

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Audrey Zhang, age 13, for "Count Your Blessings," page 17

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF DREAMS

Mariana finds help where she least expected it

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Why me? Kenna feels sorry for herself because her sister has special needs

Also: A review of *Anne of Green Gables*

MARCH/APRIL 2017

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 45, NUMBER 4
MARCH/APRIL 2017

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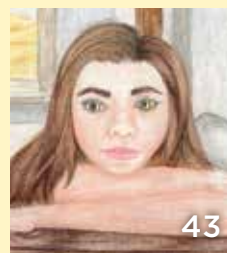
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Editor's Note

Don't give up! Just when it seems like things can't get any worse, they could get better. Three of our new stories illustrate this point. In "The Scholarship of Dreams," Mariana wants nothing more than to go to nursing school. Her parents have lost their jobs. The family is struggling to get by. Mariana babysits, teaches crafts, gets scholarships, but it's not enough. Never did she imagine that help could be so close by. Firoz, in "Home," has moved to Minnesota after the death of his family in India. He has a foster family but despairs of ever finding a friend. The kids at school bully him. Then Viv appears, and it turns out they have a lot in common. In "The Dragon," a girl is lost in the desert. She can barely take another step when, seemingly out of nowhere, a welcoming house appears. Is it real? A mirage? Have you ever felt like giving up? Are you glad you didn't? Tell us about it in your next story.

— Gerry Mandel

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Submissions

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ON THE COVER Audrey Zhang has been making art since she was two years old. She especially likes to draw people and things from her imagination. In 2014 Audrey won the national Doodle 4 Google contest with her drawing of "An Invention That Would Make the World a Better Place": <http://tiny.cc/vhf14x>.



The Mailbox



I love *Stone Soup*'s magazines because they are so inspirational and heart-warming, and it motivates me to write more as an author. The magazine encourages us writers to be

open with our thoughts and to be able to share them with the world. My dream is to be able to publish my pieces in *Stone Soup*.

Claire Xu, 11

Palo Alto, California

I love reading *Stone Soup*! One of my favorites from the July/August 2016 issue is "The Songs of Green Waters." The story was very original and exciting, and the artwork was colorful. In the illustrations, I especially loved the realistic depiction of the ocean! I think that writing fantasy takes a lot of work because you have to create whole new worlds or new aspects of our world purely by imagination. Thank you for all you do for young writers like us!

Abigail Rose Cargo, 13

Lexington, South Carolina

Abigail's poem, "A Fraction of an Inch," appears on page 30 of this issue.

My teacher introduced my class to *Stone Soup*, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading the stories and poems published in it. I especially liked Gracie Shapiro's "A Swing??" [May/June 2016] for its imagery, figurative language, and active plot line.

Vimala Alagappan, 13

Oyster Bay, New York

A year ago, my friend recommended to my class that *Stone Soup* was a must-read magazine. As soon as I listened to her read one of the stories, "Grandma's Angels" [March/April 2014], I knew it was my type. So here I am now, reading a magazine that will lead to my future career. I am always sprinting to my mailbox every second month to get the magazine. Children are so talented! Never underestimate the power and knowledge of children.

Nicole Qian, 12

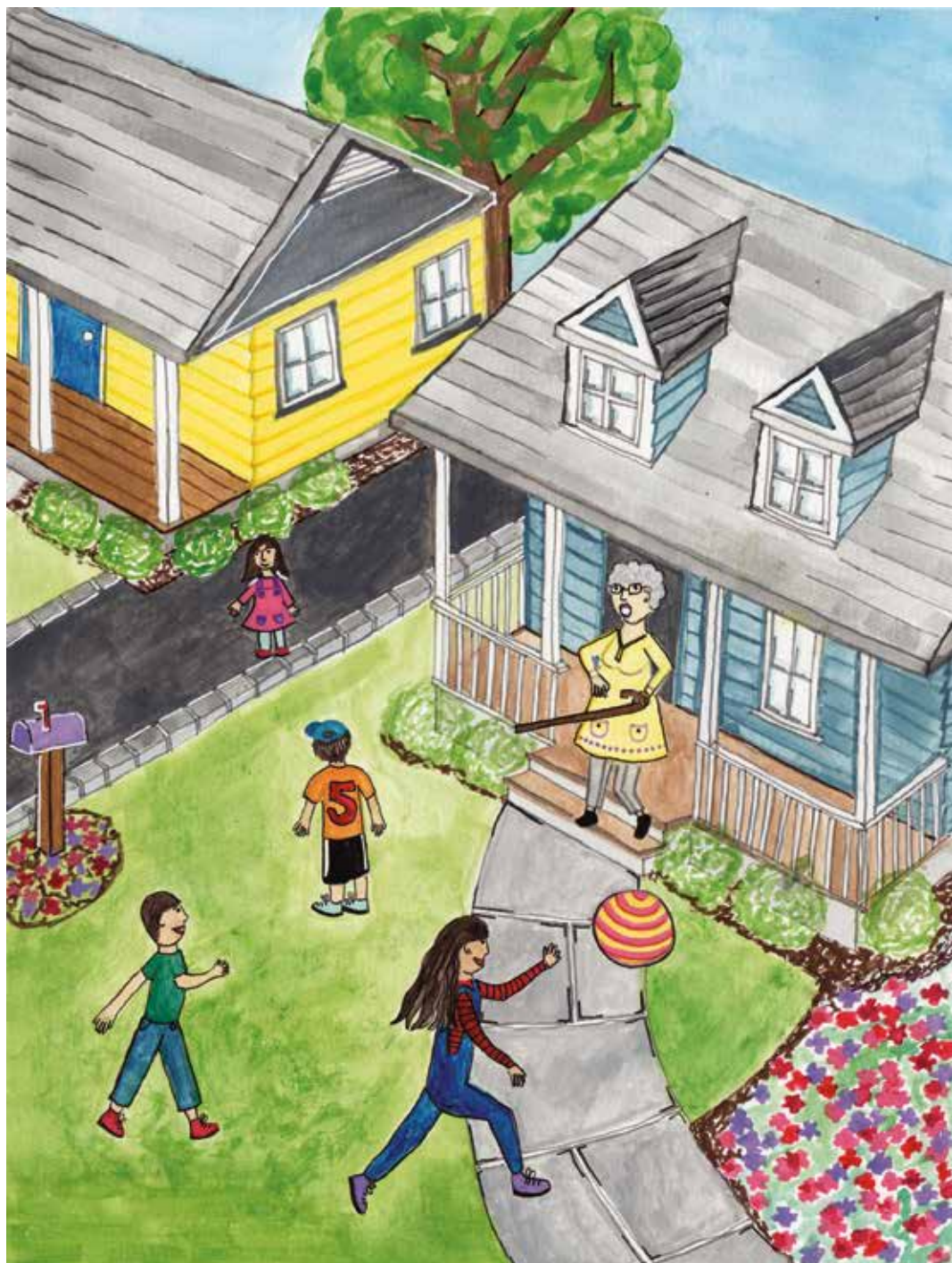
Auckland, New Zealand

I usually don't engage in this particular segment of *Stone Soup*, but after reading "The Hunt," by Christopher Thien [September/October 2016], I felt I had no other option. What I appreciate most about this story is how it is so distinct from all the other writings. It isn't black and white, with a message readers are expected to distill from it noticeably evident, or crowded with lessons and fantasy for young children. No, "The Hunt" is a gray story, compressed with such intense details I feel as though I am the main character, complete with exhilaration and fear. Yet "The Hunt" isn't a "perfect" story either, it has its flaws and weak spots. That is what makes it so great. It's *real*.

Yael Shavelson, 13

Passaic, New Jersey

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.



Mrs. Brewster was a mean, cantankerous, bossy old lady

The Scholarship of Dreams

By Meg Pheifer

Illustrated by Sofia Schreiber

EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE, I knew that my future lay in nursing. One day when I was six, we visited my mama at her hospital. The sights, the sounds, and the smells all reached out to me. I told my papa on the way home that I wanted to be a nurse, and he chuckled softly. “Not too fast, *pequeña*, my little one. Don’t grow up too fast.”

My parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico before I was born. I am the eldest of four children. When I was two, my brother Pedro was born, followed by José. Last but not least was my little sister, Gabrielle.

Our life was always happy, even though we were not the richest of families. We always had food in the pantry, always could afford new clothes. My *abuelita*, or grandmother, came to live with us when I was seven. That was the happiest time of my childhood.

But that all changed when I turned eight. The hospital Mama worked at had to cut staff wages in half, and then half again. Papa lost his variety store and had to find work at a tiny auto-furnishing shop. We were forced to sell our big house in Phoenix, Arizona, and move to a tiny two-bedroom house in southern California. One bedroom went to Mama and Papa, and one went to Abuelita, though she highly objected. Papa stretched the budget to the limit and added another tiny bedroom and a small shed in the back. Gabrielle and I share the bedroom (we sleep in the same bed), and the boys sleep in the shed.

Often we could only afford to have two meals a day, and



Meg Pheifer, 11
Lakewood, California



Sofia Schreiber, 13
Princeton, New Jersey

they were always scanty. I grew thin. Maybe it was a good thing, too, because all my clothes were getting too small; we couldn't get new ones. There were no summer camps, no sports teams, no movie nights for us. We simply could not pay for it.

Another reason I hated our new home was our next-door neighbor. Mrs. Brewster was a mean, cantankerous, bossy old lady. She couldn't stand it when we would accidentally run across her lawn, or a stray bouncy ball found its way into her petunias. She'd wave her walker at us, yelling croakily. In time, I learned to avoid her and taught my siblings the same.

That was how I grew up.

NOW I AM a senior in high school. I am getting ready to go to college. I knew my major: *Nursing!* It had always been my dream. I knew that I was going to go to Cal State Long Beach. Everything was ready. Everything was set. Except...

Money. I had worked as hard as I could all my years of high school, raising money so I could go to college. I had earned scholarships. I had received money from more fortunate relatives. But every time Papa and I went through the list we always came up short.

"*De nuevo*, Mariana," Papa said beseechingly. My head lay on my arms, which were resting on the kitchen table. "Let's do it again."

"What's the use, Papa?" I asked. "We know the list, we've gone through it a million times..."

"Maybe we missed something," Papa interrupted. "One more time? *Por favor?*"

I sighed but pulled the notebook that contained all my college notes toward me. Papa read the long column of writing. "Money from babysitting. Scholarship. Donation from Tio and Tia Rodriguez. Money from organizing crafts at school. Another scholarship. Money from Abuelo and Abuela. All that adds up to..." He frowned thoughtfully.

"What, Papa?" I asked, my voice cracking as I waited for the verdict that would, I thought, change my life forever.

He spread his hands out in defeat. "*Lo siento*, Mariana. I'm sorry. We just do not have enough."

My heart split in two as my dreams were crushed. I couldn't go to college. I couldn't become a nurse. Tears blurring my eyes, I leapt up from the table and fled to my room.

Gabrielle looked up from her book, concern on her face. "What's wrong, Mariana?"

"Leave me alone!" I screamed, throwing myself on the bed and letting the tears run fast and hard.

BREAKFAST the next morning was a sorry affair. I wouldn't speak to anyone, and Papa kept sending me apologetic looks. As if his apologies would help anything.

Thirteen-year-old José looked up from the newspaper he was reading. "Mama, what's heritage?"

"Heritage is a kind of balloon that when you sit on it, it farts." Pedro cracked

up at his own joke.

Mama shot him a warning look before answering, "It's like your ancestry. Who your family was."

"What are you reading?" Papa wanted to know.

Reciting from the newspaper, José said, "If you are of Mexican heritage or descent, you are immediately eligible to win a \$20,000 scholarship to the college of your choice—hey!"

I had grabbed the newspaper from him. Feverishly reading the article, I nearly fainted.

"Read it, Mariana," Papa commanded.

"If you are of Mexican heritage or descent, you are immediately eligible to win a \$20,000 scholarship to the college of your choice. Write a short historical fiction story and submit it at the Los Angeles *La Plaza de Cultura y Artes*, a Mexican-American museum and cultural center. Entries must be submitted before April 20."

I looked up and saw Papa staring at me, surprise and delight showing on his face.

"This is the answer!" I cried. "I *have* to win this contest. If I did this I could go to college!"

"Then what are you waiting for?!" Mama cried. "You have barely twenty-four hours. Go write!"

I locked myself in my room, much to Gabrielle's anger. Time ticked past as I feverishly scribbled on a paper, writing

ideas and crossing them out. My pencil went from sharp to nearly flat. There: my first draft was written. Now to revise. Done.

These thoughts raced through my head as the hours did the same. I poured out my heart into that story. This wasn't just any piece of writing. If I didn't win this scholarship, my dream would be gone.

Obliterated. Destroyed. I would never be a nurse. And to think that the thing that had ruined my long-standing hope was money.

Papa knocked on my door at about three o'clock. "Mariana?"

"I'm busy," I growled, hunched over my notebook.

Finally, around five o'clock, I emerged from my room, exhausted. I had used every ounce of my being to write a story, and I knew that it was worth the effort. Papa looked up from the kitchen table, where a pile of bills with red warning labels lay. He covered them with his hand so I couldn't see them. "*Finalmente*, Mariana. Done?"

"Sí, Papa. May I go bring it to the museum?"

With his consent, I left the house and started through the streets. An address had been under the article in the newspaper, so I knew we weren't that far from *La Plaza de Cultura y Artes*.

"What do you think you're doing, Mariana?" It was Mrs. Brewster.

I realized I was walking on her lawn.

Often we could
only afford to have
two meals a day.

"Sorry, Mrs. Brewster."

"You'd better be sorry. When I tell your father you were on my lawn again..." She trailed off, apparently relishing the thought. I rolled my eyes but continued on.

When I finally reached the place, I saw a large red banner with a table underneath. The banner bore the words "Mexican-American Scholarship Literature Contest." There was a young man lounging in a chair at the table, and I boldly walked up to him.

He gazed at me sleepily, then said, "Submitting a story for the scholarship?"

"Yes, sir."

He drawled, "Fill out this form and leave your writing in that box over there." A registration form was pushed toward me, and as I bent over to fill it out, I caught a glimpse of the box he was talking about. It was already partway full. I gulped. There were dozens of people trying to get this scholarship. And there was only one winner.

But no. I *had* to win. I pushed those thoughts out of my mind and concentrated on writing my name, birthdate, place of birth, parents' place of birth...

I handed the now completed paper back to the man, who put it on a stack of papers, then leaned back and closed his eyes. Not wanting to disturb him, I dropped my story in the box and fled from the scene.

For the next few days I scoured the newspapers, looking for any shred of talk of the scholarship contest. My nails were bitten down until they were nothing. I

pushed my food around at meals. I was so worked up about the contest I thought about nothing else. If I didn't win, I couldn't go to college. My life would be ruined.

Until finally, at breakfast, I saw it. "WINNER OF SCHOLARSHIP CONTEST ANNOUNCED," the huge title said. I grabbed the newspaper and read the article so fast I wasn't registering it. Then I saw the name. I covered my eyes and burst into tears. I could feel Papa looking at me, hoping against hope that it was my name typed there.

I looked at the name again, my heart too full to speak.

And the winner was... Diego Lopez.

The tears came rushing harder and harder. I didn't know who Diego Lopez was, and I didn't care. All I knew was that my dreams were torn, too broken to be salvaged.

Mama grabbed me and pulled me into her embrace.

"What's wrong?" Gabrielle asked innocently.

I didn't answer and neither did Mama. She was stroking my hair. "*Mi pobre bebe*, my poor baby. *Lo siento mucho*, I'm so sorry."

Then she began to sing a Mexican lullaby.

"De Colores, De Colores se visten los campos en la primavera,

De Colores, De Colores son los pajaritos que vienen de afuera..."

Listening to her sing, my heart couldn't take it anymore. I broke away and ran from the house. I ran, not knowing where



"You know, I was once an immigrant from Ireland. I had dreams, too."

to, but somewhere.

“Mariana Enriquez! STOP!”

I turned and saw Mrs. Brewster hobbling along the walk to me. “This is the last straw, girl! I don’t care what excuses you make, I will not have you walking on my lawn! Do you...” She stopped, seeing my woebegone face. In a soft voice I didn’t think possible from her, she said, “Good heavens, Mariana, what’s the matter?”

In a choked voice I told her.

Frowning, she motioned me to her house. “I think you’d better come inside.”

HALF AN HOUR later, I was sitting with tea and cookies, and finishing pouring out my dilemma to not-so-cranky Mrs. Brewster.

Her forehead was in two creased lines. “You want to go to college but can’t because of money?”

I nodded.

“How much do you need per year?”

I did the math in my head. “About \$15,000, ma’am.”

Mrs. Brewster stood up, shaking the crumbs off her skirt. She smiled a little sadly and said, “Well, that’s no problem. I’ve spent years saving up for the children I no longer have, and I might as well spend the money on you.”

I sat in stunned silence. My hope for the future, which only a few minutes earlier had been lying in pieces on the ground, slowly picked itself up and started healing.

“You mean... you’ll pay my way for college?”

She nodded, looking a little anxious about my reaction.

I smiled. Suddenly I jumped up and hugged her, dancing and singing with delight. I was going to college! My dreams were going to be fulfilled! I would become a nurse. My heart, which a moment ago felt like a deserted cavern, empty and dark, was shouting for joy at the generous gift of the elder lady next to me.


After a little while, I quieted down. “Why are you doing this for me?” I asked Mrs. Brewster. “I mean... I always thought you hated us.”

Mrs. Brewster laughed softly. “No, Mariana. Not hate. Annoyed beyond belief, maybe, but never hate.” Her gaze became distant. “You know, I was once an immigrant from Ireland. I had dreams, too. Dreams to get a good education, raise a family...” Her voice was sad. “Much like you, I couldn’t afford to go to college. Only I never went. And then much later, both of my children died. I... I want you to have the chance that I never did.

“Go to college, Mariana. Get a degree. Get a good job. Support your family. I want you to make the most out of your life. Will you do that for me?”

“Yes,” I whispered.

She put a hand on my shoulder. “Let’s go tell your family that you are indeed going to be a nurse!”

I got up, my heart so full that I thought it would burst. “Let’s,” I said. 

Starry Night

By **Jude Stumpf**

In an art museum in Chicago
my dad and Van Gogh stare at each other.
On a kitchen table in Sanford
my mom watches me draw.
In the museum gift shop
my dad buys me a print of Starry Night.
At home in my room
Starry Night hangs above my bed,
calming like a space gallery,
yellow,
white,
black,
and blue.



Jude Stumpf, 8
Sanford, North Carolina

In All Its Silvery Beauty

By Hannah Ferreira

Illustrated by Rachel Maughan



Hannah Ferreira, 11
Virginia Beach, Virginia



Rachel Maughan, 11
Keller, Texas

IT WAS IN THE MIDDLE of the night. The sheets were thrown to the floor, useless. The window was open, and you could hear the sounds of summer. Cicadas chirping in unison, the occasional car starting, and the breeze that was so precious it was worth gold. My hair was sweaty, and I brushed away the bangs that clung to my forehead.

Maybe I should get some air, I thought. I grabbed my flashlight and stood up. My sister was still fast asleep in another bed, sucking her thumb.

Slowly, I walked over to the window and swung one leg over the ledge. The windowsill creaked and I froze. After ten seconds, I let out my breath. My sister still had her eyes closed.

When my feet touched the grass, I was in a whole new world. Instead of rough, wooden boards, my feet felt soft dirt and grass.

Instead of the artificial breeze from the broken-down fan, I felt a real breeze. The kind that is soft and comforting, like a quilt that your mother draped around you when it got cold.

Oh, and the *smells*. The grass and the dirt and the bark on the trees. Even the moonlight. The silvery glow coming from the moon shone down on every blade of grass that dared to reach for it. It made the sidewalk look metallic—silver. Almost like how hose water tastes in your mouth.

I could write a poem about moonlight. *Light, fight, height, bite,* I thought.



When my feet touched the grass, I was in a whole new world

Even at night, the air was as thick as my mother's chowder. It was muggy and humid, not the dry heat from Phoenix.

I turned on my flashlight and moved the sphere of light no bigger than a fist toward the house. Everything was calm. Flicking the flashlight off, I sank down to my knees. I lay down on the cool, soft grass and breathed in the scent of the ground.

I let out a yelp when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Looking up, I realized it was my mother, her long black hair tumbling down her back.

"I saw your flashlight beam," she commented. She sat down next to me and squeezed my shoulder. "Time to go in."

She gave me a small, sad smile, like it wasn't her choice that I had to go inside. I stood up and she took my hand.

"Sorry, I needed some air, and..." my voice trailed off and faded away, like a line of watercolor paint.

She nodded, as if she understood.

"The moonlight," she said.

"The moonlight." I nodded, and I took one last look at the silvery beauty before returning to the shelter of my house. 🌀

Book Review

By Samuel Phillips

George, by Alex Gino; Scholastic Press: New York, 2015; \$16.99



Samuel Phillips, 12
Syracuse, New York

GEORGE COULD NOT have come out at a better time. LGBT rights is an important issue, yet for kids unfamiliar with the acronym or those interested in the subject, like me, seeing this in a kids' novel had never happened, until *George*. The main character of the book, George, is transgender. Because of this, I believe that *George* is a thought-provoking and fresh book for kids and teens of all ages.

George looks like a standard fourth-grade boy, short hair, freckles, and the parts that make a boy, a boy. But George knows on the inside that she is a girl. The annual school play of *Charlotte's Web* is coming up and George and her friend Kelly are really excited for auditions. But George doesn't want to play Wilbur. She wants to be Charlotte.


On a trip to the library, I picked up this book and got it, just because. Little did I know, this book would consume my life for four hours on an emotional journey through the mind of George. Cliffhangers propelled me through the book faster and faster. I struggled to find an explanation for my reading outburst until I broke it down.

Here are the three things that really won this book over for me: The characters, writing style, and plot. The characters in this book

were realistic and relatable. Kelly is this lighthearted, kind, and caring friend, people we need more of in this world. I have a friend who is like Kelly. We were signing up for game workshops and I was in the library. I really wanted to play Capture the Flag, so I asked a favor of him. He actually crossed his name off the list so that I could play. I still need to repay him. Kelly is truly the hero of this book, making her my favorite character. The brother, Scott, I also find realistic. He really understands what George is dealing with, despite being a little shocked at first. My brother and I talk late at night and we talk about what's happening in our lives and I feel that he understands me, unlike even the best of my friends. Scott and George feel like my brother and me a lot.

I love the plot in *George* for so many reasons. It's simple, with only one goal and mission, giving it the opportunity to deeply tell the story of George. The other reason is it's predictable, from start to finish. This allowed me to focus on those little moments and small details that I would otherwise miss.

The way Alex Gino wrote this book was very interesting. The book is written in a third-person viewpoint, but George's character is written the way George identifies, as a girl. This makes this book confusing, but in the best of ways. But by the end of *George*, I had become so used to the idea of George as she is, that I didn't notice.

I admit, I almost cried at the end. The ending is just so magical and so right for the book. I cannot express the emotions that seep through those words. In fact, the entire book is emotional, with triumphant moments and times of lonesome sorrow. And when you can feel those moments, where tears pool up in your eyes or when you scream out in joy for the character, that is the making of a good book. I used to find myself picking up books with awards to their names, but now I see that *George* is different. *George* is one of those amazing books left unrecognized. 



"Kenna, come push your sister out to the car"

Count Your Blessings

Special Needs

By Emma Harwell

Illustrated by Audrey Zhang

KENNA, COME PUSH your sister out to the car.”
I swing my backpack onto my shoulder and jog down the stairs just as I hear the school bus pull up to our driveway and beep.

“Can’t you do it? I don’t want to have to walk again. The bus only waits five minutes, and Anna is really hard to push over the gravel.”

“Don’t argue. I’ve got my hands full with your brother, and I have to get this roast beef put in the crock pot. You’re perfectly capable of walking to school, and it’s a nice day,” Mom replies, pulling three-year-old Leo’s hands from her apron strings and retying them.

Sighing heavily, I rest my hands on Anna’s wheelchair handles and push. Her wheelchair inches slowly towards the door. By the time I have Anna just outside, I hear the bus brakes squeal as they let up, and the driver and the load of kids begin to roll away. Holding back angry tears, I shove the wheelchair the rest of the way to the van.

“They don’t pay me enough to do all this,” I grumble, even though I don’t get paid at all. I pull open the van door and help my sister into the seat. Folding her wheelchair together, I lift up the trunk door and heave it inside. Pushing the van door closed, I shove my hands deep in my pockets.

Without saying goodbye to my mom, I start off down the driveway. A little finch hops along at the same pace as me but keeps a cautious few feet between us. It turns its head and chirps at me, but even the cheerful singing of a pretty little



Emma Harwell, 12
Lenoir, North Carolina



Audrey Zhang, 13
Levittown, New York

bird can't lift my spirits.

I sigh and turn away from the bird.

"It seems that every day of my life, I'm stuck taking care of Anna. 'Kenna, come help Anna eat.' 'Kenna, come read to Anna.' 'Kenna, do this.' 'Kenna, do that.' It's not fair," I say in a hushed, irritated voice. "I'm always doing stuff for Anna. But what is she doing for me? Nothing, is the answer. All she does is eat and drool and constantly smile at me."

IT'S ONLY A FEW minutes past eight o'clock when I reach the school. I hear the warning bell ring as I hurry inside my classroom. Luckily, Mr. Regardo has his back turned and doesn't even notice me.

I take my seat next to my best friend, Piper. A seat behind Piper sits one of our mortal enemies, Ruth. Two summers ago, we were all best friends. But she went to a sleep-away camp this past summer, and now all she's interested in is the latest hairstyle and fashion magazines. Apparently, she roomed with the group of girls who bully everyone here at school. Now Ruth isn't really nice to me or Piper. She just hangs out with those girls.

"All right, class," says Mr. Regardo presently, turning around and grinning at us. "Seeing as it is almost time for fall vacation, and Thanksgiving is approaching quickly, I have a surprise for you." The class gives a small cheer at this, all except for Ryan Hoss, who always has to get everyone's attention. He jumps out of his seat and throws his baseball cap in the air, whooping and hollering.

"That's enough, Ryan. I'm pretty sure you don't want to have to go to the principal's office—again," Mr. Regardo says, with a warning look. Ryan, grinning with pride, gives one last attention-seeking toss of his baseball cap and plops down in his chair, his cap landing on top of his desk.

"What I was saying—before I was interrupted," Mr. Regardo goes on, pointedly turning his eyes toward Ryan, "is that, instead of our usual English worksheets, we will be doing a Thanksgiving craft!" This gets the class going again, and Mr. Regardo walks to the rear of the classroom and puts a hand on Ryan's shoulder before he can get all riled up a second time.

"All right now, let's keep quiet. I'm going to hand out craft packets to you all. They have ten leaves and a tree trunk in them, as well as a picture of the ground and the sky on a piece of paper. Paste your tree and leaves onto the paper, and then write what you're thankful for on the leaves."

"This is too easy! Can't we write the names of all the presidents on the leaves or something?" Ryan pipes up.

"This isn't homework, Ryan," Mr. Regardo replies. "This is a craft to put up on your fridge."

"I'm not allowed to put things on my fridge," a girl named Ria answers.

"Well, do what you want with it," Mr. Regardo says, with a dismissive wave of his hand.

"So... I can throw it away?" Ryan calls, putting his hand in the air.

"No. Ryan, although this is not homework, it is an assignment, so treat it like one," Mr. Regardo says sternly. Ryan drops his hand to his packet and begins tearing out the pieces.

I take all of the pieces out of my packet and lay them across my desk. There are red, yellow, and orange leaves, a brown tree trunk, a blue sky, and green grass. I always notice colors—they're my favorite thing in the whole world. I love getting out my art stuff and making gradients. Red to orange, yellow to green, blue to purple.

Smiling, I take the glue stick out of the packet and pop off the cap. The smell of glue always appeals to me. I take a long whiff until I see Piper looking at me strangely and Ruth giving me the evil eye. My cheeks flush with embarrassment, and I hunch over my paper. I begin rolling the glue stick over the back of the tree trunk, careful not to let my hair get in the sticky mixture. After a moment, I press the trunk against the paper, and the leaves go down with it.

"Nice work, Kenna! Your leaves are arranged very nicely," Mr. Regardo's voice says from beside me. I jerk slightly, having not realized that he was standing there.

"Oh! Thanks, Mr. Regardo," I reply, and he hands me an ink pen.

"Better get to work on those thanks." He smiles.

I return the smile and open the pen. I

begin writing down, in my best handwriting, everything I'm thankful for.

Mom. Dad. Dog. Cat. House. Bed. Leo. Dolls. Money.

I put my pen down on top of the tenth leaf and then pull it up again. I have no idea what my last thankful is. I think and think, but nothing comes to mind. And then, I realize there is something I have forgotten. Or rather, someone.

I haven't written Anna's name yet.

A feeling of spitefulness washes over me, and my anger rises as I remember that she made me walk to school this morning—again. But if I don't write it, Mom will be mad at me.

So I scribble "Anna" almost illegibly on the leaf.

"All right, class, pens up," Mr. Regardo calls out. "Gather up your projects. If you haven't finished it, put everything back in your packet and bring it to me. You can finish it next time. If you have finished, take it with you, but leave the glue sticks and ink pens up here on my desk."

I pick up my paper and take the glue stick and pen to the front desk.

"Thank you, Kenna. May I?" he asks, holding out his hand. Nodding, I give him the paper, and he skims over it.

"If you don't mind my asking, what's this last word?" he inquires, pointing to the very last leaf.

"Um..." I say, trying not to flush red, "...it's my sister's name—Anna." He

**"I'm always doing
stuff for Anna.
But what is she
doing for me?"**

frowns but doesn't say anything. Handing my paper back, he gestures that I can go. Breathing a sigh of relief, I hoist my backpack up higher and walk out of the classroom.

The rest of the school day drags slowly, and I become tired of trudging around with this heavy backpack on my shoulders. If it's even possible, the Thankful Tree craft seems to weigh down my backpack even more.

Finally, the last bell rings and I fly out of the school, as fast as I can. I meet Piper by the bus door.

"Hi, Kenna!" Piper says cheerfully.

"Hey, Piper," I reply.

"Why weren't you on the bus this morning?" she asks, starting up the bus steps when the doors open.

"Because of Anna," I say, scowling. "She always makes me late for the bus because Mom has to drive her to the special needs school, and I have to wheel her to the car every morning."

"Oh. Well, at least Anna's always in a good mood. You probably wouldn't be able to handle her if she always scowled and frowned and hissed at you," Piper says, partly joking. We take our seats in the back of the bus, and she says, "Come on, Kenna. It can't be that bad."

"How would you know?" I retort, my anger rising. "You don't know what it's like to have a sister with cerebral palsy. I can't have friends over to dinner because she drools and can't feed herself.

I can't watch my favorite show because she always hogs the TV and cries if I even touch the remote. Mom always puts on her favorite radio station, and never mine. And I always have to take her to the car in the mornings, and I never make the bus in time, and all she'll do is smile at me and laugh that stupid laugh of hers!

I hate it!"

"Whoa," Piper says, holding out her hands. "That's far enough. You practically just said you hate *her*." I turn to the window.

"Sometimes... I think I do."

We sit in silence the rest of the way. The bus pulls up to my house first, and I stand up, slowly turning my head to glance at Piper.

"Bye, Kenna. See you Monday," she says, not unkindly.

"See you then," I reply. I walk down the aisle and off the bus, making my way up the driveway. I turn and see Piper waving at me, and I return the gesture.

I ROLL OVER and hit my alarm clock. Groaning, I push back my covers and sit up. My cat, Willow, stretches out her teeny gray paws and bats at my feet as I pull them out from beneath my blankets.

I smile and pick up the little kitty, holding her close. She purrs and laps at my hand.

"Sweet kitty," I croon. I scratch the soft fur beneath her chin.

**"You don't know
what it's like
to have a sister with
cerebral palsy."**

"Mew," she replies, turning her head and licking my cheek. I set her down on my bed and stretch out, yawning. Walking over to my closet, I pull out my usual Saturday outfit: an orange tie-dye T-shirt with the words "Deal With It" written on the front, and a khaki-colored skirt.

"Come on, Willow," I coo softly. "Time for breakfast." She mews again and hops off of my bed, prancing after me with her tail high in the air.

I jog down the stairs and seat myself at the breakfast table. Willow wanders over to her bowl of kibble and sits down to eat.

"Morning, sweetheart!" Dad says, gulping down some coffee. He slips his glasses onto his nose and opens the paper.

"Morning, Dad," I answer.

"Good morning, Kenna! Sleep well?" Mom says, cheerfully bustling into the kitchen with a pan of pancakes. She drops two on my plate and passes me the butter.

"Yeah, I guess," I reply. Anna makes a loud noise in her throat that I suppose is her good morning to me as well. "Good morning to you too, Anna," I reply, not really angry at her anymore. I butter up my pancakes and pour syrup across them.

"By the way, Piper's mother called a bit earlier. She said she would pick you up before church tonight, so you and Piper could ride together," Mom tells me, spreading peanut butter on her pancakes and drizzling honey on top.

"OK."

"I think Anna is going to ride with you, too."

"Huh!? Can't she ride with you? Her

wheelchair probably won't fit in the trunk," I say. I know Anna can understand me—she's not mentally handicapped. She frowns and makes a noise at me.

"I'm sure it will fit, because Piper's mother invited her."

I refrain from rolling my eyes and continue picking at my pancakes.

PIPER'S MINIVAN pulls up to our house.

"Piper and her family are here, Mom!" I call.

"OK, Anna's almost ready! Please go tell Mr. and Mrs. Noel that we'll be out shortly," Mom replies.

I head out the door, and Piper pulls open the van door.

"Hi!" she says brightly, grinning and patting the seat next to her. Her parents echo a hello.

"Hey! My mom is getting Anna ready. She'll be out in a minute," I tell her parents.

"That's fine. Hop in, Kenna. I think Anna will ride in the back with Maya." Maya is Piper's little sister. She grins and waves at me. I wave back and say hello to her. She holds out a yellow duck and pinches it. It squeaks, and she cracks up.

After a few moments, Mom wheels Anna out of the house.

"Hi there, Anna!" Mrs. Noel says kindly, and Anna grins. She loves Mrs. Noel because she always gives Anna packs of peppermint gummies.

"Hayo!" Anna tries to say. Mrs. Noel laughs cheerfully.



"Anna... I am so sorry. I've been treating you really badly lately."

"She's learning well," Mrs. Noel tells Mom.

"She is," Mom beams proudly.

"Well, we'd better be off." The van load waves goodbye to my mom.

I SIT STILL in the long church service. Seeing as it is Thanksgiving, the preacher talks about being thankful.

"One of the most important things that we need to be thankful for is our family, whether you are a husband, wife, or a child. Be thankful for your parents, for your siblings if you have them." At this, I sit up a little straighter and lean forward to look at Anna.

We have the same idea, because she leans forward and grins at me.

I sit back in my seat, feeling relieved. The one thing that Anna always does is forgive.

AFTER CHURCH, I talk to Piper for a moment and then tell her I have something I need to do. I run outside and spot Anna by herself in the shade. She has a thin book in her hands. I walk to her side, and she looks up.

"Hi, Anna. What're you reading?" I ask. She shows me the book. It's the story of Job, with big print and colorful pictures. I think that Anna is a lot like Job. She hasn't lost all of her family, but she has gone through a lot, like him, but she loves going to church and listening to the service.

She goes back to reading, and I wait a moment. Finally, I take a deep breath.

"Anna, can I talk to you?" I ask.

Anna closes her book and turns her wheelchair to look at me.

I breathe in again, and I start talking.

"Anna... I am so sorry. I've been treating you really badly lately, and I just haven't taken time to think about what I was doing. I've been so angry with you, and I've been rude and selfish. I haven't put myself in your shoes and tried to think about how hard it is for *you*." I take another deep breath, and I see Anna slowly nod for me to keep going.

"I've always thought about how hard it is for me to have friends over because of you. But I realize now that you've never had a friend over. You don't get to see your friends often, either, and I know that must be really hard. So... I'm asking, Anna, if you will forgive me. I am so, so sorry for everything."

Anna pauses. She stares down at her lap, then up at me again. Slowly, her mouth begins to open.

"K-Ken-na," she says, uncertainly. My eyes brim with tears, and I clap my hand over my mouth.

"Yes."

She struggles again, and then her eyes brighten as she comes to the part that she knows well, the one she's been practicing, solely so that she could speak the special words to me.

"I love you!"





"I have waited a long time for you," he said

Shadow-Dancing

By Noelia M. Colón

Illustrated by Elena Delzer

SARAH WRAPPED HER ARMS around herself, shivering. The wind was biting chilly, and it kept worming its way up her sleeves and through the open space where she was missing a button. She tugged on her little dog Ollie's leash, and he trotted toward her, flashing her a doggy grin.

"Come on," she said, and they headed toward the woods.

But just as Sarah went to enter the woods, she heard a voice say, "I wouldn't go in there if I were you."

She turned to see two kids standing behind her, a boy and a girl. Sarah guessed they were twins.

"Why not?" she asked.

"You're new, so you wouldn't know," said the girl.

"Know *what*?" said Sarah, growing irritated.

"Well, the woods, they're... haunted," said the boy. Sarah laughed.

"It's true!" said the boy.

"Yeah, we're not kidding," said the girl seriously. "By the way, I'm Meg, and this is my brother, Mac."

"I'm Sarah," said Sarah, "and I don't believe in ghosts." She brushed her sandy curls from her forehead and looked down at Ollie. He tilted his head and sat down, waiting patiently for their walk to begin. She bent down to ruffle his ears and then turned back to the woods.

"People have seen things in there," said Meg, her voice hushed, "if they go in after dusk. Dark figures dancing around a campfire... a strange man playing even stranger music... people say that he plays music so terrible and wonderful it dis-



Noelia M. Colón, 13
Amherst, New York



Elena Delzer, 13
Suamico, Wisconsin

turbs the dead.”

Sarah rolled her eyes. “It’s probably just some guy camping out.”

Mac and Meg looked at each other.

“Once,” Mac said, “someone went in and *never came out*.”

“Maybe they got lost,” Sarah suggested. “Anyway, there’s no such thing as ghosts, and I’m going to go for a walk in the woods. Just you wait and see, I’ll be perfectly fine.”

“Well, we warned you,” said Mac darkly.

“OK,” said Sarah, and she and Ollie strode into the woods.

It was nice in the woods, quiet and peaceful, with all the trees forming a leafy canopy overhead. Sarah and Ollie took a long, lovely walk through the trees, and soon it began to get dark. “We’d better get back,” Sarah told Ollie, “or Mom and Dad will be worried.”

He yipped and followed her back the way they’d come. They’d only gone a little ways when Sarah caught a whiff of smoke on the breeze. She soon spotted the flicker of fire ahead. She remembered what the twins had said to her about the woods being haunted and wondered if they were out here trying to scare her. She crept forward quietly, and then she heard the music. It was beautiful. It danced on the breeze and seemed to call to her. She followed the sound and came to a little bonfire. The smoke seemed very thick and dark, but as she stepped forward, the music stopped and the darkness dispersed.

A man was sitting at the bonfire, holding a fiddle in his hands and watching her.

He was an old, old man, old and weathered with many wrinkles on his face, but his smile was that of a child’s. His eyes were bright and shiny as mirrors, and they had clearly seen many things.

“I have waited a long time for you,” he said. He took his fiddle and laid it in a case. He held the case out to her.

“You want me to take your fiddle?” she asked, confused.

“You are the one,” the man said solemnly. “You are my successor.”

“What do you mean?” She was even more confused now.

“I’ve been waiting for the perfect person to pass this down to,” said the man. “Now remember, there must be a flame, and everything must be back as it was before sunrise.”

He placed the fiddle case in her hands.

All of a sudden, the fire went out, and a rustling noise filled her ears. Scared, she turned and ran, Ollie scampering after her.

When Sarah had left that part of the woods behind her, she looked down at the fiddle case in her hands. Then she looked down at Ollie.

“Do you think that man was a ghost, Ollie?” she asked.

Ollie tilted his head.

“Yeah, I didn’t think so either. He was just a little odd. Nice of him to give me his fiddle, though.” Ollie wagged his tail, and they went home.

After eating dinner with her parents, Sarah and Ollie went up to Sarah’s bedroom. Sarah read a book for a while and then decided to go to bed. She got on

her pajamas and lay down to sleep. But she couldn't. Finally she got up and took the old man's fiddle out of its case. As she turned over the pretty instrument, she remembered what the man had said: "There must be a flame."

She went and got a tall red candle and lit it. She put it on her bedside table and thought, Now what? Then she realized, Of course. I have to play the fiddle.

Sarah knew nothing about playing the fiddle, so the first few notes she screeched out sounded awful. But then she felt almost like someone was guiding her hands and showing her what to do. Soon she was playing a beautiful song. It sounded bright and lively, like a jig. She was really enjoying playing the music when all of a sudden her shadow peeled itself off the wall and started dancing!

Sarah froze, her mouth falling open in shock. The shadow stopped dancing and watched her expectantly, so she started playing the song again. Then Ollie's shadow jumped off the wall, too! Ollie yelped in surprise as his shadow chased him around the room.

Sarah's shadow went to the window and threw it open. Her shadow made a strange rustling noise, like leaves in the wind, but soon Sarah began to understand it—it was a language! The shadow was calling out into the night, inviting more shadows to come. Soon more were pouring in through the window, singing

and dancing along to Sarah's music.

Ollie barked, and then Sarah realized she could understand him, too!

"Get these shadows out!" he whimpered. "I don't like them."

For a moment, Sarah was surprised, but then she said, "It's OK, Ollie." But he just whined and hid behind her legs as a cat shadow hissed at him.

Sarah kept playing the fiddle. It's magic! she thought.

Then her shadow stepped forward. Sarah paused her fiddle playing. "Come with me," said the shadow, extending a hand.

Sarah reached out and

took it hesitantly. It was more like water than an ordinary, solid hand—it was half solid and cool and flowing. Sarah let her shadow lead her over to the window and stepped onto a moonbeam. To her surprise, the moonbeam felt solid beneath her feet. She picked up Ollie and ran out the open window on the moonbeam.

"Isn't this amazing?" Sarah said excitedly.

"No!" Ollie yelped. "It's terrifying!" He buried his face in his paws.

Soon, Sarah, Ollie, and their shadows were above the clouds. Sarah stepped onto the clouds to find that they were solid too. She set down Ollie, who frolicked around. "I guess it kinda is nice up here," he said.

The others shadows came up the moonbeams, joyful. Sarah started to play the fiddle again, and all the shad-

**It was beautiful.
It danced on the
breeze and seemed
to call to her.**

ows cheered. One of them plucked a few stars from the sky as easily as if they were picking berries from a bush, and they threaded the stars on a strand of moonlight. They set it on Sarah's head like a crown. They rolled moonlight into balls and played catch with them, and Ollie caught one and chewed on it until his mouth started to glow. They laughed and played with the moon watching them, and just as the horizon began to turn pink, Sarah lay down, exhausted but happy, on a pile of fluffy clouds, Ollie snuggling up beside her. Gently, the shadows lifted them up and carried them down the last moonbeams into their bedroom.

"You need to go back to your places," said Sarah sleepily, yawning. "Everything must be as it was before sunrise." That was what the man had said.

The shadows looked at each other.

"No," said Sarah's shadow boldly.

"But aren't you tired?" asked Sarah.

"Yes, we are. But we like being free."

The sun was rising.

"Please?" Sarah begged, but they shook their heads.

"Sarah," whispered Ollie, "play them a lullaby."

So Sarah picked up her fiddle one last time and began to play. The shadows started yawning. They slowly drifted away and floated out the window one by one. Ollie's shadow crept onto the wall behind Ollie, and Sarah's shadow moved toward

the wall as well. But then it turned back.

"You'll let us free again tomorrow night, won't you?" it asked.

"Yes," said Sarah.

"You promise?"

"I promise."

And then the shadow slid back where it belonged, and the little candle burning on the bedside table went out.

Sarah awoke with a start. She looked at her clock. It was noon. She looked around her room. The fiddle was safe in its case. The window was shut. Ollie lay snoring at

the foot of the bed.

"What a strange dream," Sarah said aloud.

Just then, the doorbell rang. Sarah got up and threw on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and went to answer it. It was the twins from the day before.

"Hi," said Mac.

"Hi," said Sarah.

"So, you didn't see anything... weird in the woods?" asked Meg.

"No," said Sarah. "There was a man playing a fiddle. I guess people thought he was a ghost. That's it."

The twins glanced sheepishly at each other. "I guess we were wrong then," said Mac.

"Hey," said Meg suddenly, "do you want to come out and play? Us neighborhood kids are having a four-square tournament."

"Sure," said Sarah, surprised but

To her surprise, the
moonbeam felt solid
beneath her feet.



Sarah's shadow went to the window and threw it open

pleased. She clipped on Ollie's leash and headed out.

As they walked along, Mac squinted down at Ollie. "Um, Sarah? Is your dog's mouth glowing?"

Sarah looked down at Ollie. Sure enough, his tongue was glowing very faintly. She smiled.

"Of course not," she said. "Dogs' mouths don't glow. That's ridiculous."

Meg laughed. "You must be seeing things, Mac," she said. "Now come on, let's hurry, or they might start without us!"

They hurried off, laughing.

And their shadows slunk after them. ❁

A Fraction of an Inch

By **Abigail Rose Cargo**



Abigail Rose Cargo, 13
Lexington, South Carolina

Either the boat did not want
to be withdrawn from the water,

or the water did not want
to let its new prize go.

Waves of green foam
rolled over the railing

in a calm firmness,
and the trees cast shadows

on the rippling water
pooling at the edge of

a concrete slab where
a red truck's wheels

were spinning in the mud.
A few more inches

and the rubber would have connected
to the waves bouncing off

the boat's hull.
I sometimes think of life's

fractions of inches
it reminds me of how closely

life and death are related.
I'm thinking now

watching two hawks circle
a fraction of an inch

to the left
of the chickens below.

Baseball

By Ruby DeFrank

Illustrated by Brayson Brown



Ruby DeFrank, 10
Richmond, California



Brayson Brown, 11
Hartford, Wisconsin

THE SUN BEAT DOWN mercilessly on my sweaty neck. My shoulders ached. I was tired and my mouth was as dry as the Sahara. Bases were loaded. Three balls, two strikes, pressure on. I adjusted my baseball cap as I stepped carefully onto the dusty mound, fingering the ball in my right hand.

Change-up, I thought. I stepped back in my windup. The ball shot out of my hand, bouncing right before the plate. The batter didn't swing.

"Ball four!" The batter set his bat down by the fence and took a base, advancing his teammates. I watched helplessly as the third-base runner happily jogged home. My team groaned.

Coach called time out and jogged over to where I stood, defeated on the mound. I knew at once I was being replaced. I had just walked a batter home, but what I got instead surprised me. "You're doing good, son, keep it up," Coach said, slapping me hard on the back.

"It's so hot," I complained in reply, wiping the beads of sweat from my forehead.

Coach knelt so we were face to face and stared at me with his wise, chocolatey-brown eyes. "It's baseball." With that, he headed back to the shade of the dugout, nodding to the umpire to begin the game again. "Play ball!"

The batter stepped up to the plate, ready to jump out of the way of a bad pitch. I felt the ball in my sweaty palm. *It's baseball*. I pulled my arm back like a slingshot and launched the ball. *Whack!* It slammed into the catcher's leath-



"Don't worry," I said, acting as his coach. "Try again."

er mitt. The batter flinched but didn't swing.

"Strike!"

THWACK! My younger brother, in a third attempt to hit the ball, knocked over the black rubber tee it rested on instead.

"Darn it!" he exclaimed in frustration.


"Don't worry," I said, acting as his coach. "Try again."

He mumbled something under his breath but did as he was told. Dull gray light crept through the thick fog that hung over the field. Crisp, early morning air stung my lungs and a soft breeze rustled my sandy hair. A crow danced around on the deserted bleachers, looking for

scraps. Me and my younger brother, Julian, had been at the field since seven A.M., almost two hours. Julian was new to baseball and hadn't adapted to the hard work and discipline it takes to become a quality player. That, and he's eight years old. Finally, he successfully hit the ball off the tee and it landed at my feet with a thud. I picked it up out of the dust and nodded with approval.

"Not bad. Do it again."

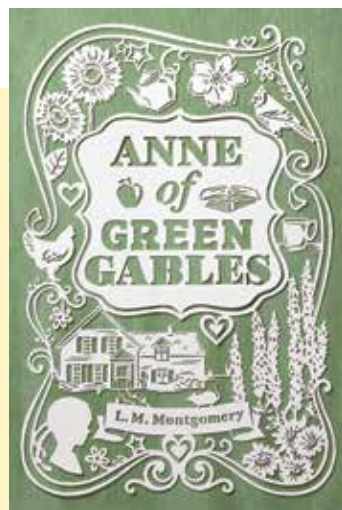
Julian crossed his arms over his maroon Harvard hoodie and groaned in protest, "This is so hard!" He stretched out the words as if they were silly putty.

I looked him up and down, remembering Coach's words. "No," I said knowingly. "It's baseball." 

Book Review

By Autumn Shelton

Anne of Green Gables, by L. M. Montgomery;
Simon & Schuster: New York, 2014; \$7.99




Autumn Shelton, 13
Lamar, Missouri

FEW BOOKS COPY the whimsy of childhood. Picasso said, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.” L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* is a remedy to that lack of adolescent joy. To me this book also represents perseverance, to survive through the bad times to get to the good.

When I was going into third grade, my family moved to a new school district. At eight, I was incredibly shy and self-conscious. Even when I went to my first school I had few close friends. To me the move was the end of the world. How was I going to make new friends? Would the teachers be nice? As I walked into the classroom on the first day of school, I was terrified. What could make it worse? I already knew what the teacher was teaching. Instead of going to recess, I took tests to measure my skills in math, language arts, and science. The school district decided that I would skip a grade. For the first week everything was perfect. I received tons of attention, but soon everything changed. Being so shy made me hate to answer in class, people would ask me to do their homework, and teachers thought I had to get a perfect on every test. In that school year, I had lots of difficulties, and one of the things that helped me get through the year was *Anne of Green Gables*.

Anne was orphaned as a baby. Until age eleven she moved from house to house, working as a maid and caregiver. She helped me believe that my situation wasn't that bad. If she could still be so happy and intelligent, even though she had no parents, then how could I be angry over being teased? How could I complain over a bad grade on a test, when Anne didn't get to go to school until she was eleven? To me, Anne is stronger than any other character in this book. Even though life gave her a terrible deck of cards, she made the best of it.

Anne of Green Gables was first published in 1908. At that time, women were expected to stay in the home and raise children. Anne proves that girls can be anything they believe they can be. Even though Anne didn't start her education until eleven, she soon rose to the top of her class. She went to a junior college to get her license in teaching. Because of her hard work, Anne received her license in one year and won a full-ride scholarship to a university. Anne is an inspiration to me. That she could achieve so much, yet with so little to work with.

Now I have read *Anne of Green Gables* for the second time, and it still makes me smile. This novel will make you have empathy. No, it's not an action novel, full of violence and guns, but is a story of how hard growing up is. This book is more than paper and ink. It is a symbol of childhood that I hold close to my heart. 



Firoz watched, wondering if it was alone like he was

Home

By **Brooke Hemingway**

Illustrated by **Matthew Lei**

A TINY RIPPLE SPREAD from the center of the pond as a small stone struck the surface. The delicate lily pads drifted and then settled as the water calmed. A dark shape swam beneath the water, then emerged, the spotted toad settling serenely on top of a dark green leaf floating like a boat. It collapsed under the toad's weight, reminding Firoz of how fragile life could be.

The air hummed all around the small boy sitting on the rocky shore, insects continually moving and eating all around the beautiful pond. Flowers waved in the wind, their bulbous heads drooping down to the path in the wind. Leaves fell from the trees, some landing atop the pond, stirring the water, then settling it, looking like the leaf had always been there.

Out of the thick swath of trees that surrounded the pond, a small, trembling head poked itself out. The baby deer looked around once, then emerged on its thin legs. Firoz watched, wondering if it was alone like he was.

It wasn't. Soon after, a larger deer came from behind and nuzzled its spotted coat, leading it away from the pond, and away from Firoz.

Firoz felt a small twinge of disappointment. Being alone all of the time wasn't the most fun thing in the entire world. All he wanted was a family, and when he finally got one, he wanted a friend. But nobody wanted to be friends with a small boy from India. Nobody at all. So Firoz sat by the pond, all alone.

He had been sitting there, it seemed, ever since his family



Brooke Hemingway, 13
Chicago, Illinois



Matthew Lei, 11
Portland, Oregon

had died.

A breeze blew hard through the thick trees, whistling like a badly played flute. It ruffled Firoz's navy-blue shorts and white shirt, billowing it out like a kite. He wrapped his arms around his body, rocking in the cold. India had never been cold, and Minnesota was close to freezing. One more reason it wasn't at all like his real home.

He should be in school, the fancy private school that his foster parents had paid so much for. Alton Prep was the most miserable part of Firoz's life. Almost all of the kids there were pampered and viewed Firoz as someone not to be associated with. He wished he could go to a public school. Maybe he could fit in there. Maybe at a regular school, where nobody was spoiled, he wouldn't be bullied and hung upside down until his face turned gray. Maybe at a regular school, somebody would like him and not wonder why he had a patch over one eye, where a shard of glass had pierced deep, deep into it.

His eye wasn't the only thing that had broken since the death of his family. His heart had too. His heart had broken from the teasing and the moving, the memories of his lost family and India.

And so Firoz sat by the pond, as he had every day since he had wandered into the forest, angry and tired of being teased. He thought of his troubles, so many there were that when a girl emerged from

the swath of trees, just as the baby deer had done, Firoz didn't look up. He didn't look up until she sat right beside him and spoke.

"I guess you weren't prepared for the weather today, huh?"

Firoz's soulful brown eye glanced up from the pebbly shore of the pond.

Sitting next to him there was a blond-haired girl. Her wavy blond hair was waving in the wind, and she stared intently at him.

"You don't have a jacket on, you know, and it's about thirty degrees out,"

she said, then looked down at her own shirt. "But I'm not wearing one either, to be fair."

He blinked and moved slightly away from her. He recognized the logo she wore on her shirt. It was the same one he wore on his uniform. The blond-haired girl was from Alton Prep, the same private school he went to. She was probably one of the people who cheered and laughed while he was thrust down a toilet or garbage can.

The girl tilted her head and smiled brilliantly. "Hey, no need to move away," she called, looking at Firoz with a glimmer in her eyes. She smiled again.

Firoz blinked once. It seemed like ages since anybody had talked to him, and manners seemed to have drifted out of him like a spirit soaring to the clouds.

She reached out a hand, and her elbow sank into the muddy pebbles lining the

**Nobody wanted to be
friends with a small
boy from India.**

pond's banks. "Sorry if I startled you. I'm Viv." Viv looked into Firoz's wide-spread eye. "And before you ask, it's not short for Vivian." She grinned. "It's short for Vivace."

"Vivace?" Firoz asked, his voice small and tentative. "Really?"

Viv shrugged. "I'm told that my mum loved music."

Firoz's mother had loved music too. She had named her only daughter Vina.

"My sister's name was Vina."

Viv looked at him, and Firoz searched his head for the English word. The wind howled through the trees once more, and he remembered.

"My sister's name was flute."

"Vina," Viv closed her eyes and tilted her pale face to the light gray sky, "that's beautiful."

"She died," said Firoz. His one remaining eye blinked, trying to hold back tears.

Viv moved closer to Firoz. "My mother died too."

The two children stayed silent for several long seconds before Firoz extended his hand tentatively.

"Firoz," he said. Viv clasped it, and the two shook hands. It may have been decided without words, but they both knew. They knew that they would be friends.

IT WASN'T LONG before winter settled its icy hold on the forest. Ice had spread across the once always-moving pond, icy blue tendrils reaching across like a blue spiderweb over the surface. The rocks by the bank were frozen into the dirt, and the grass was coated with a

delicate frost each morning, and by the afternoon when Viv and Firoz got out of school, the grass had collapsed and looked quite pitiful next to the brilliant white and blue beauty of the forest.

The children would lie on their stomachs beside the frozen pond, small pebbles sinking into the soft padding of their heavy jackets. There may have been less to do near the pond in the winter, but the two had never run out of stories. They had years of joys, triumphs, and sorrows to tell.

Firoz told Viv how he and his family had lived in New Guinea until three months ago. He told her how his family had died when their house had collapsed, and now he lived with a pair of foster parents here in Minnesota.

"It doesn't feel like home, though," Firoz told his friend.

"Why isn't it home?" Viv asked, her eyes full of curiosity.

There were, of course, many reasons why Minnesota wasn't like home. Firoz remembered so clearly India, its smells and bold flavors and deep traditions. He thought of the shambling houses lining the streets, and the throngs of people. He thought, and then knew.

"We danced," he said. "My mother loved it—she loved music and used to sing until her accident. It made her happy to see us dance."

"And you miss dancing?" Viv said, her fingers running slowly over a frozen leaf in-between two rocks.

"Yeah," said Firoz. "I miss it very much. It's just not the same here, without the dancing."



It was so, so familiar. And so different, too.

Viv stood up, her slender frame blocking out the steady stream of sunlight that shown through the sky. She walked over the bank and into the middle of the pond space, atop the frozen grass. She stood there.

"What are you doing, Viv?" Firoz asked.

She turned towards him and extended a purple mitten. "Come on."

Firoz stood up uncertainly, brushing a couple of stray pebbles from his boots. He walked over the grass and took Viv's hand.

"What are we doing?" he asked.

Viv smiled with both her mouth and eyes. "We're dancing, Firoz. Come on!"

And so they did.

And that frozen tundra world swept over Firoz in an ocean wave. He took it all in. The blue ice that imprisoned the pond water, and the bare branches of trees that waved like lonely skeletons. He saw the frost-tipped pieces of grass and the icy rocks. Then he saw Viv and himself, whirring and dancing in the silent and still world, broken only by their peals of laughter. It was so, so familiar. And so different, too.

And Firoz knew he was home.



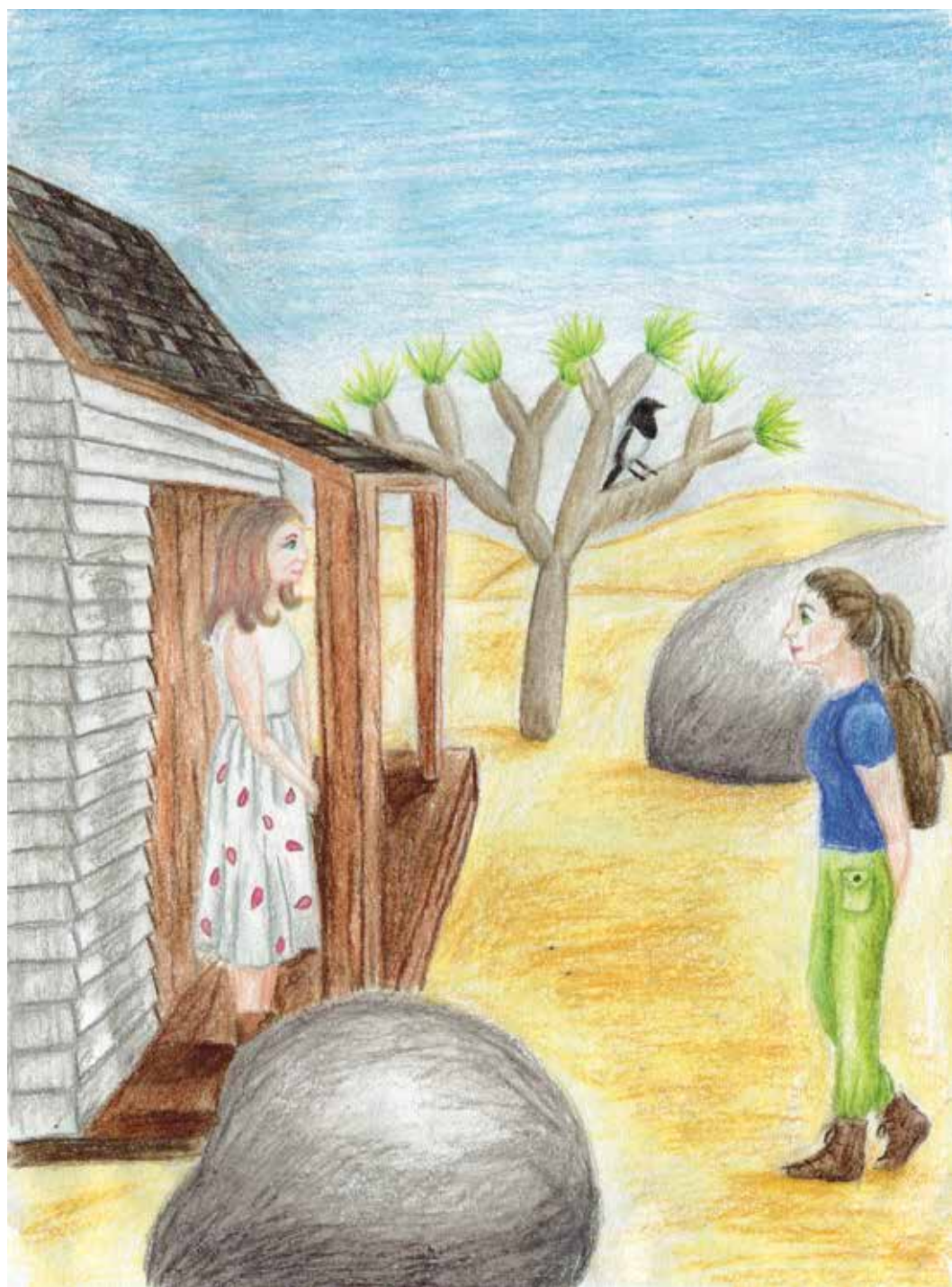
Rain

By **Celie Kreilkamp**

I like to think
That when it rains, the thunder encloses our small city
In a soft gray blanket.
We are cut off from the complications and distractions
Of the outside world
And all there is
Has been
And ever will be
Is the white noise of rain.
I like to think
That when it drip-drops down from the leaves
Showing us the simple beauties
Of ripples in puddles
And quiet crackles of bright yellow,
It wraps us up tight in that blanket.
It rocks us to sleep,
Content in the misty gray fog
And the pitter-patter of rain,
The low rumbles of thunder and the golden lightning.



Celie Kreilkamp, 12
Bloomington, Indiana



She said hello to me, her musical voice echoing across the vast, empty, rocky plain

The Dragon

By Ayla Schultz

Illustrated by Alexandra Carr

I WAS WEARING OLD SHOES, brown like the dust my feet tramped through. The wind was sighing around my ears, a soft symphony echoing off the lonesome Joshua trees that dotted the cracked earth. Their thick limbs out, they were awkward creatures trying desperately to catch the little moisture that the air held. Their spiny leaves stuck out for protection, daring anyone to try and take the water stored beneath their thick skin. Their roots had burst through the earth, so parched they had shriveled, opening their vaults to the heat; giving up.

I heard a magpie squawking, feathers flashing silver in the three o'clock sun, its black beak combing the ground, watching with small, dark, beady eyes for anything unlucky enough to cross its path. Looking down, I saw car tracks, slender valleys in the earth. People were here, I thought. Perhaps my relentless search was not in vain.

I kept tramping on, down the lonely road. A deep scar, a reminder that even in nature's domain human civilization still holds its iron fist tight. I felt a bead of thirst boiling up in my throat, threatening to overtake me. A cactus came within my view, a small, young one. I broke one of the limbs off and peeled off the outer skin, supple; it had not yet learned how harsh life can be.

I had thought that it would be so easy when they said, "Get to the other side." I had been so naive, thinking I could do the unthinkable, cross this small desert alone. I had already walked through five twilights, and the desert still cascaded on



Ayla Schultz, 13
Brooklyn, New York



Alexandra Carr, 13
Brooklyn, New York

in front of me. A roiling carpet going on and on into infinity.

Darkness started to come with unexpected swiftness. It climbed up the ladder of the sky, took hold of the sun, and swallowed it. I heard rustling beside me, animals were coming out. The foxes emerged with ears almost twice the size of their heads, rusty brown fur swaying with each step, fine, like the things you might find in high-end boutiques. I heard an owl hoot in the distance, far away, coming in for the kill.

I found an old hollow in a burnt-out tree, struck years ago. It looked like twisted dreams, aged, gone sour. I saw something skittering over a rock in front of me in the waning sun. A gecko, brown with spikes upon its back. Even small insignificant creatures needed to protect themselves. I had heard about them on the television when I was little, on a show about the Wild West. I cringed under my blanket in my mother's bed whenever I saw them, scared that they would gobble me whole. I now saw that they fit inside one of my worn-out shoes.

Settling down to sleep, the sand filling in the spaces between my toes, coating my sweaty feet, I dreamt odd snippets of dreams. They always ended right before they were done. I woke up more tired than when I had first laid down on the sand in which I was drowning.

I looked out and saw that the splatter-painted sunset of the night before had disappeared, and a softly blended sunrise had taken its place. The red and orange swirled together so that it looked as if

the whole world was cracking open, coming out of its shell and being set free. I felt the cool morning dew settling on my skin, I knew this moisture would not last for long. Soon the sun would drink every last drop that we mortal animals so desperately held in our clutches and leave us with only the memory of the beads of dampness.

I started to walk again, the red rocks building up beside me, enclosing me in a natural box. Cliffs spiraled out of nowhere, rough, like something that a three-year-old would make out of a lump of clay.

I kept on walking, sweat dripping into my eyes. Heat was rolling over me, one excruciatingly slow wave at a time. I felt my whole body growing heavy, but I dragged myself on, that driving fear inside of me, pushing me onwards, fear of being forgotten, dying out here where nobody would care that I was gone. I felt the callouses on my feet rubbing against my shoes, restless jolts of pain, sharp reminders with each step as to how little resilience I had left. I had run out of water this morning. My thoughts started to blur together.

My steps were faltering, I felt I could no longer go on when I looked down and saw that the car tire tracks had grown fresher, more defined. I was getting closer to habitation. Maybe my journey was almost over and help was at hand.

A dark silhouette rose upon the horizon, a misshapen blot steadily getting closer every step I took. The blotch took on the form of a house. I saw it with a

peculiar clarity—all its details are etched in my mind even now. It was the kind of house you would see in an old western film, the whitewash on the porch faded from the beating sun. It had withered away, like so much else in this barren land. There were old wooden columns supporting a cracked, pale gray roof. A few of the shingles had been lost, fallen away. They had left empty sockets, eyes, staring up at the ever-cloudless sky.

The house itself was made of sandstone, frayed away in some places. The air had warped the crumbly red rock, carving it into the faint shape of a smile echoed in the curved treads of the rocking chair that rested on the porch. Its soft wood slowly bumped, swaying in an invisible breeze. The old, loose fabric, printed with a faded pattern of running horses, was coming up off of the cushion. Billowing, it trapped air inside.

The door opened with a faint scratching noise, soft sand being thrown across the already filled porch. An old woman came out, red hair streaked with gray. It had fallen loose, glimmering across her shoulders. She was wearing a sleeveless dress, flower petals scattered on the cloth of her skirt. Strewn with a deliberate, yet carefree hand, they looked as if they were being blown, tossing and turning in a gentle summer breeze.

She said hello to me, her musical voice echoing across the vast, empty, rocky plain. Her words bounced off the red

rock, rising up from the dessert floor, scaring the barely hidden magpies into flight. Their glossy black beaks and white wings fluttered up from the hot earth.

She asked me to come inside, and, dreamlike, my blistered feet started to walk.

**Maybe my journey
was almost over and
help was at hand.**

I stepped in and saw the soft light, fluttering slowly through the creamy air. The harsh dessert sun flew in through the windows and was instantly calmed. It turned from its hot, angry self to a creature that you would want to im-

merse yourself in. Sit in and read forever, forget time, be happy in your little window of light. There were old armchairs scattered around the room, with permanent indents from years of habitation. Dips in the brightly colored fabric. A reminder that someone lived in that magical house.

The air smelled like cinnamon, a joyful fragrance. Like the time when I was three and threw cookie dough on the ceiling for fun. My mother came in and dread lodged itself in my throat, stopping me from breathing for a second. She picked up a bit of dough, stared at me for a moment, then threw it onto the wall herself. Laughing, saying all the while that life was so constraining and you have to remember to let it all loose sometimes, otherwise you will suffocate under the weight of it all.

After mindlessly quenching my thirst from the cool jug of water the lady hand-



There was a small table by the side of the bed. On it was a small glass statue of a dragon.

ed to me, sensing my desperate need, and eating some of the cinnamon bread, I walked upstairs, the staircase creaking delicately underfoot, cleaving the silence. I felt the polished wood underneath my fingers, soft and silky after the days in the rough sand. I got upstairs and opened the door into my room. It led me into a space that was not large by any standards, but not small either. A perfect balance of the two. There was a small four-poster bed in the center of the room, its frame arching up to the ceiling. The walls were painted a soft blue-gray color, the color of a sky just after a rain-storm. There was a small table by the side of the bed. On it was a small glass statue of a dragon. It was sleeping with one eye open, as if proclaiming that even in sleep it would protect you from all of the evils of the outside world.

I was there for seven days, healing from the days spent walking in the harsh desert expanse, when I reluctantly decided that it was time for me to leave. It was hard to detach myself from the protection of the old lady and the cool shelter of her house. She told me that there was a town a few miles away from here and sketched a map of a shortcut that would get me there in no time. Before I left, she slipped the sleeping dragon into my pocket for luck on my journey. I hoped, in a strange way, that the dragon would protect me from the relentless sand that was slowly encroaching upon everything


around me, even as I stepped outside.

I stepped outside, even though it was late in the day the sun was still burning. It glared down at the earth with a fiery passion, there was no doubt that nature was in charge. It seemed like I had been walking for hours when I felt the edges of my vision go foggy. I felt myself fall, softly hitting the loose red sand below, it flew up in a dusty cloud around me.

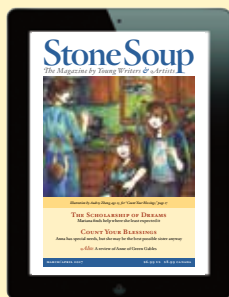
I awoke to the sound of voices and faces staring down at me. I looked around, I was in someone's living room. Out the window I saw the roiling sand,

an old enemy waiting patiently to make its next move. "The house," I whispered. "I was in a house. I stayed there for seven days. An old woman lived there. She said that this town was a few miles from there."

A soft face whispered. "We found you a few days ago, lying in the shortcut path to our town. We wondered how you had found it—very few people know of this route. It is not on any map. You had fainted, you have been drifting in and out of consciousness ever since. I have been out into the desert so many times, there are no houses out there."

The dragon, I thought. I reached into my pocket and found it bare. I looked over at my nightstand and saw the sleeping toothy smile staring back at me. It was there, lying with its tail under its head, slowly sleeping, protecting me from the dangers of the world, just outside the window. 

"The house,"
I whispered.
"I was in a house."



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— *The Editors*

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