

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*"Autumn Scene," by Anna Ruth, age 11, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*

## MEMORIES

Thomas can't stop thinking about his mother

## LIFE AMONG THE WHISPERS

Lise keeps her friendship with the graffiti artist a secret

*Also:* Illustrations by Savva Gretzky and Anika Knudson

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014

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# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 2  
NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2014

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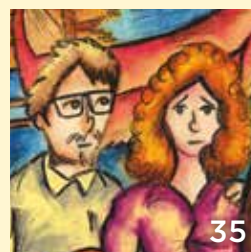
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# Editor's Note

**All it takes is one nice person**, a few kind words, and everything can change for the better. Have you ever started over at a new school? Ever been teased by some mean kids? You feel alone, depressed. Then one person says hi, offers to be your friend. It's a new day. Happiness seems possible. Maybe you were that nice kid. Good for you! Two stories in this issue show the power one person has to help another. In "Memories," Thomas has lost his mother. Then he and his dad have to move. Thomas is so lonely, until Billy stops by, tells Thomas a funny joke, and a friendship is born. "You Did It, Friend" is about a mentally disabled boy named Arthur who has never had a friend. Kevin decides to take Arthur under his wing and teach him to play basketball. Both boys win in the end. For your next story, create a character who changes another character's life by reaching out.

— *Gerry Mandel*

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**ON THE COVER** "Autumn Scene" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy. Founded in 1987, Paintbrush Diplomacy promotes peace and understanding through children's art exchanges. Visit [pbdmuseum.org](http://pbdmuseum.org) to learn more and see artwork from the collection. Special thanks to Joan Sieber.



# The Mailbox



**I read the book** review by Kaylee Ayres [September/October 2014] for the book *18 Things*, by Jamie Ayres, which I have not read yet. I have comments about two of the things Kaylee said she did

that were on her “bucket list.” She said that she “carved her name in a tree.” By doing this she was harming the tree and probably stunting, stopping, or harming its growth. The second thing Kaylee said she did was “send a message in a bottle.” Another name for sending a message in a bottle is l-i-t-t-e-r-i-n-g. Not only did Kaylee add a piece of trash to our already polluted ocean, but she could also cause a dolphin or other sea animal to choke, become injured, or die. *Stone Soup* is one of my favorite magazines. However, I do not think that you should have published Kaylee Ayres’s book review as written. It will probably encourage people to carve into trees and send messages in bottles, which will make our environment worse off than it already is.

**Ruth Hazzard, 13**

West Chester, Pennsylvania

*We didn't know this before we published Kaylee's book review, but the author of 18 Things, Jamie Ayres, is Kaylee's mother.*

**I got my subscription** for *Stone Soup* last Christmas from my grandma. This is a magnificent magazine, and I appreciate you giving us kids a chance at writing.

**Genevieve Elwell, 12**

Reedsport, Oregon

**A few years ago**, I came across *Stone Soup Magazine* when looking for something to read. I fell in love with it and now read it at the library after school almost all the time. I have always dreamed to be in it, and now I have finally plucked up the courage to try. It would be a great honor for my writing to sit beside those of some amazing young authors!

**Ennya Papastoitsis, 11**

Watertown, Massachusetts

*Ennya's story, "Baking Cookies," appears on page 12 of this issue.*

**I watched your video** where you interviewed Isabel Folger. Considering she's a year older than me, then surely she knows more about writing than I do! And she did. Her words encouraged me to keep on writing! In the July/August 2014 issue of *Stone Soup*, Isabel had a story published entitled “Believing.” It was one of the most moving stories I have ever read. Her story was so magnificent and well written that you could actually take a walk in Naomi’s shoes. You could look inside of her and see the pain that she was going through. And the ending was heartwarming. I loved how, etched in the sand, it said, “I love you too.” I believe I cried when I arrived at that point.

**Sofia M. Hassan, 11**

New Castle, Pennsylvania

*You can see Isabel's video on the Stone Soup Magazine channel at YouTube. Her new book review is on page 32 of this issue.*

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*Stone Soup* welcomes your comments. Send them to [editor@stonesoup.com](mailto:editor@stonesoup.com).





*I still missed Mama so much*

# Memories

By **Clara Elizabeth Lind**

*Illustrated by* **Savva Gretzky**

**S**LOWLY, CAREFULLY, I CARVED the last stroke on the bird's tail. There. Finished. Getting up off the grass, I rushed into the shop to show my father.

"Good work, son," he said to me, "though there is always a part to improve." I braced myself. Pop was the kind of person who saw fault in everything. "See the bird's eye, here?" he asked me. I nodded. "You want it to be shaped a little more rounded with that slightly pointed inner side, like this one." He pulled a carved bird of his own from the display shelf.

"Uh-huh," I said. I was interested, but I got this all the time. "Do you want me to change it before it goes in the shop?" I said.

"No, leave it as you like," he replied, which of course meant I would be changing it.

I went back outside. It was a lovely day, one of those where you feel so extremely happy, like everything in the world is good, from the blue sky with its billowing white clouds to the trees with the little birds singing in the branches. Of course, everything is never quite that good, but you get what I mean. I picked up my knife, which I had left in its case in the grass, and started perfecting the eye that Pop had told me wasn't quite right. While I carved and whittled away, I thought about everything that had been going on. Mama had died more than three years ago, but Pop and I still hadn't gotten used to it. Sometimes, at night, I would catch him sitting in a chair by the fire and staring at the one photograph of Mama we had. It was a picture of the two of them on their wedding day, Pop in his



Clara Elizabeth Lind, 11  
Goshen, Indiana



Savva Gretzky, 13  
Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

fancy black suit that he had never worn since, and Mama in her white dress and veil, with a bouquet of perfect roses in her hands.

It had been a wonderful shock when, a little more than three years ago, it was announced that I was to have a little brother, and terrible shock some months later when Pop told me I wasn't going to have a brother after all, and besides that, I no longer had a mother.

As I finished perfecting the eye, my vision was slightly blurred with tears. I still missed Mama so much. I brushed away the tears, and, sweeping some wood shavings off my lap, I got up off the grass and went in through the side door of the store to put the little carved bird on a table, where I would later varnish it with linseed oil and put it out in the shop to be sold.

Then I went into our house, which was in back of the store, and went to the kitchen. I took out some bread and butter, made myself a sandwich, and went back outside to sit in the large oak tree and eat. The oak tree was a special place for me. Part of what made it special was that when Mama was alive, she would climb up in the tree with me. It had a perfect set of branches that curved in just the right way, so that you could sit leaning back and not worry about falling out. It also felt like you could see everything from up there. Mama and I used to sit there on hot summer days and see if we could see what the neighbors were doing.

I sat there and finished off my sandwich. After that I just sat there a bit

more, looked at the scenery, and did some more thinking. A lot of my time was taken up with thinking now, especially since school was let out. I really didn't have much else to do. Except carve.

I shimmied down the tree, picked up a stick, and started randomly whittling. As I whittled, our cat, Toffee, came up and started batting at my legs and purring. I set down my carving stick and started petting her. I sat there for a few minutes, enjoying the feel of the soft breeze ruffling my hair and the slightly prickly grass on my legs, until I heard Pop calling me from the door of the shop.

"Son? I need you to come help clean up in here. I'm going into town soon." I stopped petting Toffee and, leaving my whittling stick in the grass, walked back to the shop.

THAT NIGHT, I had a sit-down supper with Pop. This was unusual because Pop would usually be in the shop until very late at night. At first we both just sat there in a slightly awkward silence, because we didn't really know what to say to each other.

But soon Pop said, "How are you liking me teaching you to carve and all?"

"Oh!" I said. "Yes, I really like it." I paused. "And I like helping you in the shop."

"Good." Pop seemed pleased.

"You know, we have pretty good business in the shop," I said.

"Yes," Pop said. "You know, I've been thinking of moving the shop into town.



We do make a good amount of money here, but we could probably make even more in the town, and with your mother gone..."

"Oh," I said. "All right." I began to have a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. Moving away from the only place I had to remember Mama? I couldn't do that. I started thinking of all the things I would miss if we moved. That was a mistake.

What followed was another awkward silence in which the only sound was the plates clinking. This time I was the one to break the silence.

"When?" I said.

"Hmmm?" said Pop with his mouth full.

"I mean, when are you thinking of moving the shop?"

"Oh, I'm not really sure yet, but maybe sometime this summer."

"Oh." That definitely didn't make it better. I started feeling very sorry for myself. I couldn't move away from here. If we did that I might, God forbid, forget some things about Mama. And I couldn't do that, I just couldn't.

After we were done with supper, I cleared the dishes to the kitchen. Then I said good night to my pop and climbed the stairs to my room. I slipped into my nightclothes and got into bed, but I couldn't fall asleep right then, because I had too much thinking and feeling sorry for myself to do. Then I started thinking

some more about Mama. Oh, how much I missed her. I missed the way she would tuck me into bed at night and brush my bangs away from my forehead. I missed her sunny laugh, and boy, did she laugh. All of this just made me sadder, and eventually I cried myself to sleep.

---

**Pop was the kind  
of person who saw  
fault in everything.**

---

It was the middle of the night and I had been dreaming about my mother. She had burnt the toast for breakfast and we had both been laughing until she got all serious and said, "Thomas, you need

to wake up right now. You don't want the house to burn down, do you?" That had woken me up with a start, and when I realized that I really was smelling smoke, I was scared. I pulled on my boots and rushed downstairs to Pop's room.

"Pop! Pop!" I yelled. "I think the house is on fire!"

"What?" he said blearily.

"I said, I think house is on fire! We have to get out now!"

That woke him up. My pop got out of bed, pulled on his jacket, and took charge. "Son, all of our money is in the cupboard behind the dishes in a jar on the top shelf," he said. "I want you to take the money and go outside. I will be out soon." I nodded my head and went to do as he told me, my heart thumping all the way. I had to move all of our china out of the way to get to the money, but I did in the end. Then I took the jar and my coat and left the house. I waited for what felt like



*Boy, were those pancakes good*

forever for Pop to come out of the house, and when he finally did I ran over to him. He was carrying a pile of our things: some clothes for both of us, our carved wooden dishes, Mama's jewelry box, and the wedding photo. But nothing from the shop. I was about to ask why when he started explaining.

"It was the shop that caught fire," he said. "My guess is that a rag soaked in linseed oil was left too close to a candle, and just like that, everything was in flames. I might never find out what *really* happened, but I know it started in the shop."

"Oh no," I said. "What will we do now?"

"We'll do what I planned to do anyway. Move to the town."

WE SPENT WHAT remained of the night at an aunt's house in town, in blankets on the floor and our bundles of clothes as pillows. Normally, that would have been very uncomfortable, but in this case we were so tired we didn't even care.

The next morning my aunt, whose name was Millie, gave us a breakfast of

pancakes and bacon. Boy, were those pancakes good. Then she told us how shocked she'd been to see us: "And when I opened the door, there you were, standing on the doorstep with your bundles of clothes! And I asked what are you doing here in the middle of night, and you told me your house had burnt down! Oh, how awful."

After that we decided to go and see what was left of our house. We weren't expecting much, of course, but there might be something to salvage. Aunt Millie drove us there in her car, and what was left of the house, or what wasn't, was a sight to see. It seemed that the fire trucks had taken their own sweet time getting to our house. There was pretty much nothing left except half a wall here and there, and a chunk of the sturdy old table in what had been the shop. And then, I saw it. It remains a mystery to me how it managed to remain so completely untouched by the fire, but there it was. My carved bird. I ran over and picked it up. It had fallen into a part of the table hollowed out by flame, but it had fallen in after the fire. There it was, with its eye that I had perfected the day before, and its wing feathers carved in so much complicated detail. I started to cry.

All of a sudden I heard a soft purring. I looked down and there was Toffee, winding herself between my legs in a figure eight. I scooped her up in my arms and buried my face in her soft, velvety fur.

It was all too much. Mama gone, the fire, and then my carved bird to remind

me of it all. I stood up, dropping Toffee in the process, and my pop came up behind me and clasped me in a great big hug. And then I knew. We would be OK.

ABOUT A MONTH later we were settled into our new house in the town. At first I was really lonely. I didn't seem to have any friends, except Toffee, of course, but she was only a cat. Then one day, a boy named Billy came over to our house with his mom to bring some cookies. I liked Billy right away. He had a great big smile, and the first thing he told me was a joke.

"Hey," he said. "What did the banana say to the orange when they were looking for the apple?"

"I dunno," I said. "Tell me."

Billy laughed. "The banana said, 'Keep your eyes peeled.'"

We laughed and laughed over all of Billy's jokes. The two of us became great friends. Apparently my pop and his mother really hit it off too. Thinking over it all, part of me is glad we moved to the town. Now I do a lot less thinking and a lot more laughing. Another part of me misses Mama and our quiet house in the country, but a person can't have everything. I'm pretty sure that's how it will always be, though. Most of me will have a good time with friends, laugh, and do everything a person should do to live a good life. But a part of me, deep down inside, will always mourn Mama and that little house in the country. But, no matter what, life goes on. And most of the time, it's good. 🍌

# Silent Language

By **Bethany Duff**



Bethany Duff, 11  
Landenberg, Pennsylvania

There are special moments  
where you connect with another living being.  
When no words are spoken  
you can understand each other.  
Some moments you can physically feel,  
as you run with your dog  
and your steps fall in line, as if to the beat of a drum.  
You can feel it through music as you dance together  
with someone you love, twirling in and out of the rhythm  
and letting it hold you close.  
When you don't even try, it can happen,  
as you hold a baby close to your chest  
feeling its fragile heart beat.  
And the precious life in your arms  
doesn't even know the brightness of the world,  
but you know each other.

When you are a baby, you don't know how to speak  
but you have a language.  
It is silent and without words.

As you learn to speak,  
that unspoken language gets less practice  
and slowly fades away like a memory from long ago  
until all you know are words  
as if that is the only way to communicate.  
Sometimes you can still use it  
and it will kick in on its own,  
that is when these moments happen.

The language is strong and quiet  
like a wooded stream.  
You will stop to listen to it  
and feel it in you  
bypassing your brain  
and rushing straight to your heart.  
If you hold onto that current  
you can embrace it  
and let it speak to you  
in its own way.



# Baking Cookies

By Ennya Papastoitsis

*Illustrated by* Onalee Higgins



Ennya Papastoitsis, 11  
Watertown, Massachusetts



Onalee Higgins, 13  
Galesville, Wisconsin

SINCE THE BEGINNING of time itself, my mom, my sister, and I have baked chocolate-chip cookies. They're not amazing or perfect and definitely not round, but to us they're as good as paradise. We bake them all the time, on rainy evenings, or mopey afternoons, or cozy Sunday mornings. If you scavenged through our kitchen and found that cookbook, in its rightful place beside the toaster, you would see the recipe forever open to that spot. You would see the splattered batter marks. You could even count the thousand chocolaty finger-prints. Today, we will bake them again, stirring up all our memories in the mixing bowl.

We cascade into the kitchen, hollering and whooping and turning on cheerful music. We all dance, and Zoe sings, her sweet melodies rising into the air. We do a lot of things, but mostly, we bake. I dump in teaspoon after teaspoon. Cup after cup. I add vanilla, contemplate, and then add more. We pull out ingredients from cupboards. Flour flies, and batter drips. All the while my dog licks up the mess. Spatter, lick, spatter, lick. It goes on like this for a while until we have successfully put the pan into the oven. We stare in, oohing and aahing at the soon-to-be cookies.

Now all there is left to do is wait. And check the timer, and wait. And peer in through the oven glass and wait. And wait.

With nimble fingers, my mom pulls our legendary cookies from the oven. They are the yummiest shade of buttery brown. The chips are melted completely, mixed into the soft cookie.



*I add vanilla, contemplate, and then add more*

Perfect. Only then does my dad come down to admire. Only then does my sister stop texting. Now, it is time for our little feast.

When I was little, and Zoe was little, we would pretend to have tea parties. I would lay out a pink crocheted blanket, on which we'd all sit, as if on a picnic. We'd sip milk from small teacups, and talk in English accents. My sister and I were usually princesses, and my mom, the queen.

Now, as time progresses and we are all too old for make-believe, my family sits at the kitchen counter, just our plain old selves. We guzzle cookies, not trying to be proper or princess-like. We talk too. About regular things, about school, about what we'll cook next. It usually turns out to be those same cookies. About past and future, and right now. Maybe we don't play pretend anymore, but I'm sure we love these cookies as much as any queen of England ever could. Maybe even more. 🍪

# Book Review

By Nicole Cooper

*The Children of the King* by Sonya Hartnett;  
Candlewick Press: Somerville, Massachusetts,  
2014; \$16.99



Nicole Cooper, 11  
Urbana, Illinois

IT IS TOO DANGEROUS to stay in London. The threat of bombs falling overhead is constant, and now that France has fallen, Cecily's parents are getting worried. So they decide to send Cecily and her brother Jeremy (along with their mother) to their Uncle Peregrine's house until it's "safe" enough.

Although Cecily is perfectly happy to stay with her favorite uncle, Jeremy is frustrated. He feels like he's not a child anymore at the age of fourteen and should help with the war. He wants to do anything, *anything* to help, which leads to reckless decisions later on.

If you haven't realized it yet, it's World War II, and reckless decisions can end you up in situations you don't want to be in. Especially when you are on the battlefield, and your only decision is to kill—or be killed.

This isn't the first book I have read about World War II, and it certainly won't be the last. How can I read about such horrible times? How do I stand to listen to those terrifying stories? Because these stories are in my blood.

My mom grew up in the Soviet Union. As you can expect, so did her parents, my grandparents. So did my *great-grandparents*. Yes. My great-grandparents on my mother's side, two of whom

are alive now, lived in the Soviet Union during World War II. To top it off, they were Jewish, and they were each very young then, high-schoolers at most. As you can expect, they each had their very own interesting story that happened during that time.


One of my great-grandfathers fled to a safer part of the country, where he finished school and started going to the university when he was only sixteen. My great-grandmothers also fled to different parts of the country, where they could be safe and sound from the Nazis. Meanwhile, my other great-grandfather, who was only eighteen, got automatically signed up to fight in the war. He doesn't tell anyone what happened during those times, but I can only imagine how horrible it was.

I read these stories so I can know what was happening on other sides of the globe during this dreadful period of time. Stories of bombs, murder, and loss, but they are connected to me, and all of us, through our blood. We must know our history.

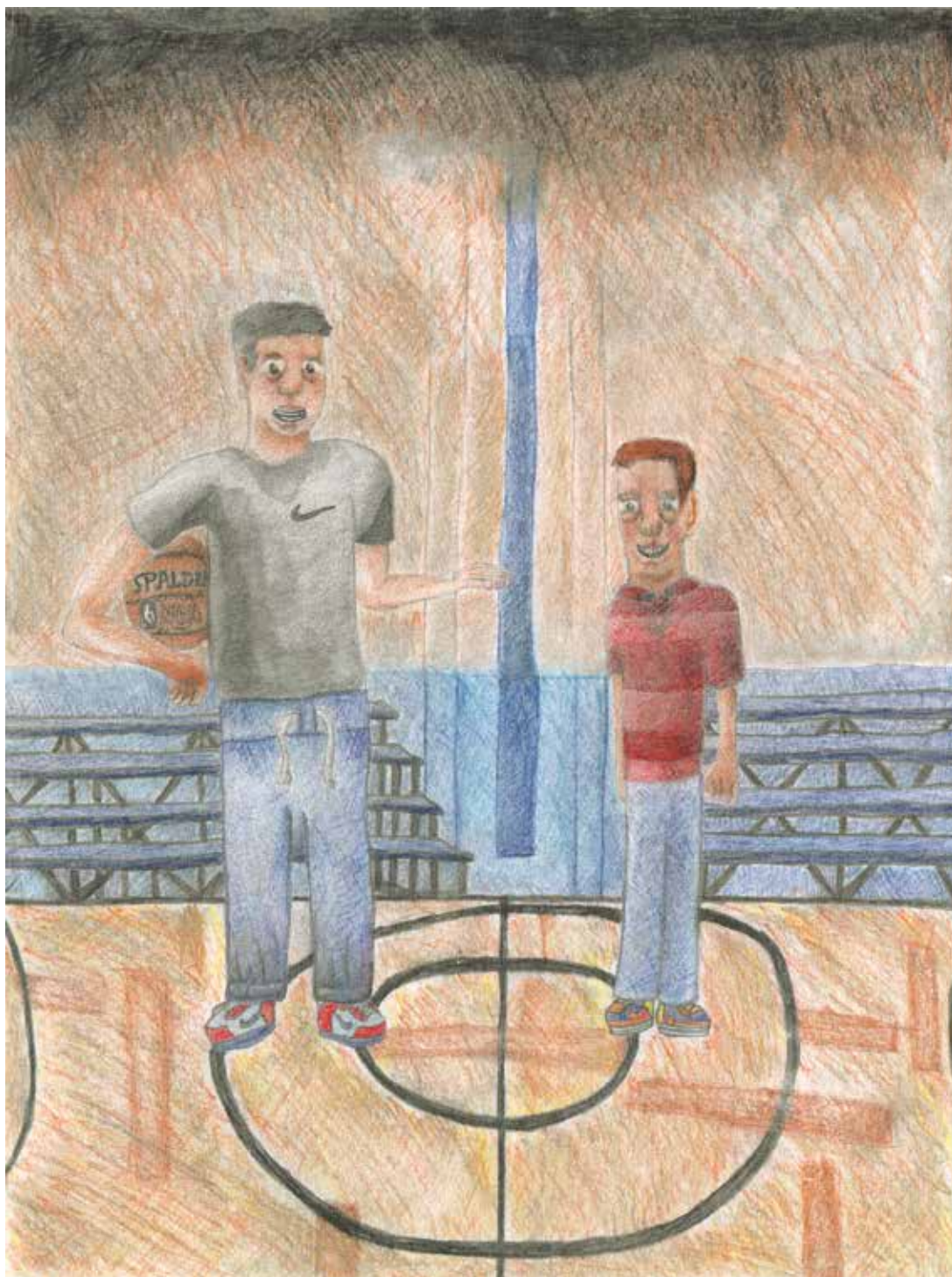
During this time, many children got separated from their parents. May was one of these children. She was sent alone to the countryside, to be taken as part of a new family until it was safe enough for her to go home. She was an evacuee, and if she wasn't taken by a family, who knows what would have happened to her.

So it's lucky for her that Cecily spots her and decides that she would make a good friend. They take May to their home, and everyone quickly adapts to the new lifestyle. Well, except for Jeremy. He still feels helpless in the war and doesn't like the feeling.

Then one day, Jeremy runs off to London. With no one knowing where he was, when he was coming back, or if he was even safe, the two girls got worried, and not only about him. Would he come back? And who were the two boys hiding in the woods?

This was a wonderful book, and the thrill it gave me as I read it was also. I'd recommend it to anyone, anywhere. 





*“Really? You will teach me how to play?” he asked, not believing*



# You Did It, Friend

By **Connor Gorton**

*Illustrated by* **Nahome Yohannes**

**K**EVIN JUMPED OUT of bed and pulled at the curtains to open them. He glanced outside and groaned. The sun was not yet over the horizon, but snow was falling very heavily and the wind was whipping the trees back and forth. The snow was so thick he couldn't even see the houses on the other side of the street. Kevin threw himself back on the bed and tried to console himself. Grabbing his iPod off the nightstand nearby, Kevin checked it for messages. There was one new message. Please no, he prayed silently, and he opened the text. The text was exactly what he didn't want to read. School canceled and that meant no basketball. Today was the last basketball game and Kevin was looking forward to it and now there had to be a snowstorm. "Drat!" Kevin mumbled to himself. Kevin had been out all season from the first game with a broken wrist, and now with a few days of practice under his belt he was going to play in tonight's final game of the season. Or he was, until school was canceled.

Kevin dragged himself out of bed and slouched down the stairs to the main floor where his mother was busy making breakfast. The pancakes and bacon didn't improve his mood, even though they were his favorite meal. Kevin just sat in his chair, moodily staring at the wall.

His dad thumped down the stairs wearing a suit and a tie and rubbing his head with a grimace on his face. "Hit my head on the low ceiling again," Kevin's father replied to his wife's inquiring look. Mr. Hargrove was six-foot-ten and very muscular. He



Connor Gorton, 13  
Marion, Iowa



Nahome Yohannes, 11  
Lynnwood, Washington

dropped his tall ungainly figure into a chair and settled himself down to a plateful of pancakes and bacon. He was halfway done with his plate of breakfast when he noticed that Kevin had eaten nothing. Kevin was tall like his father already at six-foot-one in eighth grade. "Canceled?" Mr. Hargrove asked his wife. She nodded and turned back to the griddle silently.

Kevin looked up from his plate and asked, "May I be excused? I'm not hungry."

"Not hungry?" his mother asked, pretending to be surprised. "You know I made this especially for you. I want you to at least eat one pancake and one piece of bacon."

Kevin broke off a tiny piece of bacon and a slightly larger piece of pancake, swallowed them quickly, and washed them down with a glass of orange juice. "Now?" he asked.

"Fine, whatever," his mother replied impatiently. "Go." Kevin pushed his chair back and walked upstairs.

As soon as he left, Mrs. Hargrove turned to her husband with a sad look. Mr. Hargrove stood up and took his wife's hand. "You know how much this means to him, Mary."

She nodded and said, "Yes, I know, especially after what it meant to you, Tim."

Mr. Hargrove nodded. He knew what she was talking about. He had been a star in the NBA, but in his third year he had a career-ending injury during a game, injuring his spine so that he could never play again. Kevin had this dream that he could

be a star like his father, only without injuring himself. Kevin was only in eighth grade and was better than any boy his age at basketball, and that is why it bothered him so much to have been injured in the first game.

Kevin made himself go downstairs about fifteen minutes later. His parents were talking by the garage door and stopped when they saw him approaching. As he came to say goodbye to his father, his parents came to a silent agreement. "Kevin," Mother said slowly, "how about you drive along with your father to his work and use the gym next door? You can spend the entire day there. Here is some money," Mrs. Hargrove said, handing him ten dollars, "to buy lunch with at the Pizza Hut next door. Will you be OK being there by yourself?"

Kevin nodded. He had spent many days in that gym all by himself in the summer when his mother worked and he wasn't at any of his friends' houses.

"All right then," his father clapped. "I definitely don't want to be late for my meeting, so let's get going." Kevin grabbed his basketball and hopped in the car with his father.

A few minutes later Kevin stretched as he stepped out of the red Corvette his father drove. "See ya, Dad," Kevin called as he slammed the door and his father pulled away around the corner. Kevin opened the door to the building, showed his pass to the clerk, and walked on to the gym. A fun day in the gym by myself, thought Kevin. He was wrong about one thing. He

wouldn't be alone.

As he walked through the open door to the gym it seemed empty, as usual. He ran to barely behind the three-point line, lined up, and, with perfect form, took a shot. *Swish!* "Yes!" he muttered to himself and ran to get the ball. After three more shots he was startled by someone standing up from under the bleachers on the left. "AHH!" Kevin shouted. "Don't do that!" he said, startled.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," said the boy. The boy's voice sounded different from any voice Kevin had heard before.

"Well, what were you doing under there? Did you drop your phone?" Kevin asked.

"No," the boy replied. "I was just looking for something to do."

"Oh," Kevin replied. The other boy came and stood a few feet away from Kevin. Kevin had to stop himself from pinching his nose at the smell of the other boy. He smelled like he hadn't taken a shower in months. Kevin didn't recognize him from the school he went to. Kevin just tried to keep the conversation going. "Where are you from? I haven't seen you before."

"I-I-I," the boy stuttered, then said in a rush, "I went to another school a few cities away but then my parents died in a fire and now I live with my uncle who works nearby and he said I need to come and get

some exercise but I think he said it to get me out of the way and so I came here and I will start school on Monday..."

"Whoa, slow down. It's OK," Kevin said as the boy began to cry about his loss of parents. "I'm sorry about your mom and dad," Kevin said, then asked, "Well, what are you doing here? Without a basketball, I mean." Kevin continued without waiting for the other boy to answer. "But since you're here for exercise and I've got a ball, you can share with me."

"I don't know how to play basketball," the boy replied nervously.

Kevin was shocked, but all he said was, "OK, then I guess I can teach you." Kevin was thinking in his brain how annoying it would be and that all he really just wanted was to get rid of the boy, but he remained nice and hoped that the boy would just leave soon.

"Really?" the other boy smiled a full smile. "You will teach me how to play?" he asked, not believing.

"Sure," Kevin replied. "By the way, my name's Kevin."

"My-my name's Arthur," the boy stammered.

And just like that, Kevin began teaching Arthur how to play basketball. As he began to teach, he saw an odd run the boy had and how his face was a little different. He remembered the boy saying that his uncle wanted him out of the way. That's what it is, Kevin thought, he must have a

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**Kevin had this dream  
that he could be a star  
like his father.**

---

mental disability. I wonder if he has any friends because of it. I know my parents would be proud if I made a friend with Arthur, but what if my other friends at school found out? Maybe they wouldn't like me anymore. Then Kevin made up his mind. He knew what he had to do. "Arthur," he asked, "I would like to be your friend."

Arthur turned to stare at him the same way as when Kevin offered to teach him how to play basketball. "You are asking me to be your friend? I've never had a friend before."

"Well, I'll be the first, Arthur," Kevin said, smiling, knowing in his heart that he had chosen the right thing to do.

Kevin spent the rest of the day patiently teaching Arthur all he knew about basketball. There were times when Kevin wanted to yell, but he stayed patient, and by the end of the day Arthur knew all about basketball, even though he had a small problem of traveling. "Need a ride home?" Kevin asked Arthur as his dad pulled up. The snow had stopped and everything was a white, sparkly surface.

"No, I'll walk. Bye, friend."

Kevin tried to insist on a ride, but Arthur just walked toward his home and called louder, "Bye, friend!" So Kevin shouted goodbye back.

That night Kevin fell asleep dreading what his friends would think and remembering Arthur's smile.

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**Kevin closed his eyes  
and forced himself  
to remember that it  
was just a game.**

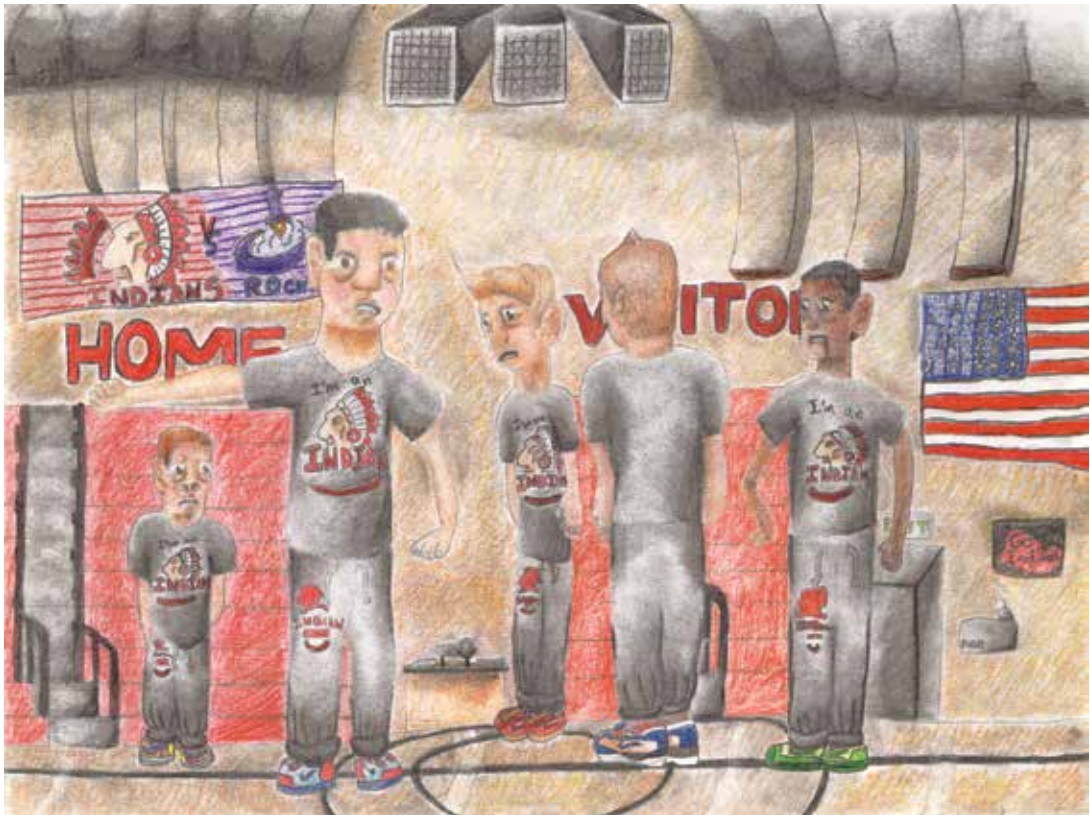
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MONDAY MORNING Kevin woke up ready for school. He hurried through breakfast and hopped on the bus. When he arrived at school he didn't see Arthur all day until his last class of the day, PE. Today the teachers let the students pick their teams for a basketball game and Kevin chose his closest three friends and

Arthur. When his team took the floor Kevin knew the game was going to be tough, even though he was by far the best individual in the whole middle school. Despite Kevin swishing three three-pointers, Kevin's team was

down by one with a minute left. Getting a steal, Kevin took it down the court and scored, and Kevin's team was up by one. Then the other team scored a jump shot two-pointer with seventeen seconds left. Then Kevin, directing the offense, saw the other team double-teaming him and leaving Arthur wide open. With a ball fake and a bounce pass, he passed it to Arthur. Arthur, surprised at getting the ball, traveled with it as time expired. Kevin closed his eyes and forced himself to remember that it was just a game, but inside he was disappointed that his team didn't win. One of his friends came up to him and complained, "Come on, man, why did you pass it to *him*?" The way his friend said *him* made Kevin get angry.

"Don't blame Arthur!" he shouted. "As of Friday he didn't even know how to play basketball."



*"If you must blame anyone, blame me"*

"Oh, well, that makes it all right then!" his friend retorted and stomped away.

Kevin turned around and asked the rest of his teammates, "If you question what I did back there, don't. Any of you could have made the same mistake, so don't blame Arthur. If you must blame anyone, blame me." He looked each of his friends in the eyes and they all nodded. Kevin was right.

Just then the PE teacher, who happened to be the eighth-grade basketball coach, came up and told Kevin, "Hey, I just heard that they rescheduled the last game to this Friday."

"Sweet!" Kevin grinned, then thought of something. "Coach," he said, "I want you to let Arthur be on the basketball team. I want him to practice with us this week and play the game on Friday." Kevin's basketball coach was an amiable man and readily agreed. As soon as Coach Tom moved on to tell the other boys on the basketball team about the rescheduled game, Kevin hurried over to Arthur. Arthur was still standing where he had traveled. Kevin told him it was OK and that the game didn't really matter. Then Kevin told Arthur that he could play on the basketball team. Arthur's eyes lit up again.



"That would be awesome to play with you," Arthur said. So it was decided. Arthur practiced with the team and with Kevin and improved every day, but there were still many trials for the both of them. Every time the other kids on the basketball team got a chance, they dissed Arthur and yelled at Kevin for inviting him on the team. Through it all Kevin remained unmoved, but sometimes it was hard for Arthur.


"You wish you hadn't invited me to be on the basketball team," Arthur would say, and Kevin would try and tell him that he was wrong, but he wondered if Arthur actually believed him.

**F**INALLY, FRIDAY came around and Kevin's team was on the bench getting a last-minute pep talk from their coach. "Guys," he said, "I know how much you want this win tonight, but just remember to still have fun. Indians on three! One, two, three, INDIANS!" The rest of the team joined in on the last word.

The opposing team, the Rockets, was the best in the state and had beaten Kevin's team two years in a row. Now it was different, though, because the other team's best player broke his arm, so the teams were a little more even.

Kevin won the tip and his team took it down the court and scored a layup. The Rockets raced down the court, though,

and scored a basket of their own. They went back and forth like that the entire game with Kevin draining a couple of three-pointers. Arthur hadn't played yet, even though it was the start of the fourth quarter. Finally, Coach Tom decided to put him in. As soon as Arthur got the ball a whistle was blown on him for traveling. "It's OK," Kevin told him.

Kevin's team hung in the game until there were thirty seconds left and his team was up one. Kevin passed it to Arthur; Arthur took a shot and air-balled. The Rockets took the ball down the court and Arthur's man scored on him. Arthur looked ready to cry, and Kevin told him it was OK again and dribbled the ball down the court. Kevin looked over and saw a sub waiting, probably to replace Arthur. The sub wasn't going to be able to come in because Kevin's coach had already used all his timeouts. When there were five seconds left, Kevin saw the other team double-teaming him and leaving Arthur open. Without hesitation Kevin passed it to him, and Arthur got a wild look in his eyes but he shot anyway. The ball fell. And dropped through the net as the clock expired! Arthur had won the game! Kevin shouted with joy and ran over to Arthur as the team swarmed them. Kevin hugged Arthur and whispered, "You did it, friend." Arthur just smiled a wide smile. 

# Performance

*By* Izzah Khairi

Night knits the mountains close  
and hazy lines shoot high.  
A half moon rising low and dim  
quietly moans a tune;  
the wind is at a howl;  
the trees are a wobbling drum.  
The lake ripples—  
the main event is about to occur—

Though it is nothing special, really,  
but celestial dead bodies that light up  
our little souls.



Izzah Khairi, 13  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada



*No longer was the building a building, but a window*

# Life Among the Whispers

By **Mathilde Fox-Smith**

*Illustrated by* **Anika Knudson**

**H**E HAD DECIDED earlier that he wouldn't do it tonight. This nagging annoyed him profoundly. Though now that he was already plastered against a wall, inches from the swerving shaft of police-car headlights in the city, it might as well happen. As soon as the tires rolled over the crumbly pavement, he crept from the shadowed wall, slipping down the road.

The streets were licked by shadows and mostly undisturbed by the din of passing cars. He could faintly picture a blank, ancient building in the back of the park a few roads over, one that he had seen before. To avoid being questioned or recognized by drivers, he kept his head down, his eyes burning into the sidewalk.

A tall gate guarded the entrance to the quiet park, made up of thin black posts set close together. A barrier of thick bamboo crowded the borders between grass and street. He began to shove aside the flexible trunks, squeezing in between the stems. It enclosed him in a chamber of green as he pushed through to the park's grassy edge. Pale moonbeams pooled over the dark ground.

Barbed wire twisted between the park and the site of the old building. Gingerly taking the smoother bit of the wire in between his fingers, he jerked it up as far as he could to create an entrance for himself. Crumpled leaves and rust-colored pine needles concealed cans of spray paint, stashed there on his last encounter with the police.



Mathilde Fox-Smith, 11  
St. Francisville, Louisiana



Anika Knudson, 13  
Tumwater, Washington

Lifting a random container, he scrubbed away a patch of the dirt and scanned the color: brown. Pictures fluttered back into his brain. Selecting a cream-white from the paints, he also chose a scene. And then, he began to paint.

LISE WOKE ABRUPTLY. The cheerful chirping of a robin rang in her sleepy ears. Roused by it, she slipped out of bed. Her long hair was matted from sleep. Lise clomped into the kitchen, rubbing her eyes.

"Morning!" she was greeted by her mother. Lise returned a smile and plopped down into a hard wooden chair.

"Would you mind much if I go to the new art exhibit?" she requested.

"Well, we have a party, and dinner out tonight... you know that your father's running for office again," she warned. "He might want you to help with pamphlets and flyers."

"I won't be long."

"Yeah, I guess. But be sure to be back by two-fifteen," she agreed. Lise smiled in thanks and finished her breakfast hastily.

The brutal August sun cast its blinding rays over the city and the people that swarmed like ants in the streets. An art gallery was featuring a new exhibit, and Lise was eager to visit it. Though her intention was to stay for that exhibit only, she decided to wander about the old ones, too.

Just as she exited, Lise was drawn into

the cheerful green park. Her feet ached from her brisk walking in the gallery, so she swiveled around to where she thought was a bench.

That ambition quickly vanished from her mind.

She remembered the building quite clearly; that was why she didn't recognize it at first. Its crumbly surface was completely slathered in paint. Lise blinked repeatedly, astonished. The only thing that remained of the eerie side of it was the floppy fencing of barbed wire. Otherwise, it was majestic.

A painting of a sunset flourished over the bricks. The vibrant sky was streaked with crimson, magenta, vermillion, and turquoise. They blended beautifully above the magnificent, blazing sun, reflecting in the rippled ocean. Even the water nearly moved. The beach was a golden stretch of beige, shining in the sun's rays. Just in the front of the piece, a single luscious palm tree leaf waved. No longer was the building a building, but a window. Lise was petrified with amazement at the artwork, her breath blown away.

She stepped closer, examining every flawless stroke of the painting.

"Wow," she breathed.

A tiny signature was traced with black spray paint: "Tobias Acosta." She suddenly remembered the stern reporters on television who spoke of the so-called Tobias Acosta, a graffitist. Although his paintings were signed with that name, no recorded resident of the city was called by it.

Of course, she knew this painting was



outrageously wrong—it was *graffiti*, but her amazement defied her consciousness. Lise uttered, “I never thought I’d see one in person before they erased it.”

She moved close enough that her fingers curled around the rusty barbed wire and took in every perfect detail. Unexpectedly, Lise’s eyes strayed to her digital watch and she gasped at the square letters. “Three o’clock! Oh, I’d better go.” She took one last examination of the picture and reluctantly turned to leave.

Lise took a particularly long time returning home, the image glowing in her mind. By the time she approached her doorstep, the little watch ticked three-fifteen. Entering the apartment, she was first greeted by her mother, and her daze quickly dissolved.

“Sorry. I... lost track of the time,” she stammered, because it wasn’t a total lie. What would her parents—her campaigning father, mostly—think if she marveled over the artwork of a criminal? Lise passed her mother and entered her own room, standing before the dresser and gazing at the girl in the mirror.

“Will I ever be able to draw like that?” she wondered aloud. Lise’s favorite activity was art, and she was praised at school and home for her artwork. The girl repeated her question, but something in her aqua eyes made Lise know that her inquiry was foolish.

“MOM... I LEFT my purse in the car.”  
“Lise, do you really need it?”

She sighed, “I’ll get it.”

Her mother’s forehead creased, but she tossed Lise the keys to their vehicle and called, “Be quick!”

The warm August air was much more welcoming at night. Lise hurried under the blanket of stars above her head.

Shadows slid around her, sliced away by the dim glow of streetlights. The black automobile reflected the crescent moon like tranquil water. Lise pressed the button on the keys and watched the

headlights flash. She quietly extended a hand and pulled the glossy door open, retrieving her handbag.

A certain shadow suddenly caught her eye. Lise turned worriedly, afraid at what her curiosity might lead to. The shadow slunk in the darkest corners of the street, moving with mastered stealth. All at once, it hesitated, and its head turned, catching sight of Lise. She drew in a frightened breath, locked the car quickly, and ran.

Dinner was quiet on Lise’s part, but that went unnoticed. The chatter in the crowded restaurant droned on about the campaigns and changes that should be made—including heavier investigation of a certain graffitist. The party was spectacular; but Lise was strangely anxious to leave. The shadow—whatever it was—triggered a peculiar mix of fear and curiosity.

It was late at night when the family re-

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**She knew this painting  
was outrageously  
wrong—it was graffiti.**

---

turned home to their clean apartment. Lise was exhausted, but the deep, soft bed was not much of a comfort. The eventful day had stirred her mind. She fruitlessly tried to beckon sleep.

“PARK CLOSED.”

Lise passed the park again on her errand to the grocery store for her mother. The metal sign immediately caught her eye, dangling from the locked gates. Interested, Lise craned her neck as far as she could around the bars. Officers stood before the spectacular painting, and just at their presence, Lise turned away sharply. They were erasing it, obviously, as she had thought before.

INDIGO EVENING haze hung in the air, cooling it from the temperature before. Shadows wrapped around the streetlights, spilling over the ground. The sky was uncovering stars one at a time, each glittering in the everlasting black above. A slight breeze fanned Lise’s loose brown hair and ruffled the short sleeves on her shirt. As she passed the park, she paused, wondering if the piece was completely gone. It had been a few days since her last outing around the park—she was just returning from a late school activity. Out of curiosity, she tentatively tiptoed up to the gate, her stomach churning nervously. Then she saw it.

An unmistakably-shaped shadow lingered just outside of the line of clustered bamboo. It hesitated while it moved, turning and noticing Lise immediately

with hawklike eyes. She clutched the bars to the gate. It slowly approached her presence, and she took a stride back. The shadow was a person; and though its face was barely visible, she knew precisely what person.

Lise felt inclined to leave, but her feet were glued to the sidewalk. What if this was the only time she saw the artist of that spectacular painting. With a raspy voice, she whispered, “They erased it.”

What she could see of Tobias Acosta’s face did not show surprise or anger. It lacked much sign of expression, but it was darkening outside each second. Finally, the figure replied quietly, “Yes.”

It had addressed her. Lise looked down. “Don’t you care about it?”

“I’ll do another one.”

Lise quickly raised her eyes, amazed. She tried to muster, *how?* But it ended up as a “Why?”

He shrugged. “I can’t stop it. I don’t want to.”

The explanation seemed simple, but was complex. It meant that he both needed and wanted to paint, that he loved doing it. He scrutinized her face one last time before slinking down the sidewalk again.

In bed, Lise struggled with sleep again, her eyes staring blindly into the depths between herself and the ceiling. Many times, she squeezed her eyes shut, but they always pulled open again. At the peak of exhaustion, she finally closed her eyes for good. But just before she drifted to sleep, an image of the old abandoned hospital just next door appeared in her mind’s eye....



*"Well what do you know?" she gasped*

LISE HAD FOUND sleep much more easily the next night. But a stream of bright moonlight disturbed her light slumber, and she instantly woke. The milky ray of light trickled over her cheek.

She pushed the covers off of her white nightgown and peered out of the window that opened above her low bed. The old hospital loomed nearby.

"Well what do you know?" she gasped. The infamous shadow lurked at the foot of the hospital, mostly blocked from view by several tall shrubs. Blinking decidedly, she threw her legs over the window-sill and lowered herself to the ground. In the presence of the structure, her pace slowed. She lingered at the border of the shrubs and watched Acosta pick up a can of spray paint. Lise breathed loudly, afraid to speak, and he turned to see her. Alarm flashed across his face automatically, but it dissolved when he recognized her face. As if she wasn't there, he sprayed the color over the brick.

She wasn't a threat. Lise felt ever so slightly more comfortable and inched forward, her bare feet stinging on the sharp rocks. She was actually watching him create the piece, watching it birthed. Gingerly, she sat on the ground behind him and watched, fascinated.

He stole a glance at her, and she caught it. "Should I leave?"

"I don't care."

Curiously: "Do you think I won't tell?"

He shrugged. "I don't think you did before."

"I didn't." She blinked in the darkness.

They conversed, their sentences stretching slightly with each word. Lise felt nervous, but less so than before. "Why don't you be an artist instead of a graffitist?" she blurted. He hesitated. Acosta was a lot younger than she thought; he couldn't have been much more than a year older than her.

"I was tricked into it when I was younger." His phrase was chopped, and Lise abandoned the topic.

Deep into the city's sparks of light, Lise could see the horizon. It glowed with dawn behind layers of buildings, and she stuttered quickly, "I... I have to go." She wobbled to her feet. Tobias Acosta glanced back, a momentary smile flickering on his face. Then he turned his back.

The wind ruffled the curtains in the window as Lise clambered back through. It was worth a dirty nightgown.

OFFICERS DIDN'T immediately notice the painting, which gave Tobias more space and time. The hospital was a large building, and he could surely fit quite a lot of paintings on it. Lise visited each night and built a strange, fearful friendship with a "criminal." After a while, she refused to name his artwork crime.

On one particularly bleak afternoon, Lise found a newspaper scattered over the floor. On retrieving it, she started at the headline: "Key Clues to Graffitist 'Tobias Acosta's' Identity Detected."

When she met him again, he seemed extremely uneasy. At every gust of wind, he threw a worried glance over his shoul-

der. Afraid to mention it, Lise kept quiet.

Then, a chorus of loud, triumphant voices began to call from the woods. Even without seeing them, both recognized the voices of the police, and both sprang up quickly. Tobias began to race away.

Lise heard the faint “Goodbye” from behind her and wondered why his tone held such finality. When she turned again, he was gone.

THE PARISIAN SUN glowed warmly, a jewel in the spotless sky. France was a brilliant country, and the vacation should provoke a sense of happiness. Lise, though, didn’t find full enjoyment. Bitter feeling was added to the lovely vacation. She was internally creased with the now familiar loneliness. This was her disposition for the last five years. This was her twenty-first birthday.

Lise adjusted her gaze downward. She could see a faint reflection in the polished

marble floor. Her lips tightened.

The art gallery was bustling with Parisians who were absorbed in admiring the neatly framed artwork. Lise had studied French for four years now, and she had come for her twenty-first birthday to France. A particularly stunning painting beckoned her gaze. The natural setting was a forest in flames, magnificently terrible. Cinders rained from the trees, and flames fingered the thick smoke that mingled with the clouds. Lise was torn between whether to smile or frown, examining the technique.

She ended up smiling.

He came out of the crowd, hardly different from their last meeting five years ago. Instead of being veiled in worry, though, he confidently emerged from the swarms of people. The Parisians smiled their sweet, sophisticated smiles. He and Lise locked glowing eyes.

“*Bonjour*,” she whispered.

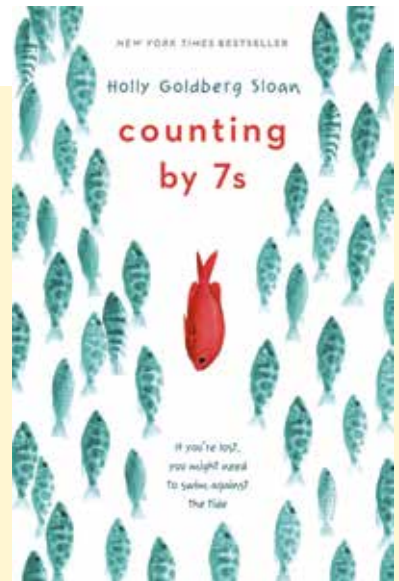




# Book Review

By Isabel Folger

*Counting by 7s*, by Holly Goldberg Sloan;  
Dial Books for Young Readers: New York,  
2013; \$16.99



Isabel Folger, 12  
Santa Cruz, California

**T**WELVE-YEAR-OLD Willow Chance, who is fascinated by and knowledgeable about plants and medical conditions, has enough to deal with starting a new middle school with no friends and being accused of cheating on an important test before her parents die in a car crash. She soon finds that not only her world is changed after her parents' sudden, tragic death, but her personality as well. Willow no longer finds herself indulging in her old habits—counting by sevens (her lucky number), charting home-grown sunflowers' percentage of germination, or even checking the time of day.

The summary on the back cover of the book states that “the triumph of this book is that it is not a tragedy.” After reading the first twenty or so chapters of the book, I couldn't say I agreed with this. Willow was completely devastated after losing the only family she ever knew—who wouldn't be? But as I proceeded to read the rest of the book, I found that the statement was true. Willow's story is not a tragedy. Instead, the plot focuses on how she puts herself back together, piece by piece, until she finally returns to her old self. I have come across several books in which the protagonist has been orphaned, but none that feature this unusual way of bringing realism to the narrative.


When I finished this book, I wasn't left with the same sense of

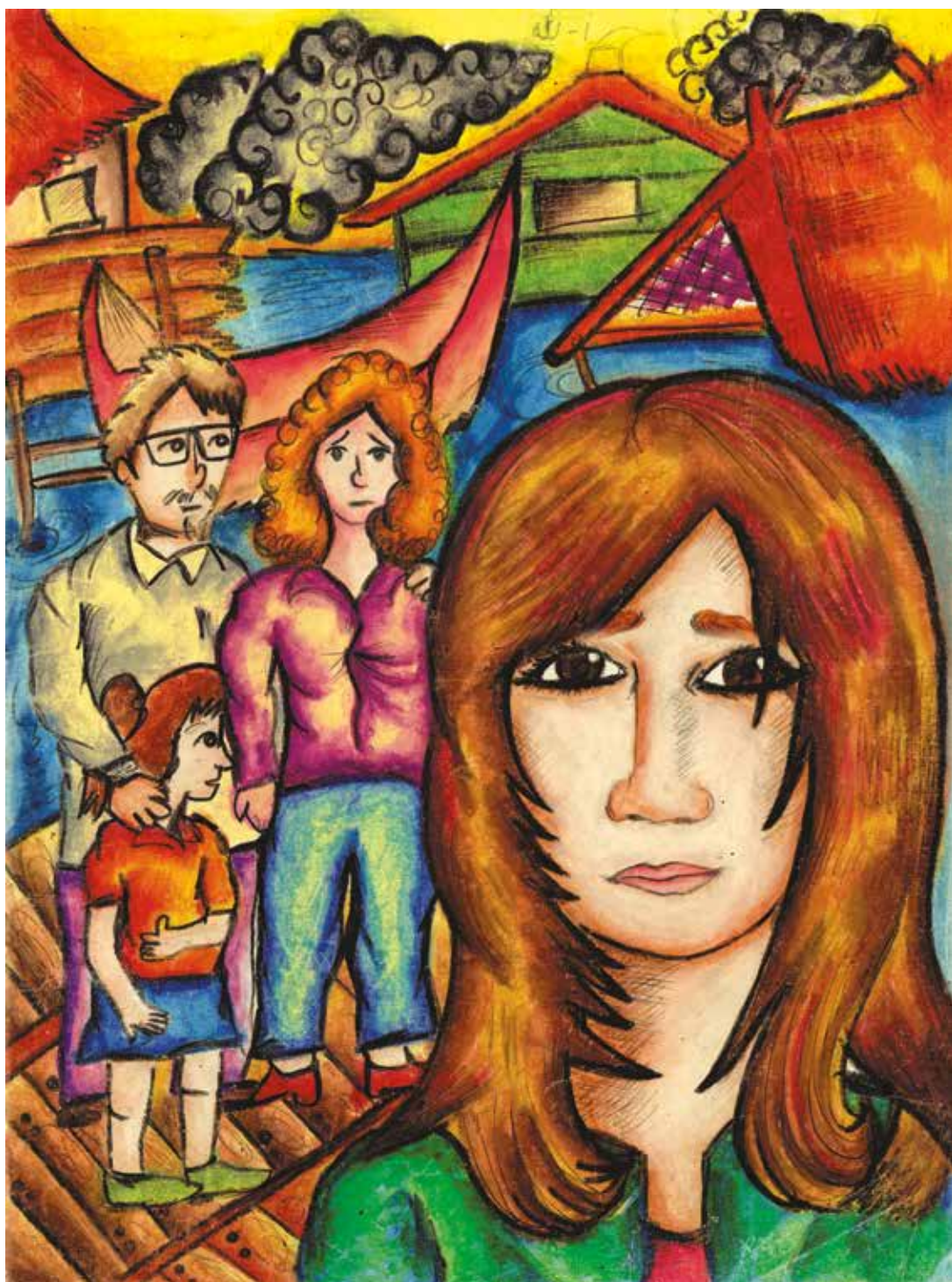
emptiness I've experienced with other books. I left Willow with compassionate, understanding people who care for her. I do miss the characters, but I don't feel the need to read more and more about what happens, as the ending is positive and satisfying.

However, what I enjoyed most of all about this book was how well written it was. In the first page, the balance between rich description and the flow of action really pulled me in. The opening scene, which includes speaking in Vietnamese and eating ice cream with the school counselor at the Foster's Freeze, left me wondering and motivated to read more. The chapters flip between first-person narration from Willow's perspective and third-person narration, giving the reader a viewpoint of what's going on in Willow's opinion and what's happening in the rest of the world. The author is so insightful about seeing the world through Willow's eyes that I can easily relate to her in many ways as a twelve-year-old myself.

Willow's story possesses another unique quality that many books lack—there is no “bad guy,” bully, or even unkind person in her story. Instead, Willow's villain is her own misery. This makes the book even more realistic. Willow does not need to humiliate, stand up to, or get revenge on anyone to be able to fix her life—she has to overcome her enemy by achieving happiness and returning to her old personality, or, as she puts it, “the Old Me.”

As new characters are introduced throughout the book, the author includes Willow's first impressions and, over time, subtly points out their strengths, weaknesses, and traits. Through many interactions, the reader learns to like the characters, each in their own way. The characters who are important enough for Willow to get to know are compassionate people, at least on the inside.

I think *Counting by 7s* is a worthwhile read because the uniqueness and realism of the plot and characters is well-matched with the compelling narrative. 



*Why was I brought to this world? Who were my parents?*

# The Life I Would Have Had

By **Ellie Woody**

*Illustrated by* **Sanobar Shariff**

**I** DIDN'T DARE BREATHE. The air smelled of fish—dirty, rotten fish, and the slightest of sea salt. In the distance I saw a long boardwalk out to sea. Dark, musty, wooden, it gave off the air of failure.

I shivered, but not with cold.

In front of me was the village I was born in. A poor fishing village hidden in South Korea.

I looked back. My family stood behind me. My sister looked nervously at me. My “family.” My “sister.” They didn’t look like me. The blood that ran through their veins wasn’t anything like mine.

I took a step on the gritty road, gazing at the old, decaying houses. They stood desolately by the ocean. It was Easter, so the town was abandoned. I guess no one wanted to spend their Easter here, in this sad old village.

But here I stood.

Clouds covered the blue sky, the sun refusing to shine. I looked back and saw my family cautiously walking forward.

But they weren’t my family.

This was where my real parents would have lived. My father would have been a fisherman, out to sea for such long periods of time that my mother and I would probably worry. My mother would stay at home, cook, wash, and do other housecleaning duties. I, her daughter, wouldn’t go to school, wouldn’t go out into the world. Instead I would be at home, repeating my mother’s life and her mother’s life.



Ellie Woody, 13  
Lincoln, Nebraska



Sanobar Shariff, 13  
TamilNadu, India



But here I stood.

My real parents were either dead or they abandoned me. Who knew why or how. This old village, full of people I would have known, was poor. Who knew if I would have ever had enough to eat.

Why was I brought to this world? Who were my parents? Burning questions that would never die out. Their flames will sting me forever.

I felt strangely distant from the woman, man, and their daughter behind me. I had been counted as a family member for so long, but somehow here, now, made me feel separated from them.

They gave me food, clothes, and shelter. They took me with them on their travels around the world.

Their daughter spent countless hours giggling with me, carefree. The man teased, joked, warned me to stay away from boys. He helped to get my homework done. He embarrassed me in front of my friends, and then we laughed about it later.

The woman stayed home with me

when I was sick. Wrapped her arms and warm blankets around me. She gave me advice and gave me sympathy.

Gave me love.

If I lived here, I would never have met them. I wouldn't know who they are. Everyone back home, all my friends, teachers, mentors, coaches... Everything I knew, everyone I know, everywhere I've been... All I believe in... Nonexistent.

Suddenly dizziness swept over me. My knees buckled. My hand grabbed for a railing, a pole, something to give me support, to help me stand. Tears rushed to my eyes. I didn't dare look behind me.

Then I felt warm, sturdy hands help me up. I found myself looking into the eyes of my mother. My adoptive mother. But it didn't matter. She had been everything a mother should be. She whispered my Korean name in my ear. Jin Ae. Its meaning: truth.

I stood up. I grabbed my mother's hand. We walked back to my family, turning away from the life I would have had. ❀





# The Interference

By Lily Strauss

*Illustrated by* Jia Qi Liu

**T**IMING IS A FUNNY THING. Some religious figures see it as fate, when in reality, it's chance. The world doesn't care about any one person enough to stop its continuously moving clock and allow what some people see as "fate" to occur. The world is morphing and changing all around us, and having bad timing can alter what could have been to what actually is. And that is exactly what happened to Helen and Rose, or what might have happened.

I suppose I'll just start at the end, since I have already spoiled it for you. If, say, this story were to be written in any sort of organized manner, the last few words would say, "Helen and Rose never officially met, and therefore, the course of history wasn't altered even the tiniest bit. The world kept spinning, the sun kept shining, and the birds kept singing as usual." Oh, but that's no fun, is it? What would you learn from that story? That timing is awful, and constantly doing us wrong? I'll continue my story, starting from the end of it all, and hopefully give you a little something more to think about.

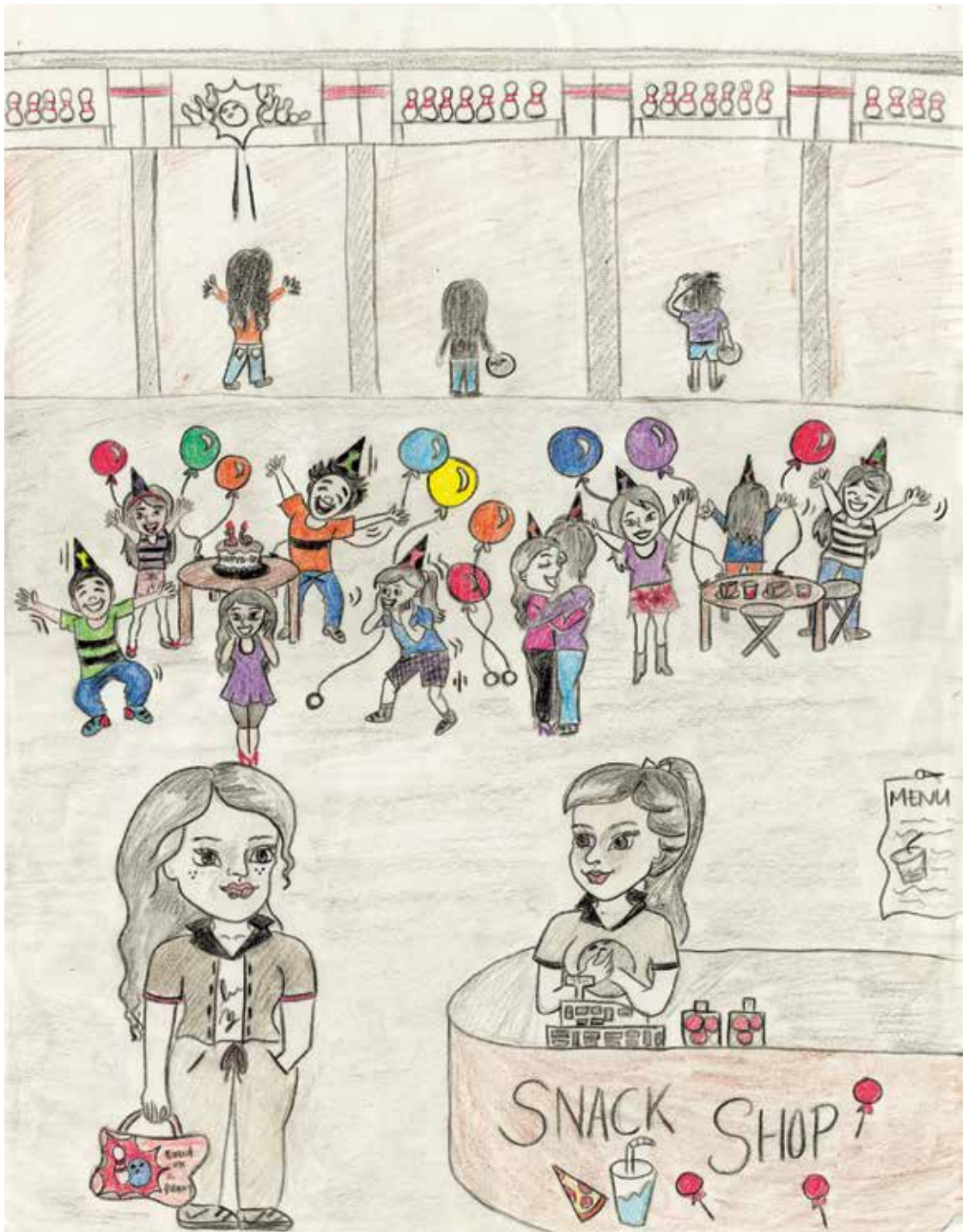
Now, I have already told you that the girls never met, but what if I told you that they almost did? Oh, they were so close! One of the opportunities, the last, to be precise, was a sweltering hot July afternoon, yet Helen was cool as a cucumber, and pale as one, too, in her study. Meanwhile, Rose was attending yet another appointment with the swimming pool and was as crispy as a potato chip. A few hours later, Helen hopped in her car, for no apparent reason but to drive, and Rose mounted her



Lily Strauss, 12  
Leawood, Kansas



Jia Qi Liu, 13  
Oakland, California



*Destiny was trying to make its way into the world again*


motorcycle (for no apparent reason but to leave). And for a second, as they passed each other on the road, they made unmistakable eye contact. Silly, worthless eye contact, really. The kind where each person thinks, “I am so much better than *her*,” because, in fact, that eye contact was the only factor holding their destined meeting back. If they hadn’t seen each other at that pitiful time, a little later down the road, Helen would have noticed the poor, shivering girl in her swimsuit, offered to give her a ride, and, well, you know what would have happened. But that wasn’t the case, so each girl’s world remained unaltered, again.

Now, let’s rewind to a few years earlier, at Rose’s sweet-sixteen party, aka *the* party, at Bowl on a Penny, “the cheapest bowling in America!” which just so happened to be Helen’s place of employment at the time. As they bowled, Rose, a clearly inexperienced bowler, rolled a bowling ball so softly that it came to a halt only a few feet away from where she had dropped it. Laughing as if her daughter had just told the funniest joke in the world, Rose’s mom walked over to a lovely young girl at the Snack Shop. That girl turned the task over to (who else, but...) Helen, of course! Destiny was trying to make its way into the world again. Grudgingly, Helen waddled up to the alley, right as Rose’s friends all gathered around her to give her the presents. Helen handed Rose’s mom the bowling ball, with a hinted “you’re welcome,” and

returned to the Snack Shop. And that was the end of it, yet another missed opportunity.

In fact, they both had a few opportunities to meet each other. Each one they missed left them two steps behind, and yet another opportunity caught them off guard. Their first opportunity was truly a shame. It was the perfect scenario, both girls were in the same store, in the same location, on the same day. The only issue: timing.

And though one may groan at the agony of all these missed opportunities, I can sure as anything tell you what would have happened had these scenarios ended in a meeting of the two girls. Yes, it would have been a great friendship at first, filled with many great memories. However, a few years later, Helen would convince Rose to spend less time at the pool. Rose would encourage Helen to give up on her dreams and goals to relax more. Over time, they would gnash away at each person’s individual talents and characteristics and morph into the “normal” person—do nothing great, achieve nothing great, learn nothing great. So be thankful for timing, for the people life lets you meet, and those who life doesn’t.

Now that you know what would have happened if fate had won over reality, be mindful that with the people life gives you, you control your destiny with them. And always be thankful for chance, because this world would have lost two individuals, Helen and Rose, without it. 

# Reflection

By **Genevieve Jacobs**



Genevieve Jacobs, 12  
Tallahassee, Florida

I spread my sides, flattening like Play-Doh,  
And close my eyes as light spreads its fingers over my back.  
My blood heats and spills warmth into my tail and toes.  
Hidden prey sings the song of my recognition and their mating.  
I open my eyes to see a lizard.  
He lies on his tri-colored boulder like a scaly draping.  
He looks dull against his darkened, nonsensical,  
almost see-through background.  
Another sun rests above his head.  
How nice it must be to have the sun follow you around.  
He cocks his head as I do the same,  
He often comes when the crickets sing and often sits  
on his red rock.  
Tonight he is a wet bearded dragon, like he was in the rain.  
As I have been,  
Warm water poured down my head as I stood,  
Up to my sides, in water before I went to my den.

Prey sits in front of him as a chirp sounds in my ear.  
I admire the diamonds on his back, so like my own,  
And the red and white around his ears I also thought were  
mine alone.  
Our close resemblance is queer.  
His tail is gray but red striped and tame.  
And his head is the work of a perfectionist artist  
In its perfect symmetrical design only nature can claim.  
I clamber off my red basking rock and so does he.  
This night he moves with me, mirroring my every move.  
He looks so close he could be me.  
Then *click*... the sun is dark.  
My eyes see in the new land instantly,  
But the lizard is gone, where does he lurk?  
I pull my dragon body over my hill into my cave,  
And wonder if he will come on the dawn of tomorrow.





*Apparently, a week isn't a long enough time to make friends*

# Free

By **Olivia Stoltzfus**

*Illustrated by* **Emma Schumacher**

**T**ILA TEQUILA ONCE SAID, “I think every person has their own identity and beauty. Everyone being different is what is really beautiful. If we were all the same, it would be boring.” If everyone was the same, would there be less fighting? This is what I wonder as I attempt to smooth my curly blond hair by running my fingers through the matted mess. Finally giving up, I sling my backpack over one shoulder and trudge out to the bus stop.

As I gnaw anxiously on a loose end of my hair, I glance down at my aqua leg warmers against my paint-smudged blue jeans. The weight of pencils in my sweatshirt pocket and *The Hobbit* in my backpack comforts me but doesn’t alleviate the butterflies in my stomach. You would think I’d be fine going to school by now, but the nervousness returns every morning before I board the bus. Apparently, a week isn’t a long enough time to make friends.

I hear the roar of the bus’s engine before I see it. Its tires screech around the curb, leaving the scent of hot rubber in the air, and it brakes at the last second, as if it is just now remembering its job. The driver signals the OK for me to come on, so I plod up the three steps. The driver’s jaw looks muscular from the many days of chewing her monstrous wads of gum. Her hair is in a very sloppy bun that looks much like a crow’s nest. Before I can find a seat, the bus lurches into action and I am slammed into a window. Around me, boys and girls toss paper airplanes at one another. One plane hits my backpack but bounces off and



Olivia Stoltzfus, 12  
New Providence, Pennsylvania



Emma Schumacher, 13  
Lexington, Massachusetts

sails a few feet away to rest unnoticed at another kid's foot. A sixth-grade boy that I recognize from a couple days ago stumbles up the aisle to sit with his friend, but on his way an eighth-grader trips him. Howls of laughter erupt randomly throughout the ride to school, but I never join in. Tuning the noise out, I read my book.

"What's your name?"

I'm startled by the voice, but I look up from the book to see a freckled girl not much younger than me. "I'm Alice," I say.

She raises her eyebrows as she asks, "Well, aren't you going to ask who I am?" But before I can, she says, "I'm Cora Jones." To my surprise, she extends her hand to shake mine. I accept her offer hesitantly. Her lips move, she mouths silently, *One... two... three.... four... five*. She releases my hand and skips back to her seat to sit with her friends where they giggle and keep looking at me. I sigh. Of course, too good to be true. It was only on a dare or some other silly game middle-school girls play. I lean my head against the chilled leather seat.

The first day I came to Cornersville Middle School, several kids looked up to see who I was, but no one even attempted to talk to me. Nothing much has changed since then. Kids sitting on their desk with their feet propped on the backs of their chairs talk casually with their peers. This part is always awkward, so I just take a seat in the back of the room and get out my textbooks.

The teacher comes in, her short heels

click-clacking against the pale tiles, talks for a few minutes, then dismisses us for our next period. In the classes, specifically English, I answer questions when I can and try to stay focused, but my mind strays to other things: the friends I left behind in New York, the Montana lifestyle that is so drastically different from city life. Frankly, I don't understand why we needed to move here. Mom says it's because life in the city was too expensive, but I think there might be other reasons.

Before I know it, it's lunchtime. I am shuffled and pushed by shoulders as I make my way through the crowd. A portion of them file into a line to wait for cold grilled-cheese sandwiches, and the other portion find tables to sit with friends and eat their packed lunches. There are about twenty tables in the large room; I choose a vacant one by the far wall. The chatter of friends and bellows of laughter grow steadily as more kids pour in through the double doors. As I feel around the depths of my backpack for a brown paper lunch bag, I watch a pinched-faced lunch lady scold a student for running and grab another kid's hood as he tries to get away with a stolen milk. I can't help but notice how it appears that the lady swallowed a lemon slice and the taste has not yet left her mouth.

I set aside my sandwich halfway through eating it to pull a sketchbook, marker, and pencil from my bag. I observe the lunchroom for a few moments, then roughly sketch what I see: the sour-faced lunch lady, groups of kids talking

and laughing, a sixth-grader attempting to persuade the cashier to accept fifty cents for a dollar milk. Once I am satisfied, I begin to outline the pencil strokes.

I stop tracing when I notice that I have also put myself in the sketch. I sit at a table with my chin resting on my hands. I peer out the corner of my eyes and have a melancholy expression on my face. From the side pocket on my backpack, I rummage for a red marker to trace the sketch of myself with it.

Once I am done, I place my hands in my lap to contemplate my work. In the drawing, I stand out from the rest of the lunchroom. It's not like I purposefully put myself in the drawing, it just happens. My heart somehow tells my hand what to do.

Other than another seventh-grade girl asking me who I am, the rest of the day goes by sluggishly and is completely uneventful. Classes, hallways, assigning homework, all of what an average school day consists of.

I yell "I'm home!" as soon as I step through the door, even though I know no one is here. It makes me feel better, almost like I'm confirming that, at last, I'm free to do as I please. My call echoes around the kitchen; we have hardly gotten anything unpacked, with my mom working and my long days at school. I grab a snack and the phone from the kitchen and dial Kim's phone number. While it's still ringing, I flop onto the living room couch.

As I wait for Kim to answer the phone, my mind ambles to days in the city. I can nearly feel the wind whipping my hair as Kim and I race down the sidewalk, seeing who will be the first one to reach art lessons. My backpack slaps my thigh as I dodge skateboarders and clusters of people. My sneakers pound the ground steadily, but Kim is still ahead of me by a few

feet. As always, I watch her disappear inside the art center's double doors. While I am just entering, she shrieks "I win!" and grabs the door frame of the art class entrance. We collapse against the wall

outside the class to catch our breath before we go in. Giggling, we attempt to stay calm as we enter the room.

"Hello?" The voice on the other end of the phone is familiar, comforting even. I imagine her tilting her head as she always does when asking a question.

"Hey, Kim!"

"Oh, hi, Alice. What's up? How was school?" I can hear the smile in the way she speaks.

I roll my eyes towards the ceiling and shrug with one shoulder. Just thinking about school these days agitates me. "Oh, you know, same as yesterday... and the day before that... and the day before *that*. Sometimes I wonder why I feel so *different* from everyone else. I don't understand why we moved. I know I was doing just fine in New York. Anyway, it's not like it helped Mom. She seems stressed lately. I

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Frankly, I don't  
understand why we  
needed to move here.

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*I can nearly feel the wind whipping my hair as Kim and I race down the sidewalk*



wish I could see you again.”

“Come on, Alice. You’ll be fine. You just need time to... adjust.” Her kind words have little effect on me.

“I’ve been adjusting for a week now! Why can’t I just be like everyone else? Not the artsy geek I am.”

“Changing who you are just to make a friend would totally defeat the purpose.” That’s Kim all right. So practical.

We talk for several minutes more, then I tell her I’ll call her again tomorrow as I hear Mom come through the back door. She comes in, hangs her bag and jacket on a chair, then flops on the couch next to me.

Unlike me, my mom is fairly tall with brunette hair. Unlike me, she always wants to look good, with her hair curled and dressed in her business outfit. Even to the grocery store, she refuses to wear sweatpants. The only similarity between us is our eyes, both hazel and fierce.

Her eyebrows arch at my sweatshirt, leg warmers, and paint-messied jeans. “Is that what you wore to school today?”


“Yes, it is.” The corners of my mouth harden defiantly.

She closes her eyes in disapproval and agitation. Without opening them, she says, “I’ve told you before, your name means noble, which is what I expect you to be. You need to be more aware of what you wear. I don’t do *this*,” she gestures to her suit and upswept hair, “for nothing, you know.”

“My name also means *truth*.” Now I am standing in front of her. “I’m sorry I don’t meet your standards,” I say with sarcasm. I turn sharply on my heel and storm off to my room, where I slam the door to prove my point.

I rest my back against the cool wooden door for a short few seconds before I thrust open the closet doors, revealing two narrow shelves on which I keep my art sup-

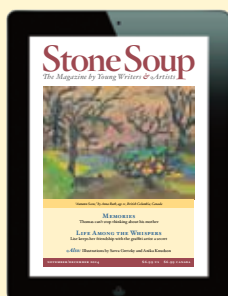
plies: paints of various colors, a glass of paintbrushes, sketchbooks, colored pencils, oil and chalk pastels, Sharpies, and charcoal. I can’t help but remember the glorious afternoons at art class with Kim and the other girls my age. I always loved the closet overflowing with art supplies at the far end of the room, the musty, yet enjoyable smell of paint. Sometimes, if I was told to gather something for that day’s lesson, I would purposefully take longer than necessary just so I could gaze longingly at the equipment. Before Mom and I moved to Montana, I vowed I wouldn’t let the move get in the way of my art.

I grab a blue paint bottle, a thick paintbrush, and a sketchbook at random, then settle at my desk. My hand hovers over the paper, but not for long. Soon, I have a girl with wind sweeping her hair across her eyes and mouth. As I sit and ponder my work, I start to see myself in the figure. Her eyes are spirited and free, not affected by what people say or think. I realize I want to be like that. *Me*. 

---

“Why can’t I just be  
like everyone else?”

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## Bonus Materials

### On Our Website

- Editor Gerry Mandel blogs about the featured story from each issue.  
[stonesoup.com/blog](http://stonesoup.com/blog)
- A feature about child composer Jahan Raymond, including video and sheet music.  
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# Honor Roll

**Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll!** We receive hundreds of submissions every month by kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

— *The Editors*

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