

AASMA COZART (6th Grade: Cleveland, Birchwood School)

Level I First Place Winner

Letter to Philip Pullman concerning his book, *The Firework-Maker's Daughter*

Dear Mr. Pullman:

I felt Lila's pain in your book *The Firework-Maker's Daughter*. Like Lila, I'm restricted from many things and I live with one parent. Lila showed me how I should change, so I climb mountains.

When I was five and a half years old, my father got remarried and moved to Egypt with my stepmom. The following year, my dad took me with him for ten months. I always felt depressed because of all the things that happened to me while I was there. My father used to beat me with a belt for the smallest things like spilling something on the floor or doing all the silly things your average five-year-old would do. Sometimes, I would get beaten for no reason. Because my father was always busy and my stepmom was pregnant, I also had to raise my little one-year-old brother; I even had to potty train him.

My brother and I slept on a moldy carpet on a roach-infested floor. Hornets made a nest in the corner of the wall and small lizards slithered around us while we slept. Because I didn't speak Arabic at that time, it was hard for me to communicate with others. My father didn't like roaches, either, so he made me kill the big ones. I kept those pains in my heart for a long time. Whenever I remembered those memories and heard about other children's memories, I felt unimportant and worthless.

Lila made me ask myself if I have talent, courage and luck: these were the three gifts that she gave to Razvani. She had talent, having made fireworks with her father for many years; she demonstrated her courage by undertaking the journey and her good fortune was manifest in her two loyal friends, Chulak and Hamlet. I discovered that I, too, had talent when I learned how to cook even the most complicated recipes just by watching. I recognized my inner courage by letting go of the pain of the past and acknowledged how lucky I am in having a great mom, friends and family to cheer me up.

Lila showed me how stubborn I was and how it was not a good thing. I slowly came out of my shell and became more open and happy. My bad memories creep and crawl into my head sometimes, so I have to go somewhere private to cry, but I have learned to let go of these painful experiences. Your book showed me how to let go of bad memories and to make new and better ones. It showed me that I am my own hero. I am inspired by Lila to climb my own mountain.

Sincerely,

Aasma Cozart