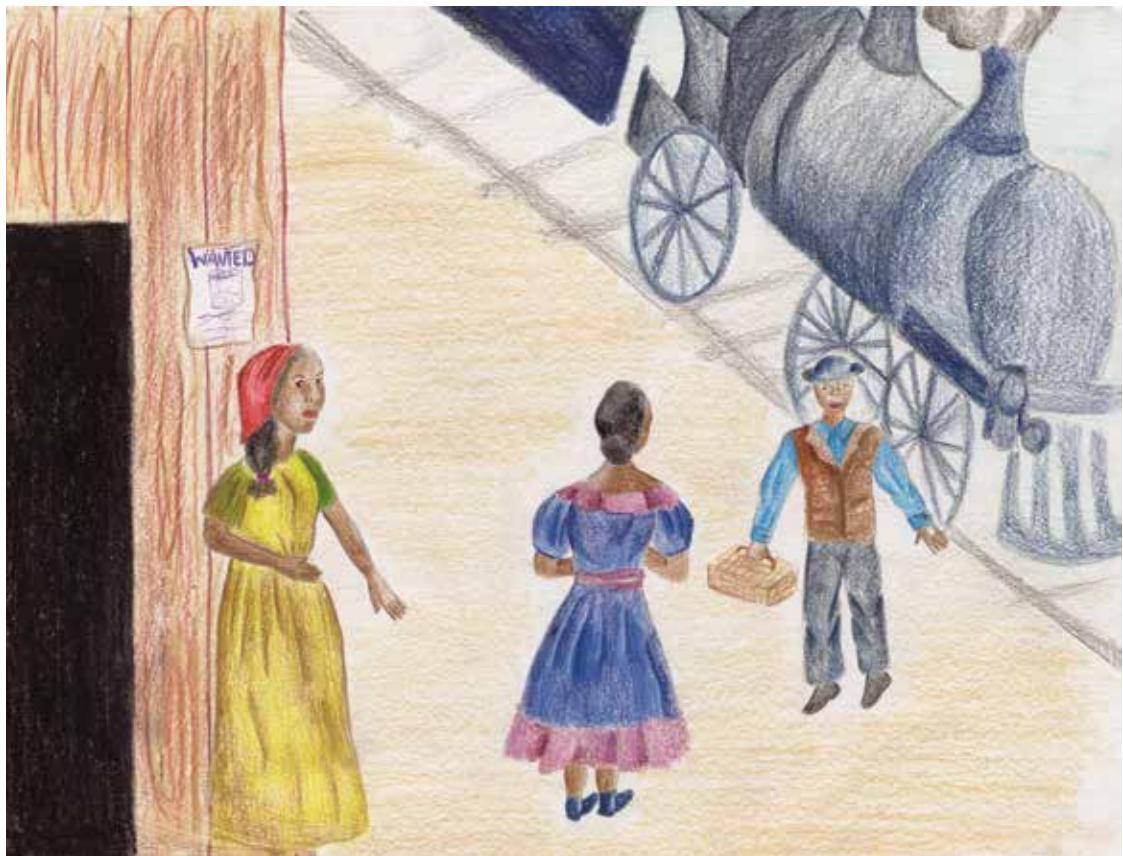
“Come to think of it, there was a man who looked something like you. What’s your name?”

Curtis told him, hoping against hope.

“A man looking something like you passed through here not more’n a month ago. His name was Curtis too. I called him to mind the moment I saw you.” Curtis was overjoyed as he climbed into the wagon. Was his father on the road to freedom too? Maybe he could catch up with him! Curtis fell asleep with new hope burning in him.

FOR THREE WEEKS, the little band traveled, resting during the day and following the North Star by night. Slowly but surely, the slaves were nearing Canada and freedom. But Curtis had no further news of his father. Every night he whispered a prayer for safety. They had almost been caught several times.

At last, Harriet communicated that the next morning, they would cross by train into Canada. Curtis was glad to be at last at the end of the trail; he wondered if



“Come on, Mother! I can’t wait!”

perhaps his father had made it too. As he lay down in the darkness, the cold northern wind sweeping among the trees, he glanced up at the stars. My last night of slavery and fear. Curtis fell asleep thinking, *Tomorrow*.

The next morning, when the group reached the train station, Harriet went inside to get tickets. Curtis was lounging on the bench outside with the others when he suddenly caught sight of a poster pinned up on the wall. He carefully spelled out the top lines:

WANTED: My black boy, Curtis. Said boy 12 years of age, hands scarred from cotton picking. Ran away from the subscriber 26 of July, 1832. \$1000 reward for his capture, or satisfactory proof that he is dead.

Curtis felt sick. All this way and now this. No. He wasn’t going back. Curtis noticed two rather rough-looking men eyeing him thoughtfully. Fortunately, Harriet appeared with the tickets. Whispering his fears to her, Curtis pointed out the poster and the men. She nodded, and led him and Eva into an old, broken-down build-

ing. Digging into her pack, she handed each of them a new suit of clothes.

A few moments later, Curtis boarded the train that would carry him to freedom in Canada. He was dressed like a white boy now, not a ragged slave. Over one arm, he bore a seeming picnic basket. Turning, he called, "Come on, Mother! I can't wait!" Eva smiled and hurried after him. One at a time, the slaves boarded. Curtis smirked. He'd walked right by those men. He slid into a window seat. All thought of his father almost vanished in the surge of adrenaline that shot through him. He was almost there! The whole way he could hardly hold still.

As the train neared the destination, Harriet called, "Come look out the window!" Curtis and the others managed to reach the windows and gasped at what they saw. Down far below, a huge waterfall sparkled in the sun, springing down from the heights. It's free, like me! exulted Curtis, staring in wonder at the gleaming water. An eagle soared over the water, screaming its harsh cry. A few moments later, the train pulled into the Canadian station.

As Curtis stepped out into the bracing air, he felt as though he would fly. The other slaves looked as he felt. Several passengers came up to shake hands and congratulate the now free men and women. A tall black man, buying a newspaper at a stand, heard the commotion and came over to add to it.

Why does he look familiar? thought

Curtis, staring at his face. "What is your name, sir?" he asked, touching the man's sleeve. The man looked down at the boy for a moment.

"My first name is Curtis; why do you ask?" Curtis bypassed the question.

"Did you ever have a son called Curtis too, sir?" he asked, almost fearfully.

"Yes, I did... long ago. Have you seen him? Is he on the way to freedom too?" The man looked anxiously down into Curtis's face. Curtis didn't wait to hear the rest.

"Father! Father, don't you know me? *I'm* Curtis!" The man looked puzzled, then looking at the boy once more, exclaimed in delight.

"You have your mother's eyes, son!" he exclaimed.

"Where is Mother? Is she free too?" Curtis asked anxiously.

"Yes, Curtis. I wouldn't have left without her, so she came with me. You'll see her at the house. Come on!"

As father and son walked towards the small house a short distance from the station, a thought struck Curtis.

"Father, what is our last name? I've always wondered."

His father answered, "Well, Curtis, when we came to this free country a month ago, we decided to take a new name because we're no longer slaves. Our new last name is Freedom."

Slowly a smile broke out on Curtis's face. Freedom, he repeated to himself. Curtis Freedom.



The Ocean

By Emma Rose Kirby



Emma Rose Kirby, 11
New York, New York

I have many worries, many fears
The hot humid air
Brings perspiration down my neck
I am tense, my mind alert

I am stretched, and pushed, and torn
And squashed and ripped apart
Between tests and recitals
And plays and performances
With the spotlight following me as I go

I let loose my high, strict, tight ponytail
I take a deep breath
Then go headfirst
Into the cold,
Calm, beautiful, sparkling
Salt water

I sit on the ocean floor
My hair dancing freely around me
The sun paints the water in the most unimaginable ways
Better than the most famous artists could

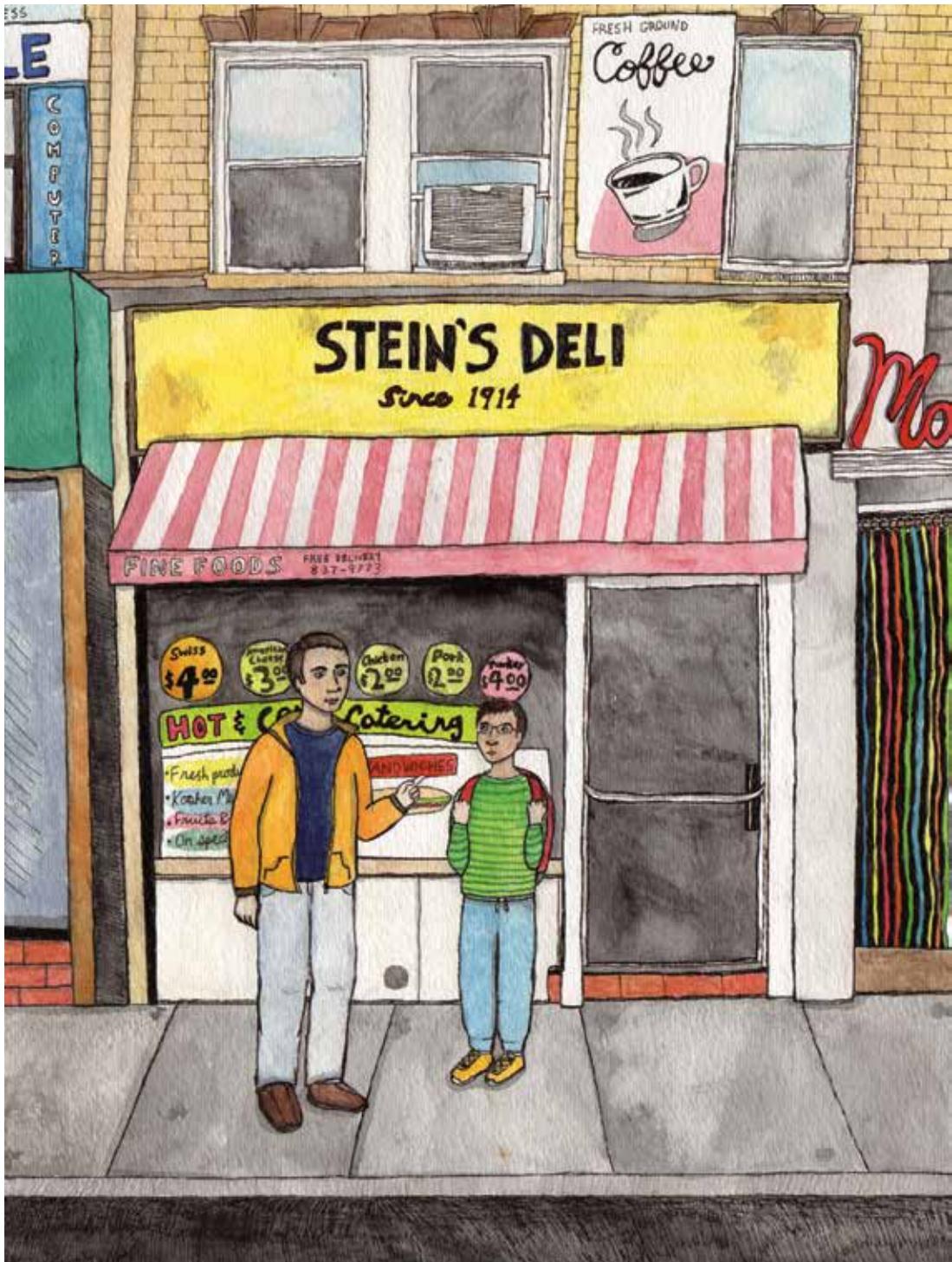
I wave to the majestic sea life
Swimming around me
The kelp speak for them
Swaying back and forth in response

I connect with the water
Feel I can understand it
It comforts me in ways
No mother could ever comfort her child
I feel at home here,
I never want to leave

Somehow I wish I could grow gills
Become a mermaid
But alas I am only human
So I must take a breath
I push up to the surface
Then as the air hits me
All my worries flow back into me
Accusing me of ever leaving them behind

But I push them away
For they can touch me no longer
Because the ocean has reminded me
That I do not have to be afraid

Even as I walk away from the ocean,
It protects me still
And together, as one
We leave those worries
To drown



"Hello, son," he said, "I'm glad that I have found you. Did you find a job?"

Filling the Jar

By Matteo Wong

Illustrated by Ava Blum-Carr

MATT OPENED HIS father's drawer. Within lay a large pile of phone, water, and electric bills. One after the other they read "late" or "unpaid." Next to them, there was a small pile of grocery coupons that was being rapidly depleted. Wrong drawer, he thought. I'll try the bottom one.

As Matt opened it, the bottom drawer creaked loudly and released a musty smell. Matt chuckled. Good thing Dad's at the factory, he thought. He thinks I'm working. Why work myself when he can do it? In the drawer, a small jar full of small bills was carefully laid to the side. A small label on it said, "Rent Money." It held about 400 dollars. Next to it, a piece of paper read, "February Rent: \$500." Matt reached into the jar and took a twenty-dollar bill. Finally, he thought, I found it.

As Matt left the two-room apartment, he saw a notice on the door.

"Whoa," he gasped, his eye wide in disbelief. "They raised all the rents in Queens. Well, Dad can pay it. He's got five days." Matt closed the door and ran upstairs to talk to José and Nick, who were twins and his best friends.

He knocked softly on their dark brown door. After a few seconds, José answered. He had blue eyes and a mop of dark brown hair. He towered over Matt, who was fairly tall himself.

"'S'up?" José asked, his usual conversation starter. "Nick is testing his slingshot on our door. Come in." Unlike Matt's family, José and Nick had money. The brothers didn't even have to



Matteo Wong, 12
Brooklyn, New York



Ava Blum-Carr, 13
Hadley, Massachusetts

share a room! Matt thought they were very lucky. The three boys gathered in Nick's room. Matt looked at the walls. These posters are so nice, Matt thought. I wish I had them.

"So?" Nick questioned eagerly. "Why'd you come? It's kind of late."

Matt gave them a smug smile. "Well," he began, "I got twenty bucks, and they're selling those extra-large exploding poppers at the deli at five dollars for ten poppers. We can get forty of them with my money and shoot people with our slingshots!" They all laughed. Slingshots were their hobby, and they loved to hit people with cheap, store-bought explosives.

"But where'd you get the money?" asked José. "You usually have to borrow, and your dad works ten hours at the factory. Did you steal it?"

"Nah," Matt lied. "It was his present to me." But in his head, he felt a little guilty. Whatever, he thought. We'll pay rent fine. I do this all the time, and Dad doesn't care. He did say I needed to get a job, but why should I? "Now then, I'm going to buy a pack of poppers, all right?" They nodded excitedly and told him to hurry up.

Matt ran out of the twins' apartment and hurtled down the stairs. He opened the glass building door and made a dash for the small deli. Its yellow sign was beaten and torn.

"Hi, Matt," said Carlos, the clerk. "I don't see you too often. What are you here for? You rarely have money to spend." The small man smiled warmly.

Matt grabbed a pack of poppers. "I'll take these," he said hurriedly. Matt paid quickly and zoomed back out of the store.

"Kids these day," Carlos sighed. "No way I was this rowdy back when I was thirteen. I was already working." He laughed to himself. I wonder how he got money, Carlos wondered.

As Matt ran toward the apartment, he saw his dad coming home from the large factory. Odd, he thought, they must've closed the factory early today. When he saw his father coming closer, he immediately stuffed the large, white poppers and the leftover money into his backpack. He saw that his father had a very grave expression on his face, but that happened fairly often.

"Hello, son," he said, "I'm glad that I have found you. Did you find a job?"

"No," Matt replied, "I didn't." He did not mention what he had done instead.

"Ugh," his father muttered. "I've come home because the factory closed, and they cut the day's pay. We're struggling enough as it is. So, Matt, where are you going?"

"Oh," said Matt, startled at the question. Think fast, he thought, think fast. "Just to visit José and Nick. I haven't seen them in a while."

"OK," Matt's father replied. "Be home by eight o'clock for dinner. I'm going to go do some work for Carlos." His father walked off towards Carlos's deli.

He's finally gone! thought Matt, very relieved. He hurried back to the build-

ing and showed José and Nick the poppers. *Pop!* They all laughed as they tested one out. Matt's financial worries began to wash away.

"We should totally get more of these and shoot them at people!" Nick exclaimed. "I'd love to see the look on Principal Walton's face. It would be priceless." The boys chuckled at the thought of scaring their hated principal.

"OK, but after school tomorrow," Matt said. "I have to go home." They exchanged goodbyes, and Matt went back to his apartment. Man, he thought wistfully. I wish we lived *there*. When he walked in, his father had a very worried look on his face. He was leafing through bills and looking at his most recent paycheck.

"Matt," he said, "sit down, I need to talk to you." He handed him a microwave dinner. "The landlord has raised our rent by fifty dollars, and..." Matt faked surprise, breathing out sharply. But in the back of his head, he felt a pang of guilt and worry. "Yes," his father continued. "I've done the math, and we can't pay it. If that happens, we will be evicted from the building after three days' time. That is why I need you to start working and earning some money. I'm sure you could get a job from Carlos. Together, I think that we can do this. So, Matt, do you understand?"

"Yeah, Dad," Matt said in a bored tone, "I'll ask Carlos after school." But in his head, Matt was thinking otherwise. Do I really care? Our landlord, Joe, is really nice. He wouldn't do that. I'll just hang

out with José and Nick again. I can fake working and give him some of the cash that I stole. I am a bit scared, but Dad will do it. Why would I actually work? Like a wolf, Matt scarfed down his dinner and then went to his room.

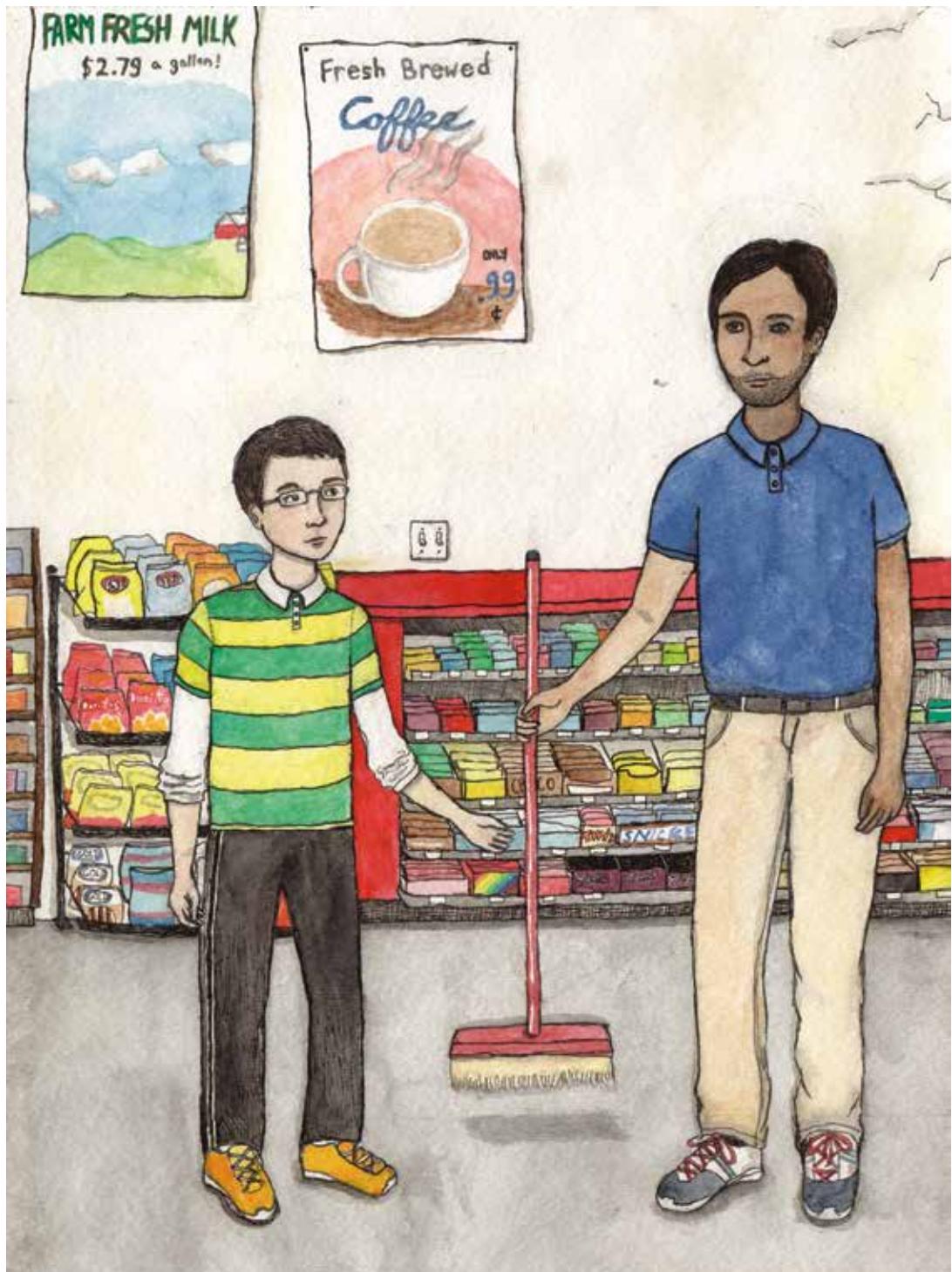
"Get some sleep!" his dad called. "Carlos works you hard."

The next day after school, Matt did not have any work to do at home. Yes! he thought to himself. I can go to José and Nick. They will be done with their homework, because they get dismissed earlier than me. He ran out to José and Nick's place. *Thump! Thump!* He knocked on their door. Soon enough, it opened.

"Hey, guys!" he said happily. "Are you done with your homework?" Then he realized it was not José or Nick but their father, Mr. Cooper. "Oh. Hello, Mr. Cooper. Can I hang out with José and Nick?"

Mr. Cooper smiled. His teeth were very yellowed. "Certainly," he said in his deep voice. "They're in the back. Come in." Matt walked into his friends' apartment and went to the back, where their rooms were located.

"Hi, Matt!" José said happily. "We've decided that we are going to get Ms. Rzepcynski today. Man, I can't wait to see her jump when she hears *Boom!* and white smoke goes everywhere. So, here's our plan." José opened up a drawer and pulled out some graph paper. "We're going to sneak out in her yard," he said as he pointed to a mark on the paper. "She goes on her terrace, and we hit her with the pop-



"I can pay you, say, seven dollars an hour. Start sweeping"

pers." The three boys continued to talk about the plan and figured out every detail.

"OK, guys," Matt said, "we've talked long enough. Let's go!" The other two boys agreed. "Also, should we invite Marc? I know he is only eleven, but he is pretty cool." Nick frowned in confusion.

"Haven't you heard?" said Nick. "His family had late rent dues and didn't pay. They were kicked out!" Matt's face turned pale, his eyes bursting with astonishment.

"Whoa," he gasped, "Joe actually did it." But on the inside, Matt began to realize what that meant for him and his father. Oh my God, he thought, Joe is getting serious. If Dad can't pay, we're out! I am so stupid, stupid, stupid! He works hard for me, and I steal what he works for... have I actually been doing this?

"José," Matt said. His lower lip trembled, and guilt spread across his face. He drooped with despair. "Nick. Maybe later. I just realized, I have to go. Bye!" He got up and ran out as fast as he could. Down the stairs, out the door, and into the deli. What if we can't pay? he questioned himself. I'll never get over it.

"Hey Carlos," Matt panted, "I was wondering if I could... I don't know, sweep up or something. Like a job, for money." Carlos smiled.

"I'm glad you've come," Carlos said. "You know, your dad's having a hard time. I can pay you, say, seven dollars an hour.

Start sweeping." Matt took a broom and swept vigorously.

When Matt went home, he saw his dad on the beaten old couch, exhausted.

"Well, son?" his father asked. "I'm guessing you didn't find a job."

"Well," said Matt, chuckling, "I worked for Carlos, and I got seventeen dollars. What do you think of that?" A smile spread across his father's face that was wider than the Grand Canyon, and his face looked like the brilliant sun.

"That's amazing!" he exclaimed. "Together, we can pay rent." His eyes shined with joy.

"And Dad, one last thing," Matt murmured, "I'm really, really sorry." He lay fifteen dollars on the table. "I've been stealing." He whimpered. "I'm so sorry, Dad." He gave his father a hug and a meek smile.

"Matt," his father said sternly, "I am very disappointed, but I am glad that you have confessed. Together, we won't get kicked out. I don't want to live in a shelter." They laughed.

FOUR DAYS LATER

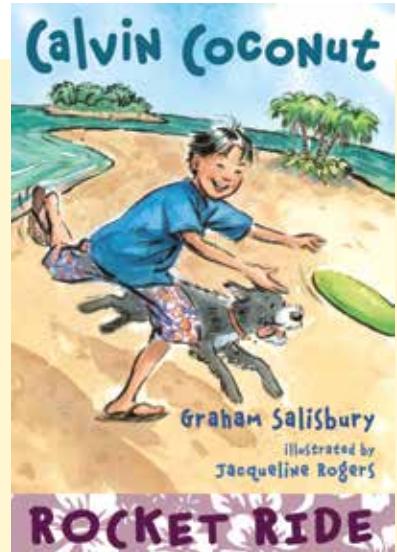
MATT OPENED HIS father's bottom drawer. It creaked loudly. Within lay a jar with small bills, holding about \$30 dollars. Next to it, a notice read, "February Rent: \$550." Matt put in his hand and dropped in a twenty-dollar bill. Finally, he thought. Done.



Book Review

By Eric Yang

Calvin Coconut: Rocket Ride, by Graham Salisbury;
Wendy Lamb Books: New York, 2012; \$12.99



Eric Yang, 9
Wellesley, Massachusetts

THIS BOOK IS about a kid named Calvin who is getting bullied to give the bully a ticket to his dad's concert. Calvin lives in Hawaii. His dad is coming there for his band performance. His dad is a famous rock star. Calvin hasn't seen him for four years, so he is very nervous to meet him. His dad will give him five tickets for his concert. He plans to give the extra tickets to his best friends. After that, he still has one ticket left. Who will he give it to?

Tito, a big and strong kid in his school, likes to bully others. Now he is demanding Calvin give him the ticket. Calvin doesn't want to. Instead, he has Shayla, his classmate, in his mind. He knows she really enjoys his dad's music. She is wearing a T-shirt at school that has a picture of his dad's band on it. She is very excited when Calvin tells her about the offer. Calvin feels like he has done the right thing. But Tito keeps on threatening Calvin. Calvin feels very scared and is forced to change his mind. He tells Shayla that she can't go. She is sad and heartbroken.

I can relate to this story. I feared a bully in school, too. The bully was actually once my friend in kindergarten. In grade one, I had many new friends. He wanted me to play with him more than I would like to. In order to get my attention, he started to play rough with me. When I started to avoid him, he was upset

and bullied me. He started with throwing rocks and woodchips at me. Then he became bolder and bolder. He progressed into kicking me. Eventually, he bluntly punched me in the neck. I felt scared and miserable. Every time I saw him, I quickly ran away. I was even reluctant to go to school to avoid him.

Will Calvin give in or face the bully? Calvin feels bad for Shayla and regrets what he did, so he calls his dad for help. His dad tells him that he can have two backstage passes for him and Shayla. Shayla is so happy to receive the pass that she jumps up and hugs him. Now Calvin still has one ticket left. However, Calvin doesn't want to give it to Tito, because he doesn't want to encourage Tito's bullying behavior. Instead, he gives it to Lovey, Tito's girlfriend, and asks her to help him tame Tito. She tells Tito to stop bullying Calvin because Tito listens to her.

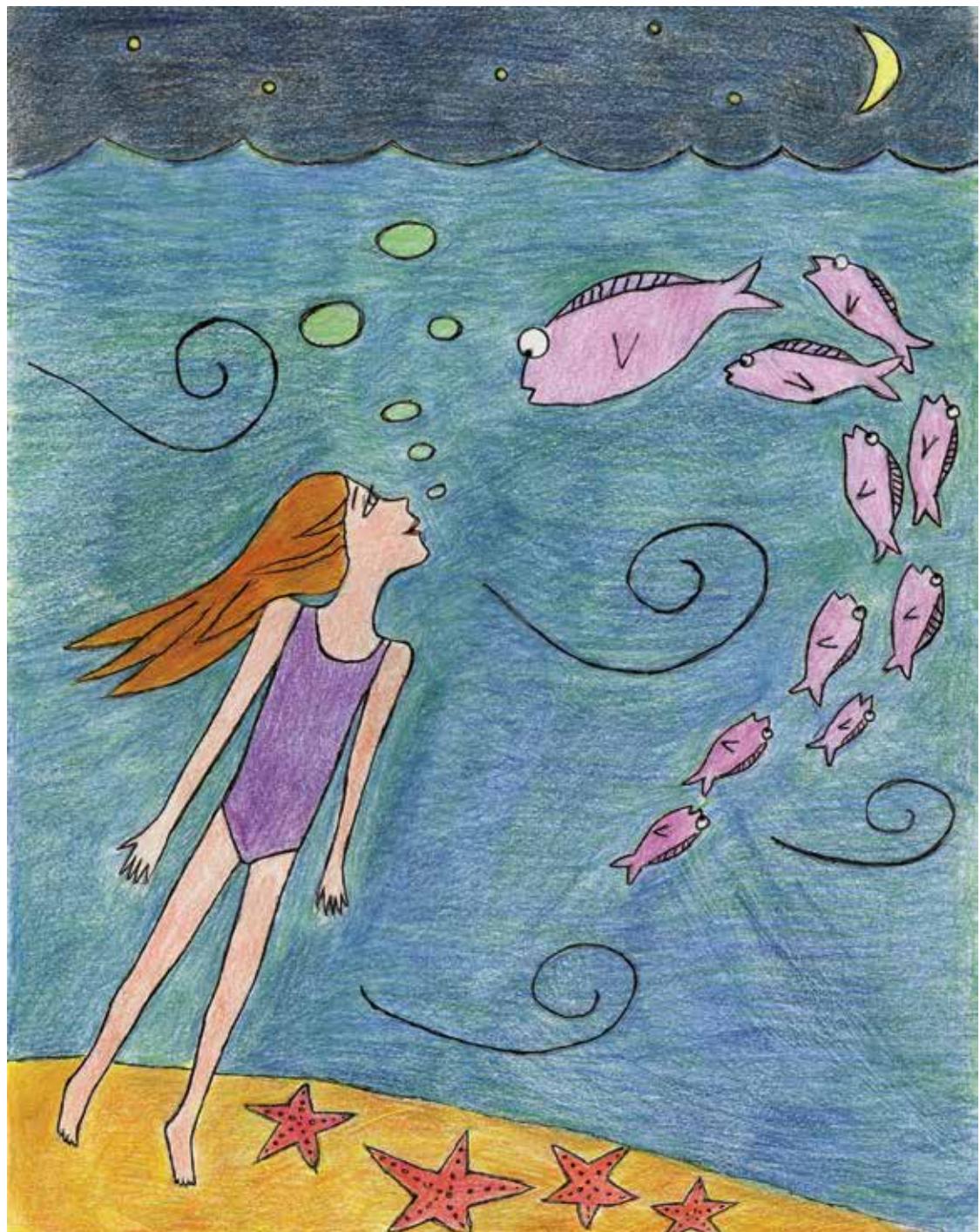
At the end, everything turns out the way Calvin likes it to be. His dad becomes his best friend. He and Shayla have a good time at the concert. Tito does not bother him anymore.

So Calvin solves his problem by telling his dad and Lovey. They helped. For me, what did I do? I informed the teacher first. But he still looked for chances to annoy me even under the teacher's eyes. Then I told my parents, who talked to the principal. Now it got serious. The bully got punished. His punishment was that he couldn't come near me. The principal watched him all the time at school. It finally stopped the nasty behavior.

I heard that bullying is very common at school. It is bad behavior. Both from the book and my own experience, I know that bullying can make you feel scared, powerless, and sad. The best way to defeat a bully is to ask for help from lots of people. If I was Calvin, I would tell his teacher and parents early on, so that he didn't have to be worrying about Tito for such a long time.

Calvin is in fourth grade. Although he is a small kid, he finds courage and wisdom to face the bully. I would recommend this book to students around his age. Young readers will learn how to take care of themselves when they are bullied.





I watched the bubbles float up from my laughing mouth

Beautiful Night

By Felicia McSweeney

Illustrated by Tina Splann

HOW THE SEA looked so different at night than at day I will never forget. How the sea lapped at my toes, moving up with the tide, to my ankles, knees, and eventually to my head.

I was engulfed by the sea. Every time I lifted my head up to breathe in the salty air I noticed how beautiful the moonlight caught the waves, how the symphony of the ocean crashing against the rock was so enchanting.

And then silence. The ocean current had transported me to the sea, miles from shore, where I began to sink down, down, down until I landed on the soft bed of sand.

I watched the bubbles float up from my laughing mouth and fantasized over the beautiful fish, dancing across my vision.

Eventually I floated back to the surface, where the renewed current swifited me past miles of glinting, silent beauty.

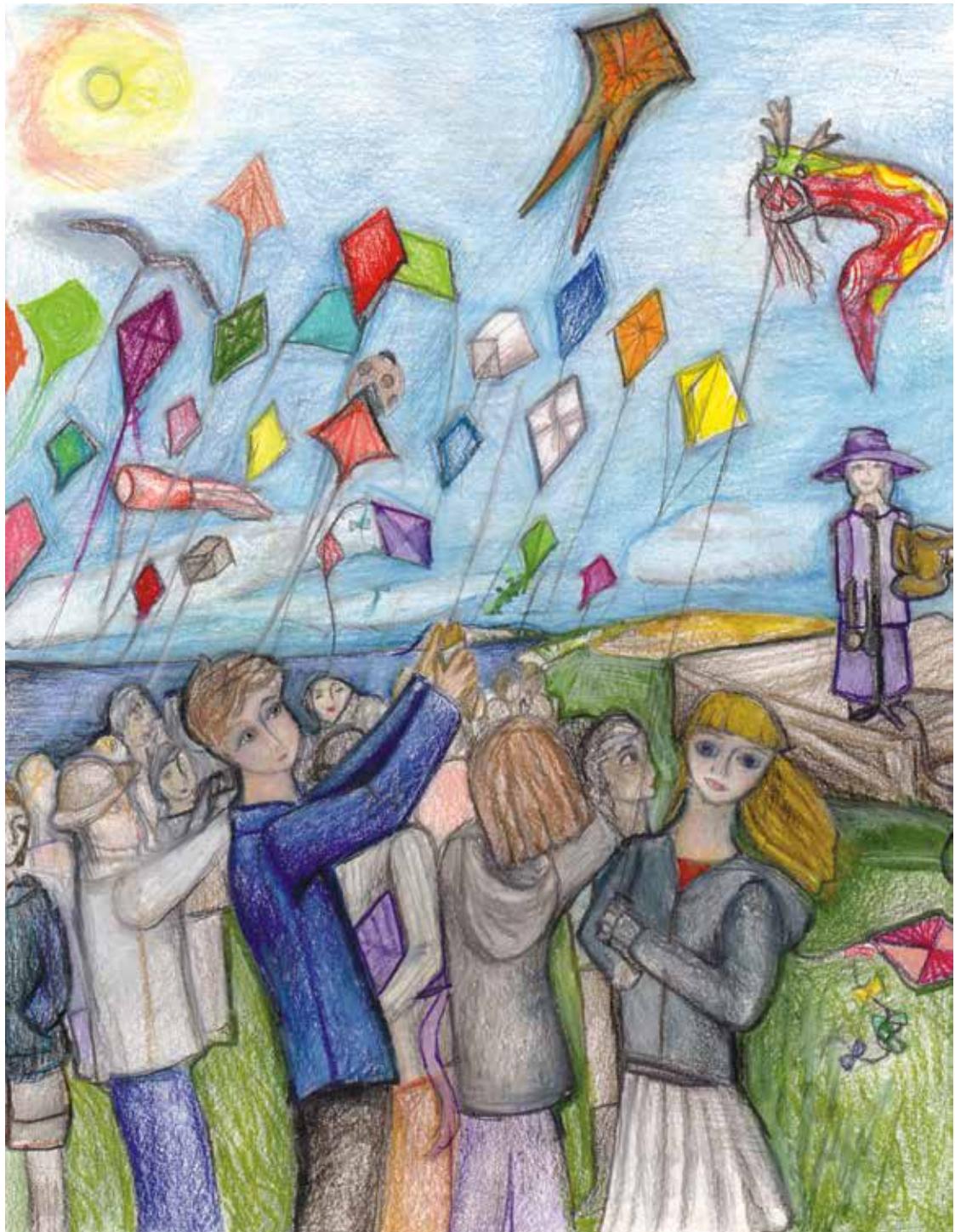
I landed back on the shore, where the sea lapped at my head, eventually going down to my knees, my ankles, and toes, until it retreated from my grasp.



Felicia McSweeney, 11
Newbury, New Hampshire



Tina Splann, 10
Providence Village, Texas



Kites of all colors speckled the sky, like paint splatters on a canvas

The Dragon Kite

By Hannah Fern Pollard

Illustrated by Frances Burnett-Stuart

HUGH GAZED HAPPILY at his creation. Yes. He'd done it!

"Leah, come look at this!" he called, holding the kite for his nine-year-old sister to see. Leah gasped out loud.

"Whoa!" she breathed, admiring his handiwork. Her eyes traced over the delicate needlework on the smooth fabric.

"Pretty cool, huh?"

"Yeah..." She leant out an arm to touch it.

"Don't touch!" Hugh quickly whisked the kite up above her head and safely out of reach.

"I like those flaps over there. What are they for?"

"They're to give it added lift," he said proudly.

"You're going to win for sure this year! You'll even beat Maude Lesley!" Leah cried, dancing around merrily. The thought of beating Maude Lesley at long last made his head spin with happiness. His kites had always come second to hers in Kite Fest. But not this year! No, he would win for sure. Kites were his favorite hobby. Yet somehow, despite his intense effort, Maude's kites always seemed to be better.

"HAVE YOU SEEN MAUDE'S?" stuttered John.

"No, but I don't need to. My kite is far better than hers, John." John shrugged uneasily.

"I don't know..."

"Well *I* do," Hugh confirmed resolutely.

A thought suddenly sprung into John's head. Yes, this would



Hannah Fern Pollard, 13
Singapore



Frances Burnett-Stuart, 12
Aberdeenshire, Scotland

make Hugh see sense. “Do you want to go see it? If you stand on tiptoe and peer over her garden wall you can see it. It wouldn’t be cheating... just comparing. Then you’d *know* for sure how unbeatable it is.” Hugh was best friends with John, yet he couldn’t believe how narrow-minded John was being. Shrugging, he followed John over to Maude’s house. Feeling like a burglar, Hugh stood on tiptoe and peered over the wall, not knowing what to expect. He did not expect what he saw. Maude was crying, her tiny frame shaking uncontrollably.

“It’s... not... fair!” she managed between hearty sobs. “It took... me a whole year... to make!” Her mum was desperately trying to calm her down.

“Maude, sweetheart, it’s only a...”

“A whole year!” she wailed. Her trademark plum-blue eyes were filled with tears. “I don’t understand where it could have gone! We’ve searched all along the riverbank yet my kite’s not there!” Hugh backed away from the wall in shock. He knew that he should be feeling sorry for Maude, yet he couldn’t help feeling smug. This was great! With Maude Lesley out of the competition he was sure to win!

“**T**HANK YOU. Oh, it’s heavy. Yes. Talented? You insist I’m a talented kite flyer? And maker?” Hugh pretended, talking to his chocolate Labrador, Moochy. Moochy showed his agreement by cocking his head playfully to one side. Hugh could just imagine the large golden trophy, glistening magnificently

in the sun. The river was a favorite dog-walking location for Hugh, and the twilight turned the normally hectic and joyful river very mysterious and beautiful. Before Hugh could do anything about it, Moochy was tugging hard on the lead. Hugh tried to yank him back, but a fully grown labrador is a lot stronger than a skinny eleven-year-old, so, much to Hugh’s dismay, Moochy ran wild. Sighing frustratedly, Hugh sped after the happy dog and found him in some tall reeds, sniffing at the ground quizzically.

Yanking on his collar, he spat, “Bad boy, Moochy! Come on. We’ve got to go home. I said come on, Mooch!” Moochy was resistant and stayed, with his bottom planted firmly on the ground. Mumbling bitterly, Hugh got down onto his hands and knees and parted the waving reeds. His stomach seemed to drop. It was Maude’s kite.

HUGH BROKE into a run, eager to return home. Moochy thought this all a splendid game, so he bounded along happily. Why should he return the kite? After all, it wasn’t as if Maude had never won before. Yes, if he kept it he would be doing a greater good, allowing other participants the chance to take home the trophy. It was unfair, *unjust* that she won every year. Hugh’s eyes traced over the magnificent kite. It was shaped like a traditional Chinese dragon, with a large open mouth and sharp white teeth. Maude need never know it had been found. Hugh might just be able

to copy some of the design elements. He didn't even really care about the copying, just so long as he won, and not Maude. It was all down to him whether or not Maude would win. He had arrived home and slipped inside noiselessly, and sprinted up to his bedroom. Stowing the kite under the bed, he made a quick decision. He would keep the kite, not return it. He had waited a long time for the title of Kite Champion, and this year it would go to him.

"Hugh? Dinner!" called his mother. Feeling content, Hugh made his way downstairs and into the dining room, where a delicious meal of roast chicken was awaiting him. He sat down and sunk his fork into the tender meat. As it travelled down his throat, it stayed in a lump. His mouth had gone dry, and suddenly he didn't feel hungry in the slightest. Only guilty. He took a gulp of water and blinked twice. Don't be an idiot, Hugh, he thought. You're doing the right thing, so why are you feeling guilty?

AND THE WINNER of the 2012 Kite Fest goes to... Hugh Willows!" Hugh raced to the podium, where he accepted the trophy joyously. His eyes scanned the audience. Hugh saw a small child curled up in a ball and sobbing broken-heartedly in the distance. The child's head rose and he saw who it was. Maude. Suddenly the floor gave way and he was hurtling through a fiery tunnel, until he dissolved into a screaming nothingness. Hugh's eyes snapped open. Just a dream, he thought

emptily. Just a dream. He looked at his watch, which read half-past six. That meant that the competition was in less than three hours. He just couldn't do it anymore. If he was to win then he would do so honestly. He checked under his bed. The kite was still there. Holding it under one arm, he crept daringly down the stairs, careful to avoid the creaking floorboards. Hugh pulled on a woolen jumper and some Wellington boots, and unlocked the front door. Once he was into the cool morning air, there was no stopping him. He practically flew to Maude's house and pressed the doorbell. He waited. The door swung open to reveal a tired-looking middle-aged man, wearing a checkered dressing gown and matching slippers.

"Mr. Lesley?"

"Hugh, right? You're in the year above Maude at school, I believe. What are you doing up so early? Is everything all right?"

"Yeah, I'm Hugh. Everything's fine. I found Maude's kite down by the river. I heard she'd lost it," he said, handing over the dragon kite.

"Oh, thank you, Hugh! You don't know how much this means to me! Poor Maude was distraught when she realized she'd lost her kite." He turned his head indoors. "Maude! Come quick!" He looked back at Hugh. "She's in the sitting room, watching telly. She hardly got any sleep she was so heavy-hearted." Maude came plodding to the front door. She quickly rubbed her blotchy, tear-stricken face when she saw who it was.

"Oh, Hugh."

"Maude, look what Hugh found," her father cried merrily. As soon as Maude saw the kite she embraced Hugh, in a hug so tight, Hugh thought that he was going to pass out.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you! I'm so glad you found it, Hugh!" Hugh smiled bashfully.

"See you at the competition, Maude."

"Yes, see you!"

Hugh turned around, smiling sadly. He'd done the right thing.

THE SKY WAS kaleidoscopic. Kites of all colors, plum, chartreuse, alabaster, and vermillion, speckled the sky, like paint splatters on a canvas. Hugh's persimmon one was flying almost higher than the rest, tugging ferociously to get away. The hooter blew, and there was the quick raveling of the twine, and soon everyone was holding their kites. The smiling old lady who annually judged Kite Fest was holding a large trophy, and two medals.

"This year has been the closest year yet. However, we must pick a winner, and a winner we have picked!" Hugh's heart seemed to have stopped beating. Even the rustling of the wind in the trees had stopped. "In third place... Jonathan White!" A tall boy of about fourteen emerged out of the large crowd and came scampering over to the podium to collect his medal. "Between second and first place there were just two points! In second... Hugh Willows!" He blinked back a tear. Taking a deep breath, he walked coolly to the podium, smiling at his friends in the crowd. "Well done, young man," whispered the old lady. It came as no real surprise when she announced that the winner of Kite Fest 2012 was Maude Lesley. As Maude stood next to Hugh and Jonathan to have their photo taken, she squeezed his hand.

"I couldn't have done it without you, Hugh." And it was true. She couldn't have.



Inhaling the Scent of the Wind

By **Sydney Pardo**

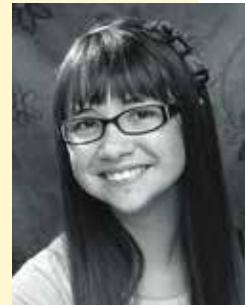
The scent of apples whispers through the air
Reminding me of our lazy days in the orchard
Lying in a bed of violet morning glories
Inhaling the scent of the wind

Remember the day we held a butterfly funeral
in grandma's backyard?
You found it in the dirt beneath the bougainvillea bush
With only one fiery wing
That fluttered into silence

We talked about everything and nothing
By flashlight under pink and purple sheets
Biscuit asleep between us, tail curled in comfort

You stopped coming around
When you turned thirteen
The two years between us
Suddenly yawned into a black abyss

You became a teenager
More interested in texting than watching hummingbirds fly
Boy talk, than watching the water dance in the fountain
And now when we meet
We are strangers



Sydney Pardo, 13
Irvine, California

The King of San Marino

By Elizabeth Surman



Elizabeth Surman, 10
San Marino, California

SCENARIO NUMBER ONE: I'm not sure if the directions on my math homework mean one thing or another. Solution: Go to Dad. Scenario Number Two: I woke up late and can't walk to school today. Solution: Ask Dad to drive me. Scenario Number Three: Mom hasn't gotten back from grocery shopping but I'm *hungry!!!* What do I do? You guessed it! I'll go to my dad and ask him to help me create a snack from ingredients in the pantry. Dad does so many things for me and here's my chance to thank him for his kind deeds.

First things first: He's not a quiet man. When he comes home after work and his feet slap against the tile, making a sound as loud as a wild bear's roar, the house shudders as if it anticipates the noise that will follow his arrival. To the annoyance of my mom and two sisters, he hums constantly, like the hummingbirds that occasionally visit our yard. At my bedtime, Daddy enthusiastically barges into my room to give me a cuddle and say goodnight. To awaken me, he increases the volume on his music and sometimes tickles me. Because of this, we love him dearly.

Do you need to be cheered up? Go to my dad! His humor will make you laugh so hard it hurts. Not only does my dad tell jokes and puns, he appreciates and watches comedies. He jokes when he trips or stubs his toe (which is very often). He even wrote a book declaring himself the "King of San Marino," the small town where we live. One of his favorite comedy shows is *The Three Stooges*. We go to a *Three Stooges* convention together every year. He loves to recall the funniest lines from different



Elizabeth and her dad

episodes and it makes me giggle.

However, my dad is very serious and devoted to his work. Sometimes, Dad stays at his office late at night, working for my family. Because of this, I think my dad makes an amazing lawyer.

Have you ever tasted a mouthful of heavenly French toast that has been prepared on the *barbecue*? This is the result of a creative experiment by my father. On Sunday afternoons, you might find the two of us side-by-side in the kitchen, inventing creative meals with ingredients you wouldn't typically find in the same dish. Our best products may end up on

the table that night for dinner.

Now you know almost everything about my dad except his appearance. Would you recognize him on the street if I told you that: a) Dad has curly black hair that frames his head like the fur on his pet poodle, Pandora, who he had when he was a boy; b) his hazel eyes twinkle; they are the sun bathing me in their golden rays; and c) he has a rather large nose, although he claims (in vain) that it is an optical illusion?

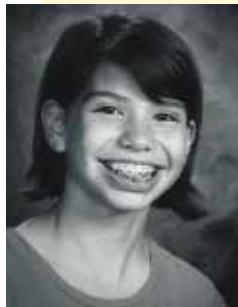
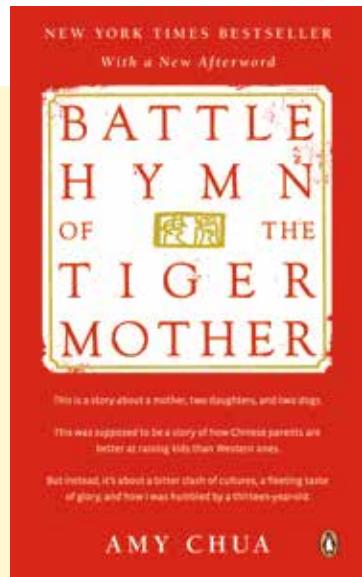
No matter what he looks like, I love my goofy, clumsy daddy as much as I love writing.



Book Review

By Ana Sofia Uzsoy

Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother, by Amy Chua;
Penguin Books: New York, 2011; \$16



Ana Sofia Uzsoy, 13
Cary, North Carolina

SOPHIA AND LOUISA CHUA are perfect kids. They get straight A's and are the best at everything. Sophia played piano at Carnegie Hall when she was fourteen; Louisa was accepted as a student of the world-famous violinist Naoko Tanaka. This sounds incredible, right? Meet Amy Chua: Yale Law professor and "Tiger Mother." She forces her daughters to practice their instruments for hours a day and doesn't let them be anything except top students. They can't have play dates or sleepovers, play computer games or watch TV, or choose their own activities.

The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother is the story of how Chua raised her daughters. She is Chinese and says that Asians stereotypically have very strict parenting habits that result in high-achieving children. They force their kids to be perfect or suffer the consequences. "Western" parents care about their children's self-esteem and worry about their child psychologically. Asian parents assume their child can handle it and dish out the criticism. I'm not trying to be racist; this is shown in various studies and in this book. I know kids whose parents really pressure them and sometimes the results aren't pretty.

This book really struck a chord with me because, well, I'm a kid. I'm the same age as Chua's daughters were for most of the

book. I think I offer a different perspective than most people who read this book because I can read about this type of parenting and wonder how I would respond to it. In my opinion, Chua had the basics right, but went too far. I think it's important for parents to have high expectations for their kids; it shows that they're confident enough in their child to think they can achieve it. At least for me, I get self-esteem by seeing that I am competent and good at things, not because people tell me that I am. But Chua screams at her daughters and threatens them if they don't keep practicing their instruments. I play piano and clarinet, and I know practicing is really important. But I wouldn't want to practice for four or five or six hours a day like Chua makes her daughters. I don't think threatening kids is the right way to get them to do things. Her daughter Louisa feels a growing resentment towards Chua after years of forced practices and arguments. It ends with an awful public shouting match when Louisa is thirteen. She screams "I HATE YOU" at her mother and smashes glasses in the restaurant. Of course, teenagers are dramatic and whatever, but that was serious.

Sophia and Louisa's talent and success are incredible, but is it worth the high price? This was a really thought-provoking book for me. It's been a controversial subject all over the media, but I think kids should get an opinion, too. The book is written incredibly. It opened a whole new world for me—the parent's world. For once, I experienced the frustration that comes when your kid doesn't cooperate; I felt the chills parents get when they are unbearably proud of their child. The story is very suspenseful and draws you right in. It was like a soap opera—I had to find out what happened. I even told my mom I was cleaning my room just so I could finish it. Sorry, Mom. In raising her daughters, Amy Chua learns that sometimes you just have to let go and that parents don't always know best. I highly recommend this book to anyone who just wants a great read. ☀

Imprisoning the Manatees

By Kerri Prinos

Illustrated by Maia Jackson



Kerri Prinos, 13
Concord, Massachusetts



Maia Jackson, 13
Long Beach, California

ISQUEEZE MY EYES SHUT and yank the plastic goggles from my face. Pulling them away, I swipe at the inside, attempting to clear away the fog that is obstructing my vision. My feet are coated by the gooey bottom of the Crystal River.

The rest of my group remains face down in the water, searching for manatees. I shiver and my goggles fog up again. I stagger blindly towards the large white blob that I know is the motorboat. The water swirls and swishes around my legs as I walk against the current. I plunge one foot, then another, into the quaggy river bottom. "Almost there!" I sigh, and trudge onward.

Suddenly, I trip on a large object floating in the water. I fall onto its slippery surface and my feet search for the bottom. I take a deep breath and submerge my face into the murky depths. I see a beautiful blue-gray creature that I recognize at once as a manatee. Its shell-shaped tail strongly and majestically propels the animal forward. I lift my head and stare down into the clear patch of water.

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

I consider calling out to my group as instructed, but at the same time I don't want to. I don't want this gorgeous creature to be hounded by humans.

I glance over at the manatee tour guide through my now clear goggles. He has river water and brume covering his goggles. I think of the rules: do not chase the manatees, do not scare them, and do not touch them. There are fines for breaking these



"I'm sorry," I whisper

rules and yet the tour guides are paid to break them! They are paid to hunt down manatees in motorboats. They are paid to dump people within two feet of these beautiful, endangered creatures. How is this any different from anyone else chas-

ing a manatee?

I take a deep breath and watch the manatee swim away from me and toward the other end of the river, toward momentary freedom. This time my vision is obstructed by tears. 



Bird Circle

By Sonia Bhaskaran



Sonia Bhaskaran, 9
Glendale, California

Two birds spiral,
Then one races after another,
And they dart through the air.
When their chase is done,
One stretches its slender neck and dives,
The other pumps its strong wings and rises.
In one acrobatic movement, a circle forms.
Yet the miracle lasts only for a moment.
They circle once more and land,
Rustling their wings.
The sounds of the world return.

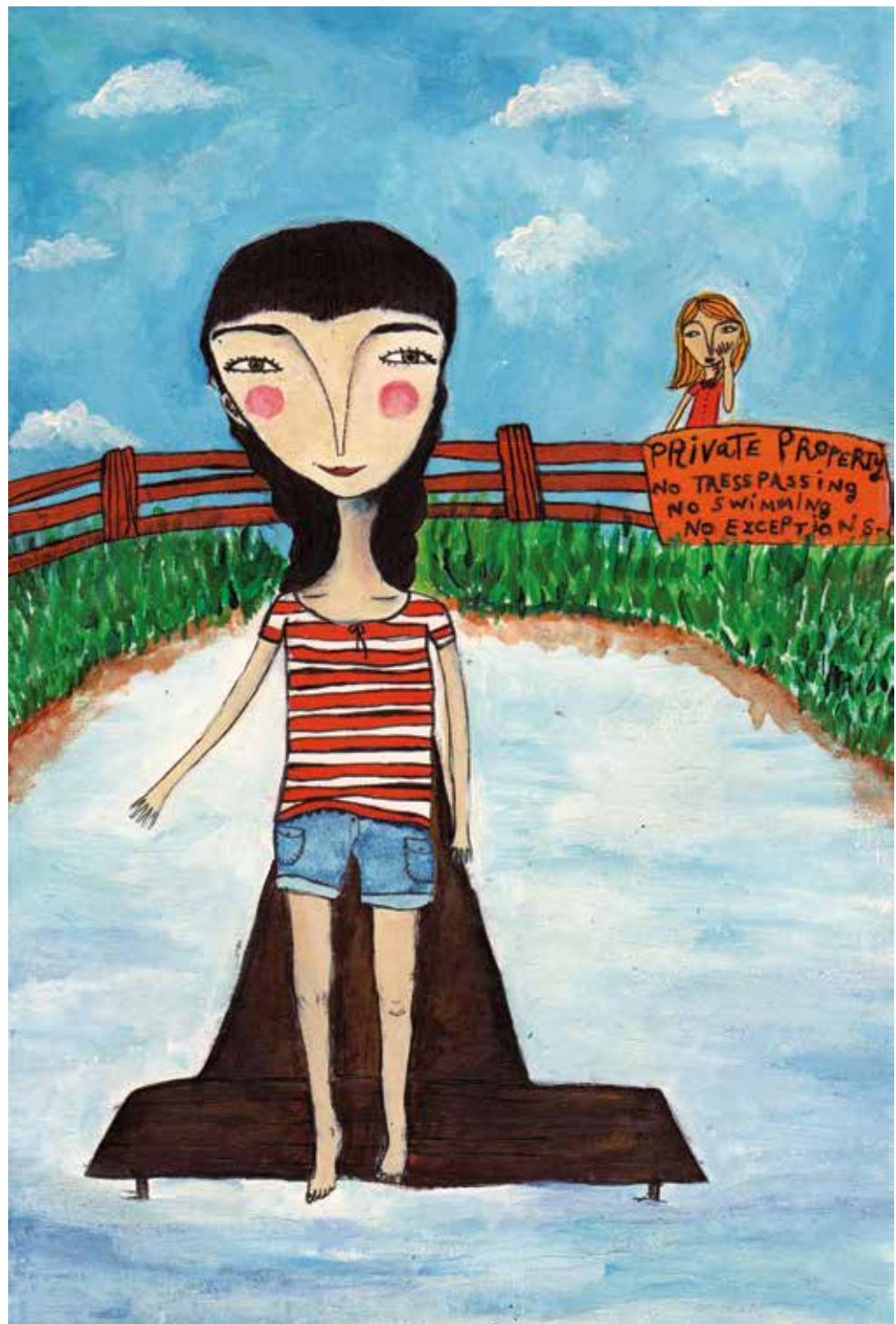
Poem

By Matteo Vita Harris

Speaking of sorrow
and happiness.
Telling a short story
with a new voice.
Speaking with a
mouth of words.
Soft as a baby's
cheek. Poem.



Matteo Vita Harris, 9
Astoria, New York



"I'm swimming in that lake whether you're coming with me or not"

The Owls of Moravia

By Madison Henson

Illustrated by Saffron Lily Gunwhy

“ANNABELLE, I JUST DON’T think this is a good idea,” my best friend said nervously. “I mean, the sign even says, ‘Private Property: No trespassing, No swimming, No exceptions!’”

“Oh, come on, Sarah! Nobody’s home right now anyway,” I replied. I enjoy having fun. You know, taking risks and doing the most ridiculous dares ever. That was fun. Now, I had my eyes set on swimming in the lake right before my eyes. It was so close, and the water looked so cool and clean. It definitely beat swimming in the community pool.

“Sarah, I’m swimming in that lake whether you’re coming with me or not.”

“Annabelle, wait!” I had already slipped through the fence and was in the process of taking my shoes off.

“Annabelle,” Sarah pleaded, “what if something happens to you, and I become known as the girl who just stood by and watched, and then no one will be my friend, and no adult would respect me, and then where would I be in life, and that would also cause me tons of emotional problems when I get older, I might get post-traumatic stress disorder seeing something horrible happen to you, I could have nightmares for the rest of my life...”

“Sarah,” I stopped her from going into one of her complete run-on-sentence-type ordeals. When she’s nervous she never stops talking.

“You are just trying to distract me from going in that lake by



Madison Henson, 13
Dunlap, Illinois



Saffron Lily Gunwhy, 13
Killaloe, County Clare
Ireland

jabbering!" With that, I jumped right off the pier and into the water. It provided wonderful relief from the heat wave that had swept through my town in Virginia.

I stayed under the water for a few more seconds before resurfacing.

"Ohhh, that feels so nice," I said, trying to get Sarah to jump in too.

"Nice try, Annabelle," Sarah said, "there is no way whatsoever that I am even going on the other side of this fence. No, sir, I'm staying right here on *un*-private property."

"Suit yourself, you can stay in that dreadful heat while I'm nice and cool in here."

"Humph," Sarah grumbled.

SUDDENLY I FELT... different. It was as if I was weightless and was floating through nothing. It was dark, and I was under the impression that I had gone underwater, but I was still breathing. My vision blurred, and the world started spinning. I closed my eyes, only wanting to stop spiraling and find out where I was.

Then everything stopped. I wasn't in the water anymore, but I was still soaking wet. I slowly opened my eyes and saw an open sky with fluffy, white clouds spread out above me. *Where the heck am I?* seemed to be the only thing that I could think at the moment. A lush, green meadow went as far as the eye could see. It was so peaceful. It wasn't a lake in Virginia where I was just moments before.

I finally made myself get up and walk around to help dry my wet clothes. I

thought about what I should do next. My options were: stay where I was and wait for someone to find me, or start moving in a random direction and hope to find someone. Of course, there was always the possibility that I was dreaming or something, but it all *felt* real.

I paced and paced like I typically do while thinking, when I no longer had to make a decision. The ground beneath my feet began to tremble and vibrate. On the horizon I spotted at least twenty figures that looked like men on horses. Maybe I was in the pasture of a horse ranch or something. A few minutes went by and the horses were still heading toward me. I started to walk forward so I could meet up with them sooner.

As I strode up to greet the men, they formed a tight circle around me. They all drew their swords while murmurs spread throughout them. One man's horse stepped forward a bit and the man's eyes narrowed.

"It is the glorious Harvest Day! One of the most important holidays celebrated in honor of Sir Nathaniel Corin of Morovia and his perilous quests to find food for his starving people. Why are you not working in the fields where a peasant like you belongs?" the man asked, sounding bored and irritated.

"I... uh... well... you see, I don't know who Nathaniel Corin is, and I'm kinda lost. All I want to do is get back home and, you know, *not* work in a field," I replied, not really knowing the best way to respond to that whole spiel.

All of the men gasped in unison and whispered urgently to one another. The man who had spoken to me clenched his fists, his eyes seemed to pop out of his head, and his face turned an unnatural shade of purple.

“Now listen! Make sure you listen well, because that kind of talk can get you killed! It is *Sir* Nathaniel Corin, or *Sir* Corin. It is never, under any circumstance, just...” he swallowed hard before reluctantly saying, “it is never just Nathaniel Corin.”

What kind of a freak was this guy? I mean, seriously! Nobody even worshipped Oprah that much and I highly doubted that not saying the “Sir” could get me a death sentence.

I was really tempted to tell this man that, but instead I said in my best theatrical voice, “My most sincere and deepest apologies. I *do* hope that you will forgive me. I really do just want to get home.” OK, the last part wasn’t a lie, but I was kind of enjoying messing with this guy.

Suddenly, someone in the crowd piped up. He cried, “Wait! Take a good look at her; she resembles the girl in Sir Corin’s puzzle!”

The man who was now returning to a normal shade of skin screamed, “Hush! Why should *she* know about that?” The man sighed, then said, exasperatedly, “She knows too much; we must bring her to the castle.”

“What?” I asked.

“Nothing,” a few of the men said together. About ten rather tall men hopped

off of their horses and headed toward me, arms outstretched.

“Whoa, wait,” I said as I backed up until I bumped into the nose of one of the horses. However, the men weren’t listening, and they kept heading toward me. One grabbed my shoulder, but I shook him off and dodged other hands that had come toward me. I had to get out of the circle and run as far as I could. More men jumped off of their horses, and soon I was knocked on the ground, and my hands and feet were bound. The last thing I remembered was a fist flying at me, then stars, then nothing.

I WOKE UP in a smelly, damp cell. The only light came from a single torch that was just outside my cell. I immediately sprang up and headed toward the door to find out how I could get out. I tried everything, I mean everything, even running straight into the bars and hoping they would budge. I regretted doing that, however, because the only thing it got me was a bruised shoulder.

Suddenly, there was mass chaos outside of my cell. Just down the hall, there was banging and the sound of metal hitting metal. Men were shouting and then groaning. I craned my neck to see what was going on, but it was too dim. Then, out of nowhere, a boy, about my age of sixteen, jumped in front of my cell and flashed an award-winning smile. “Good evening, my lady,” he said in an accent I can’t describe. “How about I get you out of here?” He pulled out a key and began to

unlock the cell.

“Wait,” I said, “how do I know I can trust you?”

“Ha! Some respect I get for trying to save you. I say I’m going to break you out, and you say you can’t trust me!”

“Well, I haven’t had a very good time since I got here, and I’m not taking any chances! I don’t even know your name!”

“All you need to know is that you’re not safe here, and I want to take you somewhere safe.”

“I still need something to call you, even if it’s not your true name.”

“Everyone calls me Spotted,” he said with a tone of finality. He finished unlocking the cell and motioned for me to follow him. He led me outdoors where a horse was waiting. “We will arrive at a cave at around midnight. We will camp there until morning, then continue on to a fort where you will be safe,” Spotted said as he held out his hand to help me onto the horse.

I rode behind Spotted for hours until we finally reached the cave. Once inside he guided me to a secret passage on the back wall of the cave. Behind that was a huge room filled with thousands of pictures with names beneath them. Each picture was different.

“These are called puzzles,” Spotted began. “They each show an image of each person’s fate or destiny in the surrounding villages. If someone moves into one of the villages, a new picture appears. We came here to try to find yours.”

“Where do we even begin to look in this mess?” I asked in dismay. “This could

take hours.”

“Well, they are in alphabetical order. So, obviously we will look in the A’s,” Spotted said simply.

“How do you know my name begins with an A?” I said quizzically, starting to get really freaked out.

Spotted only gave me a smug look and said, “I know many things, Annabelle.” How do you respond to that? A guy knowing your name should be totally flattering, but when you don’t even know him, it’s just plain creepy! So I just huffed and started leafing through images in the A section.

As I was looking, I decided to interrogate Spotted.

“So,” I began, “what do you mean when you say each image shows someone’s fate or destiny?”

Spotted paused as if trying to find words, then said, “Well, most images either show a person or a location. Typically, it means that will be the person who kills you, that is the person you will fall in love with, or that is the place where you will die. Therefore, it shows your fate or your destiny.”

“Wow, so what does your puzzle show?”
“An owl.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that I am considered to be a hero or warrior to the villagers who oppose Nathaniel Corin.” As he said this I finally pulled out my puzzle. I stared at the image, stunned at what I saw.

It was a picture of a beautiful owl with a dark brown back. Its wings were out-



“You are in my puzzle, and I am in yours”

stretched and it soared high above the trees. Its front was a cream color with a chocolate-brown face, and white outlined the eyes. It looked so majestic and strong. Right next to it was another owl with spots covering its body.

With my mouth gaping I slowly handed my puzzle to Spotted. He carefully studied it and then said, “You are in my puzzle, and I am in yours.”

That was even more shocking, so all I could do was gasp, “What?”

“The owls,” Spotted pointed out, “I’m the spotted owl, and you are the spectacled owl. That’s where I get my name; my puzzle shows a spotted owl, plus I’m covered in freckles, therefore, everyone calls

me Spotted.” I stared at my puzzle, realizing that the owl that was supposed to be me had the exact same feather color of dark brown as my hair was. I would have glasses if I didn’t wear contacts. I resembled a spectacled owl.

The cave was cool, with a draft, and I shivered, still only wearing a T-shirt, shorts, and no shoes.

“Here, Speck,” Spotted said as he handed me his cloak.

“No, that’s OK; it’s not fair that you should be cold when I was unprepared.”

“Really, I’ll be fine. I have a lot more layers than you do.” It was true, under the cloak there were at least two long-sleeved shirts.

“Thanks,” I mumbled.

For the rest of the night we each got about two hours of sleep. During the remaining time, we told stories and laughed. We got to know each other and like each other. After a while, I realized that I would trust him with my life. He also explained to me that Corin was a ruthless ruler who brought no good to his people. Spotted was fighting against him.

When morning finally came we went outside to start a fire and get some food. However, when we got outside, there were dozens of men with their swords drawn. One man stepped forward.

“Good morning, Sir Corin,” Spotted said with hate in his voice.

“Ah, well, Spotted, did you find a girl to fight with you? That’s just twice the fun; two to kill,” Corin said, his eyes gleaming. With that, several of the men stepped up. Spotted drew his sword and ran in front of me, poised to attack. What happened next was a blur. I remember Spotted skillfully keeping the attackers at bay.

“I cannot hold them off forever,” exclaimed Spotted. Just then a huge hole opened up in the ground.

Many of the men shouted, “It’s a portal!”

Spotted turned to me and pointed at the hole. He was so out of breath, he

could only whisper, “Home.”

“No,” I cried, “how will I know that you will be all right?”

Spotted only shook his head and said, “Take Corin with you. He will have no power in your land.”

I knew then that I had to go. I had to somehow get Corin to go with me. I had to do it to save Spotted, me, and the rest of the people in this land that Corin ruled.

Corin was standing right at the edge of the portal. I sprinted toward him, weaving in between the men who were advancing on Spotted. I reached Corin and ran straight into him, knocking him into the hole and falling in with him.

I WAS WEIGHTLESS again, and falling through nothing. I ended up back in the lake in my hometown of Virginia. Sarah was still on the other side of the fence, looking impatient.

“OK, Annabelle, you’ve had your fun. Now let’s go before we get into trouble,” Sarah said. She turned around and stalked away. Then, Corin resurfaced, gasping and sputtering. I swam away, and then I jumped over the fence. I ran all the way to my home. Corin would figure it out.

I went to my bedroom, and on my dresser lay a spotted owl feather. I just knew, somehow, that he was OK. 

The Fighter

By Jenna Fields

Illustrated by Christine Troll

I AM AN ANIMAL. I am a fighter. It is who I am. Each day it is the crack of the whip and the ring of a bell. It is the creed I live by, the carrot or the stick. Each rosy dawn I awaken to greet a new day, a new challenge, and always a new fight. The musty, warm smell of hay will surround me and the rustle and snort of my herd members will always be heard. The round pen we are contained in is only enough to hold me. If it weren't for that Powder River corral, I would be free, free to run and escape the restraint placed upon me. I am a fighter, one who fights for his right to freedom. I am nothing else.

I was born from one of the finest bucking mares for miles, in a small dusty corral, on the eve of June. My early days are now a blur to me, nothing but feelings and short memories. I do remember the man. Burly, rough, smelling of sweat and woodsmoke, he would bring the hay, loaded in his arms. "You are my winner, little firebrand," he would mumble to me under his breath. "Soon you will be a bucking legend among the best of the best." He would sigh and scuff his boot against the dusty, hard ground, then, whistling a slow sad song, he would trudge back to the house. Little mind I paid him then. It is interesting that after so long he would remain in my memory and not fade away like most of my other memories from my youth. I scarcely recall my own mother, so why, above all, should a man remain in my memory instead? A mystery, to me, it remains.

I do remember, however, the weaning. Harshly separated from my mother, and all I knew disappeared in the bat of an



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Coyote, California



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Somerset, Pennsylvania



I live to fight, and I fight to live

eye. No more were the quiet peaceful days with my mother in the sun. Introduced were the long lonely nights and the endless nickering of the frightened colts around me, a never-ending cry of bleak misery. I began to rely only on myself for comfort, never anyone else. I became the fighter I am today. I became "the animal."

I don't remember the first time I bucked. I remember my first rodeo, however. The noise, the smells, the fear. Never before and never again will I feel such fear. I trembled with adrenaline and terror, wide eyes engulfing my surroundings, as the fear engulfed me. I was driven from the pen in the back to the long queue of

bucking chutes, forced in, and entrapped. Then came the saddle, the heap of leather and cloth, heaved on your back for the first time and strapped on under your belly. I despised it. However, even more than that, I despised the rider that followed it, plopping down on my back like he owned it and taking an infuriating tight grip on the lead rope attached to my halter and around my sides with his legs. The fires of hate boiled a frothing stew inside me, raging and foaming within me, fueling my desire to break free and show the infuriating human on my back who was boss. I remember wriggling and shuffling in the chute, tossing my head and stamping my feet in furious impatience. Then, the bell rang and the gate opened.

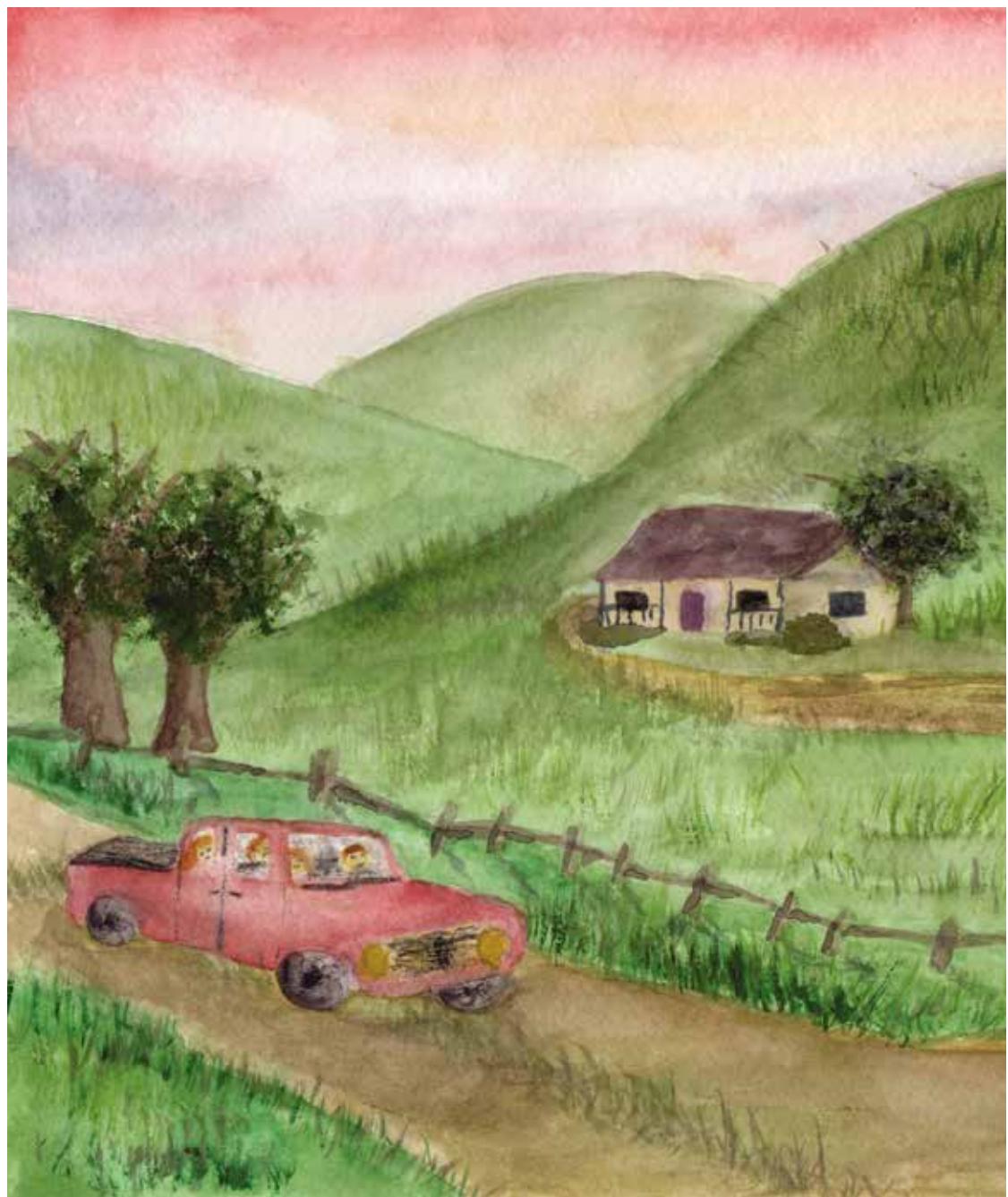
There is something about the bell, the buzzer, or the opening of the gate that sends a fighter, a bucking horse, into a mad rage. I see the gap and I release all of my fury, all of the hate that boiled within me while inside the chute. I shot out of the chute like I was shot from a cannon, kicking up my heels and leaping like a madman. My rider, I could feel, was flopping around, gouging me with his spurs and hanging on to the rigging for dear life. I leapt and spun, bucked and kicked, dodged and reared, whirling and tossing my rider about furiously. In a matter of moments, I catapulted my rider from my back, sending him in a wonderful arch to land with a *thump* on the ground nearby.

I recall clearly the roar of the immense crowd and the shrill ring of the buzzer seconds later, and in a rush, I was herded from the arena. Still mad with fear, I circled inside my pen nervously, snorting and plunging about. Little did I know, that for the years following, I would have many days like this, fighting days.

For the years following, I would grow fiercer, increasingly wiser, and forever more determined. I would learn to trick, learn to fight harder, learn to deceive. I would acquire the titles The Nightmare and The Animal, which I maintain to this day, taking them with pride, knowing they mean I can fight and win. I would become known for the ferocity in my fight, the success at the end, and the sheer determination I fight with. I live to fight, and I fight to live. It's as simple as that.

As I have said before, each morning I awaken to greet the new challenge ahead of me. I will feel the adrenaline, the hate, the fear. They will drive me into the chute, where I will be trapped, saddled, and mounted. I will feel the frothing madness and the overwhelming desire to throw my rider. I will fight. Like a caged animal, I will fight to be free, fight to show who is boss. I am an animal, a fierce fighting animal. It's who I am, always will be. It is drilled into me, planted inside me, by instinct, by breeding, by influence from man. I am the fighter, and that will never change.





Vast green plains and tall grasses are spread out in front of my vision

The Road Home

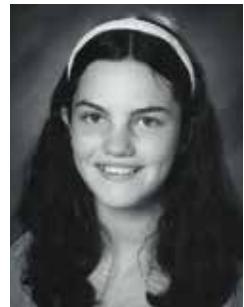
By Hannah Ogden

Illustrated by Victoria D'Ascenzo

THE SKY OUTSIDE is a blood-red color. Slowly, I close my eyes and let a mercifully cool breeze blow on my face through the open car window. I open my eyes and stare out at the landscape spread out around me. Vast green plains and tall grasses are spread out in front of my vision. The scarlet sky is streaked with pink, orange, and purple. The light of the fast-setting sun reflects off my stormy gray eyes. The shine makes my brown hair look red. "What a beautiful place," I breathe. Then I remember with a jolt. If my family and I hadn't got evicted, I wouldn't be here, right now, in this un-Montana-like place.

I sigh quietly, and then unintentionally go over yesterday's events in my mind. The giant, horrible eviction notice, which seemed to cast shadows over the lawn. The landlord with the nasal voice. My sobbing mother. Why did this have to happen to us? Every day my parents tried to make ends meet, but they failed to do so. We had lost our house and were now on an unfamiliar road, in an unfamiliar place, driving west in the oldest pickup truck in history.

My parents had informed me and my three-year-old sister, Lizzie, that we were going to live at our grandparents' house in eastern Washington for a while until they could find jobs here. Originally they had both been working at an office in Montana, but the company just didn't work out. After thinking about all this, I smile sadly. My parents always told me I was a thinker, not a speaker. I strongly agree with them.



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Suddenly, the car starts spluttering up a storm and then starts jolting back and forth, back and forth. I knew we should have stopped for gas when we passed that gas station about an hour ago.

Lizzie wakes up from a nap from her purple car seat and starts wailing. This long car drive has been really hard on her. Honestly, we've been driving for at least nine hours! Poor Lizzie, I thought. Lizzie's face is screwed up and tears are streaming down her cheeks. Her sandy-colored hair is coming out of her pigtails. Lizzie had remained quiet for this entire trip, but this was the last straw.

My mom reaches around from her seat in front of me, takes Lizzie's tiny hand in her own, and speaks softly. "Don't worry, Lizzie; it's only one more mile."

"One more mile," my dad says out loud, patting the dashboard. "Hang in there, Blue." Blue is the name I gave our red vehicle when I was two and had just started talking. Mom and Dad thought the name was so cute they started calling our truck the same thing.

"Allie?" Dad questions me. "Are you still there?"

"Oh, yeah," I reply with a yawn. "What time is it?"

"About nine o'clock," Mom says. The car shudders again, and I clench the sides of my seat with tight fists, urging the car on with my mind. "Come on," I think with every ounce of my brain. "Please."

Dad steers the truck down a gravel

road and says as the car shudders once again, "We're here!"

"Woo-hoo," I say in a semi-excited voice as Dad pulls down a long driveway in front of a modest-sized house. As if on cue, our old car chokes on the last bit of gas, and then dies.

"Whew," Mom exhales a sigh. "That was a close one. Come on, Lizzie, let's go say hello to Grandma Joy and Grandpa Rob. Mom gets out of the car and then picks up Lizzie from her car seat and starts walking towards the house. By now Lizzie has calmed down and looks around with green curious eyes. Dad gets out of the truck and opens the car door for me.

"Come on, honey," he says softly. I hop out of the car onto the driveway.

Ah, solid ground again, I think to myself.

The sky is now much darker, and stars are beginning to peep out from behind their dark veil. Lights are shining from inside the house, their light dances on the front lawn through the window. The smell of white-chocolate-chip-and-macadamia-nut cookies is beginning to waft through the open door. I turn to face my solemn-faced father. He stares up at the house with a glazed expression.

"So this is going to be where we live?" I ask him.

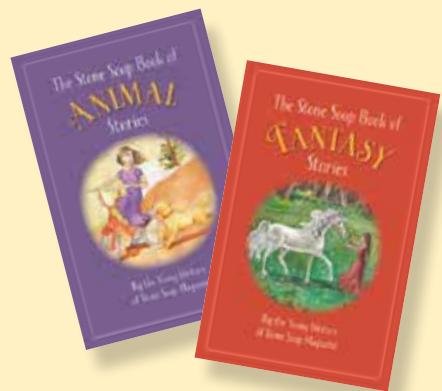
"For a little while," he replies. He gives me a hug and whispers, "Welcome home."

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