

Caesar's Salad

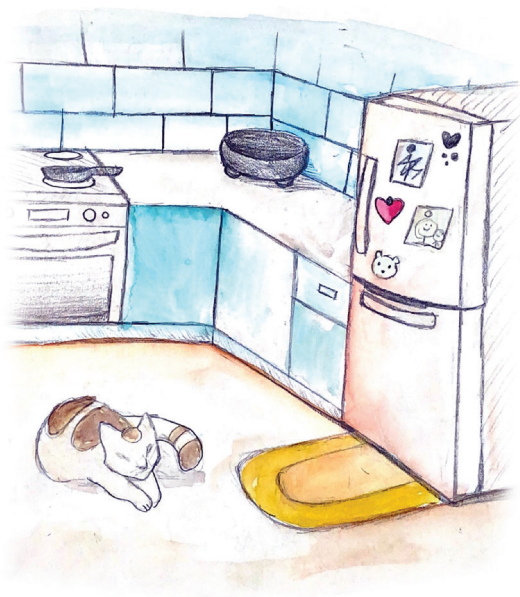
BY NICHOLAS GORTEZ

8th GRADE STATE WINNER

Sacred Heart School | Elaine Magni, Teacher
STANISLAUS COUNTY

Illustrated by: Inderkum High School

It is a crisp, chilly day. Then again, it's always crisp and chilly when you live in a refrigerator. This particular fridge is in the kitchen of a California home.



This fridge houses four shelves. These shelves are more than slabs of glass on which to store food. Each is home to a different type of produce.





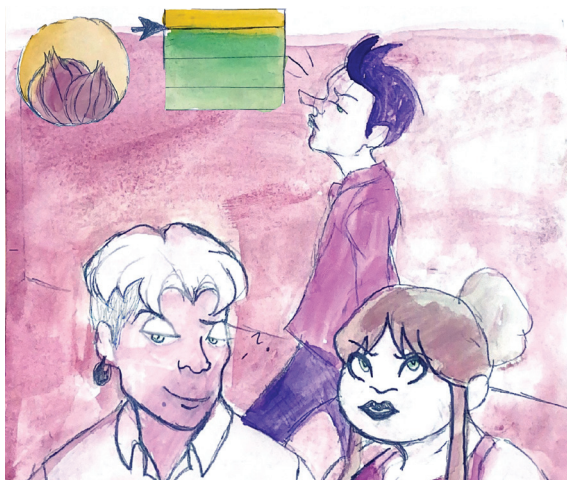
The bottom shelf hosts the rather introverted lettuce leaves. I guess it makes sense that they're shy and all, considering they're just tiny leaves before they start blooming and flowering.



Above them are the confident, some would say cocky, carrots from Kern County, where most of the nation's fresh carrots are grown. Ever since they found out that British aviators ate special carrots during World War II to overcome night blindness, they think they are better than everyone else.



Next shelf up is us tomatoes, the fun-loving residents of the fridge. By the way, my name's Roman, a Roma tomato. I'm from right here in California, our nation's top producer of processing tomatoes.



Residing above us all, on the top shelf are the onions. Nobody really knows much about them. They've always been too high and mighty to grace us with their presence, but it's gotten even worse since their U.S. consumption rate went up by 50% over the past twenty years. If you ask me, I think they just stink up the joint, I mean, what other vegetable has sulfuric compounds that make others cry? That's just messed up.



Those who live on each shelf acknowledge the existence of one another but never interact with anyone from a different shelf. Our personalities are too different. All of us are happy keeping to ourselves.

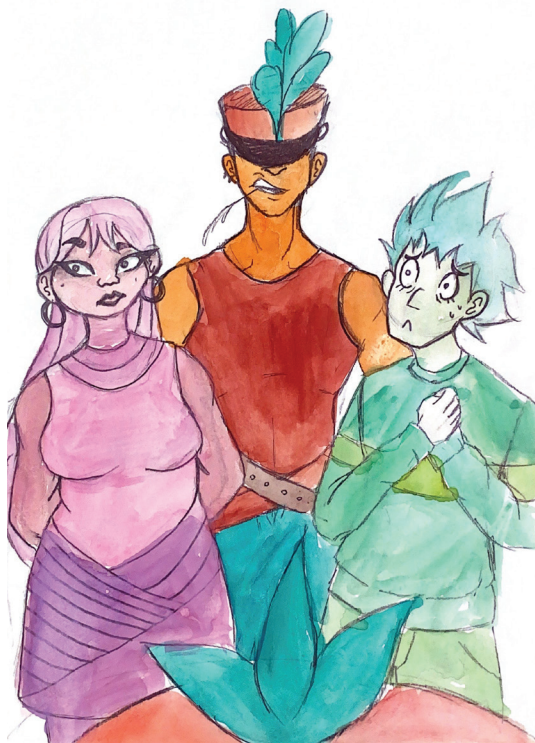
Then everything changed.

The owner of the house, Caesar, opens the refrigerator and pulls one of us from each shelf. Before I know what's going on, I am plunged into a wooden salad bowl so large that it's supported by four legs and sits in a corner. With me are a carrot, head of lettuce, and an onion.



We all stare uncomfortably at one another. Seemingly, nobody wants to speak, so I do.

“You’re all looking very fresh today,” I say, spitting out the first awkward thought that enters my mind.



“You, as well,” replies a stern-looking carrot. They are all so serious. It’s probably because they know that baby carrots are just regular carrots who happen to be skinny and start to mouth off and then get themselves peeled and then chopped into bits and pieces. The thought would scare me, too.



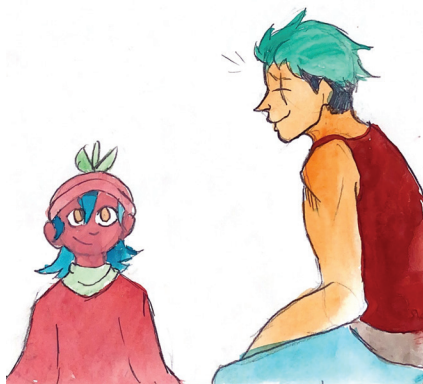
Farthest away stands the head of lettuce, who looks totally freaked out.

“Hi!” I say to him with a cheerful ring. “Would you like to come join the rest of us?”

“Okay,” he replies unsurely.

“Aren’t the rest of you freaking out?” asks the onion in quite an accusatory tone. “We’re stuck in a bowl with no chance of escape. A big bowl, I might add. One with nobody I can force into crying.”

“Well, you’re lucky I’m here,” I joke. “This would be an even more boring food-napping if I weren’t here.”



The carrot chuckles. This takes me by surprise; I never thought I’d see a carrot capable of showing emotion. After the early American colonists raised them between rows of tobacco to repel beetles, I thought carrots were all war-torn and traumatized.

“I guess you’re right,” the carrot agrees. “Better you than someone else.”

As we talk, we get along better than I thought was possible for residents of different shelves.



“You know what? You guys aren’t as bad as we tomatoes take you for,” I say.

The others smile and agree.

“I feel the same way,” says the onion.

We realize that although we enjoy living separately with our own kinds, we enjoy being together even more. My quirky, fun-loving personality brings the lettuce out of his shell and makes the carrot embrace the fun side of life.

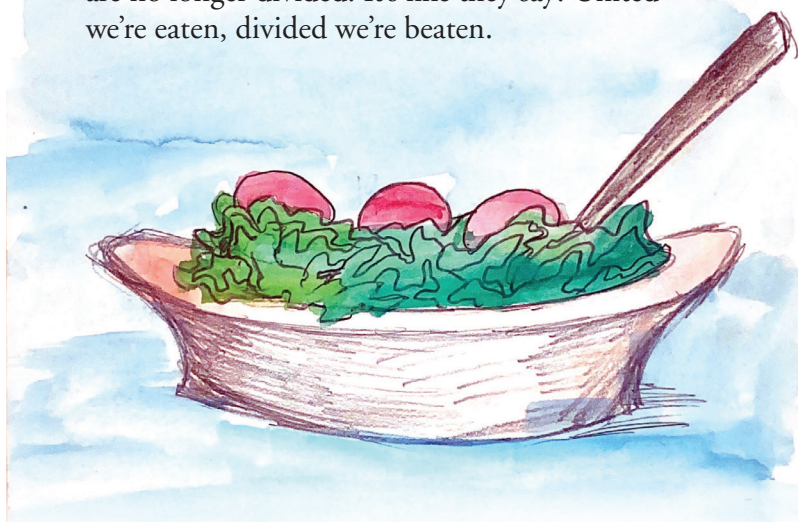
We complement each other.



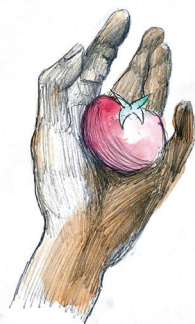


I feel a warm feeling deep inside and when I look down, we're all divided into miniature pieces of ourselves and intertwined with each other. We're a salad. Caesar enjoys us as a salad more than he ever enjoyed us individually. I guess this is how California became the "salad bowl" of America.

As the legend of Caesar's salad spreads throughout the fridge, everything changes for the better. We are no longer divided. It's like they say: United we're eaten, divided we're beaten.



Editor's Note: Did you know that tomatoes store best at room temperature? And the traditional ingredients of a Caesar salad are romaine, anchovies, croutons, and Parmesan cheese? Although we certainly like the sound of Caesar's salad!





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

≡ Nicholas Cortez ≡ 13 years old

Nicholas' goal was to write a story about social justice, but with a twist, using vegetables. How do different personalities and different types of people (or in this case vegetables) co-exist in harmony? That was the initial inspiration and idea for his story, *Caesar's Salad*.

The writing process came easy at first, with the first draft taking a mere 20-minutes, but it lacked the necessary agricultural facts. With some guidance from his teacher and a lot of research about California agriculture, Nicholas was able to write the story he was proud of. His favorite part of writing was developing each vegetable's personality. He hopes readers will identify with the fact that it may take some effort but contrasting personalities can indeed get along.

Nicholas is excited to see how his story can be further brought to life through the vision of the illustrators.



Selena Rodriguez & Emma Heinkel

Inderkum High School

Rachel Rodriguez, Art Teacher

Caesar's Salad made illustrators Emma and Selena laugh! They were eager to bring the story's message to life. The Inderkum High School seniors started the illustration process by researching the look and feel of the vegetables that star in the story. Next, they brainstormed, started sketching concepts utilizing pens and colored pencils, and created an initial rough draft. In the final draft, they enjoyed connecting the visuals with the text. The fact that the story was educational but with a comedic twist and written in a way that didn't stop the flow of the tale, made it very fun to illustrate.