

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Vaeya Nichols, age 13, for "Yellow Rose," page 17

YELLOW ROSE

Rose is unhappy with her life; then she meets Scarlet

THE BOY FICTIONALIST

With his mom's support, Peter discovers his gift for writing fiction

Also: A poem about being adopted

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 45, NUMBER 3
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

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Editor's Note

Home and Family. These are common themes for *Stone Soup* stories and poems, and this issue is no exception. Every family is different. Angie, a foster child, longs to find her dream home, a place where she really belongs, in "Family." Rose in "Yellow Rose" and Peter in "The Boy Fictionalist" must do their best to carry on after losing their mothers. In "Welcome Home," Lilly and her mom are suddenly on their own, living in a shabby house, but they realize they have what matters most—each other. "Adopted" is a poem that teaches us not to feel sorry kids who are adopted. They have families who love them too. Are you a fan of family stories and poems? If you are, or if you love friendship stories or fantasies or historical fiction, be sure to visit the Archives at stonesoup.com. With ten years of back issues you can sort by subject, you'll find hours of great reading. Enjoy, and tell us what you think!

— Gerry Mandel

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Submissions

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ON THE COVER Talented artist Vaeya Nichols has illustrated five stories for *Stone Soup* since 2013. Her favorite things to draw are people, animals, and landscapes. Her favorite medium is watercolor. Vaeya also loves reading, playing the piano, cats, spending time in nature, and the smell of a bookstore.



The Mailbox



In the November/December 2016 edition, I made many connections to books I have read. In “Black and White,” I made a connection to *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton. In “Outside the Dome,” I made a connection to *The Last Dog*, by Katherine Paterson, and *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L’Engle.

Sarah Tabak, 11
New York, New York

I absolutely love writing! Until a few years ago, I was just creating stories and then letting them sit on my computer, without anyone to read them. When I was first introduced to *Stone Soup*, I couldn’t believe that there was a magazine out there that would publish stories by kids! Now I have a goal to work for: Get published! Thanks so much for creating a magazine that helps kids work toward their dreams of becoming authors. You have helped me learn to write with more depth and feeling.

Sophia Emmert, 13
Muscatine, Iowa

Sophia’s story, “Speak,” is on page 25 of this issue.

Thank you for publishing *Stone Soup*. I love to read all of the wonderful stories, poems, and book reviews. My favorite stories are the ones that are true to the real world.

Karis Henson, 12
Durham, North Carolina

For years I have loved reading the latest edition of *Stone Soup* and admired the beautiful illustrations and moving stories. It has been such a joy getting to see and read what other people, from all over the world, have worked very hard on, and that is my favorite part of *Stone Soup*. It is really cool how it brings all kinds of people together through things they love. Or by things they are trying out.

Madeline Hammond, 12
Manchester, Massachusetts

Ever since I was six, I’ve been reading your magazine, and I received so much of my inspiration and my love for reading and writing from there. I want to become an author, and your magazine proves to me how much children and teens can accomplish!

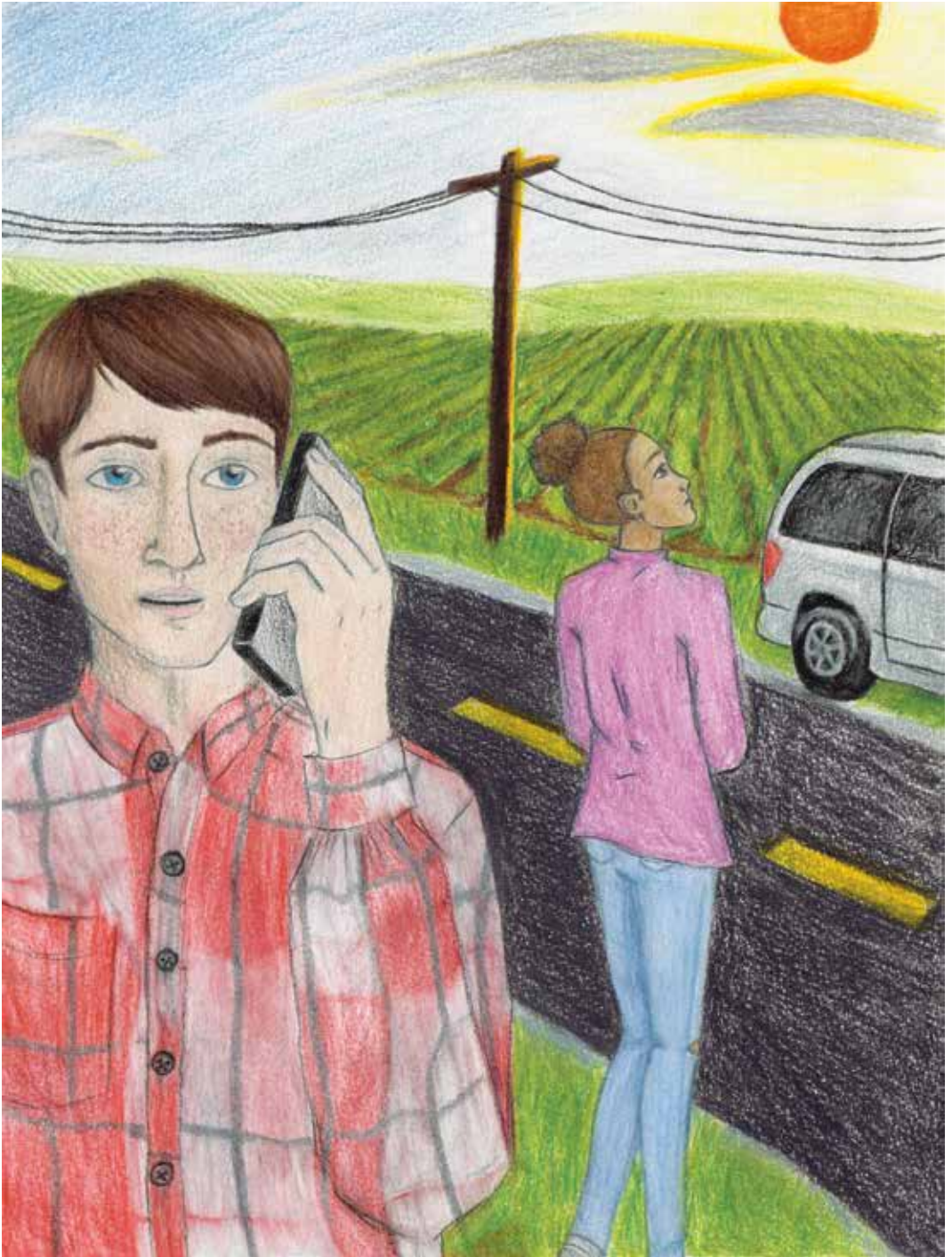
Ana Chen, 13
Bellevue, Washington

I really love how *Stone Soup* can inspire even the youngest of writers. My mom had her first story published in your magazine when she was twelve, and I enjoyed reading it.

Stiles Fraser White, 12
Los Angeles, California

Stiles’s story, “Black and White,” appeared in the November/December 2016 issue of Stone Soup. His mom, Juliet White (formerly Juliet Snowden), was published in Stone Soup in 1979 and 1980.

Stone Soup welcomes your comments. Send them to editor@stonesoup.com. You can read all the stories mentioned in The Mailbox in the Archives at stonesoup.com.



"Hi," he briskly speaks in the phone. "Is this AAA?"

Family

By **Stella Keaveny Haapala**

Illustrated by **Phoebe Wagoner**

THE THING ABOUT FAMILY IS, they're always there for you. No matter the circumstances. They don't care if you're ugly, or dress right, they just care that you are you. They love you.

I am searching for my family. I have lived in different houses, with different mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts, but I still haven't found my family; but I know, one day, I will find them.

AS I LOOK OUT THE WINDOW at the passing fields with blue skies hanging above them like blankets to keep them safe from the fiery red sun, I think of my new home. I wonder if it will be like the last, happy and cheerful on the outside but dark and secretive on the inside. Maybe it will be like the one before that, crusted and falling apart, with small children crunched tightly in every crook of the house. Or the one before that, my mind cringes at the thought of it... no, it can't be like that house.

Maybe this house will be my dream house, with my perfect family inside. I just don't know what my dream house is, but I know that I've never come close to it before. Maybe this time...

My thoughts are interrupted as I hear a sputtering coming from the back of the silver minivan as we slowly drive to the side of the highway. My driver mutters something under his breath and gets out of the car, slamming the door behind him. Tentatively, I follow him out. He sees me but, other than



Stella Keaveny Haapala, 12
Portland, Oregon



Phoebe Wagoner, 13
Carlisle, Kentucky

a glance, does not acknowledge that I'm there.

"Excuse me, sir," I ask, slowly at first, "what is wrong with the car?" He gives me a condescending look.

"If I knew, we would be on the road right now," he answers, as he pops open the hood. He walks over to the front seat of the car and rummages around for about five minutes. Finally he comes out with something in his hand. "Aha!" he says, as he pulls out his phone and begins dialing. He puts the phone to his ear and paces back and forth in front of me several times.

"Hi," he briskly speaks in the phone. "Is this AAA?"

I decide not to listen any longer and to go into the van to sleep. I've had a long day anyway, I guess it's just like any other day...

I WAKE UP to the sound of the front door slamming. I look up at my driver expectantly. He takes a deep breath and begins speaking.

"Well, we're gonna be here for a long time, Angela." He takes another deep breath, as if he's tired from this short sentence; then he continues, but I'm not sure if he is talking to me or himself. "AAA can't come for hours, and foster care can't come for longer, so we're stuck here for who knows how long!" He hits his head with his small fist and sinks into his seat. I bring my knees to my chest and try to fall asleep again, but I'm already thinking.

"Ummm... mister?" I say, not knowing his name.

"Yes?" he says, looking up. "And it's Chris, by the way."

"Chris?!" My heart leaps at the name. "I know a Chris!"

Chris's eyebrows rise. "You do?" He seems surprised, like he's never met anyone with the same name as him.

"Well... I did." As I say this my heart falls deeper than before, into the darkest of oceans. "Not anymore." I look at my feet. Chris was a friend I had met at my first foster home, when I was just five. He showed me around the house and told me everything there was to know about foster care. He was there for me when I became an orphan, and I trusted him with my biggest secrets. He was my best friend. Then, one morning, I woke up and he was gone. No goodbye hugs, not even a note. He was just... gone. For more than a year after that, I couldn't sleep without him wandering my dreams, and waking up crying with no friends to comfort me. I was alone. Now, eight years later, it still hurts to think of him. My only friend.

I bury my head in my knees but don't cry; Chris silently stares ahead at the tall grasses, swaying in the wind.

"Wanna sit up front?" He pats the seat next to him. "There's no point in having you back there anymore, it's not like we're moving or anything. Plus, you're thirteen!"

I am shocked. No one has ever asked me to sit in the front seat in my entire life! But he does have a point, I am thirteen.

I slowly climb into the passenger seat and am surprised by how much more

comfortable the front seats are. Now that I am next to Chris, I take this silent moment to study him.

He wears a red-and-gray-plaid shirt, with blue jeans and a pair of sneakers. His dark brown hair is parted to the side, and his eyes remind me of the bright blue sky outside; his skin is creamy white, like freshly whipped cream, and he has freckles dotted around his face. He looks young, around eighteen, but I'm not sure...

"Do you want to listen to music?" Chris asks, reaching for the radio in the car.

"Sure," I agree politely, although I never seem to like the same music as my drivers do.

Chris presses the power button but quickly puts his hands up and turns to me. "You have complete control over the radio, Angela," he smiles, and I smile back.

"You can call me Angie," I say, as I begin scrolling stations.

I watch Chris's face cringe for every disconnected station we pass, and I try to find a good one soon. Finally, after about five minutes of hopelessly scrolling, I find a clear channel, an oldies station, and it's playing a song that I recognize from my last home. There was an older kid who was always listening to music and blasting it from his room upstairs. He never spoke to anyone, but his music did; I guess it was his way of expressing himself.

Chris starts bobbing his head in sync

with the music, and I sit back to watch him joyfully. He looks up at me, laughing.

"Come on, Angie," he says. "Dance!"

Hesitantly, I bob my head like he is, and I start to enjoy the music.

We sit in the car for I don't know how much longer, listening to music and occasionally talking. After a while, a yellow Volkswagen drives up to us.

"Well, that's our ride!" Chris says with a sigh.

I take a look at the people inside, there is a woman driving with tightly pulled-back hair and cake batter splattered on her dark skin. She looks about fifty. Sitting next to her is a

pile of treats and presents with a pair of hands wrapped around them. A person, I figure, is sitting underneath the pile.

The car stops and the woman gets out. She hurries over to our van where Chris is now getting out of the car as well. She gives him a quick hug and then walks over to me.

"Hello, Angela! My name is Yolanda!" She holds out her hand to me and I take it gratefully. I look at her face closer. She has big brown eyes like chestnuts and high cheekbones. Her forehead is big and wrinkled, like she raises her eyebrows a lot. Her hair is pulled back in a tight bun that holds dark brown and gray curls. She wears a yellow-flowered dress with a stained white apron and peach-colored flats. Her perfume smells of peaches as well.

**Maybe this house
will be my dream
house, with my
perfect family
inside.**



For the next half an hour, we talk about everything

“I’m gonna be seeing you a lot, I guess!” Yolanda says happily. This comment puzzles me. I see Chris walk up behind her slowly.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Well,” she says with a grin on her face, “you’re gonna come stay with me, my husband, Walter, and my son, Chris, for a little while!” I am so surprised by this that I nearly fall over. I *am* going to be seeing them a lot!

For the next half an hour, we talk about everything. Yolanda introduces me to her husband, Walter, and Chris tells me about how he was a foster child until they found him. They give me presents and cookies that are so delicious I want to walk up to heaven with them. They tell me of their home, stories, and all of their pets. But the whole time, I can’t stop smiling because I know,

I’ve found my family.



The Search for Literature

By **Connor Park**

I run my fingers across the shelves
Waiting for one to catch my eye
Row after row my fingers run
Failure takes a step closer
But there in the dusty corner
Hidden by the screen of forget
Lies the love of my life that will only last a couple of hours

Bright red with gold lettering
A hard skin protecting its insides
No telling what it's like
But I have a good feeling

Gently I pick my discovery up
To me, it's a block of gold
My breath stirs the grime on top
I back up slowly and sit on the carpeted floor
Ready for an adventure, I lift the hard cover
My eyes move from left to right
As the personality of the book in my hands is revealed



Connor Park, 12
Mukilteo, Washington



"Taxation without representation is tyranny!"

Lost by Liberty

By **Alexandra Orczyk**

Illustrated by **Ester Luna**

TODAY

IT'S AN ALMOST PERFECT DAY. The sun has just come out after a long lazy nap in the clouds. It's the kind of day when elves and unicorns and faeries can be found. And if you climbed to the very top of the largest oak you'd see a rainbow.

It's the same kind of day that I first met Oliver. I was four, and I hardly remember anything from back then, but that day I clearly remember. I was helping out in my father's printing shop. I watched in fascination how he set the letters on the press. It was then that Oliver came in. He couldn't explain why he came by himself here, and he insisted that he wasn't lost. Soon he went out, and when my father wasn't looking, I ran out after him. It turned out we both loved exploring and magical creatures, and both of us wondered why the sky was blue. We were friends.

Today, we should have been running through the woods, or seeing who could swing the highest and then jump. It's a wonderful day for that. But we weren't.

THREE YEARS AGO

I'D JUST TURNED NINE. He was going on ten. I was up in that highest oak, he on the same branch. We were racing to get to the top first, and as usual, we tied. As usual, my dress got torn, although I had promised my mother to be more careful today. On the very last branch, where the leaves teased and tickled our arms, we sat down to take a rest.



Alexandra Orczyk, 12
Escondido, California



Ester Luna, 13
Washington, DC

I took a newspaper out of my pocket, for lately I had taken a liking to the news. It had a stamp printed in the right corner. I started reading.

"Parliament Passes Stamp Act." I waited for his response.

He didn't say anything.

I continued reading. "We did not consent to this. Taxation without representation is tyranny!" I especially enjoyed the way the last sentence felt, how the letters bounced with energy on my tongue.

Again there was silence. Then he spoke, slowly, a pause between each word. "I think... it's... only natural that we should pay taxes. After all... we are subjects of King George."

This time I didn't say anything. This was the opposite of what I was hearing at home. Since my father was a printer, the Stamp Act affected him very much. He had to pay a tax for every paper he printed. None of my family liked it. Why should we pay the Parliament if we couldn't elect its members?

But what worried me more was that this was the first time we didn't agree on something. I didn't like this painfully loud silence, so I suggested we look for gnome homes. Neither of us particularly wanted to do that (we were much too old, it was more like something my little sister would do), but it was better than silence, so we did it anyway.

THE NEXT DAY

WE WERE WALKING to the woods just like any other day. It was cloudy, just like any other day. But it was

different, different in a way that I didn't want to think about. I took off my shoes and went into the creek. The water stung. I saw a tadpole, reached down to catch it, but I noticed Oliver wasn't there. He was sitting on a cool gray rock behind me. I turned to him. "Would you like to catch tadpoles?"

He looked at the water. His shoes were still on. "Well, I talked to my father about the Stamp Act."

"And?"

"He said that anyone who opposes it is a traitor to Britain."

That my father, and even I, might be traitors wasn't something I'd wanted to consider. But Oliver's father is different from mine. His father is a governor, appointed by King George. He'd never approved of us being friends.

I didn't know what to say. Before, I always knew what to say to Oliver.

He continued talking. "And... he says he knew something horrid would result from us... mingling. He says that we ought not to be friends anymore."

The water stung even more than before. I'd read books about friends being driven apart, but overnight? No, it couldn't happen. Never.

"Oliver, surely you wouldn't listen to him?" I looked in his eyes. He seemed as confused as me.

"I... have to go home," he said, softly.

AND THE DAY AFTER THAT

THREE O'CLOCK. I quickly put down my books, said goodbye to my parents, and then ran out the door. It was

only after I got to the hickory tree, where I met Oliver once he came back from his tutor's house, that I remembered. Oh, I remembered.

But I waited anyway. What was the worst that could happen?

Sure enough, I saw him coming down the road. He didn't look at me.

"Oliver!" I yelled out.

Nothing.

"Oliver!"

"I'll never be friends with a traitor!" Down the road he went. Soon he disappeared from sight. I could only see the emptiness, his shadow lingering long after he had left.

Two days ago, I disliked the Stamp Act. Now I hated it. One tax and two friends driven apart? I raced away, all alone.

ONE AND A HALF YEARS LATER

I WAS AT THE HARBOR with my father. I wasn't entirely sure why we were there. Earlier, that's where my father would pick up shipments of ink and paper. But now we were boycotting English goods, instead making our own printing supplies, so why...? Looking back, it seems too odd of a coincidence.

I stood there, looking at the ocean, thinking of England on the other side. The breeze observed me for a while. It saw I was far too happy and decided to show me some sadness.

So it crept up and blew my newspaper, and I ran for it. It blew off into the harbor, and when I looked up...

The newspaper fell on the deck of a departing boat. A boy picked it up. He looked at me. I looked at him. Then the wind got angrier and picked up, the boat getting smaller, smaller, smaller, until it was gone.

TODAY

I'M UP ON that tallest oak again. Alone, the branch seems far too long, and I can see the nothingness, the silence that's replaced him. Yes, there are other friends, but no one listens like he did. There's no one who knew how to cheer me up as well. There's no one who I laughed with as loudly. And he's gone now.

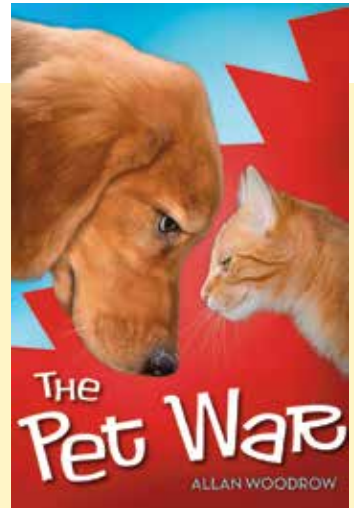
I climb down the tree, lowering myself branch after branch. Only my footprints lie helplessly behind as I walk out of the forest, out of this almost perfect day. 🌿



Book Review

By Dyllan Han

The Pet War, by Allan Woodrow; Scholastic Press:
New York, 2015; \$4.99



Dyllan Han, 11
Milpitas, California

WHEN I READ BOOKS I always set my expectations low, and also, I reluctantly admit I literally sometimes judge a book by its cover. The cover of *The Pet War* is a cartoonish picture of a dog staring down a cat, and that's how I was drawn in. The plot starts out when the protagonist, Otto, an eleven-year-old boy, is watching a family move away with their dog that he really loved. You get a touch of his personality—likeable but also frustrating. He bargains with his mother back and forth about responsibility, when Lexi, his cat-loving sister, pipes up about getting a cat. They argue fiercely, but finally his mom settles on an agreement that whoever raises five-hundred dollars first to pay for the pet will get theirs. And the war begins.


When they go to their divorced dad's house, they both kiss up to him to try to get him to agree to get either a dog or a cat, and after they do many chores, he does. One particularly sad symbol of how the “war” was affecting the family was when they traveled to their dad's house again and didn't do anything with him. He is pleading, desperate to spend some quality time with them because he misses them, but they are too busy trying to beat each other to do something with him.

As the war gets more intense, their rivalry becomes hate, with too serious name-calling, stealing, insults, and even bullying each

other through talking. Otto steals twenty dollars from his sister and rips apart one of her posters, feeling guilty but then justifying it through thinking that Lexi was an enemy of his “country” in the war. Their mom starts to notice, but it is too late, the competition has escalated too far and they have both turned ruthless against each other, ripping everyone and everything out of their lives other than the competition.

Finally, he decides that it has gone too far and gives his sister all his money, confessing his crime. This reminds me of when my stepbrother and I were in an Easter egg hunt, and, after much taunting, I finally snapped and threw my brother’s candy, shouting insults. I think at that point it wasn’t about how many eggs we had retrieved; chocolate really didn’t matter to me then. What mattered to me was getting back at my brother. The real source of it all, the competition, had escalated into something personal.

I finally realized this upon reading this book, and that has had a huge impact on me now.

They do get a cat, but they realize the burden that has been lifted off their shoulders. Otto really does learn how to be responsible and gets along better with his sister. I really liked this book and thought it would be about whether cats are better, or dogs, which was the initial reason I got it, but it really is deeper than that. It is about learning lessons and how family is the most important thing. I recommend this book to pet lovers, but also to anybody who wants to have a sad but also happy, humorous but deep, relatable story. I really loved this book, and I enjoy telling all my friends. 



"Daddy?" I asked in an unsure voice. "Where's Mama?"

Yellow Rose

By **Devon Davila**

Illustrated by **Vaeya Nichols**

MY NAME IS YELLOW ROSE. My dad says my mama loved that name, because it reminded her of sunshine and cheerful gardens. I love it too, but Dad says you simply can't go around saying, "Good day, Yellow Rose," or "How are you, Yellow Rose," or "What do you want for breakfast, Yellow Rose," so everybody calls me just Rose.

My mama wouldn't like that at all. She'd say, "That's my baby's name, and we're going to sing it from the hilltops, no matter what people say," but Mama isn't here anymore. One day she was just gone.

I was only three. I came to Dad in paint-stained overalls and lopsided pigtails, clutching Little Rose. I sat straight on his lap and said, "Where's Mama?" I traced patterns on my dad's jeans. The fabric was rough but also soft under my tiny fingertips. I traced bunnies, castles, and crowns—all the things that made me think of Mama's warm smile.

I hugged Little Rose. Mama made her for me with a needle and thread. She was soft like a pillow and wore a yellow dress with buttons down the front.

Finally, the silence was too much for me. I turned around in his lap, ready to shout, but I stopped dead at the look in his eyes. It was so intense, my heart started to swell like a balloon ready to pop.

"Daddy?" I asked in an unsure voice. "Where's Mama?"

My dad refocused his distant eyes on me. They swirled with so many emotions, it made my head swim.

"Answer me, Daddy," I demanded.



Devon Davila, 12
Whittier, California



Vaeya Nichols, 13
Ozark, Missouri

"She's with the angels, hon." He laughed delicately.

I let out a sigh of relief. I believed in magic back then.

"The angels will take care of Mama. They'll fetch her chamomile tea with two extra sugar cubes, just like she likes. They'll let her nap on the clouds and maybe they'll give her a pet to bring home to me!"

My dad smiled at me. He knew my dream was to have a dog.

"Mama will stay up there, but the angels told me to tell you that when you look for her, look here." He patted his chest right where his heart pumped away. Then he slid me off his lap and went into his bedroom, closing the door with a loud creak.

For a moment, it was just me and the summer sounds—the birds chirping, the leaves rustling, the faint sound of a barking dog.

I got up and walked to the freezer. I opened the heavy drawer and pulled out a tangerine popsicle. I took a lick. Instead of tasting big, salty tears, I tasted its tangy sweetness. I was too young to realize Mama was dead.

EIGHT YEARS LATER

OUR CAR PULLS into the driveway. When I get out, I sigh. I'm happy to be home. I had missed the faded blue paint that was chipping from age and the flower pots that decorated the front

porch. The wind chimes tinkle their welcome.

We have just gotten back from my grandmother's house. It isn't like our house, which makes me think of ocean cliffs. Her house is dull brown, without a speck of personality and nothing but spotless pieces of Victorian furniture.

"How does it feel to be home, Rose?" Dad asks, holding out my backpack. I look at him.

Dad and I aren't close. We barely talk, and our conversations are always awkward.

"Fine," I say after a long pause. My dad nods. Then we just stand there, letting the wind tousle our hair. The breeze is heavy with moisture. I inhale and taste the coming rain.

"Go inside, Rose," Dad says, tossing me the house key. The key flies past me, so I turn around to retrieve it. Before I pick it up, I see a girl waving at me from across the street.

She's barefoot, and her hair is long, red, and rippling in the wind. I see her parents stacking boxes in their open garage. The "For Sale" sign I had gotten used to is missing.

"Hey!" the girl shouts at me.

My fingers snatch the house key, and I run inside, before she can cross the street. I slam the front door and kick off my shoes.

The floor is icy as I cross to my bedroom. Just before I make my retreat, I

"They'll fetch her
chamomile tea with
two extra sugar
cubes, just like
she likes."

see my father outside the window. He's staring at the door I just ran through, looking sad.

I feel a pang of guilt. He must think I ran from him, even though I was really running from the redheaded girl. My eyes travel to her. She's staring at my house, slightly confused. Her blue eyes are glimmering. They stand out in the gloom, like two sapphires.

Now, I feel so guilty that I want to run outside and apologize. I could shout it to the world, and maybe a piece of sunshine would appear from behind the clouds.

My thought is trampled by my dad's high-heel-loving, auburn-haired girlfriend, running across the lawn to him on her cloud of bliss. She throws her arms around his neck, and I watch him laugh soundlessly through the glass.

I bite my cheek before slamming my bedroom door so hard the windows rattle. I definitely don't feel guilty anymore.

THE NEXT DAY, my dad's girlfriend comes into my bedroom, carrying a cheap, plastic tray with steaming pancakes on top. I glance up from my magazine, then down at the tray. The pancakes look slightly crisp, and they are covered in some kind of berry sauce. My mouth waters.

"Hello, Rose," Susan says, putting the tray down on my bed. I just stare at her, refusing to speak. I can tell she is nervous, because her hands shake as she twirls them through her hair.

Finally, after I unsuccessfully will her to leave by boring my eyes into hers, she

sits down at the foot of my bed.

"You should go hang out with your friends," she says, gazing at me with a serious look in her amber eyes.

I raise the magazine to hide my face.

"If you want a night with my dad, just ask me, OK?" I say. I can tell she's stung.

"Rose, I care about you, and I think it's healthy to play with other kids your age, especially in summer."

"It's raining," I state gloomily.

"Come on, that's no excuse. I'll take you to my friend's house. She has twins around your age. I'm sure they'd be pleased to meet you. Besides, you're practically my stepdaughter."

I glare. I suddenly notice that my doll is missing from her usual place on my ancient dresser. My heart jumps.

"Where is Little Rose?" I demand.

"Who?" Susan asks, her perfect eyebrows furrowed in confusion and concern.

"You took her!" I shout. With that, I throw down my magazine and rush from the room, leaving Susan gaping.

"WHAT WOULD your mom think of your behavior, Yellow Rose?" I stare at my dad, my arms folded. My cheeks feel hot and throbbing. "She'd think, what a shame, Yellow Rose's garden full of flowers is wilting," he says poetically.

"I'm going for a walk," I say, grabbing my raincoat off the rack and putting it on inside-out.

"This is the worst summer ever!" I say before shoving through the front door.



"You dropped your doll in your front yard earlier"

What waits for me on the porch are sheets and sheets of rain. I start to walk, the small holly leaves brushing my coat as I pass the picket fence around my house.

I stomp through the puddles, getting soaked, but I don't care. *Susan doesn't even live with us, but she spends all her time trying to get me out of the house, so she can be alone with my dad.*

I slosh down the sidewalk, getting more furious by the minute, until I see the redheaded girl ahead, just standing there in a blue coat.

We're yards apart, and I'm terrified. My head swivels, looking for the nearest bush to dive into. Unfortunately, her yard is bare of bushes.

No, I think, just before I hear her voice say, "Hi, are you crazy like me, spending your whole day outside in the rain?"

I spin around and find myself within inches of her friendly face. Up close, I notice her millions of brilliant-orange freckles. Some people don't like freckles, but I think they show character.

"Hi," the girl laughs, sticking out her hand. "I'm Scarlet, your new neighbor."

I take her hand. "My name's Yellow Rose," I say before putting both hands in

my pockets. "I really should be going, but it's nice meeting you." *I'll probably never see or hear from you again, considering I'm the nobody here on Everybody-Has-an-Awesome-Life Street*, I think before turning around.

"Wait!" she calls, letting a note of desperation creep into her voice. I halt in my tracks but don't turn around.

"Look," Scarlet says in a firm but delicate voice. "I don't know anybody. I'm not used to being lonely. It's weird."

I can sort of relate to that feeling. I am actually used to being lonely, but it does still feel weird. I turn and stare at her, reconsidering.

"I also wanted to return this. You dropped your doll in your front yard earlier." She pulls Little Rose out of her pocket and places her in my hand. The wind gusts and rain bursts toward us. We both scream and laugh.

"Want to come inside?" she calls over the rising noise of the wind and rain. "My mom and brother just made cookies."

I pause, my heart thumping beneath my coat. I look down at Little Rose and gaze at her frozen smile.

"Yes," I say.



Some people
don't like freckles,
but I think they
show character.

3:30 A.M.

By **Sonja Skye Wooley**



Sonja Skye Wooley, 12
Berkeley, California

At 3:30 A.M.

I gradually rise from my ocean of sleep
Away from the trenches of unconsciousness
Where lantern-fish dreams lurk.

Tick, tick, tick

The dutiful second hand is making itself dizzy again.
Whirr...

The fish tank motor sounds throughout the night.

It is dark

Yet I can see outlines of posters on my wall.

My long-haired cat

Is curled tightly

At the end of the bed.

My pillow is squashed

Sheets wrap around me

All other blankets

Tossed unceremoniously

To the floor.

My throat is sandpaper dry
There is a tug at my stomach.
Milk.
I need milk.

Toes land among carpet fuzz
Then lift slowly
I stumble through the hallway.

The kitchen blacker than my bedroom
Outside puddles shudder with raindrops
The cat has slipped past me
She peers out with interest.

I flip the switch
And harsh light glares
Into my pupils.
I can't see the rain any longer
The windows are dark squares.

I pour milk, and down the glass
Leaving it on the counter.
I flee the frozen tiles
And climb into bed.



Often I stare out of my window and watch the world, wondering about the sounds

Speak

By **Sophia Emmert**

Illustrated by **Savannah Ugo**

YOU NEVER TRULY KNOW what you have, until you try to live without it. Until something you love is taken, you don't know how fortunate you are. You take everyday things for granted, like listening to the wind swirl around the branches of a giant oak or hearing the night owls call farewell to each other in the mist of the evenings.

Sometimes I want the sounds. Since birth, all I have heard is silence. It makes me sad, not to be able to hear the waves crash against the sand or the strum of talented fingers on a guitar. All I hear is silence. Complete and utter silence.

It has always been my dream to listen. Often I stare out of my window and watch the world, wondering about the sounds. I watch the birds, seeing their mouths open, but hearing nothing. What does their song sound like? I've seen the wind skip across the lake, creating hundreds of miniature tidal waves. What does this sound like?

Once I watched a young woman hurrying home from the crowds. In her hands she held a bouquet of flowers, all different shades of color and beautifully bright. She stepped onto the curb and in her hurry dropped a daisy. It fluttered to the ground gently, lost and abandoned. Had anyone heard the flower fall? I will never know.

With the gift of voice comes the great form of verbal communication: talking, singing, shouting. Without it I am left with hands. By age four I had mastered the amazing language of signing. My parents and siblings could talk to me, but few of my friends understood my strange motions.



Sophia Emmert, 13
Muscatine, Iowa



Savannah Ugo, 12
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

My name is Naomi. I live a completely normal life, except for the fact that I am deaf. I've never been able to hear, I was born this way. I'd gotten used to signing and was happy. Even so, something was missing; a void in my existence that had never been filled.

When we first moved to Minnesota, I was terrified. A new home, a new school—who wouldn't be a little nervous? Headed to a new state hundreds of miles away, I had left my friends and old city behind. But in the wake of my fear was a sense of thrilling excitement that I didn't recognize.

THE DOORS of the giant school building opened and closed behind me, letting hundreds of students inside. The aroma of fresh paint and the crisp winter breeze filled my nose as I took in all the sights. There were so many more children here than where I used to go to school, and I could feel my face growing hot as I entered and stared. Watching everyone talking, I tried to smile and seem confident, though in reality, I was terrified. Chin held out, trying to ignore the flapping butterflies in my stomach and avoiding glances, I quickly walked to my first class.

Little did I know that when I entered those doors, my life would change instantly. I had no idea that a hidden talent was deep inside me, for never had I been given a chance like this before. Forcing a smile, I looked at the small sign posted on the classroom door: Room 103, *Music*.

Taking a deep breath, I entered.

Immediately I fell in love. The room was so bright, with posters of every possible shape and color scattered across the walls in no particular order. Instruments lined the shelves, smooth and clean. Kids laughed and talked to each other as they prepared for the lesson, but patiently and silently, I sat alone.

As I set my bag down, something caught my eye. There, in the very corner, was a grand piano. It was old and dusty, but the black and white keys mesmerized me. I held my breath as another student sat at its bench and pressed the keys. Right then I felt completely alone and desolate, a longing to hear the beautiful music filling me.

The clear morning sunlight flashed through the tinted windows. It felt warm against my arms and face, almost helping me relax. The sunlight had always comforted me, giving me warmth, providing me with a sense of safety.

Finally the teacher arrived. She was a young, beautiful brunette, with a sort of kindness filling her eyes. The students shuffled to take seats and I smiled at her. She grinned back and started to say something to me. I shrugged my shoulders, signing to her that I was deaf. A wave of realization swept over her, and she nodded quickly and continued to unpack.

This action alone surprised me. Usually, my past teachers would smile sadly at me or give me an unspoken apology for my inability to hear their words. It made me wonder why this woman was different, why she hadn't acted like the others. Immediately I liked her.

Once the class had quieted she began to speak. I studied her lips, trying to understand what she was saying. It seemed like she was taking each student one by one, talking to them for a few minutes, then giving them an instrument to play. Children eagerly stepped up and picked up an instrument, then awkwardly tried to play a few notes. They would all cringe at the noise, and the teacher would laugh, then show them a short tune.

Panic flooded me as I watched her turn and motion for me to step forward. Cautiously I stood up, my face turning a deep, violet red as the children looked at me. I hated attention, preferring the spotlight to be on someone else.

"I am Ms. Germain," the woman politely smiled and mouthed slowly. "Have you ever played an instrument before?"

I shook my head, trying to ignore the seemingly hundreds of eyes that bore into my skin. The room suddenly felt stiff and uncomfortable, so I steadied myself with the desk.

"Would you like to learn how?"

I shrugged, offering a regretful smile.

What a strange question it was. Wasn't it clear to her that I was deaf? How could someone like me learn to create a beautiful sound? These kids had no idea how much I wanted to be able to wake up to the birds in the morning or how much I wanted to be able to hear my mother's voice calling me to dinner. They didn't

know that what I deeply wanted, they possessed.

Again Ms. Germain smiled. She carefully led me to the corner, and I stared, shocked and unsure at what she wanted me to do. Helping me onto the seat, she told me to press a key. I was embarrassed and feeling pretty stupid because of her directions, but still I obeyed. Anger pulsed through my veins as I touched the piano, yet still remaining in a world of silence.

"Here," Ms. Germain drew my attention away from the piano, carefully mouthing her words. "Take off your sandals, Naomi."

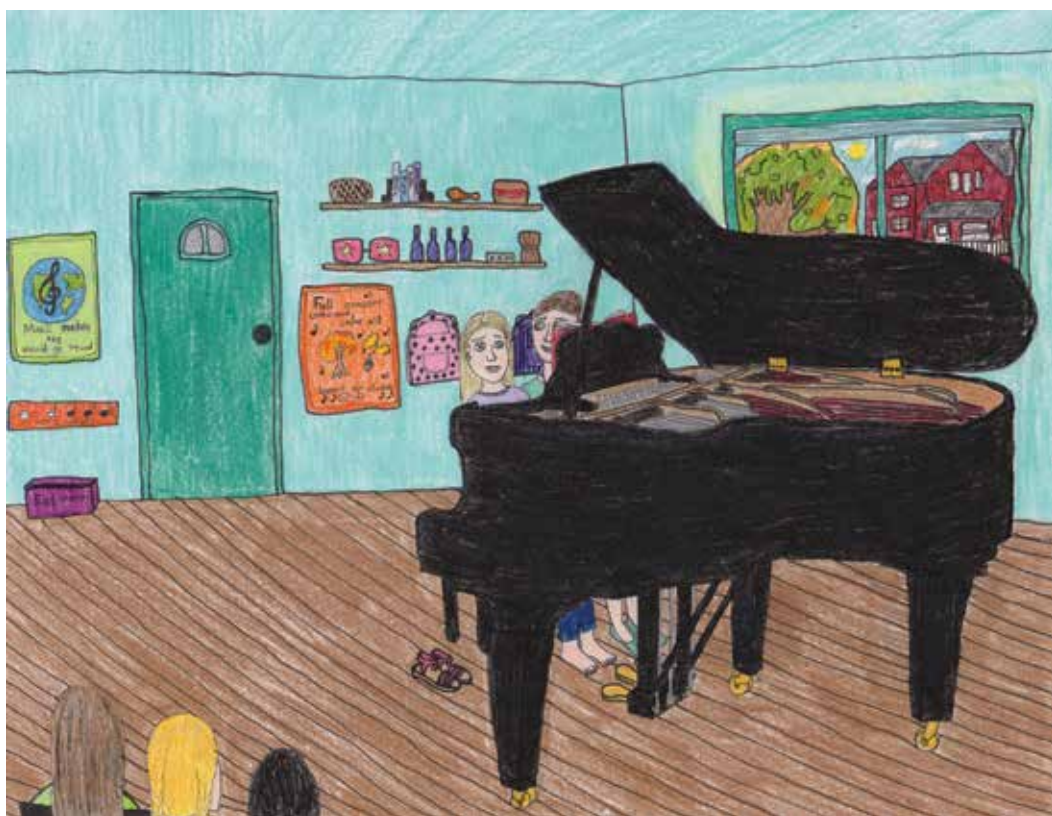
Now I hesitated. Was she purposely *trying* to embarrass me? It was an awkward command, but slowly I removed my shoes and set them beside the bench. Then, placing my bare feet on the cool ground, I looked up at her.

Sitting next to me, the teacher began to play, her delicate fingers moving up and down the piano in a jolly, skillful pattern. A tingling sensation began to move up my body from the vibrations the piano created. Was this the music? The sound?

She finished her piece and I stared profoundly as the class erupted in applause. Had she just performed a beautiful piece right in front of me? Had the vibrations somehow let me listen?

Ms. Germain turned to me, helping me place my hands on the piano. She placed her hands on top of mine, pressing

Little did I know
that when I entered
those doors, my life
would change
instantly.



For the first time, I had expressed myself with sound

my fingers down so that I could play her song. The vibrations started again and I sat in awe, realizing that I was making them and that this music was being created because of *my* hands.

Ms. Germain finished the song with a hard, quick staccato chord that shook the room. She then told me to turn around. My eyes filled with joyous tears as I saw that the entire class was clapping.

For the first time, I had expressed myself with sound. It was like a sadness was lifted from deep inside of me, and suddenly replaced with a need to learn; a need to play this incredible instrument.

Pride filled my heart, and I stood to walk back to my seat.

MUSIC IS A SOUND, a language, a voice. Without it my world is silent. Now I can show the world that I can create a beautiful masterpiece with my hands and a piano.

Today is my recital. All the children in my class will perform a short piece on an instrument of their choice. I sit completely still in my seat, watching as the students play. My hands are shaking as I look at all the people. I'm nervous, yes, but have to show them what I can do.

There is an invisible drive inside of me, craving to tell the world my own story.

There is an endless variety of instruments before our eyes, each with a student to make them speak. The girl before me finishes her piece and the parents politely clap. I am excited to show my talent, but at the same time I'm terrified. I stand to take my spot. Ms. Germain introduces me like all the rest of the children. Except I am different, and have always been.

I sit, making sure Ms. Germain is finished and that the audience is listening, then turn to place my hands. Taking a deep breath, I begin to play, my feet flat on the floor, feeling the vibrations. My feet are used to the strange vibrations by now and they recognize the tune. The vibrations are my key to sound.

I smile as my fingers fly across the keys, watching and making sure that they move in the pattern that I have grown so familiar with. The vibrations stay steady and I am certain that the music sounds lovely. My heart soars along with the music, letting it describe who *I* am and what *I* feel, without any words at all.

Finally I finish. I stand slowly and turn to find the parents and teachers on their feet, applauding. Tears come to my eyes as I slowly bow, a huge smile pasted

across my face.

When they return to their seats, I come to the center of the room. Ms. Germain already agreed to translate what I desperately wanted to say.

"My name is Naomi," I explain to the world, using my hands. "I can't hear the music."

**My eyes filled with
joyous tears as I saw
that the entire class
was clapping.**

My throat is dry and coarse, my hands shaking. "Until not long ago, I couldn't find a way out of the silence. I thank my teacher for giving me this amazing chance."


Looking out across the room, I see my mother, her face in her hands.

She looks up and I see her smile, tears streaming down her cheeks. My father sits next to her, proudly grinning as he nods at me. In that moment, the empty space that I had felt in Minnesota was filled.

"I have always lived, trapped in silence," Ms. Germain voices my quiet words, "until I found a new way out, and that way is music."

I pause. Everyone is focused on my hands, staring at me. And for the first time in my life, I'm OK with it.

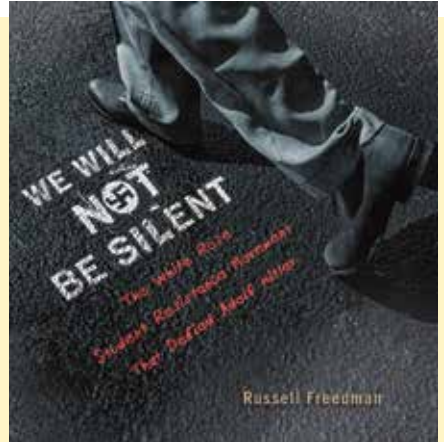
Music is a sound, a language, a voice. Without it my world is silent.

"This is how I speak," I sign, finally released from the quiet. "Music is my voice." 

Book Review

By Ariel Kirman

We Will Not Be Silent, by Russell Freedman;
Clarion Books: New York, 2016; \$17.99



Ariel Kirman, 12
New York, New York

“THEY COULD HAVE chosen to throw bombs.”


Not often in history are peaceful attempts to disrupt political regimes successful. However, Russell Freedman’s *We Will Not Be Silent* captures one of the past’s greatest peaceful movements, which proved that the pen—or, in Hans and Sophie Scholl’s case, the mimeograph—is mightier than the sword.

During the 1930s, Germany was moving toward a dictatorship and world war. The Scholl siblings—Hans and younger sister Sophie—were typical young Germans. However, not long after joining the Hitler Youth movement, they grew extremely opposed to Hitler’s beliefs. Also, they were not afraid to take risks for their beliefs. Their participation in a banned youth group landed them in jail in 1937 as mere teenagers.

After arriving to university, they took their opposition to a new level and created the White Rose leaflets—anonymous letters targeting Hitler and the Nazis. They were mimeographed in secret and called on Germans to act against the growing Nazi tyranny. Hans Scholl delivered the first set of leaflets in 1942 with a friend. As his sister Sophie and a few others joined the movement, the leaflets gained popularity, yet also drew the attention of the dreaded Gestapo secret police. From then on, they had a huge target on their backs.

The book tells a powerful historical story but also speaks to children and young adults today. Here is an example we have probably all encountered—someone says something mean to you, or hits you, and your instinct is to do the equivalent in response. It is always tempting to fight fire with fire. The Nazis used violence to harm and it might have been appealing to use violence to fight back. However, the Scholls resisted that urge and used the power of their words to resist. They stayed true to their beliefs, which, as the leaflets summarized, promoted peace, instead of creating even more bloodshed. To this day, the Scholls set an example to young people around the world, demonstrating that peaceful activism can be effective.

The Scholls' bravery at a young age is also an important inspiration about not accepting limits. Have you ever felt as if you can never make a difference or cannot have certain opinions simply because of a certain trait you possess? Because you are young, or a certain gender, or from a certain background? We all do, at times. Despite the fact that they were only students, the Scholl siblings became some of Germany's most effective Hitler opponents in an age where even educated adults were afraid to speak up. They created an extremely influential operation to express their political viewpoints. And they pursued their beliefs despite the limitations they encountered—Hans rebelled against the Hitler Youth and Sophie pursued her studies, even though girls were only a slim ten percent of the student body. They stood up for their opinions and rights, with a big risk to themselves, and inspire all of us to do the same.

If you are looking for an amazing read, full of historical and inspiring information and intriguing pictures, *We Will Not Be Silent* is the perfect book for you! I highly recommend this fantastic story. It is truly an inspirational tale of courage and independence, and it speaks to all of us. 

Freedom to Fly

By Allie Aguila

Illustrated by Valentina von Wiederhold



Allie Aguila, 11
Miami Springs, Florida



Valentina von Wiederhold, 12
Nyack, New York

AN ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL woke up on a patch of sunlit sand. Her small elfish ears picked up the sound of crashing waves and the rustling of bushes and the dense canopy of intertwining branches and leaves to her right. Her green eyes opened slowly, first slits, and then wide open and darting quickly over her surroundings. The girl propped herself up onto her elbows, which sank into the squishy beach sand. Her waist-length, light red hair whipped around her face. The girl slowly stood up and gazed at the sun sinking down below the horizon and the waves crashing inches from her soaked sneakers.

To the girl's surprise, a girl that seemed a little younger than her and a boy that seemed her age were quickly approaching her. Before the girl could think to hide, the boy had spotted her and was pointing her out to his friend. As they approached, the frightened girl heard their voices.

The younger girl said to the boy, "Who is she, Mathew?"

The boy, Mathew, responded, "Liri, shush. She doesn't look dangerous."

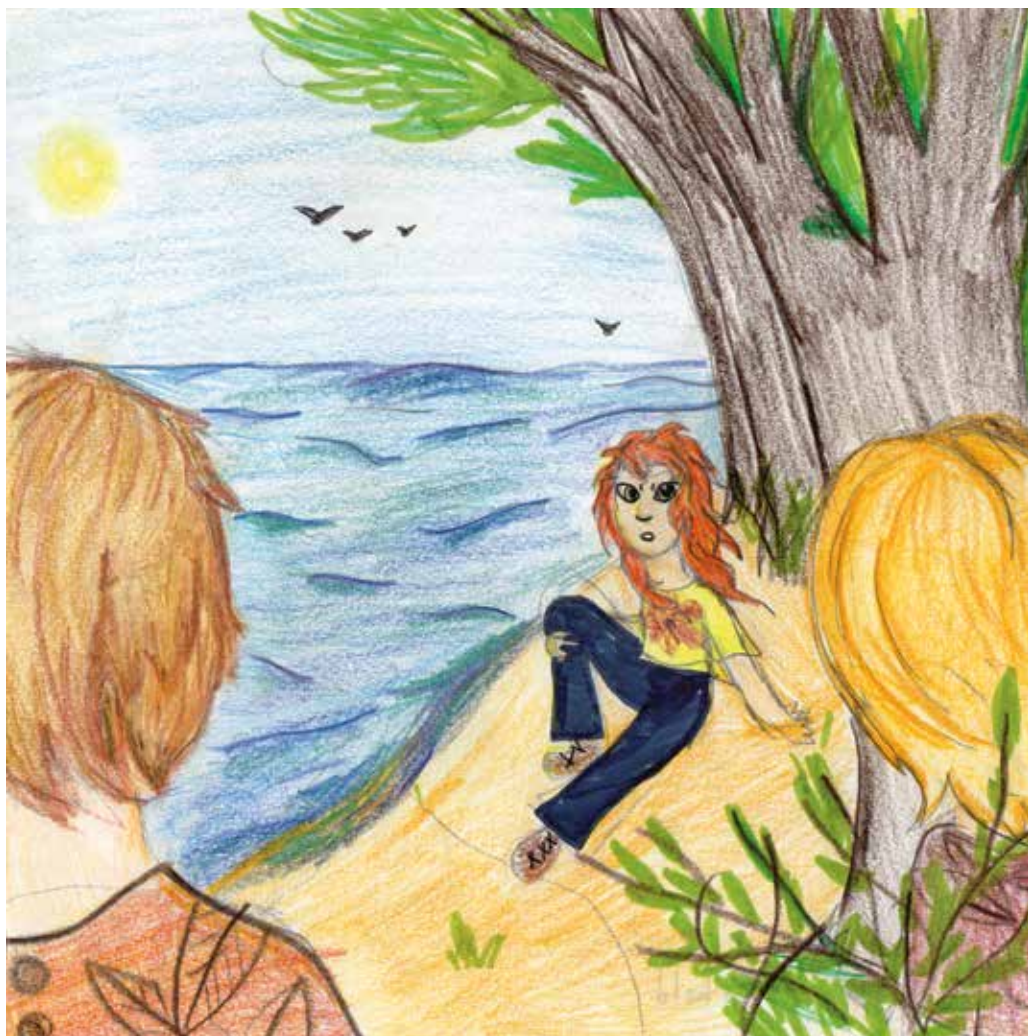
Liri looked slightly doubtful and hung back a bit, keeping her distance from the strange girl.

"What's your name?" asked Mathew gently.

"I don't know... I don't remember much." The girl started to panic. "I don't remember anything!"

"It's OK, we will call you Freedom," said Mathew, eyeing the girl's wild and free hair.

Freedom nodded her head slowly.



The girl started to panic. "I don't remember anything!"

Liri stepped forward, "You can join our group, if you like. We are free, with no one to tell us what to do. We come and go as we like. Our leader and helper is Indigo. She will know how to help you. Will you come with us?"

Freedom followed Liri and Mathew, leaving her footprints in a trail behind her as she journeyed deeper into the for-

est. Soon, Freedom began to see some huts and living structures, overflowing with about two dozen more children, laughing and frolicking. Liri and Mathew approached an older girl who looked to be fourteen with long, dark brown braids running down her back.

Mathew explained to the older girl, "Indigo, this is Freedom. She doesn't re-

member who she is or where she is from, but she wants to join our group of roamers."

Indigo thoroughly scrutinized the new girl's face and then simply said in a melodious voice, "What would you like to learn here, Freedom? You can choose anything, but only one thing you can learn. Then you must teach."

Freedom thought for one moment and then her emerald eyes lit up with pure excitement and childlike wonder, "I want to fly."

Liri and Mathew looked at each other, confused. Indigo stood expressionless, but then broke into a wide grin, "Then that you must, and will, learn, so then you can teach us how to fly."

Over the next few weeks, Freedom studied the birds that soared through the forest. Their composure, wing structure, wing motion, and anything else she could think of that had to do with flying. After several attempts, which ended in pitying glances exchanged between Liri and Mathew, a great deal of frustration, and six broken sets of paper wings, Freedom wondered if she needed a different approach to flying. She sat thinking at the bottom of trees where birds zoomed by overhead, and often voiced out loud her questions to the feathered flyers. "How do I fly? What's missing? What's wrong?"

One evening, Mathew came to inquire about how she was doing. Freedom said miserably, "It's not working. I know that I should try a different angle, but I don't know which one."

Mathew slid down on the tree trunk next to Freedom. "You'll find a way. I know you will. I believe in you, Freedom." He squeezed her hand firmly and reassuringly. Freedom smiled slightly, but her smile was quickly replaced with delighted shock as she looked down and saw she was floating two feet off the ground!

"I just needed to believe in myself!" Freedom exclaimed. "That was the key the whole time!"

She steadily rose higher and higher until Mathew was craning his neck to keep her in sight. "Try it! It's fun!" she yelled.

Mathew joined her in the air and she began to propel herself forward through the great blue sky. With Mathew alongside her, every limb in Freedom's body tingled with elation and energy as the wind ruffled her red hair and Mathew's short, caramel-colored hair. Then Mathew was speaking in a different but achingly familiar voice, "Penny, wake up! Penny! Wake up!"

With a sudden jolt from her brain and her body, waking up suddenly, she remembered who she was. She was Penny Dylan. She had been sleeping, and it had all been a dream. Her little brother, Hunter, gazed down at her. "I can't believe you were sleep-talking again! You know that my big soccer match is tomorrow morning! What was so important, Penny?!" He looked slightly amused but still very angry.

She sighed as she lay back down on her bed, "Oh, Hunter, I had the most wonderful dream. I was flying. I was free." ❁

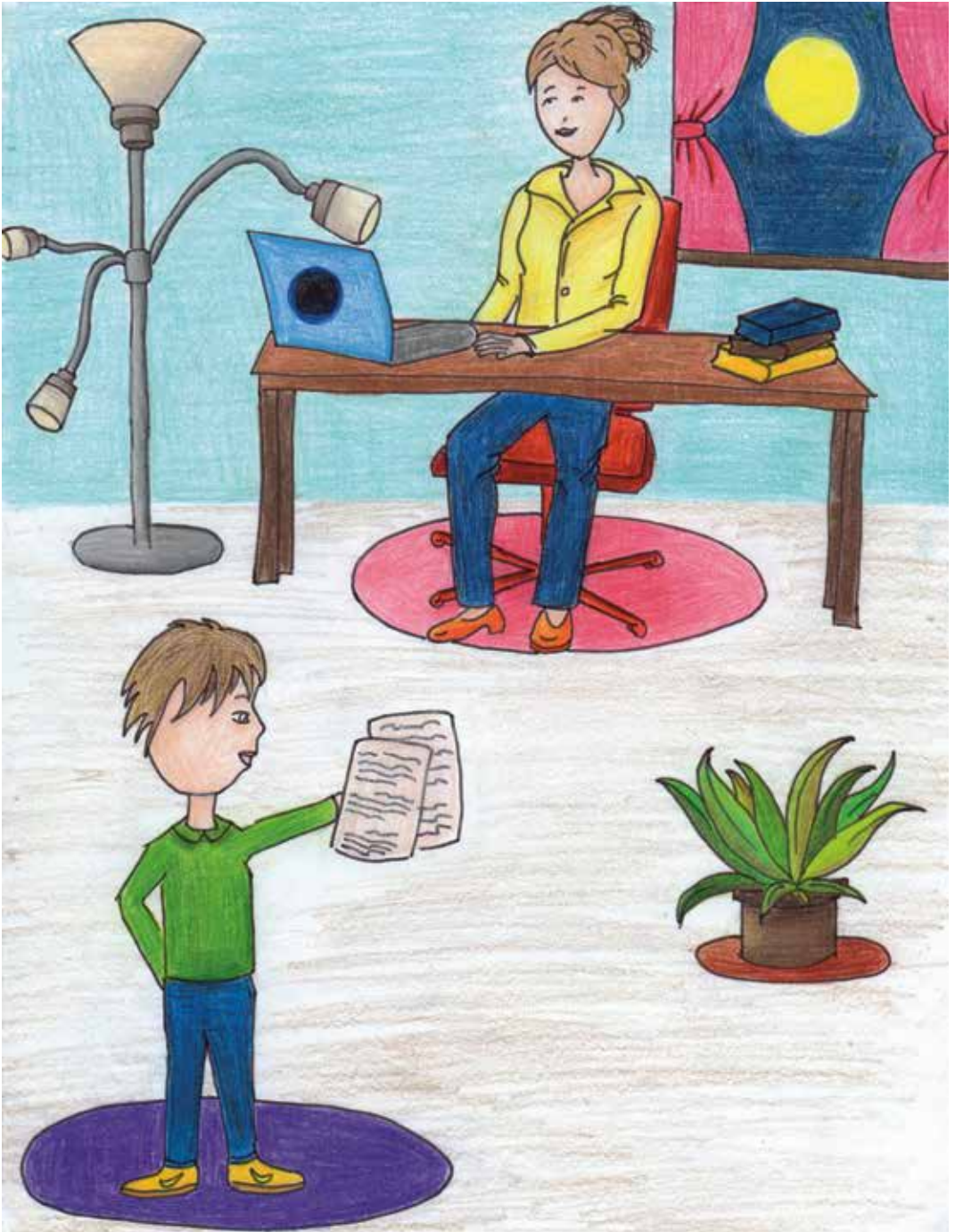
My Deepest Desires

By **Isabel Taylor**

I want to be one with the earth
I want to sink my feet into the soft dirt
and feel no difference between myself and the world
around me.
I want to slip into the cool river water
and float as if I am made of it.
I want to climb the tallest trees
and daringly sway in the breeze.
I want to look into a wolf's eyes
and feel no fear at all.
I want to be one with the earth.



Isabel Taylor, 13
Royal, Arkansas



"Mom, I wrote this, and I thought you might want to read it"

The Boy Fictionalist

By **Joshua Bernheisel**

Illustrated by **Fangze Tian**

FOR ALL MY LIFE, I had hated writing. In fact, I had loathed it. When we were at school, our class would have to do writing exercises every day. My teacher, Ms. Sanders, would write a seemingly random topic on our whiteboard every morning. Before the end of class, each and every one of us had to write at least ten sentences about it. I remember doing this day after day, and I found it tedious and time-consuming but also quite pointless. Although I didn't like it, I would write my ten sentences anyway. This continued for the first couple months of the school year, and after a while, it wasn't so bad.

One day, I came into my classroom. There was change in the air, and I realized what it was very quickly. Rather than "Current Canadian Holidays" or "Early Wind Instruments," there was something unusual written on the whiteboard. It said, in large lettering, "Free Writing—write whatever you want." I wasn't going to waste any time. I expeditiously began writing a short story that I called "The Ghost Child."

As I sat at my desk and commenced work, a boy named Robert walked up behind me. Robert was fairly tall for his age with a pasted-on smirk, jet-black hair, and constant bad breath.

"The Ghost Child," he said mockingly, leaning over my shoulder. "That has to be the stupidest name I've ever seen. Out of all the kids in this room with cutesy titles like 'Little Dead Hiding Wood' or 'Jack and the Leanwalk,' yours is the worst." While I don't want to call anyone the meanest kid,



Joshua Bernheisel, 10
Medina, Tennessee



Fangze Tian, 12
Lexington, Massachusetts

Robert was pretty mean and quite annoying.

I rolled my eyes, the best tactic for getting him to leave me alone. “Robert, please just do your writing.”

“Ha!” he scoffed. “Let me get right on that, Griffin Boy. What should mine be called? Hmm... How about ‘Peter Griffin Writes Hit Story!’ But I’m sure my lowly writing could never compete with ‘The Ghost Kid,’ could it?”

I rolled my eyes again. “Very funny. And it’s ‘The Ghost Child.’” I resumed writing my story as Robert walked off to find someone else to put down.

For the rest of the week, Ms. Sanders would write the same thing on the whiteboard: “Free Writing—write whatever you want.” Working in the mornings, after completing lessons, and sometimes at home, I was able to finish writing “The Ghost Child” over the course of the week. Creating that story, I was opened to a better and more enjoyable side of writing—fiction.

I decided to show my newly written story to my mother, Anna Griffin. She has curly brown hair and beautiful green eyes. She is a fantastic singer, would eat key lime pie every day if she could, and loves the color yellow. She’s also the sweetest, most encouraging mother in the entire world. Once I finished perfecting the details of my story, I went downstairs and walked into our living room where my mom was sitting on a red

chair, using her computer.

“Mom,” I said. She looked up from her computer. “I wrote this, and I thought you might want to read it.” I held out the papers that made up my story.

“Of course I would, honey,” she replied as she took the papers. I watched as she adroitly scanned the page. When she finished reading, a smile emerged on her face.

“Wow!” she exclaimed. “This is really good! When did you write it?”

“I started about a week ago at school, and I just finished.”

“At school?” She looked taken aback. “I thought you didn’t like the writing

that you did at school.”

“That was before,” I said, “back when all we wrote about were Prehistoric Amphibians and Civil War Leaders.”

“And that’s not what you write about anymore?”

“That’s right. One day I walked into the classroom, and Ms. Sanders had written: ‘Free Writing—write whatever you want.’ I think she might do that for a while because that’s what she’s written this whole week.”

“Well, that’s fantastic! Promise me you’ll write another story soon. I really like ‘The Ghost Child.’ It’s hard to believe that a ten-year-old wrote it!”

“I’ll write another story soon, Mom,” I replied. “I promise.”

“Great!” My mother leaned over her computer and kissed me on the forehead.

**“I really like
‘The Ghost Child.’
It’s hard to believe
that a ten-year-old
wrote it!”**

"I love you, Peter. More than you'll ever imagine."

OVER THE NEXT few months, I was able to write five original short stories. My mom would always love them no matter what and encourage me to write more and more. The only conversation I recall from that time period occurred when I was feeling discouraged about my writing.

"Mom," I said, "it's not any good."

"Of course it is, Peter," she replied. "It has to be good. It was written by you, after all."

"OK, whatever," I said, handing her the sheets of paper. She took them and began reading. As she finished, I anticipated her telling me that my story was great and I was kidding myself to think that it wasn't. That didn't happen.

"Peter, you see only the bad things in your writing. You may think that it's bad now, but when you're my age, you'll see how good it truly is."

"When I'm your age," I said, "that story will be somewhere underneath a golf course. There's no way I'll still have it for that long."

"Then let me word that differently. Your children will surely write stories, and sometimes they will only see the bad things. At that point, you'll be my age, and you will see the good things."

That actually made a lot of sense. "I guess I see what you mean."

"Hopefully, you can see the good things about your story now. Just try looking as hard as you can."

I began to notice some small details, little snippets of writing that were really well made. "I see some good things here and there."

"Good," my mom said. She kissed me on the forehead. "I love you, Peter. More than you'll ever imagine."

I'M PRETTY SURE it was the middle of January when my mom became very sick. I remember once at school when I was trying to write a story. I couldn't though. All I could do was think about my mother. Robert walked up behind my desk.

"What're you doing, Ghost Peter?" he asked.

I rolled my eyes. "Really? That was back in October, Robert."

"Let's see, Ghost Peter," he said. "You've got a pencil. You've got some paper. But you're not writing!"

"Will you please go away?" My mother was sick, and I didn't need Robert bugging me.

"Aw, come on," he said. "Open up a little."

I took a deep breath and decided to tell him. "My mother's really sick and there's nothing the doctors can do about it."

"Oh," he said. A look I had never before seen on Robert came over his face. It wasn't a look of mockery or superiority. It was a look of sadness. It was his turn to take a deep breath. "I used to have an older brother," he said quietly. "He meant everything to me. The crash was inevitable. When some chucklehead

goes at a red light, bad things happen. They took my brother to the hospital, but he died before I could say goodbye.

I turned away from Robert, feeling guiltier than I ever had. He had lost his brother in a car crash, and I thought poorly of him for it.

That night, my mother's condition worsened and she was taken to the hospital. At school, I didn't talk to anyone. All I did was write. My dad came from the hospital and picked me up from school. We went back to the hospital where my mother was in a bright yellow room that smelled

like brand-new rubber gloves. She was an odd sight, clad in a hospital gown, her eyes closed, and her brown hair mussed. My father and I sat in two very cushiony chairs with a chevron pattern on them.

After a little bit, a nurse walked in, woke my mother, and gave her some dinner. My mom noticed us as the nurse left.

"James, Peter," she said, slowly turning her head toward us. "The doctors told me that I probably wouldn't have much time left. Peter, tell me a story."

I reached into my backpack and pulled out the pad of paper I had been writing on today. As I read the story to my mother, she seemed to grow tired. I remember her eyes fluttering as if she had been awake for days and needed sleep badly. When I finished reading, my father and I walked over and held each of my mother's hands.

"I love you so much, Anna," said my father. He bent down and my mother kissed him on the forehead. She turned to me.

"Peter, I love you," she said. "More than you'll ever imagine." I leaned down and she kissed my forehead. I remember her hand feeling frail and fragile in mine.

I squeezed it tighter.

"Mom, please stay alive."

"Listen, Peter," she said. "This is life. Both good and bad things happen. No matter what happens, please remember that I always love you." Her eyes closed, and I realized

how lucky I was to be able to talk to my mother. Robert's brother died before he had a chance to say goodbye to him. My father and I sat back down, and a few nurses came in. We watched the line on the heart monitor go up and down, up and down. I think the nurses, my father, and I sat there for hours. At long last, my mother opened her eyes with great strain.

"I love you all," she said. "More than you'll ever imagine." Her eyes fluttered closed. The line on the monitor stopped moving and stayed right in the center. In that moment, I remembered all the times she had encouraged me and helped me feel better. A horrible silence poured into the room. No one breathed. I cried. I couldn't help it.

I wanted to scream at the nurses, "She'd be all right if it weren't for you!" But I couldn't. It wasn't true. The truth

"No matter what happens, please remember that I always love you."

was that my mother was gone, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. My father put his comforting arm around me, and I concentrated on breathing in and out, in and out. The tears slowly stopped dripping from my eyes.

"This is life," I said, repeating my mother. "This is life." The nurses looked on as if they saw this happen every other day.

"I'm so sorry," one of them said. I didn't respond. I just sat there taking it all in. After a few minutes, I felt like I had to do something. I stood up and walked over to my mother.

"I love you," I said. "More than you'll ever imagine." I bent down and kissed her on the forehead. In that moment, I knew what I had to do. I would publish a book and dedicate it to my mother.

ABOUT A WEEK LATER, I was at school, writing my story. Robert walked up behind me, and I braced for

the insults. Instead, he apologized.

"I'm sorry for the way I treated you, and I'm even sorrier about your mother." He noticed the sheet of paper I had. "What're you writing?" he asked.


"A story dedicated to my mom," I replied.

"Can I see it?" he asked.

"Sure." I handed the paper to him. His eyes quickly scanned the page.

"This is really good!" he said.

I continued adding more to the story, and Robert continued reading it and making suggestions. When I finished it, I called and sent it to a publisher. It wasn't published instantly; Robert and I spent months revising, editing, and rewording, and finally it was published with the title of "Search for the Heart." For the dedication, I wrote: "For my amazing and encouraging mother, who passed too soon."

That book is my pride and joy, but it's more than a book. It's a piece of my mother here on earth. 



Adopted

By **Zoe Savishinsky**



Zoe Savishinsky, 12
Seattle, Washington

We walked home together. We talked about schoolwork,
and then you said,

“You are adopted. I’m sorry.”

Sometimes you commented on the dirt on my clothes
as we walked out of school.

But this felt different, like we were at a party and all of a sudden
the music stopped and everyone stared at me.

The words take me back: You’re adopted. I’m sorry?

What did you say?

These words make me feel like I should hide in a box
and never come out.

I am utterly quiet while my hands clench into fists.

You shattered the moment, the laughing, the talking, everything.

And you know it.

I am like a rope held together by trust and care.

That rope has been severed—

A rope made of tiny threads that wear out if you use it too much—
by you.

And you can say “I’m sorry” because you do not know what it is like
To feel the shadow of hurtful words. To feel small

Because you cast the shadow.

Now think

Deep

Deep

Deep

Could you say that now? Would you say that now?

All those times you were mean this is just hurtful.

Welcome Home

By Sarah Bryden

Illustrated by Claire Schultz



Sarah Bryden, 12
Lake Forest, Illinois



Claire Schultz, 13
Sebastopol, California

OUR CAR, RUSTED red paint and all, squeaks into the driveway. It lurches to a stop, shoving Mom and me forward in our seats. The boxes in the back shift, slamming against the sides of the trunk. I shut my door with a bang and stand, staring at the ugly brown house directly in front of me. The paint is peeling, the shutters look like they are falling apart, and the lawn is overgrown with weeds. My mom comes up behind me.

“Do you want to go in?” she asks. I glare at her in response. She should know as well as I do that I do *not* want to go in. Nonetheless, Mom sticks her key into the hole and turns the doorknob. She pushes on the door, but it won’t budge. After considerable shoving, Mom manages to get the blue door open. “Welcome home, sweetie.” She gestures grandly.

Frowning, I look around. There is tile on the floor, but I can tell it is the fake sticker kind. It doesn’t look real and besides, some of the pieces are peeling off. One wall has splotches of different colored paints on it, like someone was using it to figure out what color to paint something. A moth-eaten rug sits in the middle of the entryway.

We move into the living room, which is just as bad. Two small windows let in a dirty, grimy light, doing nothing more than illuminating the dust that covers the floor. There is a fake-crystal chandelier hanging in the center of the room, covered in cobwebs.

After seeing the kitchen, my mother and I head upstairs. There are two bedrooms—one for me, one for her. Mom gets



"Welcome home, sweetie"

her own bathroom, but it's tiny. As for me, I'll have to use the one downstairs or borrow Mom's.

My mom puts her hand on my shoulder. "It needs a little work," she says, "but once I get the diner off the ground, we

can fix it up together." I want to believe that we will.

Mom heads back outside and walks over to the car, carefully pulling up the trunk door so as not to break it. "Come on, Lilly. Let's start unloading."

“SO, LILLY, I hear that they’ll have a soccer team at your new school,” Mom offers. I don’t look up from my lo mein. I played on the soccer team at my old school, where Dad was the coach. I’m not going to join this one. That would be like betrayal. Besides, nothing at my new school is going to be like it was at my old school, anyway.

But Mom doesn’t give up. “They also have an art club after school. Doesn’t that sound like fun?”

I shrug. “I’m full,” I mumble, even though I’ve barely touched my takeout. I leave the kitchen and head for my room, which is in dismal condition. The movers haven’t come yet and probably won’t for a while, just because we couldn’t really afford to pay for good ones. So right now, my room is empty except for a sleeping bag and a pile of boxes in the corner.

Sighing, I sit down on my sleeping bag. I think of my room at Dad’s house. He’s a radio DJ, so he plastered my walls with all sorts of album-cover posters and vintage records. There’s a phonograph in the corner on a really cool retro table. My bedspread is straight out of the 1970s, with records and boom boxes spinning across a red background. Above my bed is a light-up sign that flashes *Lilly*. I had been begging Dad for it since I could talk, and I finally got it last year when I turned eleven. And I have my own closet, unlike here. My room at Dad’s is my place, the place where I go when life gets too fast or too confusing. It’s a place where I can slow down and think.

I walk over to the boxes and pull out

Dad’s photo from the top of one. He’s smiling up from a sound booth at a party. His hair is tousled and sticking out at odd angles from underneath his baseball cap, which is on backwards. His T-shirt has a picture of a guitar on it. His tattoo, the one of the record that Mom always hated, sticks out from underneath the sleeve.

I pick up the picture of Dad and put it next to my sleeping bag, because I don’t have a nightstand to put it on. Then I zipper myself in for the night.

“Goodnight, Dad,” I whisper.

“LILLY!” MY MOM CALLS. I crawl out of my sleeping bag, sore from having slept on the floor. I throw on a sweatshirt and head downstairs.

“Good morning, sunshine!” My mom smiles at me. “I made waffles for our first breakfast in the new house!” When I don’t say anything, Mom’s smile wavers the slightest bit. Nonetheless, she chirps, “My, my. Someone’s sleepy! Well, hon, you better wake up soon, because we’ve got a big day ahead of us!”

We spend the day cleaning. When we’ve finished dusting and washing the inside of the house, Mom and I head outside, where we start working on the weeds that are abundant in the backyard.

“So, Lilly. Are you looking forward to going to your new school tomorrow?” Mom asks, trying to make conversation. I pull harder at a weed, yanking it clean out of the ground. “It’s a very good school.” Mom smiles. “They’ve got a computer lab *and* a library, and they’re both really big. Can you believe that, honey?”

I throw my weeds into a paper bag.

"I'd love to go there if I were you. You're really lucky." Mom grins at me. I don't look up at her. Instead, I focus all my attention on the spider crawling up the side of a weed, pretending to be utterly fascinated.

"Are you nervous, honey? I bet you are. You know, when I was your age, I had to start at a new school too. I was petrified. And on the first day, my locker wouldn't open." My mom laughs. "It seems like such a small thing now, but back then, that was pretty much my worst nightmare. Anyway, I was on the verge of tears when this girl came up to me and offered me some space in her locker. Then at lunch we went and got my locker fixed, and we've been best friends ever since. You know Suzie, right? You met her at that family picnic..." Mom trails off. That family picnic was for Dad's work, when he was DJ-ing at it. "Anyway, I'm sure you'll make plenty of great friends, honey."

I TRUDGE UPSTAIRS. This is the second night in a row that we've had Chinese takeout for dinner, because it's the only cheap restaurant close to here. The rest are the kind you have a big celebration at—really expensive.

Mom's light flicks on in her bedroom. I stand there, looking at the crack under her door, the strip of light illuminating the hallway's floor. I walk up to the brown slab of wood and push it open.

My mom is sitting on the floor, the contents of a box pulled out all around her. It looks like she'd been unpacking. I


start to back out of the room, thinking I better not interrupt her, and not wanting to, anyway. Then I see the teardrop fall, like a glistening pearl sliding down her face and landing onto the piece of paper she's holding in her hands. Something inside of me changes. All the anger I've harbored against her, all the grudges, disappear. I peer in. The piece of paper is a picture of Dad, laughing on the beach, his hair wet and flattened down over his head. Watching my mother, I realize something—this isn't her fault. She didn't want it, either.

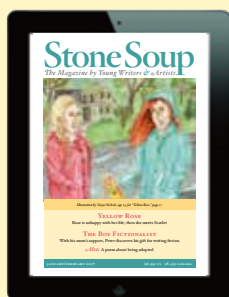
"Hey, Mom." They're the first real words I've spoken to her since the divorce.

Mom looks up. "Lilly," she says. It sounds sad and happy at the same time, like one of Dad's favorite songs that I can't quite place.

"Can I come in?" I ask. Mom doesn't respond. Instead, she moves some of the papers out of the way—pictures, I see, of her and Dad together. I sit down and lean against her.

"It hasn't been easy on me, either, Lilly," Mom says, holding my hand. She rubs her thumb up and down my palm.

"I know, Mom. I'm sorry." I squeeze her hand. And then she wraps her arms around me, and we embrace. It's the warmest hug I've ever had. We still have the ugly house. I still only see Dad on weekends. We still don't have our furniture from the movers. And I still have to start at a new school tomorrow. But somehow, leaning against my mom, hugging her, everything seems OK. 



Honor Roll

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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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