



StoneSoup

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StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting
creative kids around the world*

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Editor's Note

Friends! “Without them,” as Neel Rangan writes in his poem “Dreamland,” “we would have the most boring sleep.” Even when they bring us pain, as in the friends nearly broken up by political differences in the story “Red and Blue,” the other people in our life give our life life. I hope the stories in this issue will inspire you to think and write about the incredible friends in your life—human, animal, or mineral. I also hope that when you're done reading this issue you go to our website and check out our new (and lively!) Book Reviews section to help you select books for your summer reading list!

Sincerely,

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On the cover:
'Red Fern,' photography

by Hannah Parker, 12
South Burlington, VT

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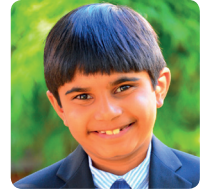


I love my mother
My true mother
I smack my feet
Against her sandy skin
Hot or cold
I don't care
I do it every day

You do it too
Sometimes
To get exercise
But I do it for fun
To love her
To hug her
To roll around on her lap
And laugh.

Dreamland

by Neel Rangan, 9
Palo Alto, CA



There once was a land.
So far and fine,
Full of dreams and thoughts.
The place people came when they dreamed,
the place people came when they slept.
So far and so high that no one could reach.
And yet if you close your eyes, you are there!

The creator created it
So man could dream,
He is long gone but his memory still lingers,
To us he is known as god!

The people there live only to give you dreams.
Their life is a job much like in theatre,
They act out your dreams,
They make you happy,
Without them we would have the most boring sleep.



The House in the Willows



by Nicole Qian, 13
Auckland, NZ

Friends and Footprints

When Melody's brother goes missing, she's forced to venture into the creepiest house in her town

It was precisely 3:27 am, and Melody Campbell was sitting cross legged by the beach, having stealthily snuck out of the house due to insomnia. It wasn't a public beach with mobs and mobs of vacationers and gaudy umbrellas that made your eyes ache when you looked at them too long—it was more like a huge cove along the Atlantic coast, private to only Melody's family and their neighbors. In fact, Melody rarely saw anybody out there but herself, and of course the bottlenose dolphins. There was no particular reason for Melody's insomnia; it just happened some nights. But the Cove always seemed to help with that. The sound of the gentle night's waves tamed her restlessness, the humming breeze helped her to think, and the sand, cool from the shade of nighttime, was a welcome difference to the stuffiness of sharing a small room. By now, Melody's eyelids were heavy and she was struggling to keep them open. Just as she turned away from the lulling waves, she caught something in her peripheral vision. Stifling a yawn, Melody turned back and blearily took a second look.

What she saw astonished her.

Footprints.

At first she thought they might be her own, but a closer inspection proved otherwise. Then she noticed the next thing. The footsteps led right into the water—and never back out. Scanning the ocean front, Melody didn't see any signs of a human disturbance. The churning waves crashed on smooth sand, and behind the surf, the ocean was glassy smooth. The footprints must have been fresh, the bottoms still filled with tiny pools of water.

Eventually exhaustion won her over and forced her to turn back to the house. At the front porch, Melody took one last glance at the Cove and the footprints, only to find she couldn't even see them anymore. *Maybe it was just a trick of the moonlight*, she thought doubtfully. *Or perhaps I was just dreaming the whole thing.* She went into the house, silently shutting the door behind her, and crept into the room she shared with her little brother Harmony (her parent's bad idea of a joke.) The moon shone through a crack in their curtains, forging a path onto his

by Samantha Abrishani, 12
McLean, VA



face. For a second, she stared at him lovingly. His shaggy blonde hair was strewn about his pillow, those plump little-kiddish cheeks were littered with golden freckles illuminated by the moonlight, and his lips were curled into a quirky smile, perfectly reflecting his sweet nature. And then she was stumbling into her bed, pulling her sheets around her, and falling asleep, dreaming of mysterious footprints leading into the ocean...

Melody woke up to Harmony banging out a lively (and very out of tune) song on the piano downstairs. On second thought, it probably wasn't a real song. Her little brother was indeed a... creative... composer. However, nobody in the Campbell family had the heart to tell him how he really sounded. Any headaches or earaches were carefully hidden. At first she screwed her eyes shut, trying to close off the sound and fall back asleep. And then it hit her with the force of a pummeling wave, one of the freezing ones you get when you first run into the water, one that soaks you through and makes your breath hitch up in surprise. Everything that happened last night was recalled, and suddenly she didn't feel so tired. Leaping out of bed, she dragged a comb through her honey blonde hair, changed, and rushed into the bathroom to perform the quickest brush-your-teeth-while-washing-your-face procedure mankind has ever seen.

"I'm running out, but I'll be back

soon!" shouted Melody to her mom over the commotion of the piano as she scooped up a pancake and folded it into her palm. Her mom nodded and sent her a thumbs up signal, not even bothering to try raising her voice above the chaos. Slipping on her flip-flops, Melody sprinted out the door of the cute gray house and ran around to the back, stuffing the pancake into her mouth. She's always thought she must be one of the luckiest girls in the world, to have a beach for her backyard. Melody raced to the shore, golden-speckled chocolate eyes probing the sand for a trace, any trace, of the footprints she thought she had seen the night before... And there, to the left, a trail of faint imprints that just defined footprints leading into the water. There still weren't footprints leading out of the water. So she hadn't imagined it, she wasn't crazy. Someone or something had definitely been here last night, had definitely walked right into the water and never came back out again. Most kids would have been scared when they figured that out, but Melody wasn't like most kids. She was intrigued, curious, pulled into the mystery, the mystery of the footprints.

When she got back to the house, Melody was relieved that the piano abuse had finally stopped. Melody's mom smiled knowingly at her, one of the smiles moms can give you when they know just what you're thinking at that moment.

"Don't tell him, but I was relieved Harmony decided to go play in the

back with you and got off of that poor piano." Wait. There was something wrong with that sentence, but Melody couldn't quite put her finger on it. Oh. Her eyes widened, lips parting slightly. She looked at her mom. "What, honey?"

"Harmony. He- he wasn't in the back. When did he leave the house?"

"About five minutes ago," volunteered her dad, looking up from his copy of the paper, eyebrows creased in worry. "If he went back to the Cove, you would have seen him." They all exchanged glances. They knew how quickly Harmony's little blond head moved from one thing to another— he might have started out intending to join Melody, but by the time he left the house, had a different destination in mind. He might get hurt on the way, or get lost. There was a Campbell family rule that you didn't go anywhere other than the Cove without a buddy. Obviously, Harmony wouldn't mean to break this rule, but he was only five years old. There was a period of dead silence, concern shining through all of their faces. Melody was the first to act. Shoving her feet in her flip-flops again, she turned to her parents.

"I'll go and check out a couple of places for him. You two stay here in case he comes back before I reach him." Without waiting for an answer, Melody jumped out the door and began to jog away from the house, trying to tame her panic. Sure, Harmony was the annoying piano banger and always wanted her to play cars with

him, (something Melody detested) but he was still her little brother, and of course she loved him. Harmony wasn't at the rock, a gargantuan boulder the Campbell siblings often went to climb and sit on the very top. He wasn't at the picnic table, a small wooden table in the middle of the woods. And he wasn't in the local supermarket, in which he liked to admire the delicately adorned fresh-baked cupcakes and cookies.

"Mrs. Blake, have you seen Harmony anywhere?" asked Melody, out of breath, to one of their kind neighbors. She had older kids in high school.

"No, I haven't. Has he gone missing?" Her eyebrows lifted up to her hairline. "Poor little dear." Melody wasn't sure if Mrs. Blake was referring to her or Harmony.

"It's alright, I'll find him. Thanks." She turned and jogged away. There was no place else she could think of looking for the little boy. Melody had asked most of her neighbors if they had seen Harmony, and though their answers were sympathetic, they were all the same.

By now Melody was freaking out, ready to race back to her house and announce, breathless, that it was time to call the police. Her sweet little brother was gone.

But what was that, over there? Behind that house? She could have sworn a swatch of golden hair just whizzed by. Holding her breath in anticipation, Melody burst around the side of the old brick house and, just



Light in the Dark



by Hannah Parker, 12
South Burlington, VT

as she thought it must be, there was Harmony!

"Harmony!" At first, that was all Melody could get out. Her sides were heaving from her frantic dash around the neighborhood, and her knees felt weak with relief. And then she realized that he was signalling something to her, smashing a finger against his lips and raising his eyebrows in a hopeful plea.

"Wha—?" Melody began to ask. Harmony jabbed a thumb towards the house.

It was, as she had noticed earlier, a brick house. The gutters, that must have once been white, were stained an ugly brown, like coffee stains on an old, musty book. It was a spider paradise; every wedge was thickly woven with glistening silver strands of cobwebs. "Ugh." Melody moved a step away from the house. Then she realized exactly whose house it was. Stifling a gasp, she stared with steadily widening eyes at Harmony. "Explain. Now." she whispered, pulling him down the side of the house to the ground. "Why are we at the crazy old—I mean, why are we at Ms. Jillian's house?"

"I was trying to see if Ms. Jillian really does eat spiders for her breakfast, like Todd from school says," Harmony whispered. "Honest, Melly, I just forgot to go back!" Harmony called Melody 'Melly' because when he was a baby, he couldn't say her whole name.

"It's forgot." Melody corrected sharply, still annoyed from her scare. "And that crazy—I mean, Ms. Jillian doesn't eat spiders. Honestly, Harmony, I'm really disappointed in you."

Normally, this wouldn't be something an older sister tells her little brother—that's more for the parents to do. But being the oldest and often in charge of babysitting Harmony when her parents were out, Melody had kind of stepped into the role.

"But she isn't even in there!"

"All the better." Melody snapped, taking Harmony by the hand and turning to their own house.

"No, her lights are on."

"Then she just forgot to turn them off."

"Melly," he said, in a voice that was beyond his age and clearly suggested she was being ridiculous. "We should go in—"

"Absolutely not."

Ms. Jillian, with her wispy white hair, deep wrinkles, very pale eyes, and shaky, wizened hands had always turned Melody away.

"You are scared." He stated, matter of factly.

"I, I..." For a second, Melody stuttered and muttered, trying to find a suitable answer to this challenge. "Fine. Just don't be rude, don't say anything, just stand next to me and disappear," she said grumpily, taking a breath and knocking on the front door like a soldier reporting to duty.

"But, Melly, if I'm standing next to you, how can I—"

"Harmony," she said warningly. He shrugged and smiled his little dimpled grin. They waited. And waited. Melody knocked again. It seemed like nobody was home. "No one's home, Harmony." She told the little boy. But Melody's reasonable side was pushing out her fantasies of the skeletal old woman. She might be hurt in her house,

If Melody had any doubt about Ms. Jillian being a little crazy, it was gone.

needing help. Ms. Jillian lived alone. She may have fallen. Nobody knew how old she was, but by the looks of it, she was the oldest resident. "If the door's unlocked, we'll just go in and see if she's in there. You're right, it's very unusual for her to leave her lights on when she isn't home." Most times Melody ran into the old woman, Ms. Jillian gripped her wrists with her knobbly, quivering hands and informed her all about how much electricity was wasted when you left lights on. "I remember when so many electric light bulbs in every home was a privilege," she'd tell Melody, "we never took it for granted. If only the world now thought the same thing..." She would shake her head forlornly, wisps of white falling out of her dark hood. "Good day, child." And like that, Ms. Jillian would be disappearing into the dreary fog. No, it would be most uncharacteristic for her to leave them on. Which meant she must be in trouble.

When Melody opened the door and pushed her way in, the first thing she did was see was Ms. Jillian, hunched on the floor in the corner. The second thing she did was think, *why in the world did I bring Harmony in with me?* Backing out the door with the little boy behind her, she turned around and faced him, trying to clear the fright from her features.

"Stay here. Don't move." She turned into the house again, shut the door, and went uncertainty for Ms. Jillian.

"M-Ms. Jillian?" She stammered, staring at the shaking old lady. She might be having a seizure, or a heart attack, or something else that was just as horrible... *Think clearly*, she reminded herself. "Ms. Jillian, can you hear me?" she asked putting a hand on the back of the black coat. She went in front of Ms. Jillian and saw she was clutching a pendant around her neck.

"Campbell... you are the Campbell girl..."

"I am the Campbell girl. It's me, Melody. Are you okay? Are you hurt?" Ms. Jillian blinked, eyebrows knit up in confusion.

"Hurt...? No. He is gone, dear child. Gone. I knew it, when I found him sitting by the beach. I knew he was magical..." she paused, bottom lip trembling. "Yes, I should have known, I should have. It was stormy. Mystical things are brought up by great storms..."

"Magical? Mystical?" If Melody had any doubt about Ms. Jillian being a little crazy, it was gone. "Please, let me go get help."

"No, no, no." she gripped Melody's arms in a vice-like way with her bony fingers that were too strong for her age. "He was huddled on the beach, gasping for water, moaning for water." Now it was Melody's eyebrows that were knit up in confusion. She gave a gentle tug on her arms, but Ms. Jillian gripped them fast. "So I took him to my house and put him in my bathtub."

"In your... bathtub?" It didn't make

sense. Nothing made sense. "A boy? A human?"

"A human on the outside, but a beautiful creature on the inside." Now that both of her hands were occupied, Melody could focus on the swinging pendant. It was glass, a sleek, gray bottlenose dolphin. But no... the crazy notion didn't make sense. Ms. Jillian's eyes seemed to be snow white and glowing in the dim, flickering lighting of her house. Those eyes probed Melody's own brown speckled eyes, trying to make her understand.

"A dolphin?" Melody breathed. Ms. Jillian's eyes were focused on something far away, and her chin barely bobbed up and down.

"Yes, he was an angel of the sea, never destined to live on this, this dry land. So he left, he left this earth and went to his roots, within the waves and among the other angels." Ms. Jillian's grip on Melody's wrists loosened, and she broke free of it completely. She felt like she was so close to understanding Ms. Jillian's story, she felt like there was just one puzzle piece missing. Going into the small bathroom, she saw towels strewn about the floor, all soaking wet. The tub was still sloshing full of water.

"So..." Melody tried to understand, walking back to Ms. Jillian. "So you found this kid a long time ago on the beach in the middle of a storm and brought him back to your house? You cared for him and put him in your bathtub because he needed water to live... and then one night he just left?" Speaking the words, she felt like she was speaking another language. This was too preposterous to believe. But

Ms. Jillian nodded, a small tear making its way down her wrinkled old face.

And in a way, it made sense. Ms. Jillian had already kept to herself, but when Melody was little, maybe Harmony's age, it wasn't unusual to see her walking around the town. That stormy night must have changed everything.

"Yesterday night." Yesterday night!! That was the night she saw the fresh prints, the night they went in and never came out. The mystery was slowly unfolding, the truth starting to shine. And the startling realization only seemed to prove Ms. Jillian's point.

"Well, then... he's where he belongs. You can't keep a... dolphin spirit in your tub, Ms. Jillian. Surely you know that." She put a comforting arm hesitantly on Ms. Jillian's shoulder.

"I know that." She repeated numbly, nodding slightly. "I knew it, all along. Knew that one day..." Her voice puttered out and eventually lapsed into a period of lengthy silence.

"Are you okay now?" As soon as she said it, Melody mentally face-palmed herself. It was a bad question—she had suffered a loss, for a period of time the creaky old brick house had seemed not as creaky and old to Ms. Jillian herself, because she was sharing it with someone. Someone she had obviously loved. Apparently Ms. Jillian thought it was bad question too, because she ignored it.

"I know what people say. About me." She said. She wasn't speaking in that whispery frail voice anymore, and she almost seemed... well, normal. "I know they think I'm crazy. I know they think I stay in my house all day long doing nothing... I don't have any

family anymore. I'm the last." Ms. Jillian turned to Melody with a sad smile that made Melody struggle to keep a tear or two in her tear ducts. "The folks here are nice. They bring me things sometimes, and greet me nicely when I'm out of the house. But it's not the same as having someone, as having a friend. And for a while, I had that friend. But not anymore."

"I don't really, either." Melody allowed herself to admit.

"But you're a beautiful, friendly little girl... surely you have a buddy from school?"

"Not really. And it's summer now. Everyone that goes to my school lives closer to it, and I live the farthest away. It's kind of like I'm an alien from another world, the places are so different."

"Then. We should get to know each other a little more." Ms. Jillian suggested hesitantly, smiling and looking decades younger. Melody smiled back, thinking that it wasn't such a bad idea.

Melody woke up early a few weeks later and clambered down the stairs, grabbing a piece of toast and waving to her mother over the thumping of piano keys and wrong notes. She ran around back to the Cove and made her way to the North side of it, where it was rocky and offered many ledges to sit down on.

"Hey, wait up!" she called to her friend who was in front of her, steadily making her way to the same spot. They had made plans the other day to meet up here. The lady turned around, grinning. Her white hair was braided loosely over her shoulder, and she was

wearing a light blue shirt that brought out the pale color of her unique eyes.

"Did you wake up to Harmony's piano skills again this morning?" She asked jokingly. Melody groaned.

"I sure did!" She replied, catching up to her. As the friends sat side by side on the rocky ledge, talking, Melody smiled to herself and thought, *What a huge change one friend can make.* And she was right. And then as the sun began to rise, casting beautiful colors onto the waves below, a dolphin leapt out of the ocean and slapped his tail onto the surface of the water, concentric circles spreading. The lady reached out a hand and caught a droplet that had spiraled up to them.

Ms. Jillian and Melody turned and smiled at each other.



Green Envy



by Delaney Slote, 12
Missoula, MT

What's inside my messy head?

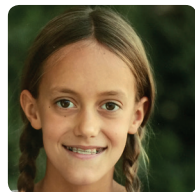


by Tommy Swartz, 12
McLean, VA

What's inside my messy head?
Being funny
And when I'm dead.
Things I should've said
Done and said.
And always stress
About things lost
And of my actions
What will be the cost.
Was that joke
Weird or funny?
Or what I'll do outside
If tomorrow's sunny.
So what's inside my messy head?
And the day's
Shortening length.
Being a star
And messed up jokes
That I try to tell quietly
And how to escape
Authority's yoke.

A New Comfort

by Sonja ten Grotenhuis, 10
Piedmont, CA



Ding!! The school bell rings as loud as a lion would roar. I sprint out of the old crusty building, rushing along the sidewalk, leaving the chipped blue schoolhouse behind me. I only slow down when I know Patricia isn't following me.

Patricia is the star of everything she does. She executes lovely, fake smiles. She is perfect, and is the number one student in all of her classes, and every sport she does by far. She settled, after much deliberation, on making me her new best friend.

One day as I was walking home from school, the grey sidewalk beneath my feet felt bare and as soon as Patricia skipped by, I knew why.

"So did you hear the news that the school cleared the mural off of the sidewalk?" Patricia beamed expectantly.

"No. I thought that mural had been there for years." I replied.

"Yes, but that doesn't matter, they picked me to choose a team of six people to help me paint the new mural. Isn't that great!"

I shrugged and looked back down at the uncovered sidewalk.

As soon as I spot our bright new house, I rush up the stairs, through

the screen door and into my room, slamming the door and locking it. I fall down on my bed, legs splayed out in front of me.

Summer is the best time of the year. The sun shines down on me as popsicles drip on my bare feet. I stroll home from the pool, still wet from swimming; my best friend Maria skips beside me and we talk and laugh together. My schedule is always free and I never have any boring camps to do, so it's just Maria and I.

"Maddy, I have a surprise for you!" I hear my mom's voice call, smooth and sweet. I slowly sit up and open my door expecting another book or baseball cap. Instead my mom is standing, smiling like a clown.

"What is it?" I ask, expecting something worse than books.

"I signed you up for bike camp! Isn't that great? Patricia will be there so you'll have a friend, and I'm sure that you'll make new ones." She said, beaming even more.

I tensed up, realizing what she'd just said. "Mom, I don't know how to ride a bike." I replied, my voice scratchy and weak.

"It starts tomorrow," she said, apparently not paying much attention

Patricia is annoyingly perfect — and she's decided to make Maddy her best friend

to me.

I close my door quietly, explaining that, "I have so much summer homework!" Instead I spend the next four hours trying to figure out how to ride a bike on the Internet.

Dinner was a depressing sight. My sister, Georgia, texting on her phone, mom planning carpools with Patricia's mom on her computer, dad tapping constantly on his iPad, trying to email his friends, and me, sitting and wondering if I'd survive the next day.

"So are you super excited? I am! I've been riding bikes since I was five!" chatters Patricia.

I sit on the neat, perfect leather seat in Patricia's minivan trying not to puke from the scent of mint tea and banana all mixed in one. Patricia stares at me expectantly, her small blue eyes like needles piercing into my skin.

"Um sure." I reply. "I've been riding since I was three," I coughed, apparently allergic to the lie.

Her mouth fell open, and I could see her perfect shiny white teeth, gleaming like diamonds.

Once at the arena, Patricia's mom waves her goodbye, not bothering to hug or kiss her. I wheel my new green bike to the starting point, where eight other people are standing. I fasten on my helmet and climb on the seat. I feel unstable and unsafe. Patricia mounts her pink bike with ease and sits on it comfortably, waiting for our instructions.

A man with spiked blue hair and bright green eyes walks up to us. He stands in front of the rainbow of bikes. "I am Sebastian." He booms, in a voice like thunder. "Let us start our camp

with a little competition, shall we?"

I hear whooping and hollering from a gang of boys, and I gulp nervously.

"The first person to reach the finish line," he points across the track, "will win," he finishes.

My arms are shaking and quivering so much that I can't hide it from Patricia, who looks over suspiciously at me.

"Ready... Set.... Go!" Sebastian cries, waving a red flag in the air.

My legs start sweating, as I start pedaling. Instantly I'm behind everyone. Shaking I feel myself falling, then crash!! It happened. I embarrassed myself in front of everyone. I look up to see a concerned pair of brown eyes looking at me. I sit up and recognize the girl as the one sitting on her bike next to Patricia at the starting point.

"Hi. I just wanted to see if you're okay," she says.

I push myself up on my bloody elbows, trying not to cry. She was probably one of those professional bike riders who knew how to ride when she was 5.

"I'm fine," I reply, yanking my new, very damaged bike up.

The girl has short wavy brown hair and dark brown eyes. Her smile is kind and protective, the way Maria would smile at me. She grasps my hand and helps me up. "Thanks." I mumble. She nods and replies, "You're welcome." Then she mounts her bike and pedals away.

I suddenly realize that she has the same jerky movements, the same quivering legs as me. I rush toward her

and say, "Wait! What's your name?"

She jumps off her brown bike and says, "Rosie, what's yours?"

I catch my breath and say, "Maddy."

We exchange smiles before Sebastian blows his whistle, crying, "Thomas wins!"

I glance back to see one of the boys standing at the finish line, screaming, "I won! I won!" at the top of his lungs. I suck in my breath, trying not to cry from embarrassment.

Patricia walks over to me and demands, "So, you've been riding since you were three?"

I gulp and reply, "Well not really."

Patricia groans and jogs back to the starting point, her pink bike trailing behind. "As if she hasn't told any lies," I thought.

Then I silently wheel my bike back to the starting line, and sit on it, ashamed of myself. As if hearing my thoughts Rosie put a reassuring arm around my shoulder. At that moment, I knew we were friends.



Blue Heron



Ostriches

by Sierra Glassman, 12
Watsonville, CA



The Mouse Who Played Keyboard

There once was a mouse
who played the keyboard.

When he played at night
the cats came out.

The rats came out.

The owls came out!

The Lion and the House Cat

In the African sun there was a lion
and the house cat.

One day the cat told the lion
to have a race.

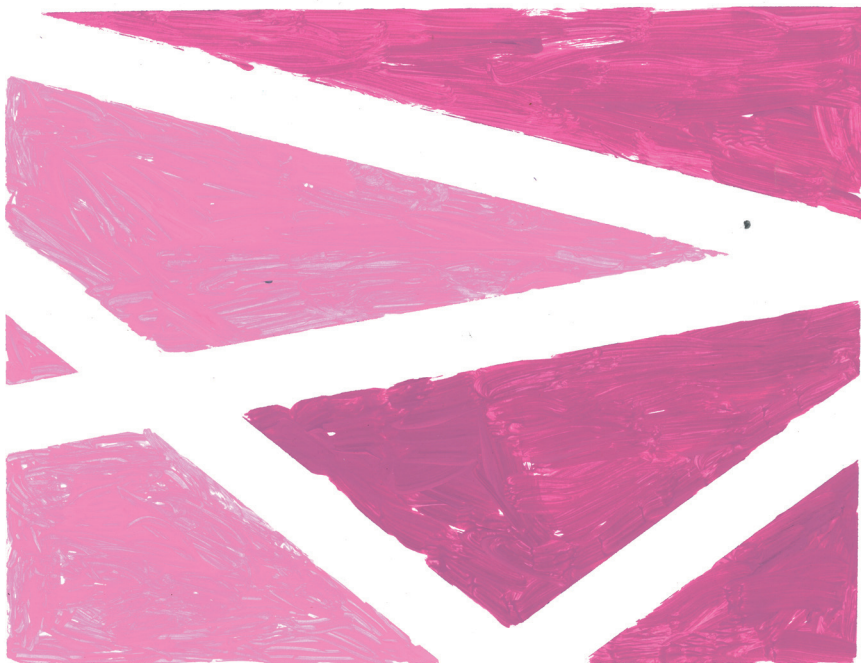
So the race started.

They ran so fast
a rock fell on the king of France.

The lion won the race!

by Isaiah Albro, 7
Sherman Oaks, CA





Pink



by Abhi Sukhdial, 9
Stillwater, OK

The Red and Blue Thread

The divisive 2016 election threatens to break the bond between two best friends

Stella Addle pushed through the school building door, a wave of sound hitting her. Kids yelling and laughing, smiling and scowling. The air felt weighty; the anger, the confusion, pushing down on her shoulders, feeling heavy as bricks. Stella lugged her backpack to her locker. She stared at the lime green paint, then fiddled with her lock and pulled open the locker door. She dropped her backpack on the bottom of the locker and pulled out her math books and her calculator, which was covered in leftover heart stickers from Valentine's Day. Usually seeing the stickers made her smile, but today she felt as though nothing could make her lips turn upward. This was a tragedy, an absolute tragedy. Forty five presidents and none of them had been women! Hillary Clinton should have won, she should have been the first woman president, but that stupid Donald Trump had to ruin everything! Stella thought as she slammed her locker shut with gusto. November 8th 2016 is going to be the worst day of my life! Stella walked to her homeroom, her legs feeling unsteady, her whole world feeling out of balance, broken.

Feeling dizzy, she sat down and scanned the room for Gabby while taking in the rest of the scene. Gabriella Carmann had been Stella's best friend since second grade. They did everything together; they had sleepovers and shared their deepest secrets with each other, they knew they could tease the other about their clothes and not offend them. They balanced each other out, Gabby was the flashy, stubborn, strong headed leader of the two, and Stella was the quieter, gentler one, keeping them away from heated drama. When Stella was around Gabby she felt a certain strength, a sense of courage that she didn't feel when she was alone, as if some of Gabby's confidence was magically seeping into her. For Gabby, Stella was the source of cool water that doused Gabby's flames, the flames that burned the same color as her orange hair. It was because of Stella that Gabby was starting to find some of that water in herself, way deep down, but still it was there.

Finally she saw her: Gabby walked into the classroom sporting a pair of gray hand-me-down sweatpants

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from her older sister Franny, short for Frances, and a purple t-shirt with a turquoise flower print. Her denim backpack hung over her shoulder and her long red hair was pulled into a tight ponytail. This was Gabby's usual look, so what surprised Stella was the smile that spread across Gabby's face. Stella knew Gabby and her family were Republican, but for some reason Stella never thought they would vote for Trump, or be happy if he won. Puzzled, Stella stood up and followed Gabby to her locker.

"Hey," Stella said leaning against one of the lockers.

"Morning," Gabby replied as she unpacked her backpack.

"So..." Stella said nodding slowly. Thoughts were racing through her mind; conversation usually came easy to the two of them, why was it hard now?

"What?" Gabby said. "What is it? What's wrong?"

You're happy.... Trump's our President-Elect.... Stella thought as she looked at the floor.

"If something's up, just tell me," Gabby slammed her locker shut and stared at her friend. "Just tell me. Please."

"It's just... you... are you glad Trump won?" Stella's face turned red with shame.

"Oh! Uh, yeah, I mean, I guess.... I mean my parents voted for him." *She thought we voted for Hillary? She knows we're Republican,* Gabby thought.

The bell rang and the hallways were filled with noisy sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Stella had math first period and Gabby had science.

"I got to go. See you later?" Gabby

asked.

"Sure," Stella said, and she turned and walked to math, wondering what had just happened.

Stella plopped down in her chair, feeling exhausted. Family dinners were an important part of the Addle household and usually Stella enjoyed them, especially on lasagna nights like these, but not tonight. Margaret Addle, Stella's mom, placed the lasagna on the table and sat down across from her husband. Usually, though it was only the three of them, the table buzzed with conversation, a light and fluffy happiness, almost as delicious as Mrs. Addle's cooking, hanging in the air. Tonight however, the air felt heavy and cold and the conversation that usually flowed easily, had vanished.

"Well, how was everyone's day?" Mr. Addle asked. His eyes were wide and he had an awkward smile. He began scooping lasagna onto plates.

"Where do I begin!?" Mrs. Addle rolled her eyes, looking generally annoyed. "Sarah and Megan were talking about the election during our lunch break, and guess what?" She put a fork full of lasagna into her mouth. Sarah and Megan were some of Mrs. Addle's coworkers.

"What?" Mr. Addle asked.

Stella looked back and forth between her parents, she could tell this was not a good "guess what."

"They both voted for Trump! Both of them!" Mrs. Addle was yelling now. "Women! Women voted for Trump! They're uneducated women, that's what they are!" She let out a heavy sigh. "Uneducated women," she said, shaking her head.

Stella stared at her mother. She had never seen her like this: yelling, looking close to tears, yet not sad.

"Margaret, please, calm down," Mr. Addle said putting a hand on his wife's hand.

Stella kept looking at her mother. Mrs. Addle's blue eyes looked foggy and gray. Her body shook with anger, but slowly as she got back her cool, the anger lessened and a sadness settled in. Her shoulders sagged and Stella noticed something she had never seen in her mother before: helplessness.

Suddenly a frightening thought came to Stella, and her parents conversation about taxes and broken printers at work became muffled and hard to hear. Gabby said her parents voted for Trump, and that includes her mom. Her mom is a woman... "Uneducated women," that's what Mrs. Addle had said. Did Stella's parents know Gabby's parents had voted for Trump? "Uneducated women..."

Stella climbed the stairs to her room, pulled open the door, and flopped down on her bed. No one made lasagna better than Mrs. Addle, but tonight it had tasted like cardboard.

"It's not like we got in a fight or anything," Stella said out loud, looking up at her ceiling fan as it slowly spun around, dust mites dancing in the air. Her light was off, the room covered in a giant shadow. "We're still friends. Why am I even worried about this? I mean, it's Gabby for Pete's sake!" She lay quiet for a minute, but her mind was still

racing along with her beating heart. *It's Gabby. An unbreakable friendship.* She closed her eyes, feeling tired.

Suddenly her eyes flicked open. She reached over to her nightstand and grabbed her cell phone. She sat up and leaned against her pillows, stretching her legs out and wiggling her toes. She pressed the home button on her phone and punched in her password. Then she pulled up her texts and created a new one. She was going to make up with Gabby. But what should she say? So many things were going through her head. She started to type.

Did your mom go to college?

She stared down at what she had written. Why did I write that? She wondered as her finger moved to the backspace button. It hovered there for a minute. Two minutes. Three minutes. Stella looked up at the ceiling. Before she had been confused at why this had happened, why Trump had won. Now she was startled and confused by her own words, her own actions. *What's wrong with me?* she thought looking back down at what she had typed.

Stella closed her eyes. This was all so messed up. She hit send.

Gabby's phone made its usual "bing" sound that meant she had gotten a text. She put down her pink mechanical pencil, which she was using to solve for x, and got up to check her phone. The text was from Stella.

Did your mom go to college?

Gabby looked up, shocked and confused. *Stella had written this? Why*

Did Stella's parents know Gabby's parents had voted for Trump?

would she ask something like that? My mom owns her own company. I think you need a college degree to do that, Gabby thought.

Of course.

She sent the text and settled back into her math homework, but no sooner had she sat down than her phone “binged” again.

R u mad at me?

Again Gabby was shocked. Stella? What was up with her friend? Gabby plopped down on her bed, not sure what to write. Was she mad at Stella? She was more confused than mad. And why did Stella think Gabby was mad at her? Gabby wanted to write back, but she couldn't find the words, so instead she wrote nothing.

Stella stood in front of the school building the next morning, scanning the parking lot for Gabby. She hadn't slept well; she had been too preoccupied when Gabby hadn't written back to her last text. Finally she spotted her. She waited for Gabby to walk over, but once she got close Stella suddenly felt shy; she looked down at her Star Wars shirt, hoping to find an old stain that she could focus on. But it was too late, Gabby was already there.

“Hi,” Gabby said, eyeing Stella suspiciously.

“Hi,” Stella said back, blushing.

“So last night, the texts that you sent... what was that about?” Gabby asked, looking Stella straight in the eye.

“I—” Gabby's green eyes were like hound dogs, viciously searching for the truth. “Gabby, I know your mom went to college. I don't know why I said it. It's just, my mom, she said—” Stella

faltered.

“She said what?” Gabby prompted. She felt a flame of anger start to burn inside her.

Guilty tears sprang into Stella's blue, unexpected eyes; she had never cried at school before. “She said that all the women who voted for Trump were... were uneducated women.”

Gabby was starting to get the picture. “So you thought my mom wasn't educated?”

“Gabby I know she's smart! I know!”

“Stella, if you didn't mean it then why did you send the text?”

“I don't know why! Okay!” Stella paused. “There's so much I don't know right now.”

“I get it, I get it,” Gabby said, rolling her eyes. “You're like half the country, uncertain and afraid. You think Trump is an idiot, just like you thought my mom was an idiot!”

“Gabby, I never said your mom was an idiot!”

“Just because you never said it doesn't mean you didn't think it!”

“But I didn't!” Stella insisted, she felt like she was being drowned by waves of regret.

“I always thought our political views would never alter our friendship, I guess I was wrong!” Gabby yelled.

Stella went silent. She stared at her neon orange and gray sneakers. She wanted to say that their political views didn't matter; she had been so sure about that, but now for some reason, they did seem to matter.

Gabby's chest heaved up and down, her heart pounding. “I got to go,” she said, turning toward the door.

Stella stared at her friend as she walked away. Tears crawled down Stella's cheeks; this was worse than Trump being President. She had known deep down that she could survive anything as long as she had Gabby, but now Gabby was out of reach, surrounded by her own bubble of anger. Usually when Gabby was mad, Stella could touch her shoulder, and talk to her and everything would be alright but now everything was blurred and out of place, and worst of all, Stella was alone.

Stella sat on her bed, cross legged. In front of her, fanned out, were all of her colored embroidery threads, and a tote bag. She held a safety pin in her hand. She pinned the safety pin to the tote bag as she looked down on her threads. Which colors should I use? She wondered. She knew Gabby liked purple, but her thoughts kept drifting back to the map they had looked at in social studies class before the election. The Democratic states, like California, were blue, and the Republican states, like Texas, were red. Stella picked up the bright red thread and the dark blue thread. She cut off long pieces of them and tied them to the safety pin. Then she began to make knots. Knot after knot, slowly but surely, a bracelet began to form. A friendship bracelet. Stella's mom had taught Stella how to make these friendship bracelets when she was eight, and her fingers had never forgotten. As Stella tied knots, tears of regret, and confusion slid down her face. Gabby had always been her shelter; now she was all alone, in her silent room and in the loud,

jumbled-up world. Going through life was like riding a rollercoaster: Gabby and Stella sat side by side, yelling with joy and fear, Stella squeezing Gabby's arm and never wanting to let go. Now they were riding in different rollercoaster cars, Stella squeezing the handlebar, realizing how high above the ground she was. Now she was yelling solely because she was afraid.

Finally, she was done. She tied off the end and untied the top from the safety pin. Then she tied the ends together to make it a circle. She laid the bracelet down on her dresser. Now all that was left was to deliver it.

Stella walked along the tiled school floor to Gabby's locker. It was the morning and kids started to pour into the hallway, carrying backpacks to lockers and talking about funny texts that had been sent the night before in the class group chats.

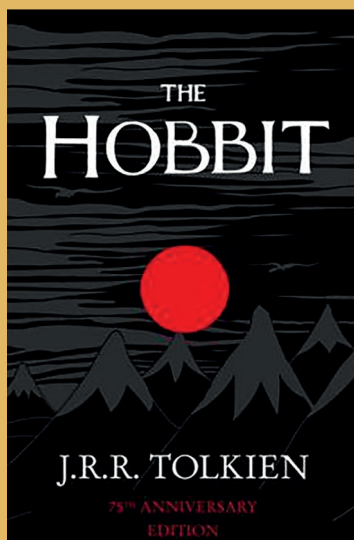
Stella stood in front of Gabby's locker, suddenly feeling small. She pulled the friendship bracelet she had made the night before off her wrist and gently ran her fingers over the thread. *Please Gabby, please come back to me*, she thought. She got out a lavender colored sticky note from her backpack and, leaning it against the lockers, wrote with black sharpie:

Love, Stella.

She folded part of the bracelet into the sticky note and folded over the sticky part so that the two were attached. Then she slipped the bracelet through one of the slits in Gabby's locker. She leaned her head against the locker door and putting a hand to the door whispered, "Please."

Book Review

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien;
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012; \$14.99



"In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit." J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, published in 1937, is a timeless tale of adventure worth reading over and over again. If you manage to pull open the green door that guards the cozy home inside, what do you see? Try to take the yellow brass knob placed picturesquely in the center. This door guards an adventurous tale of thirteen dwarves and a hobbit. The "unexpected party" sets off to reclaim the dwarves' treasure from Smaug "the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities". You creep inside this door and hear faint singing; Tolkien's poetry and songs fill this story with fun rhymes and longing hopes. Down the hall, in the kitchen, is Bilbo Baggins, a clever, courageous

and persistent hobbit. Farther inside the well-kept hobbit hole, you see lessons Bilbo learns along his journey. You look out the window, and in the distance you watch fourteen figures on horseback. Will the burglar and the dwarves reclaim their "long-forgotten gold"?

Whether you're on your way far over the Misty Mountains cold, chipping glasses and cracking plates, or maybe tra-la-la-lalling in the valley, Tolkien's dexterous poems and songs are sure to please for ages to come. The poems are either funny, longing or ingenious. They add an extra layer of description that makes one feel as if one is actually in Bilbo's parlor listening to the dwarves singing of the Lonely Mountain and the dragon's

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great greed that led to the destruction of Dale.

No hobbit is smarter, more stout-hearted and steadfast than Bilbo Baggins. Throughout the course of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is clever. For example, he rescued the dwarves when they had been captured by the Wood-Elves in Mirkwood. No one would have come up with the escape plan Bilbo thought of: saving the dwarves by way of barrel. But that is only one side of the Tookish hobbit. It takes courage to go on an adventure with thirteen strange, uncouth dwarves. For instance, Bilbo was brave and bright when he bested Gollum in the riddle contest while inside the dark, damp tunnels of the Goblin King. Lastly, Bilbo is persistent. Finding the keyhole when all the others had given up shows his sense of perseverance. All in all, Bilbo is valiant, quick-witted and never quits.

The books that have withstood time's test have lessons to teach. *The Hobbit* did, and still does, just that. Along his journey, the small hobbit, Bilbo, learns many lessons. Smaug's greed for gold and jewels lead the scarlet dragon to destruction. This teaches us not to live for ourselves alone. The theme of good versus evil teaches us to fight for what is right. The company's determination to succeed in their goal is admirable. This inculcates in us to never give up. The lessons learned in this valuable book

have endured.

As Bilbo said, or more rather, sang, roads do go ever on and on. Sometimes the road is made of difficult terrain, rocky and hard to climb; but sometimes the road is smooth; the sun is shining, and the sky is clear and blue. You stop short as you see your neighbor's hobbit holes—you're home! However, you notice something different. It isn't something you can hold in your hand, but something imprinted in your heart. What you find are clever songs; and an endearing character—Bilbo—who teaches you life lessons. You gently close the round door, smiling.

Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll. Every month we receive submissions from hundreds of 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.

Fiction

Nicholas Taplitz, 12
Asha Baudart, 13
Tudor Achim, 8
Jasmine Li, 12
Macy Li, 12
Molly Tulk, 13
Genevieve Gray, 10

Poetry

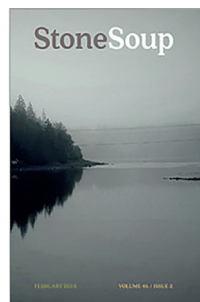
Max Cummins, 13
Anna Dolan, 12
Jayden Bolick, 10
Sophie Yu, 10
Arielle Kouyoumdjian, 9
Nandita S, 11

Art

Jaya Shankar, 11
John P. Anson, 7
Audrey Tai

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