

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of numerous water droplets of various sizes scattered across a light grey, slightly textured surface. The droplets are in sharp focus, showing their rounded, reflective shapes. The overall tone is muted and naturalistic.

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creative kids around the world*

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Editor's Note

What is home to you? Is it a specific place—a whole country, state, or city? Is it a whole house or just a room? Is it being with certain family or friends? Or is it simply a feeling you get—of comfort and belonging—regardless of where you are? For me, home is not just one of these things: it is all of them. It is my childhood bedroom in my parents' New York City apartment and New York City and the U.S. and my family, my dogs, and my closest friends and a feeling I sometimes get, even when I'm far from all of these places and alone. The pieces in the issue all explore different ideas of home—as well as what it means to leave home, how one can make a home, and even what happens when someone enters that home uninvited.

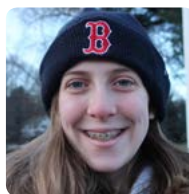
I hope you will feel “at home” in this issue!



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On the cover:
“Water Droplets”
Canon G9 X

by Anya Geist, 12
Worcester, MA

StoneSoup Contents

FICTION

5 Grateful

by Vandana Ravi

A simple bike ride to school occasions a complex meditation on life

10 The Missing Hair

by Oliver Giller

Oliver employs a detective to find his missing hair

13 The Cedar Bracelet

by Ella Martinez Nocito

A girl needs the courage to face a new home and a new school all the way across the country

16 A Monarch's Way Through

by Alexa Rivera Rockwood

A monarch butterfly encounters many obstacles—pollution, cars, and predatory birds—on her migration route

25 Seanella's Magical House

by Sean O'Connor

A generous, imaginative turtle dreams of building a house for her friends

29 Green

by Sascha Farmer

After moving from a small town in Canada to a big U.S. city, Gale struggles to adapt

POETRY

8 In the Playroom

by William Chui

23 Days

by Analise Braddock

27 Two Poems

by Griffin Romandetta

ART

Cover: Water Droplets

by Anya Geist

4 Contrast

by Delaney Slote

9 Spirit to Healthy Living

by Parinita Chandrashekar

12 Dandelions

by Alicia Xin

17 Which Way Car Wash

by Nicholas Taplitz

24 The Mountains Are Calling

by Marco Lu

28 Lighthouse

by Oishee Sinharay

31 HONOR ROLL



Contrast, Nikon D3400



by Delaney Slote, 12
Missoula, MT

Grateful

by Vandana Ravi, 12
Palo Alto, CA



A simple bike ride to school occasions a complex meditation on life

7:35 a.m. My mind is still heavy with sleep, barely woken up by my hurried breakfast. It only allows one thought in at a time, so two words are looping through my head: *get ready*. I take a last gulp of lukewarm tea and place my lunchbox in the basket on the side of my bicycle. I try to get my thoughts in order as I strap on my helmet and roll the bike out of the garage. I tie my sneakers, the laces chafing my cold fingers, and pull two layers of warm mittens onto my hands. I pause for a moment to look back at my house. It is the smallest on my street, painted a dull brown. I can see warm golden light flooding the rooms inside, illuminating the furniture, each piece of which seems to be having a friendly conversation with the others. I glimpse my younger brother's face inside. He is smiling. The contented spirit of the house seems to reach out of the dusty windows and embrace me. I carry an image of it in my heart. My talisman.

7:40 a.m. I pedal out onto the street. The crisp, chilly morning air wraps around me like a cloak, blowing the wisps of sleepiness out of my hair and eyelids. Somewhere, I can hear the cheerful fluting of an early songbird. I blink and lean forward in the saddle. I

am ready.

7:43 a.m. After a couple of minutes, I take a sudden turn onto the main road. The change hits me like a slap—the formerly empty streets are filled with rushing, honking cars, the peace of the morning cut to pieces with sound and motion. But both environments are so familiar to me that I take a strange pleasure in the new leg of my route.

7:46 a.m. My bike grinds to a halt in front of the main intersection. It is filled with early morning traffic. I walk my bike to a pole and press the walk button, then lean back in my seat to wait.

Gradually, a crowd of children appears behind me, filling up the sidewalk. They wait on their bikes, some chattering quietly. Others sit and stare ahead, breathless from their ride. They all have the same look in their eyes—that expression of blank determination. It is the only expression to have when the cold is biting through two layers of mittens and numbing your cheeks. Scarves and conversation are the thawing agents for those kids. The thing that thaws my fingers is the thought that there are some things that are gifted only to me—the

sight of my tiny, welcoming house, my muddy-but-strong Goodwill sneakers, the texture of tattered cloth in my fingers. That knowledge is as much a part of my body as my arms and legs, throbbing slowly in the chilly air. I can see this knowledge flickering in their determined-yet-carefree faces, but it is more than a flicker in me. It is a flame, keeping me alive.

7:48 a.m. The cars are facing each other like bulls rearing for a fight, engines growling softly. It takes me a moment to register the faint, ghostly white form flickering ahead: the walk sign. A second later, the group of bicycles is whooshing across the road. We are like a single form, the colors of the bikes blending and blurring together as we ride. We reach the sidewalk and disperse like colorful butterflies, many remaining in tight groups of two or three. I ride alone, as always, savoring the scent of the apple blossoms, which have fallen over the bike path like a carpet.

7:55 a.m. I take a turn into a wooded, shady trail. The trees arch over me. Red and gold ivy climbs over the walls on either side of me, spiraling and curling over the peeling paint. With satisfaction, I think about how the trail will look coming home from school: sun-dappled, the green-gold shadows dancing on the path before me. Only a few riders accompany me on this leg of the route, going and coming: I will enjoy the beauty alone. That is the

moment I look forward to all day, the thought sustaining me through seven hours of misery and happiness, dappling the hallways of the school like sunlight on the road.

8:00 a.m. The few bikers remaining with me turn right at the intersection, their flashy wheels glinting as they move. I pause and watch them for a few moments. The road ahead of them is smooth and nearly shiny, the spotless streets lined with green ginkgo trees, immaculate bushes, and sprawling, pastel-hued houses. Their colorful coats dot the landscape, and I gaze at the picturesque sight with the same bittersweet pleasure I feel every morning. Finally, I take a quick glance at my cracked pink watch and ride precipitately in the opposite direction.

8:02 a.m. I ride in the middle of the road—there is no bike path here. The path becomes increasingly cracked and dusty as I move forward, and I watch the ground carefully, avoiding a fall. The houses, packed together like sardines, line the streets. The idea crosses my mind, as it does every morning, that the grimy-yet-sunshiny yellow walls look suffocated, like caged tigers. But the simile, however impressive, does not fit. The houses are more like the stray cats that sometimes sleep on the road in this part of town—bedraggled and tired, yet strangely contented. The thought leaves my mind as quickly as it came, and I wave to an acquaintance standing on her

I gaze at the picturesque sight with the same bittersweet pleasure I feel every morning

doorstep. The time to linger and dream is gone.

8:05 a.m. My school, from the outside, looks much like the identical yellow houses that captured my imagination a few streets down. It has a bed of flowers growing in the front. Just daisies, nothing more—yet they tug at my heart every morning as I pass their dusty, begrimed container. Their surroundings seem to have no effect on the delicate rosy petals, a testimony to the resilience of the least flashy blooms.

I park my bike and undo my ponytail. The dingy walls of my school make something taste bitter in my mouth as I walk past them in the morning. Images flash through my head. The smooth, painted walls of the school on the other side of town. The sparkling, decorated bicycles of my fellow bikers alongside my own scratched black one, a picture I always try to forget. The expensive backpacks stuffed carelessly into bike bags.

Something aches in my chest. The word darts through my mind, the color of earthbound spring weeds: envy.

And then I think of the splendid wooded trail, the roads filled with apple blossoms, the colorful whoosh of the bicycles crossing the road. I think of the cheerful yellow houses packed along the sides of the street. I think of my brother's smiling face in the window. My heart feels light. Winged. There are some things that are gifted only to me.

In the Playroom

by William Chui, 12
Mill Valley, CA



The silver and bronze chessmen
wait to be set against one another,
next to Lego soldiers who defend their base
from giant robots while starfighters stage dog fights.
Facing themselves in an otherworldly mirror
like an alien monument to primitive gods.
While the slow whirr of the foot massager
comforts my mother as she texts her friends.
A big centerpiece, a shiny, often-out-of-tune piano
on which “Für Elise” was mastered in a month.
Opposite, a huge window with sunsets galore
and at night, I can make a game of
finding how many moths plaster the window.

When I am down, I can always escape over here,
away from all the excitement and hubbub of outside
and indulge in dear playtime and my own fantasies.
Ah, the sweet smell of fond memories,
of earthy, waxy incense candles burning,
fit for meditations at a Buddhist monastery.
And the moist lemon and herb tea,
as savory as a summer salad.
The spicy jalapeño chips contrasting
with the clean air of the heater
warming me while I type this on the Mac.
When stuck on writing, I chew on my comfort food,
cheesy, nutty, spiced crackers,
and feel the hairy fuzziness of the piano sheepskin cover for inspiration.
My favorite sound: Lego pieces falling onto
the smooth, polished hardwood, little souls
trapped inside and unable to help themselves.



Spirit to Healthy Living, *Prismacolor pencils*



by Parinita Chandrashekar, 12
Bridgewater, NJ

The Missing Hair

by Oliver Giller, 10
Providence, RI



Oliver employs a detective to find his missing hair

Once, when I was counting the hairs on my head, I noticed that one hair was missing. You see, usually, I had 2,476 hairs on my head, but when I counted them this time, there were only 2,475 hairs on my head. Someone had stolen my hair. I went to the police station for help, but they said that I was crazy. Then I went to the FBI, but they said that they had much more important cases on their hands. Personally, I don't understand how vandalism in the White House could be more important than my missing hair, but it wasn't my choice. Finally, I realized that the best way to handle any situation was to take care of it at home.

I went to the private detective on my street. No one ever went to him to solve their cases. I wondered why. I walked into his room, where I found him holding a magnifying glass to my face.

"Do you have poor eyesight?" I asked.

"No," he said. "But I could never be a proper detective if I didn't always hold a magnifying glass to people's faces when they enter this room."

I was impressed. This was clearly a man I could trust.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"My name is Detective DaVinci."

"That name sounds French," I said.

"It's actually Spanish," Detective DaVinci said.

"My name is Olivier Ruthe."

"That name is also Spanish," the detective noted. "What trouble do you bear?"

So, I told him about how I lost my hair and about how no one would take me seriously.

"This is a difficult case," Detective DaVinci told me. "I will need \$100."

I hesitated. One hundred dollars was a lot of money. But my hair was worth a lot of money.

"Of course," I said. "Anything for my hair."

"You should give me the money before I solve the case. Just so I know you aren't a crook."

"OK," I replied. I met his price.

Then I went back to my house, feeling satisfied and tired after a long day's work.

That night, I had a hard time sleeping. I kept hearing shuffling noises at the window. Once, I felt a sharp pain on my scalp. I kept my eyes closed the whole time, hoping I might fall asleep. Eventually, the noises stopped.

The next day, I went straight to my detective.

"I found your hair!" he exclaimed.

He showed me the hair in a glass bottle. I immediately started counting

my hair. It took about an hour and a half. When I was finished, I found that I was missing another hair.

“Don’t worry,” the detective said. “I’ll find it.”

That night, I had trouble sleeping again. The same thing happened as had happened the night before. I heard noises at the window, felt a pain on my head, heard more noises, then silence. First thing in the morning, I counted my hair. I was missing another hair. I told my detective. He had, however, found another hair.

“You probably counted wrong.” He started counting my hair. “There. I counted the same number of hairs you started with . . . whatever that number was.”

“Oh,” I said simply.

Again, that night, I heard a noise. I rolled over.

“Ahhhhhhhhhh!”

The voice of the scream sounded familiar. Then I went to sleep. When I arrived back at Detective DaVinci’s house to thank him, he was frantically packing. He was bruised, covered in dirt, and his hair was sticking out in different directions.

“You look like you fell out of a window,” I said.

“Something like that happened. No one will steal your hair again.” He started toward the door.

I tried to say something. “But—”

“Bye.” Then he slammed the door.

I lived quite happily after that, except for the time I stepped on a broken magnifying glass right below my bedroom window and ruined my shoe.

I wonder how it got there.



Dandelions, *acrylics*



by Alicia Xin, 13
Scarsdale, NY

The Cedar Bracelet

by Ella Martinez Nocito, 12
Mount Vernon, ME



A girl needs the courage to face a new home and a new school all the way across the country

I only felt like myself when I was listening to stories.

It was no surprise, really. Words were my sanctuary. I had never been good at making real friends, but those in books had always welcomed me with open arms. I had lived in the same town my whole life, and the friend I had had since preschool had moved away the previous summer. We hadn't seen each other since.

Books were different. They never moved away. They always stood beside me.

My cousin was my only real friend. She was six years older than I was, the kind of person to whom words come as easily as breath. She always told me stories.

We used to sit outside on the porch, which wrapped around the back of my house, in the sky-blue hammock that hung between two of the posts. When I was smaller and too young to get into it on my own, my cousin would lift me onto it, nearly tossing me off again when she got on herself, causing the hammock to sway back and forth like a ship on a stormy sea. We sometimes took ice-cream sandwiches outside, or bags of pretzels, or carrot sticks, and we'd munch on them and

watch the butterflies and bees dart among the brightly colored flowers of the garden. On windy days, we'd bring a kite and watch the breeze play with the kite tails as it dipped and dived through the air.

She used to tell me stories: fantastical tales of other worlds which could only be reached through mirrors, of lands of eternal snow and ice and sun. She would describe the blaze of a sunset over a restless sea and the patterns of the stars seen from the highest tower of a castle perched on the tip of the world.

Sometimes, she read to me from books with bright illustrations painted on the covers. But usually, she would tell stories that didn't come from a book. These were the ones that spun images of fantasy in my mind—of a princess in an azure gown with a bronze-plumed bird perched on her hand, or a forest-green dragon reclining on a vast horde of treasure, or a wizard in starry robes watching a phoenix circle in the sky.

There was a land among the clouds where only fairies lived, one story began.

An elven girl once floated on a raft down a river of light that ended in the stars, went another.

The daughter of the king did not plan on being trapped in the tower for long, began a third.

These days were perfect. They were the times I savored, the moments I wished could last forever.

But nothing can.

It was June. I had turned 12 a few days before. We were moving, my parents said, to the other side of the country. They said I would make new friends, that our new home would be even better than where we lived now. But my cousin was different. I knew no friend could ever replace her.

We sat in the hammock as we had so many times, with the wind swaying us back and forth and sunlight playing on butterfly wings as they fluttered through the flowers. My cousin told me that she'd be going to college soon. She said she'd write. I knew she would. But no words could change the miles that would stretch between us, a void wider than the sea.

She seemed to sense my thoughts, because she said, "Penelope, have I ever told you about the girl who went on a quest to find a feather but found something much more important?"

I shook my head.

"No? Well, in a far-off land where trees speak in the language of wind, where magic is more natural than earth and sea and sky, there was an elven girl with moon-black hair who was afraid of change, of the shifting future and the uncertainty of what would come next. There was loneliness and fear in that world as much

as in this one, and for her, she had a name to lay upon it. For all the elves go on a quest when they turn 13, and she knew hers would change her life forever.

"Her 13th birthday dawned on a sunny day, with bluebirds and orioles singing sweetly in the trees. And she learned her quest would be to find the silver feather that the phoenix Avis left when she was reborn from fire on the top of Blue Mountain, whose cliffs reared high above the clouds.

"The elven girl embarked on her journey, as tradition decreed. She scaled Blue Mountain by way of a forgotten road. She faced ancient monsters, outwitted cruel thieves, and went long days without food or drink. After the sun had risen and set more times than she could count, she reached the fabled place. She looked high and low, but she found no silver feather, nor any sign that it had ever been. All there was, was a bracelet made of cedar beads, one of which was shaped in the form of a dragon. She took it back with her, but she knew she had failed.

"When she returned home, ashamed and uncertain, she was greeted by the sage of her village. The girl told him of her failure, expecting to be rebuked or worse, but the old man simply smiled.

"Why do you cry, child?" he asked, and to the elven girl's dismay, she realized tears were indeed running down her cheeks. She bit her lip and tried to keep her voice from trembling.

"Because I have failed my family."

"The sage laughed, a low, husky sound, like the rustle of dry rushes on a riverbank. 'You have found what

you needed most,' he said. 'Your goal is simply a destination. Your journey is what is important.'

"He laughed again, and suddenly the girl understood. Her quest had never truly been for any material thing. For along the way, while facing more adversity than she ever had before, she had found courage and resilience inside her that she had never known she had. Her quest had never truly been what she needed most. What she sought had been found in the journey.

"She showed the sage the bracelet, and said, 'So this is nothing, then.'

"'Far from it,' said the sage. 'Think of it as a way of remembering your quest. A thing of your quest—and your journey.'"

My cousin fell silent with the end of the story.

"Is courage my quest?" I asked.

My cousin smiled then, the breeze playing with her hair so that it danced around her face. "No. Courage is your journey."

The day before I left, my cousin gave me a bracelet. Each of the beads was crafted out of a rich red wood.

"They're cedar," she told me.

"Like in your story?" I asked, remembering the tale she'd told me.

"Yes," my cousin said. "Do you see that bead?" She pointed to one larger one, which I realized was a different shape from the others. "It's a dragon. Just like in the story."

I peered closer and saw she was right. It made me smile. "Thank you,"

I said.

My cousin smiled at me. "Use it to remember—and to make—your journey, just like the elf girl. When you wear it, it will give you the courage to make new friends. You can look at it and think of me."

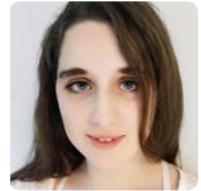
I always wore the cedar bracelet after that day.

My cousin was right, of course. The bracelet gave me courage to do new things, to make new friends, to make myself a new home. I knew I missed her, but it was easier than I had expected. We wrote every week, and we both knew we'd see each other again.

And when we did, we would find some far-off, secluded spot. We'd sit together as we did in old times. I would feel the warm reassurance of my cedar bracelet, and she'd tell me a story.

A Monarch's Way Through

by Alexa Rivera Rockwood, 12
Potomac, MD



A monarch butterfly encounters many obstacles—pollution, cars, and predatory birds—on her migration route

Silver buildings gleamed in the distance. They rose high into the sky, blocking the view of it. Shorter buildings puffed out too much smoke, making it impossible for birds to fly over the area. Cars honked almost every second of the day, filling the city with sounds of car horns. Around the perimeter of the city was a row of trees too perfect to be anywhere near the new city. The sun looked like it was ready to cough out its sunlight through the smoke in the sky.

A small monarch looked out at the new city, afraid of the new obstacles in her way. She had not seen this city before and didn't like how it was right in her migration path.

No other monarchs had made it this far yet, and she had been told by a ladybug that the only ones who had tried had gone in groups and come back with broken wings or had lost almost everyone in their group. This information scared the monarch, but she was determined to migrate to Mexico, only led by her instinctive compass and the warmth coming from the south.

The trees surrounding the perimeter of the city look safest at the moment for the monarch, so she makes her way over. From far away, there seem to be no animals perched in the tree. *That's strange*, the monarch thinks. *A tree like this is perfect for most animals who dwell near the city.*

She lands on one of these trees and almost passes out from a strong smell that burns her small trachea. Now she understands clearly why not one creature dares use this tree. It is covered in a pesticide meant to repel only a few select insects. Humans thought they were warding off termites. They had really just made this tree uninhabitable for all creatures.

The monarch coughs and glides down to the smooth marble walkway. Her small feet slip on the floor because there's no friction on the walkway. To get around, she must use her wings.

The monarch is in front of the first house and stops to take in the view. She has never seen a place so clean, so organized.

The house is modern, with three levels and a flat roof. The yard is filled



Which Way Car Wash, Canon Rebel T4i



by Nicholas Taplitz, 13
Los Angeles, CA

with completely fake plants, with the exception of one small tree covered in pesticide. Children are playing inside, and they appear to be alone.

Then there is a light visible from one of the rooms. The monarch finds herself inching toward the light, entranced by the amazing creations of humanity. Then a small child runs up to the window, staring down at the monarch. He yells something to someone and disappears.

The monarch flutters to an upper room and can't see anyone anymore. She hears a slight sliding sound, like wood against marble. Four children burst out of the door, yelling into the street that there is a butterfly.

The monarch disappears around the next corner, knowing that staying in that area would only mean death or a short life in a glass jar.

The buildings are beginning to get shorter. There is no longer a chemical scent in the air. Here, it smells musty, and slightly of rotten things. Everything is covered in a thick layer of multicolored grime. A few starlings are poking at trash near a fast food restaurant. Not that many people are in sight. The walkway has also turned into gritty concrete, and the monarch guesses that this is part of a cheaper side of the city. All sorts of bad things happen in places like this. She doesn't want to stay long but wants to visit the only animal she has seen since she started her journey through the city.

The monarch swoops down to the starlings, hoping to know what happened to the monarchs who did not come back from their migration. She also wants someone to talk to.

When she lands in the middle of a group of starlings, all of them turn to look at her.

"What is a monarch doin' around here?"

The monarch is startled, and turns around quickly to see a big starling looking down at her. He cocks his head and puts his face very close to hers.

"I'm migrating through the city," she answers confidently.

"Well, monarch, I wouldn't keep on goin'. Most of your friends died when they got to that main road," he said with a strange accent. The bird sounded British but the way that he slurred his words slightly led the monarch to believe he was from the city.

"Goodbye, bird," the monarch said as she began to flutter off. They looked uninterested in her.

The bird said nothing and went back to picking at trash.

The majority of her journey along the walkway had been uneventful, with only the occasional distraction or stomping feet to interrupt the journey. It was noon now, and what would have been a relaxing evening of cricket chirps is now the loud honk of cars not that far away.

As the walkway continues, the honks get louder. Everything seems to be tainted with car oil, and the stink is beginning to make the monarch lightheaded. The monarch is coming near to the main road, which sits right at the edge of the city. It stretches on for miles, reaching seven main cities along the way. The road is four lanes

She shudders, afraid that one car going too fast could be the end of her dream to be the first monarch to reach Mexico.

wide. Each lane is large enough to fit an 18-wheel truck comfortably.

The monarch reaches the edge of the road, and all of the determination drains out of her as fast as water going down a drain. She shudders, afraid that one car going too fast could be the end of her dream to be the first monarch to reach Mexico.

Even though there is no pattern of any type to the traffic, she does need to time when she will enter the road and plan how long to stay in certain areas. Most cars are high enough off the ground for her to fit underneath and maneuver her way past. But if one car has some wire sticking out, then it could catch on the monarch's wings and drag her so fast that her legs would be shredded away.

Going above the cars could work, but if a truck comes, she will have to go high enough that the air could become poisonous from the amount of smoke. Trucks pass by often because of the rest stop that comes right before the monarch's section of the road. *I could walk to the truck stop and fly overhead,* the monarch thinks. *There has to be some way for me to go above.*

Once she has observed the sky carefully, the monarch decides she wants to see for herself how bad the pollution in the air is. She cautiously flies up into the sky. The monarch stops below a cloud of smoke. From

here, she can feel herself burning. There's no way she would be able to survive that for more than a few seconds.

Deciding it's the safest option, the monarch begins her journey underneath the cars. Sirens wail; the cars are forced to stop. Something has gone wrong up ahead. Everything is still, but it won't stay this way for long. She flutters underneath one of the cars, a sleek white thing with no roof covering the driver's head. The monarch doesn't know why humans tend to do things this way. The car won't be fully functional if rain comes.

Humans have always been strange, the monarch thinks. *Maybe we have to be strange to understand them.*

While the monarch is lost in thought, the cars begin to move again. The monarch flattens her wings down to the ground, hoping nothing will catch and tear them. Things come dangerously close to her head. Nothing has touched her yet, though. She inches toward the safe stretch of white paint separating the two lanes. The next car passing above the monarch seems to be going slightly slower than the others. The monarch hurls herself toward the white paint and just makes it as two monstrous wheels almost crush

her.

There is a loud swooping sound, and then it stops. The monarch stops in her tracks. She's unsure what the sound is. It's there again, but closer now. A feeling of uneasiness fills the monarch.

"If it isn't a monarch! Your friends were a rare treat. They tasted real nice."

A small bird with a yellow stomach descends from above. He swoops the rest of the way down, landing close to the monarch. The monarch can tell that it's the sound she heard before. The bird has a heavy Spanish accent, and that is enough information for the monarch to know what it is.

"You're a black-backed oriole. One of the few animals that will eat monarchs," she says back. This oriole is alone, but they are still dangerous. Other birds won't eat monarchs because of the poison they carry. But two types of birds and one species of mouse are more immune than others. Since no other animals will eat monarchs, the species is an easy target as millions pass through to migrate.

"That is right, dear monarch. To make this easier, I would suggest that you stay still." The oriole advances on the monarch, flaring his wings and pecking at the ground.

The monarch flies up into the sky, flapping as hard as she can. The oriole follows, then suddenly stops. He starts to choke and lets himself drop

to the ground. The bird is overcome by wracking coughs.

The monarch feels safe and breathes in. Smoke fills her trachea instead of air. The monarch tries to breathe in again and again as she falls to the ground. She chokes on her own tongue and begins to lose consciousness. The world is spinning and continues to spin the more she tries to breathe.

From their cars, people see a small orange paper-like thing fall to the ground. No one takes much notice.

Hhhuuuuuuahhhhh

The sound is strange, but it escapes the monarch's throat when she breathes in. Breathing in is a challenge, taking every ounce of strength from the monarch to get air into her body. Her mind is wandering, not aware that around her, cars are beginning to move. Not noticing that she is sprawled across the windshield of a car.

The windshield of a car of someone who cares nothing for wildlife.

"Eww, gross."

"What is it this time?!"

"A bug died on our car. That's bad karma, if you ask me."

"Oh, just use the wipers! They invented them for a reason, you know..."

"Help!" she screams, grabbing onto the car's license plate.

Big, black sticks push the monarch to the bottom of the car. Not enough air has reached her brain yet. She flops her head to one side, feeling exhausted after that simple movement.

“Hello?” she whispers into the air.

“Oh, monarch. Don’t waste your breath.”

“Who is it?” she demands, with a stronger tone.

The voice doesn’t answer. The monarch feels alone now, even wishing the oriole could be here as company. Everything seemed so easy at first—just get through the city and fly to Mexico. But this whole trip, she has seen nothing but humans being cruel. Even now they don’t notice that a monarch is trying to make her way through. The monarch curls up at the bottom of the windshield, wishing that her journey could be over. A feeling of dread takes over. She is left with no fight in her, none of the fiery determination that got her this far.

“Don’t give up now, monarch.”

There is the voice again. It seems like someone who wants to help. The monarch extends her wings, filled with a new need to not let the mystery voice down. Whoever this is talking to the monarch, they want her to get through to Mexico.

So, she will get through to Mexico.

The monarch is far past the city. Cars travel fast, and the smoke from a new city is now in view. Things tend to be slower around cities. This city is set

up differently from the other one. The main road crosses directly through the center of the city, not near the perimeter. Due to this set-up, there will be a small amount of city to cross before the monarch gets to the suburbs. But it will be easier to cross the main road.

The car the monarch is riding stops to let people through, and the monarch takes her chance. The two lanes ahead of her seem easy enough to get through, so she flutters past the car bumpers. The monarch makes it past the first lane easily. But at the second lane, the street empties of people. None of the other cars go yet except the one in front of the monarch.

The monarch freezes, stuck in place. She isn’t able to move up or down out of sheer terror: a car is about to hit her. The car is coming fast, and the monarch has nearly run out of time to move. She lets herself drop, but not before there is a sickening ripping sound, and a cry of pain only she can hear.

“Help!” she screams, grabbing onto the car’s license plate. Her wing is torn, and the excruciating pain from the small tear is already too much to bear.

The car is speeding fast, going so fast that the wind is keeping the monarch stuck to the car. The pressure is becoming too great. The city is gone now, leaving a big open road for cars to go as fast as they please. The wind presses the monarch into the car, flattening her wings so much they almost rip. The monarch is growing cold from the constant flow of wind. Her wings are numb, and she takes the few seconds she has to rip free the rest of her wing that’s stuck to the car. The pain

makes her vision start to go black, but not before she tosses herself off of the main road. The monarch feels the sun warm her up before she goes to sleep.

Waking up is hard. The monarch wants neither to leave nor stay. The warmth of the sun and the soft grass remind her of her cocoon. But the pull of her migration instincts are enough to get the monarch on her feet again. Flying is impossible now that the monarch has only half a wing, but walking will do just fine. The monarch takes a second to go over the last few events.

She made it past the city. Maybe she will be the first monarch to reach Mexico. The monarch is filled with grief that future generations will have to go through the same experience as her. And that her friends will have to, too. But if one monarch can make it, then so can the rest.

The monarch looks into the horizon, thinking of what else she will have to undergo to get to Mexico. There is still a long way, and without half a wing, it will be hard. But she has passed the city. If she can do that, she can do anything.

Days

by Analise Braddock, 8
Katonah, NY



The nights are long
The days are short
A breeze is blown
A day is a day.
It can't be reliven
Make today today
Tomorrow is tomorrow
The gray is space or a planet.
A cold breeze sweeps by
It is time to return



The Mountains Are Calling, *chalk and acrylic*



**by Marco Lu, 12
Champaign, IL**

Seanella's Magical House

as dictated to a parent
by Sean O'Connor, 3
Bishop, CA



A generous, imaginative turtle dreams of building a house for her friends

Seanella was an unusual turtle. She could use her shell as a boat.

As she flowed down the Owen River near her home, she felt the breeze grow more powerful.

Seanella thought the breezes were kisses coming from the friends she loved most. Seanella believed that what you thought of was real.

When she imagined a rainbow glistening on the river, she could see the strong colors, and she was never bored.

One day, Seanella dreamed she met a kitten. The kitten was shiny brown with purple eyes and a lollipop in her mouth.

The kitten introduced herself as Mouse. The kitten did the cutest dance whenever she spoke. Seanella was so happy to meet such a special cat that she wanted to give the kitten the perfect place to live.

She continued to dream up a place for the kitten with all her favorite foods, like spaghetti and burnt broccoli.

This place was always the right temperature, not too hot and not too cold. She then realized, in order for her

friend to be really happy, she would have to stay there, too, or Mouse would be too sad.

Out of the blue, a very real dog came to talk with Seanella. "What are you doing floating down the river?" he barked.

"I am building my friend Mouse, who is really a kitten, the perfect place to live."

"How can you build houses for kittens when you are just a turtle?"

"When I think of it, it is there," she proudly said.

"Can you think of a place for me to live too?" asked the dog, Weevle.

"Yes, I can!" The turtle proudly glowed.

She then imagined the dog in a very beautiful doghouse made of swirling rainbow glass and obsidian roof tiles.

She didn't stop there. She also thought of the bowls he would drink out of, which were studded with gems and nested in colorfully woven grass.

As she thought, the dog got impatient. "Well, are you going to do anything?" he asked.

“Don’t you see all the obsidian I used for your roof and the bowls I have knitted with grass?” she cried.

“No!” he sputtered. “I can’t see anything!”

“It is sad no one can see what I can,” the turtle lamented.

At this, the dog thought about the house and bowls the turtle had described.

“What an idea!” He realized he could make a house using obsidian and bowls made of gems and grass! “While I collect the obsidian, who can knit the grass?” he asked. “My paws are too clumsy.”

And with that, the turtle quickly knew the answer, for she was friends with many a creative bird. “My friend Lil will help you—she makes the most exquisite nests!”

In the end, the imagination of Seanella and the practical work of the dog helped create a magnificent home for the two of them, with tree houses equally beautiful for the visiting birds.

Two Poems

by Griffin Romandetta, 13
Apex, NC



Wobbly Teeth

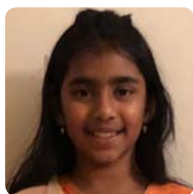
Wobbly teeth are like
broken legs on
an old creaking white
chair.

My Secret Dream

My secret dream is to
soar high like a soccer ball
flying into a net
and be sort of like
the tip of a paint
brush.



Lighthouse, watercolor



by Oishee Sinharay, 11
Pennington, NJ

Green

by Sascha Farmer, 12
Northampton, MA



After moving from a small town in Canada to a big U.S. city, Gale struggles to adapt

Gale was a late sleeper. She had always been. It was just her way of responding to the weekend. But for some reason, she felt as if she wanted to get up now. And what made it odder was that it was the last day of summer vacation. Typically, she would have crammed as much late-sleeping into the day as she could, but no. She was getting up right now.

Gale rolled out of bed (getting her blankets tangled around herself in the process) and fell to the floor, letting out an involuntary groan. She sat up and looked around. Her room was clean and tidy as always. On one side of the room there were two windows, both of them a quarter of the way open, and beside her bed was a green crate that served as a bedside table. A few feet away from the foot of the bed, mounted on the wall, was an ugly white wire shelf. On it were all sorts of things, from kindergarten artwork to baseball trophies.

Gale turned on her fan. Summers in Houston could be hot. She then pulled on a T-shirt and jeans and yanked her long black hair into a ponytail.

Gale thumped down the stairs, clearing the last four in a massive leap

and checked the breadbox for sliced bread. It was the only kind she would willingly digest.

“Gay-o,” yelled Violet, Gale’s two-year-old sister, as she charged into the kitchen. She wrapped her arms around Gale’s legs, preventing her from moving. Gale, ignoring her human barnacle, pivoted and grabbed a jar of peanut butter.

Early on, she had learned that it was no use asking her sister to stop. Violet would just laugh maniacally like a tiny Disney villain and hold tighter. Siblings were odd that way.

Gale layered her peanut butter about an inch thick on her toast. She had a bit of a peanut butter problem. She bit into her toast and instantly found her teeth stuck together. After finishing her toast, she licked the peanut butter off of her fingers to make sure they were clean.

Gale pried her sister off her legs and dashed outside to enjoy the warm summer air and flopped down onto the grass. She missed her old home. Gale hated living in Houston. She just wasn’t a city person.

They used to live in British Columbia, Canada. “They” being Gale, her mom, and her dad. Violet hadn’t been

born yet.

Her home had been in a small town by the sea. It rained all through the year and never snowed. But she loved her old home. She remembered the chipped brown paint of the house, the front door with the big silver knocker, and most of all, the big balcony where she used to imagine that she was a wildlife photographer. She had always been more secure with animals than her friends. She was different from them in that. While they all dreamed of being astronauts and police officers when they grew up, all she wanted to do was to be romping through the woods with her friends, the animals.

They had lived on the outskirts of town. Their house had been surrounded by pines. Back on the west coast, conifers were everywhere. They were lush green due to all the rain. Green, the color of the docks with all the boats moored to them. Green, the color of the sea. Green, the color of the grass on their lawn after a rainstorm. Green was everything back there.

She needed to be walking through the woods, rain pattering on her hood, legs soaked.

She remembered her friends, the gray jays. Whenever she went outside, she would bring a couple of nuts in her pocket in case she saw one. Then, she would hold out her hand; they would land on it and start poking around. They would pick up the nut and fly away.

Fly away. They would fly away just like she flew away to Houston.

She had always preferred sailing. Gale's family had owned a small

canoe. By the time she was eight, she knew all the strokes and could paddle effectively. By the time she was 10, she was allowed to go out on the ocean by herself. She would bring her fishing rod, but always spincast with it. She refused to learn any other technique.

Back then she had a routine.

Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays were for homework. Thursdays were free. Fridays were for baseball practice and Saturdays were the games. But her favorite days of all were Sundays. Fishing days. In the morning, Gale and her family would go to church. Afterward, she would dash outdoors, untie the boat from the dock, and paddle out as far as she could. Then she would start fishing.

She could almost *smell* the salty air, *feel* the paddle in her hands, *see* the fish swimming in the murky water. *That* was her old life.

"Gay-o!" yelled the unmistakable voice of Violet. She stopped when she saw the expression on Gale's face. "Miss home?" asked Violet, wrapping her pudgy arms around her.

"Yeah," said Gale. "Yeah, I do."

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 that comes our way. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

Fiction

Josie Ervin, 12
Alice Greene, 8
Sam Hanson, 13
Kris Li, 11
Maya McDaniel, 13
Matthew Miller, 11
Valerie Song, 11
Jacky Xue, 11

Poetry

Edward Biggins, 8
Aspen Clayton, 9
Oskar Hockmann, 11
Fiona Mikita, 10
Bo-Violet Vig, 13
Amy Yan, 7

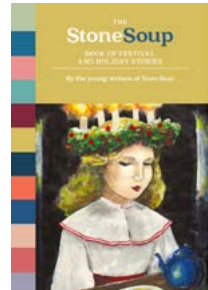
Art

Talia Chin, 8
Ludivine Martin, 9
Ignacio Moyano, 10
Grace Williams, 12

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