

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*Illustration by Thomas Buchanan, age 13, for "Firework City"*

## **FIREWORK CITY**

It's a different kind of 4th of July, but no less wonderful

## **WELCOME ABOARD**

On a train trip across CHina, Catherine makes a new friend

*Also:* Two poems celebrate summer at the seashore



# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*

JULY/AUGUST 2017  
VOL 45, ISSUE 6

## STORIES

- Firework City** *by Jem Burch* ..... 6  
Maybe Jem and his family won't miss the fireworks after all
- A Horse Named Seamus** *by Kate Bailey* ..... 11  
When Valery learns the truth, she knows what she has to do
- Softball** *by Sonja Skye Wooley* ..... 20  
The pressure is on, as Sonja goes up to bat
- Not Just a Dream** *by Stella Kearveny Haapala* ..... 24  
Cecilia dreams of happier times with her mom
- Goodbye, Mr. Semach** *by Tyler Leiderman* ..... 26  
It's hard to say goodbye to one of your best friends
- The Track of Fear** *by Isabelle Dastgheib* ..... 36  
Isabelle conquers her fear
- Welcome Aboard** *by Catherine Chung* ..... 39  
Little Hang Yan is delighted by Catherine's drawing of her

## POEMS

- Summer Sea Shell** *by McKenzie Steury* ..... 9
- Dreams** *by Malin Moeller* ..... 23
- Enchanting Sunset** *by Jinny Min* ..... 38

## BOOK REVIEWS

- Ghost Girl** *reviewed by Sarah Day Cymrot* ..... 18
- The Boy on the Wooden Box** *reviewed by Dash Barnett* ... 34



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# Editor's Note

In the classic book *Frankenstein*, the monster isn't actually named Frankenstein. Frankenstein is the *doctor*; the monster is never given a name. Throughout the novel, he's alternately "the monster," "the creature," or, simply, "it." But what is a *creature*, exactly? The word (which, like most words, came to us through Latin), means "a thing created," but we tend to use it to refer solely to animals—even though us humans are also created, by our parents and perhaps by a greater being beyond them.

In this issue, I found myself collecting stories, poems, and images about *creatures*—birds, butterflies, mountain cats, and jellyfish. And, in the process, I realized that we seem to turn to animals in our deepest, darkest moments, when we are contemplating the loss of someone we loved very much or wondering what our purpose is. This is an issue to match the season, with its short days and long, black nights.

— Emma Wood

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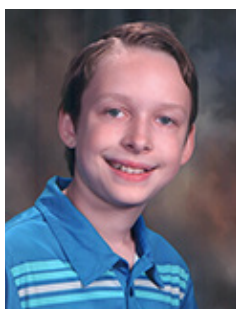
# Firework City

By Jem Burch

*Illustrated by* Thomas Buchanan



Jem Burch, 13  
Van Nuys, California



Thomas Buchanan, 13  
Newalla, Oklahoma

I TOOK A SEAT in the metal rocking chair outside my grandparents' loft, gently swaying back and forth. Through the metal bars of the railing, I saw the grand old church below, small yellow lights illuminating the stained-glass windows. A light breeze blew; stars twinkled high above; the church parking lot was empty and silent, save for the single, glossy bulk of a black car lurking in the shadows. But all around there was noise—the booming explosion of fireworks bursting through the cracks in the wall, echoing in my ears like the distant rumble of thunder in a summer storm.

I sighed, staring at the horizon where a dark cloud of smoke pulsed from the light of the fireworks I could not see. It seemed as though we weren't going to have a true Fourth of July this year.

"Liam, time to go," Dad called, and I stood up, casting one last wistful glance at the disappointingly blank skyline.

We bid a quick farewell to my grandparents, wishing them a happy Fourth, and then trooped down the staircase to the ground floor. No one spoke. Everyone seemed to understand that we had missed the celebration.

As we were getting in the car, my younger sister Amy asked aloud, "Where are the fireworks?"

"You see those buildings?" Mom said. "If they weren't there, we might be able to see them. They're over by the freeway."

The car pulled out into the street, and we started home.





*The car rounded a bend, and there was the city, stretched out before us*

"I'm going to take the 210 home," Dad said. "We might be able to see the fireworks from there."

The car turned onto a small side street, which opened up into a bigger avenue. Dad spun the wheel, and we turned right.

"I see them!" Amy shouted. "I see the fireworks!"

My heart leaped. Half hidden by trees, great bursts of color ballooned in the night's sky. Fireworks.

The light in front of us turned green,

and the car turned onto the freeway. From here, the fireworks were even more visible. It was wonderful.

"Look at that," Mom said, pointing to the shoulder. There, a line of cars had stopped, and I could see the faint silhouettes of people getting out to watch the fireworks show.

"Dangerous," Dad said.

I craned my neck to see the last of the fireworks as we rounded a bend. A beautiful green spark shot like a rocket into the

air, exploding into a shower of red, white, and blue rain.

“Look!” Amy squealed. “More fireworks!” She pointed out the front window to where a red firework was bursting.

“And there’s another one,” Mom said, turning to the left, where a group of blue sparks ascended into the sky, bursting into a fountain of color.

“How many shows do you think there are?” I asked aloud, chuckling. This was amazing.

We kept going, listening to the pop of firecrackers going off, and the distant boom of the fireworks. All around us, fireworks burst from unseen corners. It was amazing and beautiful.

And then suddenly, as we left the suburbs and ascended into the foothills, the fireworks stopped. The distant booms and rumbles and pops faded into the distance, and it seemed as though that was the end.

But it was only the beginning.

We drove in silence for a few minutes. Amy nodded off to sleep, her soft head leaning against my shoulder. In the front seat, Mom and Dad conversed in low tones, and I sat still, eyes half closed, remembering the beauty of the fireworks we had just seen.

The car rounded a bend, and there was the city, stretched out before us. I could see each major street, lined with the ever-changing glow of car lights and street

lights. It was magnificent, almost as wonderful as the fireworks.

And then in the brightness of the city, a single flash of red ballooned in the darkness, like a flower unfurling its petals on the first day of spring. It took me a minute to recognize what it was. And then I realized it was a firework.

I shook Amy awake. “Look at this!” I whispered excitedly, pointing out the window to where a green chrysanthemum of color was bursting over the city. Her eyes widened when she realized what it was, suddenly wide awake.

“Fireworks!” she squealed, hugging me fiercely but never tearing her eyes from the scene unfolding. Even though, from this distance, they were barely the size of the toenail on Amy’s littlest toe, they couldn’t have pleased her more. They were like precious sparkling jewels, glimmering dazzlingly in the light. Or maybe they were the sparks from a wizard’s wand as he fought off dark magicians with spells and trickery. The faraway fireworks show was fantastic, and fantastical.

As we exited the freeway, I craned my neck to see one last green firework exploding in the sky. Only three hundred and sixty-five days from now there was a city of fireworks to be explored once more. I smiled. I couldn’t wait for next year.





# Summer Sea Shell

*By* **McKenzie Steury**

My feet sunk into the soft sand.  
The waves called to me.  
“Come play,” they said,  
“within my water so that I can  
hear your laughter.”  
The water washed up on the yellow sand,  
trying to reach me.  
The breeze rustled in my hair  
and the only sound I could hear  
was the love that the seagulls shared that morning.  
In the distance, the water  
looked as pretty as a pearl.  
Just as I was about to turn back,  
something sparkling came out of the sand.  
At first, it looked like a shell.  
Then it became more.



McKenzie Steury, 11  
Auburn, Alabama

It was a precious turtle,  
small and helpless.  
Suddenly, crabs and seagulls  
crowded around the turtle.  
Breakfast was what they saw.  
“Stop!” I shouted.  
I walked over to where the turtle hid and I guarded it.  
Slowly, I walked with it,  
imagining our conversation as we sauntered to the sea.  
Then, the turtle stumbled  
over a shell the color of my mother’s eyes.  
Finally, it made it to the sea.  
I picked up the shell,  
for it would be my memory.

# A Horse Named Seamus

By **Kate Bailey**

*Illustrated by* **Elena Delzer**

**H**ORSES, HORSES, HORSES. There were so many horses! Valery wondered which one would be hers as she gazed over the crowd of them. She had waited so long for this day.

Today was her tenth birthday, and her parents had finally given in to Valery's pleas to let her adopt a horse. There was a local horse carnival in town, so Valery and her mom had gone.

"Do you want to go see the Pony Parade? It's starting in five minutes," Lucia, Valery's mom asked.

"I want to keep on looking for a horse, Mom." Valery shook her head. "Can I look for a horse alone while you watch the show?" Valery offered.

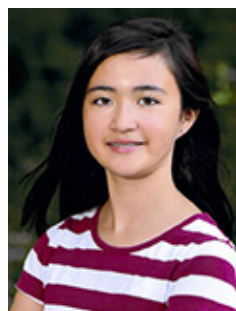
"I suppose so," Lucia replied. "But stay safe! And meet me here after the parade."

"Thanks, Mom!" Valery called as she walked towards a large bay horse. The sun was starting to go down into the trees, and darkness was falling. "How much is he?" Valery asked the horse's owner as she patted the horse kindly. He was a bit old but looked friendly.

"Four hundred dollars," the woman answered.

"OK, thanks," Valery nodded. Her parents' budget for a horse was two hundred and fifty dollars.

Valery walked around for a while, going from horse to horse. She examined great horses and small horses. Full horses and thin horses. The moon was rising as she went closer and closer to the woods that marked the



Kate Bailey, 11  
Bethesda, Maryland



Elena Delzer, 12  
Suamico, Wisconsin

end of the carnival. Valery was starting to think there were not any more horses to see when a flash of white caught her eye and the shrill cry of a horse echoed throughout the woods. Glancing around, Valery noticed that there was no one else in sight. Since the Pony Parade was probably ending, or perhaps already finished, Valery decided just to take a look at this horse, then go.

Moving towards the horse, she saw it was tethered to a tree not far into the woods, unlike most of the horses who were in shiny trailers. The horse reared again and whinnied louder this time.

"It's OK," Valery said calmly, inching slowly towards the horse. The horse snorted and backed away from her, tossing his head. He was a handsome piebald stallion who did not look older than four years. His eyes were big and dark, reflecting a sense of sadness from within. His head swept back and forth as if he could see something she could not. Then, deciding that all was well, the horse walked towards her and sniffed her face. Valery laughed as she rummaged through her pockets for treats. "Sorry, I spent them all on other horses," she said apologetically, noticing how thin and bony the horse was. A bale of hay and some oats would help take care of that, Valery thought to herself.

"Hello?" she called into the darkness. Someone had to own this horse,

Valery knew, but all she could spot was a table. The carnival lights did not reach this far, and Valery called again, louder this time. "Hello?"

"What?" a raspy voice snapped, making Valery jump.

Quickly, she brushed a strand of dark red hair that had fallen out of her braid away from her face. There was no one in sight! Who could be speaking? Valery wondered. She looked at the horse half accusingly. No, it wasn't the horse. But as long as someone was speaking, she may as well ask. "How much is this horse?" Valery called cautiously.

"Three hundred dollars," said the voice. Valery looked around but could not distinguish who was speaking.

"One hundred." Valery frowned. She wasn't very good at bargaining, but she knew to start low.

"Two hundred and seventy-five," the voice replied irritably. Valery knew the Pony Parade must have ended a long time ago, but something told her that this horse was the one.

"Two hundred and fifty." Valery bit her lip. Two hundred and fifty dollars was the maximum, and she knew she couldn't lose this horse. If she had to pay more she had to pay more. Valery just hoped her mother would understand.

"All right, sold. Put the money in the bowl on the table."

Valery gasped in surprise. The horse was hers! Valery turned to-

wards the table. There was now a dark pink and gray bowl sitting on the table where there was nothing before. Fear began to creep up her neck as she placed the two hundred and fifty dollars on the table quickly. The trees cast long shadows over the ground like the silhouettes of ghosts, and she felt invisible spiders crawling up her back. Valery began to untie the lead rope, which was tied tightly to the tree.

"What's his name?" Valery asked, desperately trying to start up a conversation as she picked at the knot with her nails. Cold chills were creeping up her back. Was it raining? Or were those footsteps she heard? Turning around, she saw that the money and the bowl were gone.

Valery prepared to run, but darkness seemed to swallow her from both sides. Running could either lead her out to safety or deeper into the woods. Her nails throbbed with pain as they scrabbled with the rope.

"Seamus." His name seemed to be carried by the wind, only appearing for a moment before vanishing. Valery nodded meekly as she finally succeeded in untying the knot. Now remembering which way she came from, Valery prepared to escape with her life and the horse. Cold fingers grasped her shoulders, and Valery ran out of the dark and shadowy woods with the horse following beside her.

"Valery, where were you?" Lucia cried, hugging Valery. "It's been

nearly an hour since the Pony Parade ended! I was about to call the police!"

"Sorry, Mom," Valery apologized. "I got a horse, though. His name is Seamus." She stepped aside to let the piebald horse through. The horse had a white blaze running down his face and four white stockings that glowed in the light of the moon. But the most interesting thing about the horse was that he had a white spot on his side that looked like a horse head with its mane blowing in the wind.

"Valery, you didn't ask me for permission. You should have waited for me." Lucia frowned at her daughter.

"Yes, Mom," Valery answered, knowing that there was no way she could have waited as she watched Seamus stride proudly beside her. It was late at night, and on the long car ride home with Seamus in a trailer behind them, Valery fell asleep.

When she opened her eyes, it was morning, and sunlight was flooding through her bedroom window. Blinking the sleep from her eyes, Valery rushed into her parents' bedroom. "Mom! Dad!" she cried. "Where's Seamus?"

"Uh, you mean the horse?" Valery's father Jeff muttered sleepily. "He's outside in Blaze's old place." Blaze was Lucia's horse who had died seven years before when Valery was three. Rushing to the window, Valery saw the piebald horse outside, grazing lazily near Blaze's old shed.

"I'm going for a ride!" Valery called

as she raced down the steps and strapped on her tall black boots. Then she flung open the door and ran outside, letting the sun warm her back.

Seamus lifted his head and neighed excitedly. Valery went over to him and scratched his neck where his long mane tickled him. The horse snorted in response. Valery saddled and bridled Seamus as he stomped and paced irritably, not liking the pinch of leather or the metal buckles. As graceful as a bird, Valery vault-

ed onto the horse's back and pressed him into a walk. Seamus had the smoothest and most coordinated gait of a horse that Valery had ever ridden. She opened the corral door and let Seamus choose his path as the sun began to rise. With his legs gracefully flying over the ground and his tail waving like the ocean, the pony was a four-legged masterpiece. Suddenly the piebald horse threw up his head and increased his strides as they approached a lake.

"Whoa," Valery called, slowing



*All this time Seamus didn't want ribbons or fame, he just wanted to go home*



Seamus to a walk. Valery's stomach flipped as she thought Seamus was going to roll in the sand by the lake, crushing her beneath him. Seamus let out a long, shrill, painful cry before turning around and heading back the other way at a canter. As they ran, Valery once again saw sadness in the horse's eyes.

After a while, Valery slowed Seamus to a walk. The horse's sides were heaving, but his ears remained perked, and he shuffled his long legs anxiously as if he wanted to continue running.

"Let's stop here," Valery told Seamus as she slowed him to a walk and leaped off. Just as Valery finished untying the braid in her hair, a meow sounded from above her, and Valery glanced up to see a fat gray cat, sitting way up in a tree, looking like a gray marble from where she stood down below. "Are you stuck?" Valery cooed to the cat as she climbed the tree, nimbly pulling herself up higher, and higher. The dark black wood was peeling and falling under her feet, but Valery clung on tight. She carefully edged her way out onto the flimsy branch, towards the meowing cat. Seamus let out a whinny.

"Seamus, I'll untack you in a second. Be patient," Valery responded, just as she heard the sound of splintering wood. The branch broke beneath Valery's feet, and she screamed as she plunged to the ground.

Valery opened her eyes sometime

later to see the sun was already high up in the sky. The cat was in a patch of sunlight a little ways away, grooming itself. As she tried to stand up, she felt a sharp pain in her ankle. Seamus, who had not moved since she fell, pushed against Valery so that she could lean on him and get up easier. Once she was on his back, Seamus turned back the way they had come and headed home.

A few months had passed since the night Valery had adopted Seamus, and the two had entered lots of competitions and events. Valery had painted the old shed a bright blue and written the word Seamus on the wall in yellow. Ribbons decorated the inside of the shed, and with good food and care, Seamus had filled out very nicely. Valery and Seamus had won a competition the day before, and Valery was now sitting at the breakfast table with her parents.

"Valery, there's something we need to talk about." Jeff was holding the daily paper and had a grim expression.

"What?" Valery asked through a mouthful of toast.

"Well, I'm just going to give it to you plain. Sweetheart, I think Seamus was a stolen horse," Lucia said ruefully.

Valery almost choked on her food she was so surprised. "But I paid for Seamus! I didn't steal him!" she cried.

"No, but Seamus had an owner before you, who didn't legally buy

him.” Jeff shook his head. “Seamus is a Chincoteague pony. He’s from an island off of Virginia. Every July they swim the wild ponies across the Assateague Channel, and Seamus got injured on the swim over, so they kept him in a separate pen, away from most people so that he could recover. The day before the auction he went missing. Seamus was also a buy-back, which means he will still be in the auction like the rest of the foals, but the highest bidder won’t get to keep him, only name him. Luckily for you, Seamus was taken before the auction, so he will still keep his name.”

“What? You’ve already decided that they can take him? But it’s not true! There’s a mistake!” Valery wiped her dark blue eyes, not wanting to believe her parents, though deep inside she knew they were right.

“Chincoteague’s Fire Department has been looking for him for four years now, and someone at one of your shows saw him and told them they saw a horse like that. In the newspaper, it shows his white spot that is shaped like a horse head. The missing horse is Seamus. I’m sorry, Valery.” Jeff shook his head. Valery pressed her face into her hands, not wanting to believe her dad.

“Valery, you love us, don’t you?” Lucia asked, and Valery nodded. “You would miss us if we were separated, wouldn’t you?” Valery nodded again. She couldn’t imagine separating from her parents. “You see, Valery, Seamus

has his family, and he misses them. If you were Seamus, and Seamus were you, wouldn’t you want to go home? Wouldn’t you want Seamus to allow you to return to your family?”

Valery knew her honest answer would be yes, but she didn’t want Seamus to leave. Slamming the front door, she ran down to the little blue barn. She loved Seamus! But did he love her? Valery looked at Seamus and spotted the sadness that often appeared in his dark brown eyes. Throwing on a bridle, Valery rode Seamus bareback through the rolling hills, and Seamus stopped, as usual, at the lake. All this time Seamus didn’t want ribbons or fame, he just wanted to go home, Valery realized with a pang of guilt. Seamus just wanted to return to his family. He wanted to go back to Chincoteague.

Valery gave Seamus a huge hug, trying her best not to cry as she looked at him for the last time. Seamus nuzzled her face, knowing this was it. Valery turned away as Seamus got loaded onto the truck, for she couldn’t hold in her tears. Seamus let out a shrill whinny and Valery remembered the night she had adopted him. It seemed like so long ago. “We’ll take good care of him!” the man called as he hopped into the truck and drove off down the road. Valery watched as the trailer grew smaller, and smaller, until it disappeared around the corner, knowing that they indeed would.

Two years after Seamus had gotten returned to Chincoteague, Valery received a letter in the mail. It was about Seamus. He had started a herd, and it was the biggest one yet with twenty-four mares! Seamus was doing well and was happy to be home at last. Valery was starting to put the letter away in a safe place in her room when a small photo fell out

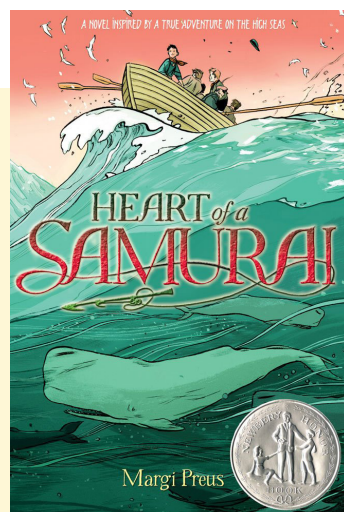
of the envelope. It was a picture of Seamus in front of a group of other horses. Valery had been unsure for the past couple of years if she had done the right thing, but now she knew for sure. The sadness in his eyes was gone. Seamus was happy.



# Book Review

By Delia Ray

*Ghost Girl: A Blue Ridge Mountain Story*, by Delia Ray; Clarion Books: New York, 2016; \$6.99



Sarah Day Cymrot, 12  
Washington, DC

“I stopped cold, then turned around real slow. ‘What did you say?’ I asked. A big grin spread out over Dewey’s wide face. ‘I said, the Hoovers say they’re gonna build us a school.’


SET IN 1930, *Ghost Girl* takes place on top of the Blue Ridge Mountains in West Virginia. The main character, Miss April Sloane, is an eleven-year-old girl dubbed ghost girl because of her white skin and hair, who lives an almost ordinary life after her brother dies in a freak accident. But when President Hoover and his family move into a vacation home in the mountains and invite Miss Christine Vest, a kind, smart young lady, to teach twenty-two uneducated kids in the new school, everything turns topsy-turvy.

In this fast-paced novel based on real letters and newspaper clippings about the school, author Delia Ray guides us through April Sloane’s ups and downs, her hardships and successes, and her realization of who she really is. Even though April’s life is very different from mine, I was trans-

ported to her world in the Blue Ridge Mountains, a world with no formal education and not much money. I felt like I was with April and her dad, doing chores and telling stories. I was enchanted by the author's descriptions of the brisk cool mountain air, the dewy morning grass, and the towering maple trees.

The creation of the president's Mountain School starts out looking like it is going to give kids a chance to thrive and be educated, but it turns out to be much more complicated. From the beginning, April's mom does not want her to go to school so her daughter can stay home to do more chores. I think the mom is still grieving for her son and wants to keep April, her last child, safe and to herself. When April comes home from school every day, overflowing with love for her new teacher, April's mom pushes her away. The jealousy leads to discord, not only with her teacher, but also between mother and daughter.

This year, I am going to school for the first time after homeschooling for six years. Like April, I am super excited, but it means that I won't be able to spend as much time with my family, and I will not have the control that I used to have over my schedule. Now, of course, it will be very different from April's experience because my family supports me, and no matter what happens out there they will be there for me (or at least I hope so!). But, as in *Ghost Girl*, there will be many challenges in going to school for the first time.

I really liked this book because it opened up a whole new way of living and a different place and time than I had ever read. I would recommend this book to anyone in need of a good story. 

# Softball

By Sonja Skye Wooley

Illustrated by Caroline Troll



Sonja Skye Wooley, 12  
Berkeley, California



Caroline Troll, 11  
Somerset, Pennsylvania

I STOOD IN THE BOX, wriggling my toes around in my cleats along with the sand that had somehow managed to wedge itself in there. It was a hot, cloudless summer day and I regretted wearing long wool knee-high socks, though they were part of my uniform.

The green-and-white bat felt heavy in my hands, as well as the large purple batting helmet atop my head. I looked nervously at the pitcher's mound and watched as she wound up... and threw. I watched as my teammate swung...and missed.

*Another hit, and I'm up, I thought, another hit and all the pressure is on me.*

It's not that I don't like softball, because I do. I love throwing and catching with my teammates, going to batting cage. But the prospect of batting in a real game makes me want to crawl under a rock for a few weeks. Behind me, in the dugout, I could hear my teammates cheering. That gave me a little courage but not much.

*Clang!*

I watched the softball sail through the air. An outfielder lunged but missed the ball and it rolled neatly onto the ground. She snatched it up and made a wild throw to first as my teammate rounded it then touched second.

"Safe!" called the umpire, though distantly in my head.

More sharply did I hear, "Batter up!"

My stomach flopped around and then violently tried to eat itself, but I forced my quivering legs to walk the couple yards to home plate. It felt like miles, especially with the ump and





*The car rounded a bend, and there was the city, stretched out before us*

pitcher watching expectantly.

My team really needed a hit. The score was one-to-two, in our opponent's favor. We had runners on second and third, there were two outs. My nerves were stretched almost to the breaking point, I wished someone—*anyone*—would do it instead of me. But nonetheless, there I was. It didn't help that I hadn't gotten a hit all season. My only experience with batting was swinging and missing, swinging and missing.

I shouldered my bat, lined my feet up with home plate, and concentrated on

the pitcher. If I was going to have to do this, I might as well try as hard as I possibly could. The pitcher wound up, and threw.

I panicked, trying to remember everything I had ever learned about batting in a split second. The ball landed short at my feet, but I still made a wobbly swing.

"Strike!" called the umpire. I winced.

*No! You knew that was a grounder, I thought, why didn't you leave it alone?*

I promised myself that I wouldn't swing at any more balls. (A ball in hitting terms is something to avoid, something

unhittable.)

Next pitch the softball whizzed by my shoulders and I didn't do anything.

"Strike two!"

But when the next ball rolled my feet, I was ready for it, staying stiffly where I was. Three more softballs hit the dirt and my bat didn't move. I looked up in surprise as one of the coaches rolled out the blue pitching machine. Had I really gotten four balls?

Something like hope stirred up inside of me. The pitching machine! In my league, that's what they brought out if you had four balls. It always threw perfectly, you could always swing at it.

"You ready?" asked the coach. I nodded stiffly, my helmet bobbing up and down on my head.

The coach brought his hand up and around, just like a real pitcher, and released. I tensed and then something inside me clicked. I was going to swing at that ball and hit it.

The ball was almost upon me, I tensed, waited for just the right moment, and then swung. Hips first, then elbows, then bat just like my coach had taught me only twenty minutes before.

Ball hit bat.

The clang echoed around in my mind. I had done it! I hit the ball! Then the

more sensible part of me reminded myself that I still had to get to first base. I dropped my bat and was off.

I ran as hard and fast as I possibly could. I had only one thought in mind, and that was: Get. To. *First*. Adrenaline raced through my body. I wasn't tired, or if I was I couldn't feel it. I didn't have *time* for that sort of nonsense.

In seconds, I was running through first as the first-base player ran to get her missed ball. I looked to the right and saw my dad (who was also the first-base coach), a gleam of excitement in his eyes, waving his arms in an ecstatic windmill-like fashion. I knew what that meant. *Keep going.*

I turned, dug my cleats into the dirt, and began to run to second. As I ran, I managed to turn my head a little to see what was going on in the field. One of the girls on the other team had the ball and was winding up for a throw to second. I sped up with all the strength I had left, my arms pumping at my sides. When I was only a few feet from the base, I dropped to my bottom and slid.

The front half of my foot touched the base.

Ball hit glove.

"Safe!" called the umpire.



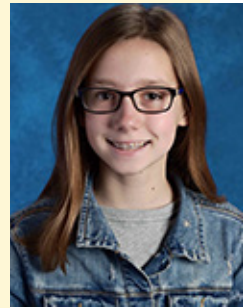
# Dreams

By **Malin Moeller**

When you remember  
The long night that passed by you  
There may be a hint of a scene  
A recollection of a moment  
Warped and disfigured  
Wonderful or horrifying  
Only playing out in your mind

This clue may be short  
It may continue to a story  
A twisted stream of events  
Where nothing ever gets done

Or you might wake up  
Believing it still to be one instant after you fell asleep  
And yet time ticks by  
Your tossing and turning the only keeper of it  
Your dreams the only memories of the night



Malin Moeller, 11  
Washington, DC

# Not Just a Dream

By **Stella Keaveny Haapala**

*Illustrated by* **Viktoriya Kukarekina**



Stella Keaveny Haapala, 12  
Portland, Oregon



Viktoriya Kukarekina, 10  
Flower Mound, Texas

**W**IND RUSHED THROUGH my long hair as I ran through the spring-green grasses of my mother's farm. I was the happiest I had ever been.

I ran through fields, picking flowers and tucking them behind my ears. I felt like a little girl again, so free, so wild.

I ran with the birds, flying high above me in the sun. I felt like I could just jump and I would fly. I tried. I was flying, flying higher than the sun; leaping, bounding, laughing.

Then, I woke up.

My laugh faded, I looked around at my closet of a room and sighed. I was still in musty, dirty, and polluted New York City, in my small apartment, living with my absent father.

When was I going to get out of here? I couldn't stand it any longer!

After my mother had died, my father had hidden any remembrance of her. He sold all of her clothing, sold all her trinkets from around the world, and sold her books. She had a whole library filled with books. Her books were historic, she got them from her travels: Egypt, Asia, Greece, everywhere! Now, there was nothing left here, except for her memories.

The memories of her singing Joni Mitchell out of tune in the car, the memories of her teaching me how to ride a horse, pressing flowers from the garden, and learning to read books. These memories brought tears to my eyes.

I jumped out of bed, put on my favorite dress, although I didn't know why. I slowly walked into the small kitchen that held only a microwave, a minimum amount of cabinets, and





*I knew that the memories of my mother would burn on forever*

a miniature table. I poured myself a bowl of cereal and sat down at our table to eat. My dad was at work, like he always was at this time.

It was still summer, so I sat at the small table and waited. Most kids my age dreaded the day school would start, but I couldn't wait. I had nothing to do.

At the farm I had everything in the world to do: I could explore, I could pick flowers, I could help my mother cook our meals, or I could ride my horse, Rose, a mare with beautiful spotted white hair. I remember my mother asking me what I wanted to name her. I decided as quick

as I could on my last name, Rose. Cecilia Rose, that was my name. I hated the name for myself, but it suited her just fine. Rose was another treasure my father sold when my mother passed away.

I continued to sit at the table, waiting for my father to return. I walked around the very small apartment and waited... and waited.

At 5:45 p.m., my father arrived. His face was encrusted with dirt and his hand was bleeding heavily.

"Dad, are you OK?" I asked, concerned.

He didn't answer, he just walked

straight into his room.

I went to bed that night with no words spoken. My father had disappeared into his room and had not returned.

That night I had a different dream.


I was running, leaping, and picking flowers. I was happy, like in the other dreams I had in the past nights. Then, in the distance, I saw my mother. She was walking closer and closer. She was beautiful, her long white dress cascaded down like a waterfall, gently flowing until it reached the ground. Her face shined bright like an angel. Her golden locks

blew in the wind. She walked closer and closer.

As she approached I was filled with a warm sensation of new comings.

I woke up and knew exactly what I was going to do.

I was going to cry.

I sat on the edge of my bed and I cried. I cried for joy, I cried for sadness, I cried for letting go, and I cried for moving on. I thought of all the things I would do and all the things I would miss. 



# Goodbye, Mr. Semach

By **Tyler Leiderman**

*Illustrated by* **Cindy Ku**

I HOPPED INTO MY FRIEND Teddy Ertel's white Honda Pilot SUV on July 26, 2016. My friends Jonny, Teddy, and Mir were there too. We were going to Teddy's beach club, Catalina, which was located in Atlantic Beach. We all squished into the back seats, fighting for room. As I banged into Teddy, I heard, "Ow, that hurt." The only thing that was more uncomfortable than my tight swim trunks was realizing that Jonny Semach, one of my best friends, would be moving over 5,000 miles away, back to his home country of Israel, and this was the last day I would be seeing him. He would be on a flight to Western Israel on July 28 and I wasn't going to see him again before he left. Usually the beach is the one peaceful spot that can soothe my problems and stress. However, on this day it felt dreary and dismal. I knew it was going to be an agonizing day but also knew that spending it with three of my best friends would make it a little more bearable.

I'd known Jonny for a long time. I met him during the first grade at PS 158 and we became instant friends. As soon as I saw him, standing in the corner with his eyes opened wide, I realized that he looked petrified to be joining a new school. Right then I made the decision to introduce myself. I scooted over to him and said, "Hi, I'm Tyler. Do you want to be my friend?"

He answered me in a shaky voice and said, "Yes, my name is Jonathan."



Tyler Leiderman, 11  
New York, New York



Cindy Ku, 12  
Basking Ridge, New Jersey

I don't know why, but from that moment on I started calling him Jonny and it stuck. We bonded while playing with the trains during choice time and that bond grew stronger through the years. In addition, I also knew Mir for a long time, even longer than Jonny. Teddy and I became close friends in fifth grade.

The car ride to Catalina Beach Club was both a depressing and bittersweet experience, because, even though we all knew Jonny would be leaving, we also knew that we were lucky to be able to create one last memory with him at a place we all enjoyed, the beach.

Once we got through the arched, tremendous entrance and signed into the beach club, we sprinted toward the ocean. My all-time favorite place to be is the beach. The sound of the waves was extremely peaceful, so I started to relax a little. In addition, the waves seemed as huge as a gigantic waterfall, just like the first time I went there with Jonny the year before.

That time it was only he and I. There was a carnival at the beach that day which included a dunk tank and an extremely tall water slide that towered over us. Jonny and I took turns in the dunk tank and laughed like hyenas when we hit the target, sending each of us into the dirty, sandy water. We raced down the water slide again and again, and whoever won got bragging rights to say

who was the fastest. Since we were such good friends, it never mattered to either of us who won. The flow of our conversation was always calm and easy.

Getting back to my last hours with Jonny, the air smelled of sea salt and the day was as bright as the sun. The ocean was clear, not a piece of seaweed to be seen. As we approached the water, Jonny asked in a depressed, glum voice, "Is today the last day I'm going to see you?"

I responded by saying, "No... it won't be, so don't think about it," but in reality I really didn't know if I'd ever see him again. I was reassuring both myself and him. It was like I was sugarcoating the truth for us, because I couldn't bear the thought that this could actually be true.

Then we all raced into the ocean, charging through the water like military soldiers charging into battle. Minutes later, we stopped and looked up and saw that there was a gigantic, eight-foot wave standing over us, making us look like we were ants. All of us said in unison, "Uh oh, we better brace ourselves before it knocks us under the water." That gave me a funny sensation, because I felt like Jonny leaving was knocking the wind out of me, but I laughed along with the other guys, while I felt like crying inside. *Crash! Bang!* We continued to get knocked around, pulled under the water, and pushed onto the beach, which took my mind off everything

temporarily. We were all chuckling hysterically as we swam back out for the next huge wave to overtake us. I was glad that we had this amazing time to add another farewell for Jonny to remember us by.

After about an hour we left the ocean to have lunch with Teddy's parents and his siblings. We all argued about who would sit next to Jonny. In the end I plopped onto the chair next to Jonny on one side and Mir sat on the other. We had Jonny's favorite food for lunch, which is pizza and then cookies for dessert. Lunch was calm and silent, which was very strange for us. In the past, we were never silent, therefore I realized everyone was just as depressed as I was. Eventually, we faced the elephant in the room and talked about how each of us was going to miss Jonny.

After lunch we headed back to the ocean. We continued to get knocked over by the waves. *Boom!* A gigantic wave overtook me and knocked me back to the shore. I was hoping I would be comforted by the sounds of the ocean, but unfortunately, that didn't happen because deep inside I knew I would miss Jonny's friendship the most because I had spent the most time with him. I became nostalgic as I remembered all the times the two of us laughed and told each other silly jokes that no one but us thought were funny. The image of us laughing so hard our sides felt like they were splitting open made my lips curl up

into a smile.

Those few hours brought back a lot of memories, like the first time I had a play date with Jonny. I went to his house and, since we both shared a passion for building, we played with Legos all day. By accident I broke one of his Legos and in true Jonny fashion he did not get angry and forgave me immediately. He told me that it was OK and that he and his dad would put the Lego together again after I left. As a result, we had play dates a lot through our years at PS 158.

Our favorite thing to do together was to go to the park and we continued to do that until the day he left. My favorite times with Jonny at the park were when we played football. He never criticized me and always picked me to be on his team. He gave me the confidence to want to keep playing. For this reason, I will be forever grateful to him.

Around three o'clock we left the ocean and descended to the pool to have a flip contest, however I didn't know how to flip. I walked slowly up to the diving board and thought to myself, I can't do this. What if I'm not capable of doing it? What if I fail? I realized after careful consideration that, if all my friends were willing to try it, I should man up and give it a try too. I jumped off the blue, unsteady diving board and did a belly flop and landed in the pool like a dead fish. As I landed on my

stomach Mir and Teddy pointed and said, “Oh boy, Tyler, that must have hurt.” I said nothing. I felt so embarrassed, even though I laughed along with everyone. I swam back to the diving board and tried and tried and tried, even though I never succeeded.

Jonny jumped into the pool and doggy-paddled over towards me. In typical Jonny fashion he said, “Don’t worry, Tyler, you’ll master it the next time around. It took me a long time to get it right too.” I was thrilled that I had made Jonny chuckle so hard

when I belly-flopped and created another great memory with him when he came to my defense.

After a while, we went to the snack bar and got ice cream like we always did each time we came to the beach. Just knowing that this experience would never occur again made me feel like a part of me was leaving along with Jonny. It felt like I was losing an arm or a leg. We reclined on the bench in front of the snack bar and started to tell jokes and stories until I blurted out, “I’m going to



*The air smelled of sea salt and the day was as bright as the sun*

miss this.”No one talked after that, because we were all so overcome with emotion. It was as if the waves collapsed on the sandy beach.

After finishing our ice cream we went down to the beach and played baseball for about an hour with Teddy’s father and his brothers Jack and Josh Ertel. I didn’t catch any balls for the first few minutes, then miraculously, a baseball landed in my glove. I smiled and realized that if everyone else could do it, so could I. Since I was never really good at baseball I was proud of myself, and was happy when Jonny said, “See, I knew you could do it.” That made me feel very proud of myself, but I wondered who would ever be as kind to me as Jonny always was. This reminded me of all the times he had my back and I was so thankful to have had him for my friend for so long.

Then the bright, sunny day was gone and it turned to dusk. Off in the distance the sun began to set over the ocean just like my smile began to fade again. We packed up and headed down the beach towards the snack bar. We all ordered the same thing, which was chicken tenders and french fries. It was hilarious and proved how similar we all were.

Once we were all finished we left the beach and re-entered the white Honda Pilot. I was thankful that on the drive home we hit a lot of traffic, which meant that we weren’t going to lose Jonny just yet.

When we got onto the FDR Drive and then York Avenue my heart basically stopped as the car stopped in front of Jonny’s building. I could hear what sounded like the loud beating of a drum in my chest and felt as if my heart was going to explode out of my chest. Immediately, my mood became extremely sad. The four of us hopped out of the car, as Jonny began to get out. None of us wanted the evening to end yet, even though we knew it was going to.

Jonny walked slowly towards his apartment building, as his upper body drooped down, like he was going to collapse onto the concrete ground. The kind of walk you do when you have to do something you don’t want to, but you know you have to. We each hugged Jonny and told him what a great friend he was to each of us. I saw Jonny start to bawl his eyes out as I watched him walk into his apartment building, leaving forever.

He put one foot into the elevator slowly and then the other, still looking at us with a look of despair on his face. Then the final blow came, I saw the elevator doors shut behind him as he left. The finality of the doors shutting signaled the end of the way our friendship had been all through the years. It all had happened so quickly, I could not comprehend that the time we spent with him had ended. That ending did not seem like enough to me, as I was not



ready to say goodbye to Jonny. It was too quick and left me in complete despair. I remember looking at everyone's glum faces and felt my eyes start to water, but I wouldn't let the tears flow, because I was afraid they'd never stop.

Mir, Teddy, and I went back to Teddy's apartment. We played mindless video games so we wouldn't have to think about what had just happened. The time went by slowly, because we just couldn't bring ourselves to face the reality of Jonny moving away. Then at about 10:00 p.m. I left in Mir's car and the pain I felt was obvious. I felt like I needed to cry, but yet I couldn't.

I arrived at my apartment building and climbed up the stairs, hunched over like an elderly man without his cane. I tried to calm myself down, even though my mind was still racing and I was still feeling so emotionally drained. My mom greeted me at the door and asked, "Tyler, honey are you OK?" in a soothing voice, the kind of voice someone would use when they were very concerned about someone they cared a great deal about.

"No, I'm devastated," I said, as my mom gave me a huge, reassuring hug. I walked into my living room and, even though the light was on, it seemed dark to me. As I sat on the gray couch my phone started vibrating over and over again in my right pocket. I kept sitting on my gray couch staring at my gray rug. Just

looking at that gray color made me think of how gray my life seemed at that moment.

I finally looked at my phone and noticed that Mir, Teddy, and Jonny had all texted me. I texted back and we all exclaimed, "Jonny, we do not want you to move 5,000 miles away from us. We are going to miss you so much."

Jonny responded, "Guys, I can not stop bawling my eyes out." At that point in time my heart broke for him as well as me.

I am very thankful that Mir, Teddy, and I created a memory book for Jonny about things we did all through our friendship, especially during fifth grade and the summer. Creating that book brought back memories for all of us, and Jonny was happy to have a piece of us to take with him when he left. Those memories with Jonny had been a huge part of my life and made me realize that even the slightest things could change how you look at the world. It's like looking at the world through rose-colored glasses, and every memory you make with your best friend the world gets nicer around you.

Very soon after Jonny moved back to Israel, I realized that I had to be more self-sufficient. Prior to fifth grade I never played sports with the other boys at the park after school or on the weekend, because I thought I would not be good enough for them.



One day at the beginning of fifth grade, Jonny convinced me to start playing sports with him and his friends. I liked sports, but I felt I needed to be better to play with them. Jonny insisted that I start playing basketball and flag football with them every day after school. I was so motivated, I even practiced with my brothers at home. I realized playing sports was fun, even if I wasn't the best player.

Jonny had been the link to my relationship to my friends, however, after he moved back to Israel I realized that he had given me the confidence to be more self-assured. Now that he isn't here I have become more self-

reliant and willing to try new things.

I am extremely thankful to Jonny for pushing me beyond my limits and challenging me to change who I was. He transformed me into a funnier, smarter, more understanding, and, most importantly, a better friend.

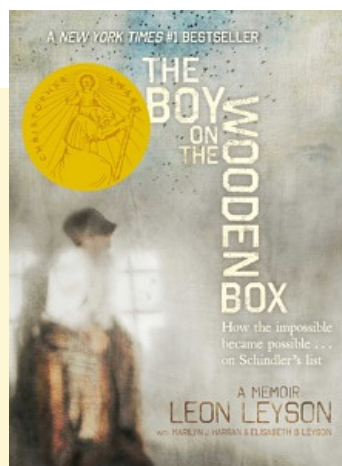
The day I walked over to Jonny Semach and asked him to be my friend was the best decision I ever made. Everything that happened in our relationship after that led me to the person I am today.

I will always remember Jonny, the most amazing friend anyone could ever have. Goodbye for now, Jonathan Semach! 🍁

# Book Review

By Delia Ray

*The Boy on the Wooden Box*, by Leon Leyson; Atheneum Books for Young Readers: New York, 2015; \$8.99



Dash Barnett, 13  
Seattle, Washington


LEON LEYSON'S MEMOIR of his experiences of Nazi Germany is a testament to the power of family and the amazing ability of kindness and good even in the darkest of times. Born Leib Lejzon, the author chronicles his family's experience during World War II and the Holocaust. He and his siblings grew up in rural Poland and moved to Krakow to join their working father in 1938. But by the fall of next year, the German army invaded, and set in motion a cycle of misery, starvation, and death that would last Leib and his Jewish family six dark years.

Leyson's writing is simple but touching and gives us a window into what it was like to live through the Holocaust. It's insane to think about how it would feel to be beaten, starved, and hated just because of which God/gods you placed your faith in. And Leyson's physical pain was just the beginning, as he had to go through the murders of several family members. What if one day you learned that the people you loved the most in the world were dead, and you would never see them again? How is it possible to go on living, when a part of who you are is crushed like that? But somehow, Leon and some of his family did survive.

It's amazing how Leon and a lot of his close family en-

dured the Holocaust. It was all through the help of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who rescued Jews from certain death to work in his factory. His story was adapted into a critically acclaimed movie, *Schindler's List*, by Steven Spielberg. Oskar Schindler was an amazing man. Disguised as a Nazi, he used bribes and extravagant parties to coerce high-ranking Nazis into letting him save Jews. Leon and his family were on Schindler's List, and it saved their lives. Leyson describes Schindler as "the hero, disguised as a monster himself, who would save my life."

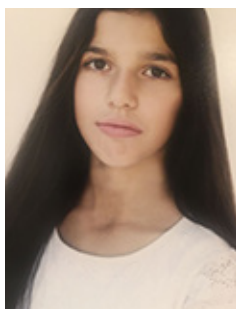
I won't tell you all of what happened, but I can tell you that the book can make you cry with matter-of-fact lines, and tells you that it's possible to outlast even the worst experiences and build a new life for yourself. Leon went through the Krakow ghetto, two brutal concentration camps, and still somehow survived his ordeal. I have read history books about World War II and the Holocaust before, but hearing someone tell a real, human story is something much different, and is so much more enlightening than any history book could be.

This book spoke to me even though I don't share the author's faith. It really made me stop and think about how valuable my family is, and how lucky I am to have comforts like a warm bed, enough food, and a roof above my head. These are things that we should really stop and think about, and when someone like Leon Leyson shares his story with us, it puts it into perspective. It's easy to take these comforts for granted, and walking a mile in Leon Leyson's shoes is important. Even though the story is very sad and touching to read, it is ultimately uplifting and teaches us that even in the worst of times, we can still find goodness and bravery, even in unlikely places. 

# The Track of Fear

By Isabelle Dastgheib

Illustrated by Mia Fang



Isabelle Dastgheib, 11  
Newport Coast, California



Mia Fang, 12  
West Lafayette, Indiana

**C**HUG! CHUG! CHUG! the rollercoaster roared as I rose higher and higher into the air. High above the bustle of Paris, my sister and I rose and plunged on the snakelike coaster. My stomach started sinking like the Titanic when I dared look down for a split second.

*Why did I do this to myself?* I silently screamed, not really wanting to answer my own question.

In a blink of an eye, we were almost at the top, and I felt my stomach clench as I stared wide-eyed at the gargantuan drop!

*If I could have one wish, it would be to freeze this moment.* I could not mentally move past this point. One second later, reality belly-flopped me into a black hole.

*Chug! Chug! Chug!* the rollercoaster taunted me. All I could think about was how high I had climbed, how soon the death-defying drop would plummet me into an abyss, and why I had agreed to do this.

“Aren’t you excited for the big drop, Izzy?” Hannah asked, gazing at me as joy shot through her voice like a sunbeam.

“Yeah,” I muttered, not looking at her.

I was lying both to her and myself.

*Think happy thoughts,* I told myself, but how could I think that way when the once bright sapphire sky was now dark and gloomy and the grass under me no longer seemed green but shadow black? I shut my eyes, not ready for what lay ahead. I would face the drop in five, four, three, two...

“*ARGHHHHH!*” my sister and I screamed. I hurled my



*"ARGHHHHH!" my sister and I screamed*

hands in the air and let the wind run against my arms, and to my surprise, it didn't turn out to be as scary as I had thought it would be.

After the ride was over, I realized I enjoyed conquering my fears and trying new challenges.

"See, wasn't that fun, Izzy?" my older sister asked, turning to me with her golden smile.

"Yeah, do you want to go again?" I asked, my voice singing with confidence as I gazed up at the giant roller coaster with pride.

"Sure."

With that, Hannah and I clasped hands conspiratorially, and we joined the line. ❁

# Enchanting Sunset

By Jinny Min



Jinny Min, 11  
Mukilteo, Washington

A walk by the shore on a blazing summer day,  
So hot that you can cook an egg on the street.  
The soft silky sand tickles your toes  
While you complain that it is hot as fire.

Happiness and laughter fill the air as I jump  
From the glistening waves that try to pull me in.  
You build a castle with your left hand  
And eat a frozen treat with the other.

You spread a fuzzy blanket to sit back and wait,  
For the time has come for you to be speechless.  
In awe you see, your eyes sparkling bright,  
Right at the horizon, is a sunset.



# Welcome Aboard

By Catherine Chung

*Illustrated by the author*

GUSTS OF WIND whipped around the platform, a welcome appearance for the impatient passengers dripping with sweat on this sweltering Beijing summer afternoon. Off in the distance, two whistles blew, piercing the air with their tremulous shrill, ushering in a series of booming *clang clang clangs*.

Eagerly, I gripped my blue suitcase ever so tightly. Sweat in my palms practically melted into the silver luggage handle. Just a few moments before we would board the train... a couple of seconds now... a mere split-second...

*CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!* Puffs of smoke from the train funnel rose and drifted in the breeze, and the locomotive stopped still on the tracks, its red hue dimming in its countless journeys. The crimson gleam remained though. A train attendant clad in a dark navy-blue suit and beaming pearly whites unlocked the train entrance. A cluster of voices suddenly bubbled up as everyone clamored to board the train, yearning to escape the burning heat. Only one young woman stayed behind to wave tearfully at her family, yelling a last minute *I promise to write!* and *I'll miss you!* Her parents nodded, ready to let her go as the young woman vanished within the clamoring crowd.

I had heard that boarding a train was like entering a whole new world. That it would be an exciting, thrilling adventure. That sometimes you met all kinds of



Catherine Chung, 12  
Theodore, Alabama



*“ARGHHHHH!” my sister and I screamed*

people who could change your life, or become a lifelong friend. It seemed that the world inside this train was bursting with people to be met, things to be seen... People also said that riding trains was the best way to immerse yourself in Chinese culture, as Chinese people routinely traveled by train, and that was just my goal as my family and I boarded the train that would take us on a cross-country route, leading from northern Beijing to the southern China harbors.

We were bound for the final stop

on the train route: Shenzhen, a mega-metropolis in China famed for being the Silicon Valley of China, for its contemporary architecture and modern, youthful culture. We'd come to visit my uncle who lived there. I had heard amazing tales of Shenzhen from my parents, and I dreamed of the urban adventures *I* would get to experience.

Inside the train, I leaped across the passenger corridors, bursting with curiosity at the unfamiliar newness of it all. I paused to stop and inspect

the cogs of an enticing gadget. Or how the window curtains were royal blue and fringed with golden yellow, with phoenix figures imprinted on the fabric... I was so thrilled to be on a real-life train, on a world away from home!

Suddenly, my mom called me over.

Instantly, I rushed—no, skipped—over to our compartment. This would be our home for the next twenty-two hours. Triple bunk beds were built on either side. Mom and I snagged the bottom bunks—rejoice!—while my cousin got the middle bunk above. Bottom bunk was almost always the best spot, because beside it was an oval-shaped window that gave a view of outside. Underneath was a sterile white table ideal for eating. And the best part was that I could freely amble in and out of the compartment. No having to climb down and fret about accidentally squashing someone's toes!

As we furnished our surroundings, I took out my travel satchel and a pink-and-purple dog-shaped pillow. Our bunkmates soon came in and settled down. They promptly began to doze off. The train would start off shortly.

Suddenly, a flurry of voices began to rise. Poking my head out to see the commotion, I heard some people having a heated debate. A woman with high heels sharp enough to stab someone chatted in animated Chinese with her friend, a carefree

spirit in her smile. A frail, elderly man with a head full of gray hair, dashed with specks of white, persevered to keep his balance as he walked and took out a pocket-sized leather-bound photo album and lovingly stared at a tiny, grainy, sepia photograph before placing it back. A pair of parents warned their child *QUIT climbing on the suitcases or else...* A teenager crunched on some chips as she listened to the blasting music in her earphones. She swayed to a rhythm I couldn't make out, completely immune to the activity rushing around her. An auburn-haired man glued to his cellphone muttered to himself in a foreign tongue, urgently tapping the screen for a response, a ghostly halo framing his features. A young mother with a tied-up bun nestled in her arms a whining and wailing infant. Trailing behind her was her daughter, pulling her mom's orange blouse, craving attention. Not far behind was the children's dad, huffing and puffing as he heaved the massive luggage. They settled in the compartment next to us, the baby screaming louder. I wondered about the tales of these people, what sort of lives they had to tell.

*TWEEEEEEEEET!* The shrill whistle abruptly sounded, and off the train lurched, giving a violent jolt and leading me to hop into the safe covers of my bed. Grabbing a book, I began to read.

Suddenly, nearly three chapters in, I

felt someone staring at me. Intently. And for a long time. Maybe it was my sixth sense creeping in. I could hear a *pitter patter* of footsteps. Then a pause.

Who could it be?

Looking up, I found a pair of deep black eyes staring at me!

*Oh!* Those eyes belonged to that little girl with the wailing infant sibling! They were thoughtful, glassy eyes, like marbles, rolling around the small room and studying the compartment, my dozing bunkmates, and, most importantly, me.

Then she hid behind the wall separating the train compartments. She peeked again. And again! This game of peek-a-boo went on for several minutes, with each stolen glance becoming increasingly longer and more confident. Black bangs framing her chubby face, radiating total innocence and utter angelicness, her thoughts seemed to echo loud and clear. *I want someone to play with.*

At last, the little girl evidently concluded that I was a qualified playmate and invited herself in, plopping down on my bed with me.

She grinned infectiously and showed me a toy she had dragged along.

"This," she announced, holding up a small red monkey, "is my toy monkey. His name is Monkey." The little girl hugged the well-loved Monkey, then, with an air of a commander, tilted her head and inquired of me,

"Where's *your* toy?"

I laughed and replied I was too old for toys.

A hint of frustration flared in her chubby cheeks. "Then *that* is your toy!" She pointed at something lying beside me.

*What toy?* I whipped my head around until my eyes lay on my dog-shaped pillow cuddled next to me. It looked slightly neglected.

"That's. . . a *pillow*," I explained. "Not a toy," I added for further clarification.

"It's your toy puppy," declared the little girl decisively, as if it had been set in stone. She promptly pleaded for me to play with her.

We then engaged in a game of pretend, of Puppy vs. Monkey. Turns out that the little girl was three years old and was named Yang Han. It seems to be a universal truth that all children love the power of pretend, wherever, whenever. Who doesn't?

As the game progressed, the sun began its descent towards the horizon, and the train stopped at various places, jolting and dismantling the clump of blankets Yang Han had designated to be a school in this game of pretend. After a stop to a nearby town, my fellow bunkmates rose and smiled at Yang Han, furiously reconstructing a yet again demolished school.

I patted her back as she wailed in frustration at the imperfect school. "But now Puppy and Monkey can't



go to school,” she lamented, sucking on the little red monkey for comfort. Seconds later, her parents called her for dinner.

With a satisfied stomach and drowsy eyes, I gazed at the sun, now fading into flaming orange, yellow, and aqua hues. Soon, glittering stars dotted the night sky, lighting up the blanket of darkness. Closing my eyes, I drifted into a deep slumber...

Today was destination day!

Yang Han seemed set on spending the whole day with me. As she zipped over to play, I asked her, “Where’s your train stop?”

She shrugged, then her eyes lit up, radiating innocence once more. “My daddy said we were going to a fun place!”

Chuckling, we engaged into another game when suddenly Yang Han leaped

up and excitedly told me, “Follow me,” dragging my hand along.

She led me to another compartment. Apparently, it seemed that Yang Han had made some other friends as well, as I found myself being swarmed by a group of equally chubby and adorable little kids.

One little boy cried in discomfort. Even his wispy tufts of hair seemed to droop as he complained about his beloved stuffed tiger he’d left at home. “All alone...” he moaned, dissolving into another bout of tears.

Yang Han shushed him and patted his back as I’d done to her yesterday. “It’s gonna be OK,” she said. She even offered to share half of a swirly butternut cookie that appeared out of nowhere to comfort him. When another little girl commented about needing to use the restroom, Yang



Hang enthusiastically offered, “I’ll take you there!” These simple acts of kindness demonstrated how profoundly sweet she was, despite—or, maybe *because* of—her young age.

Soon, Yang Han left her little troop of baby-faced friends and hurried back over to my compartment.

Plopping down on my mattress again, she pointed at my travel satchel and asked, “What’s inside?”

I unzipped the bag, shrugging. “Just some bubblegum wrappers, sunglasses, and some sketch paper...”

Peeking inside the bag too, Yang Han looked up and asked, “What’s the sketch paper for?”

I looked at the paper, creamy and bright in the morning light. “For drawing, of course!” Suddenly, an idea sprang to my head. “I’m going to sketch you, OK?”

Yang Han didn’t know what sketching was, but she grinned anyways.

Welcome Aboard author and little girl drawing

Feeling around the travel satchel, I found a pencil. Using my book as a prop stand, I etched out the facial structure of my subject, round and baby-faced. I had to work fast. Three-year-olds are impatient human beings, and they can’t pose for long stretches of time. I tapped my pencil against the paper. What was Yang Han’s most distinct feature? Her black marble eyes, I decided. As I traced the eye outlines, Yang Han took a close look at the portrait-to-be and rushed off to call some of her adorable friends to come over.

Once again, a huddle of small children plopped down on my mattress and swarmed around, observing me





as I drew Yang Han's hair china-doll style. When I filled in Yang Han's nose, the little boy Yang Han had comforted with the swirly butternut cookie had become deeply interested in my drawing, inching in and leaning over to get a better look at it, to the point where he accidentally spilled a couple drops of his orange juice, leaving a patch of stains on my pale-white mattress.

Upon completion, I showed the sketch to Yang Han and smiled. "Done! You like it?"

Abruptly abandoning her dear red monkey, she grabbed the drawing and ogled it, rapt with wonder. Jaw dropping in awe, she pressed it against her face and squealed in delight.

Immediately, she rushed to display her latest treasure to everyone in my compartment, much to the *oohs* and *ahs* of her little troop, and when that task was completed, she galloped across the passenger corridors, showing it for all the people on board to admire.

"See!" she shouted, bursting with pride, "It's *me*!" much to the nodding and *awwwws* of the bemused audience. And if there was no reaction, Yang Han would simply thrust the picture in their faces and repeat "SEE!" more forcefully.

I genuinely loved seeing her joy and the response of our fellow passengers. A tiny surge of pride rose within me as I thought about how I had indeed captured her features in

the portrait quite accurately. Yang Han reminded me of myself when I had ridden on my very first train. I had been but three too. From my family's fond memories of that event, I had wandered around the corridor a lot like Yang Han, minus the adorable troops. At home, I had been a rather withdrawn child, doubtful, suspicious of the world. Always in the shadow of my mom. And I saw that happiness that I had felt all those years ago, reflected in this jubilant three-year-old Yang Han, though her friendly openness had been the polar opposite of my three-year-old personality.

At this thought, I felt a pang of wistfulness, knowing that when Yang Han would grow up to be my age, she'd probably barely have any memories about the moment happening before my eyes now.

Later, after her "exhibition" was over, Yang Han showed the sketch over to her dad, who came to my compartment to thank me. He was as pleased as her. From him, I learned that their train stop was Ganzhou, which was the very next destination on our train route.

Too soon, the train pulled up next to Ganzhou, an industrial city. Before she and her family headed there, Yang Han clung to my jeans leg. She didn't want to let go. Nor did I.

After the Ganzhou stop, the train chugged closer and closer to Shenzhen. I gazed outside through the oval-shaped window, marveling




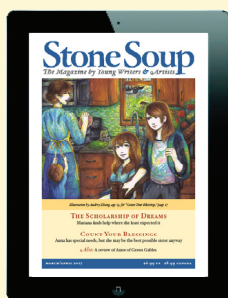
at the the views. How a sparkling, crystal-clear stream twisted through a picturesque fishing village, flanked with wooden docks, breathing life into the well-worn town. How the rolling farmland with its endless rice fields created tall grassy hills, with cows grazing upon the abundant clover, munching away the blazing hot summer. How the hills gave way to towering mountains, these grand, majestic formations, with forests so dense, lush, and thick they could rival the sprawling acres back home in Alabama! Wisps of fog enveloped the sweeping green mountain range, creating an ethereal feel.

I sighed in amazement, proud that the land of my heritage held so many captivating wonders and sights to see... I spent the entire afternoon staring, eyes pressed against the window, imagining what other natural scenery I would witness...

In due time though, scores of skyscrapers began to spiral out, luminous against the backdrop of a vibrantly colored sunset, dropping the curtain upon yet another day. The remaining passengers began to crowd around the windows to catch the first glimpse of our final destination, Shenzhen. As the train curved beyond a ridge, blocky buildings jammed the

city, as if edging in for a role in this urban spectacle. Their glassy surfaces glowed like fire as the setting sun reflected on it. Far off in the distance, fiery fireworks exploded, a cluster of dancing flames. We could hear the cascading *POW! POW! POW!*s going off. Before us, neon lights blinked nonstop.

Our train swerved towards the Shenzhen train station, and everyone descended down to the platform. Excitement grew in me as my family and I seized our suitcases and took our tentative first steps in the city. Next to me, I saw the gray-haired man glow with happiness as he embraced his young grandchildren, their parents looking on, radiant with joy. The tearful young woman who had bade goodbye to her family in Beijing now took in Shenzhen with a confident gaze and started off towards the distance, ready for her journey of independence. Many other passengers huddled together and reunited with waiting passersby. Seeing the vast sea of people bustling around us, I was a traveler blurred within the crowds of humanity, of people with dreams, hopes, challenges they had conquered, difficulties yet to be defeated... I looked out towards a world just waiting to be explored... 



# Honor Roll

## Bonus Materials

### At StoneSoup.com

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- Blog posts by the editors and by guest bloggers, filled with great ideas for teachers and young writers.
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors and illustrators. Meet some of your favorite contributors!
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- Video performances by talented young musicians, dancers, and poets.

### On Our YouTube Channel

- *Stone Soup* authors and illustrators talk about their work.

### In Our Apps (Apple & Android)

- All of the above in mobile form!

**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*

### Stories

Maris Brown, 12  
 Angelina Cao, 12  
 Catelyn Clevenger, 11  
 Maeve Filkins, 10  
 Bailey Fried, 11  
 Ava Giordano, 12  
 Sierra Glassman, 11  
 Garrett Heller, 13  
 Aleena Islam, 13  
 Ruhee Jain, 11  
 Cole Jersek, 11  
 Finn Joshi, 12  
 Renee Kelly, 9  
 Jannah Khan, 13  
 Lauren Lamson, 11  
 Eden Skye Lewis, 10  
 Sienna Ruby Lipton, 12  
 Emilia Llorca Luth, 10  
 Adelle MacDowell, 13  
 Arabella McClendon, 13  
 Sofia McTaggart, 12  
 Mackenzie Morong, 12  
 Natalia Odreman, 12  
 Sydney Phillips, 11  
 Myla Pierre-Louis, 13  
 Siddharth Ramesh, 10  
 Sophie Raskin, 9  
 Leyla Richter-Munger, 13  
 Ryan Rodman, 11

Emma Russell-Trione, 12  
 Shefali Sahai, 13  
 Emily Schechter, 11  
 Soleil Shannonhouse, 8  
 Lev Scheinfeld, 13  
 Zack Shell, 13  
 Liam Smith, 12  
 Owen Stokes, 12  
 Julia Ye, 12  
 Subin Yoon, 13  
 Emily Zhang, 12

### Poems

Hattie Bradshaw, 10  
 Eliana Brenden, 11  
 Cora Cheer, 10  
 Alma Dasberg, 11  
 Riley Dowell, 10  
 Gabriel Epstein, 12  
 Mia Harte, 12  
 Zoe Keith, 9  
 Lauren Lamson, 11  
 Kyra Mathew, 10  
 Abraham Newman, 11  
 Hannah Parker, 12  
 Tara Prakash, 10  
 Chloe Riethmiller, 10  
 Logan Settle Rishard, 11  
 River Shields, 10  
 Abby Wallach, 12

## **Book Reviews**

Olivia Brown, 13  
Claire Buchanan, 11  
Emily Cao, 13  
Eileen Wang, 13

## **Artwork**

Giselle Alexander, 12  
Emma Hensch, 10  
Reiyah Jacobs, 11  
Jordyn Levine, 12