

# StoneSoup



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# StoneSoup

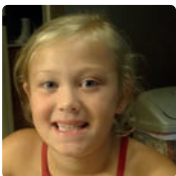
Writing and art by kids, for kids

## Editor's Note

This year, we began publishing nonfiction in the magazine. In this issue, I am excited to finally share the winners of the Personal Narrative Contest we ran with the Society of Young Inklings last fall. These three narratives give us a sense of the scope and range of narrative nonfiction. In "Locked Out of Kindergarten," Kateri Escobar Doran recounts a single, indelible memory from kindergarten, blending thoughtful reflection on the social world with detailed, poignant scenes. In "Swirling Arabesques," Zoe Kyriakakis demonstrates the poetic possibilities of prose. And, finally, in "Gratitude," Alicia Xin shares the lessons she learned after spending a summer immersed in a different culture. I hope by reading these narratives, and the ones we have been publishing in the magazine this year, that you are beginning to understand that nonfiction can be just as "literary"—as strange, as beautiful, as descriptive, as interesting—as fiction! And that it certainly need not end with a clear "lesson" or "moral."

I also hope you will enjoy the art, poetry, and two very fictional stories in this issue—both of which, in contrast to the nonfictional narratives, focus on human-animal relationships.

Welcome to fall!



On the cover:  
*Woodsy Owl*,  
Paige Smith, 8  
Benton, AR

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## Contents

### PERSONAL NARRATIVES

5 Locked Out  
of Kindergarten

by Kateri Escobar Doran

20 Swirling Arabesques

by Zoe Kyriakakis

26 Gratitude

by Alicia Xin

### STORIES

15 Yellowstone, a Fresh Start

by Emily Carver

23 The Schnitzelbird

by Elaina Heinitz

### POETRY

12 Our Blanket

by Leila Lakhal

31 Everything I Love

by Liv Baker

## ART

### Cover: Woodsy Owl

by Paige Smith

#### 4 Self Portrait

by Alyssa Wu

#### 14 Rainbow Lake

by Sage Millen

#### 18 McArthur Lights

by Oskar Cross

#### 25 A Man's Friend

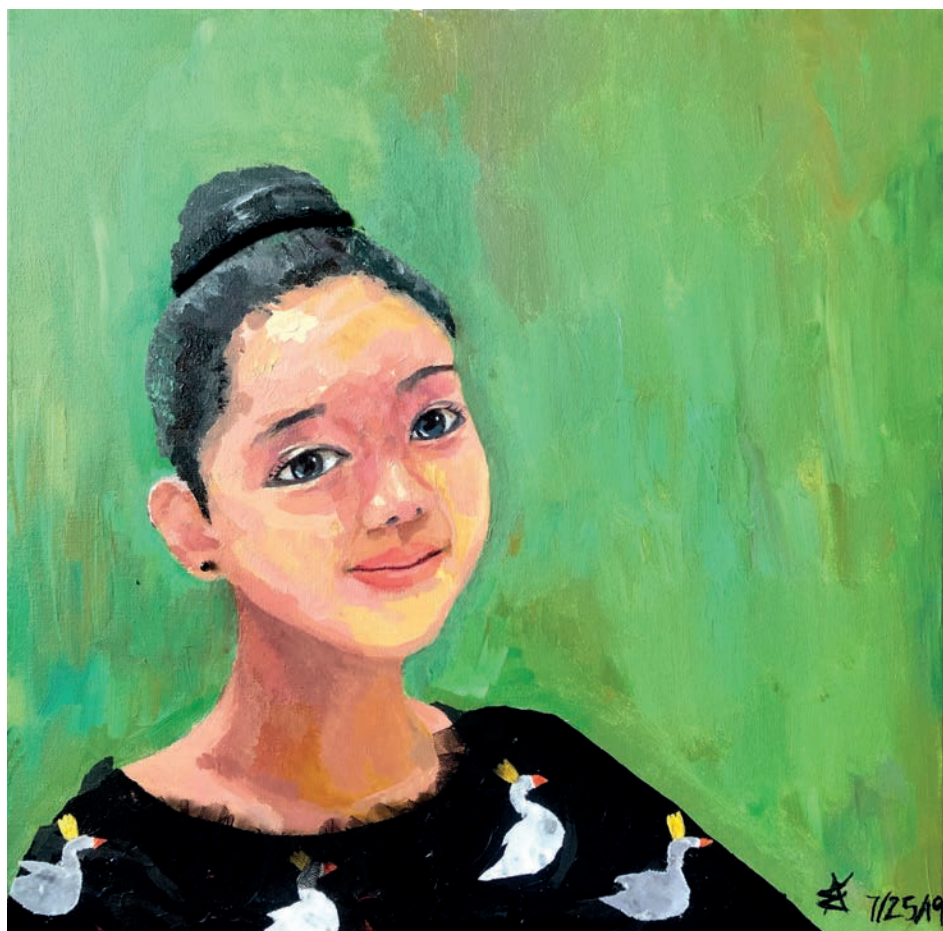
by Hanna Gustafson

#### 27 Wrinkles

by Claire Jiang

#### 32 Honor Roll





*Self Portrait (acrylics)*  
 Alyssa Wu, 12  
 Pleasanton, CA

# Locked Out of Kindergarten

A new friendship forms after a harrowing shared experience



by Kateri Escobar Doran, 12  
Cambridge, MA

"If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!"

*Clap, clap!*

"If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!"

*Clap, clap!*

We were dancing on the mat in the kindergarten classroom. Music was blasting from our teacher's magical silver box, which was sitting in the corner on a little plastic chair. Our teacher, Ms. Winnie, stood facing us while we danced, swaying to the music and clapping her hands along with us.

*Clap, clap!*

I loved dancing time. Other than playtime, it was my favorite time of day.

"If you're happy and you know it, stomp your feet!"

*Stomp, stomp!*

I turned around to see how my friends were getting along. Ella, instead of stomping her feet, was hopping on one, her waist-length, jet-black hair flapping around her shoulders. Ava, the resident drama queen and aspiring secret agent, spun around and twirled, her light-brown

pigtails flopping behind her. We had all pretty much forgotten what movement we were supposed to be making at this point, and we probably didn't care.

I watched as a familiar figure with curly, dirty-blond hair came stomping over to us. It was Chloe. She was the oldest kid in the class (she had turned six in November), as well as the first to lose a baby tooth. All of this gave Chloe status in the classroom, and she was in charge. It just seemed to make sense that way. If Chloe told us to do something or to refrain from doing something, we would do what she said; and if she made a decision for us, then we would accept it.

I didn't particularly like Chloe. But I knew as well as anyone else that she was our leader. And the leader got to choose who got to use the heart stencil when we were in the art center. People were always scrambling over one another to get to that stencil. Nearly every time, she got to it first, but she never kept it for herself. Each time, she gave it to a different person, and if you weren't chosen, you weren't allowed to complain because "you get what you

get and you don't get upset," even if you were.

"If you're happy and you know it, and you really want to show it, if you're happy and you know it, shout—"

I raised my hand suddenly. "Ms. Winnie?"

"Yes, Kate?" our teacher replied. She leaned down slightly in order to meet my gaze.

"I have to go to the bathroom."

"All right," said Ms. Winnie. She scanned the group of my still-dancing classmates shouting, "Hooray!" whenever the song told them to do so. She stood there for what seemed to me like a very long time, her gaze flicking over each of her students, considering them individually, for the sole purpose of selecting them to be my bathroom buddy.

It was one of the classroom rules that anyone who needed to use the restroom would have to cross the hall with a bathroom buddy. It would have to be another girl, of course. If not one of my two friends, then maybe one of the louder, more eccentric girls like Olivia, who was obsessed with horses, or Jeanne, who wanted to be an astronaut and was very firm in her belief that a zillion was the biggest number.

I wouldn't really mind being with any of the girls in the class, as long as it wasn't someone who had virtually no respect for me, someone whose name was . . .

"Chloe," said Ms. Winnie. "Can you go to the bathroom with Kate?"

Chloe stopped dancing. "Okay," she said, staring directly at the teacher without even stopping to glance at me. She didn't look me in the eye as

she crossed the carpet to where I was standing and slipped her hand into mine.

Ms. Winnie, seemingly glad that neither of us had expressed any open hostility, only said one more thing to us: "Go to the bathroom and come right back."

"We will," said Chloe, before I could respond.

As we made our way across the kindergarten classroom, I made a note of how awkward it was to hold Chloe's hand. There was no comfort in it; she held it loosely, barely grasping my hand in hers, and walked just a tiny bit ahead of me so it felt like she was pulling me along. She didn't look at me, and I didn't look at her. Neither of us said a word as we opened the door and stepped out into the hallway, letting the music fade away as the door swung slowly closed, falling back into position with a click.

A few minutes later, I was washing my hands, pretending not to be listening to a conversation between two fifth-grade girls. Both seemed indescribably tall. One of them was blonde, standing with her back to the pink tiles on the wall, wedged into the corner of the bathroom. The other was shorter, with darker skin and curly hair and eyelashes. They were discussing some other girl in their class whose friendship they were deciding whether or not to prematurely end. I wondered how their teacher had ever allowed them to be bathroom buddies—they certainly weren't coming right back.

I thought about the way they had looked at me as I dried my hands with a brown paper towel. It was the way I

**It was all I could do not to cry.  
I wanted Chloe to see that I wasn't a baby.**

felt when older kids ignored me on the playground or when Chloe started a conversation at the snack table about how many teeth we had lost and left me out completely.

I remembered something Ava had told me when we were sitting on the swing set on a lazy Friday when neither of us felt like swinging. We were watching the fifth-graders sit outside the blue double doors. I had wondered out loud why they always sat like that, talking, and sometimes gazing at us as if from far above, but never coming down to play with us.

"My sister says that life is like a ladder," she had told me.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"You know," said Ava, "like a ladder. Each step is higher than the last one. The bigger you get, the higher you are, and if you're small, then you're still at the bottom."

I thought about a ladder that went on forever, reaching up, up, up into the sky. It was scary to think that those fifth-graders were high up there while I was still down on the ground. I was afraid of heights; I didn't think I would ever be able to leave the bottom step if I couldn't make it up to the next one. Maybe that was why Chloe didn't look me in the eye—why she always ignored me but seemed to respect my friends, all of whom were several months older than me. Maybe that was why we let her make decisions for us, like who would get to use the heart stencil.

Maybe the ladder was why I let her reach for the classroom doorknob after we crossed the hall—why I let

her be just one step ahead of me in everything. Because she was.

Chloe turned the doorknob and pushed.

Nothing happened.

She turned the knob and pulled.

Nothing happened.

"What's going on?" I said out loud to her, though I had a creeping feeling I already knew.

She turned to look at me, meeting my gaze for the very first time since we had left the kindergarten classroom. Her eyes were clear and blue, and the look I found in them was not reassuring in the least.

"It's locked," she breathed.

"Let me try," I said frantically. I grabbed the doorknob, twisted it around as far as it would go, and leaned into it with all the weight of my small body.

As expected, nothing happened.

I banged on the door. "Ms. Winnie!"

"Ms. Winnie, the door is locked!"

"It's not working," I said. I put my ear to the door, straining to hear the music that was still playing on the other side of it.

"If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!"

*Clap, clap!*

It was all I could do not to cry. I wanted Chloe to see that I wasn't a baby. Still, how could she not be feeling the same way? She must be. Once again, she was avoiding my eyes.

*I would give anything—I told myself—anything to be back in the classroom right now, dancing and clapping and laughing with everyone*



else, not alone with Chloe behind a locked door. The sound of the music, so close yet just out of our reach, made it ten times more unbearable.

What were we supposed to do in a situation like this? *Tell the teacher*, I immediately answered myself. But our teacher was inside the classroom, and she clearly couldn't hear us. I didn't know any other teachers, except for the first-grade teacher, Mrs. Holloway. She thought of us as below her, but more importantly, she thought of us as below her students.

First grade was universally acknowledged to be the real first step on the ladder of life. As kindergarteners, we were separated from the rest of the school. We had separate times in the playground and in the library, and we left the school when everybody else was having lunch. No, it wasn't until first grade that the ladder really began. Everyone knew it, and Mrs. Holloway never let us forget it. Even if we were able to get her to help us, what would Mrs. Holloway be able to do? She wouldn't have the key to our classroom. Most likely, she would get the key from the . . .

"Principal's office," I said out loud.

"What?" said Chloe. She stared at me.

"The principal's office," I said again. "She'll have the key to the classroom, and maybe she'll give us candy, and then we can come back and she'll unlock the door for us!"

The principal's office was a place with two faces and a feeling associated with each. One of them was terror. "Go to the principal's office" threatened the worst, that your parents were about to be informed that you had

done something bad. However, the principal's office was also a place of refuge, a place of candy. The very place we needed to get to right now.

Chloe hesitated. "What if we just wait here?"

"We could be waiting forever before anyone finds us," I argued.

"But shouldn't we stay where we are?"

"No one can help us if they don't know we're in trouble!" I could hear my voice faintly echoing in the hall.

Chloe sighed. She always sighed in such an exaggerated, superior, *you-don't-understand* sort of way. I was about to press my argument further, but before I could open my mouth, Chloe said, "I can't go there."

"Where?" I asked. "To the principal's office?"

"No," she said. "Down there." She pointed down the hall.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because." She looked down at her pink-and-silver sneakers, once again refusing to meet my gaze. Then she said, her voice barely above a whisper, "Toby. He's this kid," she said. "In Lucy's class."

Lucy was Chloe's little sister. "The preschool room?"

Chloe sighed again, but this time, her sigh sounded shaky and defeated. "He lives in my apartment building," she said. "He's terrible." She looked up. She somehow seemed smaller, and her eyes were shadowed with fear. "He's Lucy's age, and we always have to play with him." She swallowed. "His favorite game is killing bugs. He's always stomping on ants on the sidewalk. One time he caught a spider in a jar and killed it right in front of us. It took

forever. He made it that way. Lucy was screaming and Toby was laughing and ... and I ...” She stopped.

“What did you do?” I asked quietly.

I knew the answer just by the way she was standing there, staring at her feet: Nothing.

“The last time I went to the bathroom, he was standing in the hall. He was with his class, waiting in line for the boys’ bathroom, and he saw me. He stared at me. And then he *laughed*.”

We stood there together for a very long time.

Then she said, “I can’t go there.”

“Okay,” I said. “That’s okay. I can go there by myself.”

I turned around and began to leave. The hall was eerily quiet, and yet, if you listened carefully, you could make out the faint, relentless buzzing of the overhead lights. The sound rang in my ears. I walked slowly, somehow unable to move my legs any faster. My footsteps echoed as I walked. It made me more aware of my presence, my disruption of the hall’s normal stasis. With every step I took, my sneakers flashed with LED lights, sparkling very briefly off the hallway floor like an echo you couldn’t hear. It reminded me of how small I was and how alone.

I was passing by the second-grade classroom. I wondered what the second-graders were doing in there. I had heard that the students sat at desks in rows, that they never had time to play except at recess, that they spent most of the day sitting down, that everyone was expected to know how to read, to hold a pencil correctly, to color within the lines. I had heard their world was full of expectations. Mrs. Holloway was the one who saw

to it that those expectations were fulfilled the year before, and the one who punished her students if those expectations were unmet, so that, by the end of the year, they were ready for second grade. They emerged from her classroom as part of things, moving up the next step on the ladder that was life.

The lights were buzzing. A muffled roar built up behind the air vents. I broke into a trot. My footsteps got louder, and I heard them echo behind me. *Were they mine? Or someone else’s?*

I ran faster. My sneakers were flashing. My heart was pounding. The AC was roaring, freezing me from the inside out. The cacophony rose in a deafening crescendo. It was bright noise, blinding noise, noise of every color. The hall was closing in on me.

I turned around and ran. I passed the second-grade classroom without even tossing it a glance. I didn’t stop until I was back where I had started, where Chloe was waiting for me.

“Kate?” she said quietly.

I shook my head. My heart was still pounding, *thump, thump, thump*. I stood there, the sounds of the hallway still ringing in my ears.

I looked up. I stared right into her eyes.

“I can’t.”

---

We were waiting outside the girls’ bathroom, our backs against the cool pink tiles, waiting for someone to save us. I felt like a coward. *How hard was it to go down a hallway? How was it possible that I hadn’t even been able to make it past the fourth-grade classroom, let alone the principal’s office?*

I glanced at Chloe sitting next to me. Toby did sound terrible. I tried to imagine what it would be like to see him all the time, to watch him destroy things, traumatizing my little sister. But Chloe hadn't done anything. She hadn't protected her sister from Toby. She had just stood there.

Chloe had been scared to go down the hall just like I had been. I had never thought of her as anything like me. I had thought she was above me. Why was *that*? Now that I had been stuck with her for this long, that seemed ridiculous. Everyone was afraid sometimes, even if they were older or more experienced. And anyway, the age difference between me and Chloe was just a few months. She wasn't above me on the ladder of life. She wasn't on the ladder at all. Neither was I, because there was no ladder. Life didn't work like that.

"Chloe?" I said, getting to my feet. Chloe looked up. I reached out my hand, and, after a moment, she took hold of it.

"We can do it," I said. "We can go to the principal's office and fix this for ourselves. We don't have to wait for anyone else. I know you're scared," I told her. "But we don't have to be scared because we can protect each other. We can do this."

We stood there for a moment, holding hands. I tried to tell her, through a smile, that she could trust me.

"Okay," she said, smiling back. "Let's do it."

I opened my mouth to say something else, but before either of us could say a word, we saw a shadow above us.

Standing over us was a grown-up with silver-streaked hair that looked like starlight and silver-and-black glasses to match. She was wearing a blue skirt and a businesslike black coat, and in her hand she held a silver keychain weighed down with the key to every door, every classroom, and every keyhole in the school. Including ours.

We both started talking at once. I told her about how the door had locked behind us. I told her about how we had tried to go get her, and that we had just been about to go try again. I told her that I had been scared, but I wasn't anymore, and I wondered to myself if she had ever been scared like that, and if she had ever been able to fix it, because, even though she was the principal, she was still a person, and she must have feelings, just like anybody else. At the same time, Chloe told her about Toby and about the hall and about how brave I had been to go alone. It was strange to hear her say that about me—but not necessarily in a bad way.

We told Ms. Sylvie everything, and when we were done, she said one thing: "Would you like me to let you back in?"

"Yes," we said. "Yes, please."

Ms. Sylvie stuck her key into the lock and, as if waking up from a long nap, the door creaked open.

Dancing time was over, and it was playtime. It was like someone had dropped a stone into a pond when we entered the classroom—the gasps and exclamations rippled over me and Chloe like one gigantic wave as we made our way across the classroom over to Ms. Winnie, who was in the middle of making it clear to Max that

hands were not for hitting, even if it was just a game.

Ms. Winnie and the principal stood there talking for a long time, and eventually they digressed from the subject of Chloe and me and moved on to the very important teacher business that Ms. Sylvie had originally been coming to deliver. Aware that we were no longer necessary, Chloe made a beeline for the art center, while I headed straight for the house center where my friends were playing. Ava and Ella were pretending to be a family of spies.

"What took you so long?" Ella wanted to know.

"Why'd you come in with the principal?" asked Ava. "Are you in trouble?"

After I finished explaining, Ella asked if I wanted to play.

I was about to say yes and ask whether I could be the other spy daughter when I glanced over at the art center. There, Chloe was sitting in a little plastic chair, at one of the many tables, all alone.

"Maybe in a little bit," I said. "Can I be the twin sister?"

"You bet," said Ava.

"See you later," said Ella.

I made my way to the art center, where I pulled up a chair next to Chloe.

"Hey," I said awkwardly. She didn't say anything. She continued to stare at her piece of pink construction paper, filling in one of the zig-zags on the stripe stencil. Next to her, lying unused on the table, was the heart stencil.

When she didn't say anything, I was about to leave, but then she spoke. "You can use the stencil," she told me. "I don't want it."

"Which stencil?" I asked.

"That one." She pointed. "The heart stencil."

I wasn't sure what to make of this. I thought about how, not so many minutes ago, we had been lost together. I remembered what she had told Ms. Sylvie, about how I was brave. I was still dwelling on this when she finally looked up. "What are you waiting for?" she demanded. "I said you could use it."

"I'm not here for the heart stencil," I said. "I'm here because I felt sorry for you."

"What?" said Chloe. She seemed genuinely surprised. "Why would you feel sorry for me?"

"I don't know," I said. "But if I wanted the stencil, I'd just take it for myself. I don't need you to let me."

"I was trying to be nice," she said, looking injured.

*Should I take the stencil or refuse it?*  
Neither option seemed right to me.  
*Was there a better way?*

"Why don't we share it?" I blurted.

Chloe blinked. "What?"

"The stencil," I said. "We can use it at the same time."

There was a moment of silence. After some hesitation, she said, "Sure." Then she added, "Good idea."

I smiled. Then I grabbed a piece of purple construction paper from the shelf behind me, placed it on the table, and sat down in the little plastic chair next to Chloe.

And, together, we shared the heart stencil.

---

**Winner of the Fall 2019 Personal Narrative Contest with the Society of Young Inklings.**

# Our Blanket



by Leila Lakhali, 12  
Seattle, WA

Everyone has their own opinion.  
But it is not okay  
To say to me that I am wrong.  
That I am bad. That I have no place here.  
Because I just said that I am Muslim.  
We are not terrorists. Not the  
Awful people the media depicts us as.

Every group has people who don't follow the rules.  
The Islam I know teaches me:  
Don't harm a hair on their head.  
No matter who they are.  
No matter what they say.  
But it is not okay to tell me that I have to say sorry.  
Sorry, sorry, sorry.  
Saying sorry for all those rule breakers that gave you a false image.  
Tear that image away.  
Underneath you will see something beautiful.  
You won't have to think twice about it.  
Muslim.  
The word I grew up with.  
I have a huge, loving community  
Backing me up, so I help them.  
We weave together like a thousand colored-wool strings.  
Warm and comforting.  
We make a blanket that is love.  
Is comforting, is cozy, is us.  
I feel strong. I feel accepted.  
Drumbeats. Singing along melodiously.  
Even little Amel, her hair gone wild long ago, and baby Nia,  
Big innocent eyes,



Warbling along too.

Even those teenagers, yes, those over there, who have forgotten their community,  
Their tradition,

Hum along quietly.

The memories of their childhood

Coming back. The fading pictures regain true color.

Muzlum

Portrays it differently.

Like sharp rocks slicing deep into our skin.

But you say it like

This.

Muslim,

Soft, this word, not rough like sandpaper.

Muslim.

That 'S'

Like a thousand silken pillows

Awaiting you as soon as you finish a

Warm, fragrant bath.

Not deep "muuu,"

Subtle "mu."

Pull out that Z; it hurts.

Take a look at me

And you'll say,

"You're white."

Part-way, but also Algerian. North African and proud of it.

We become more and more strained under tension,

But one question remains:

Why?

Why hurt someone else's community?

Why tear someone else's blanket?

But we don't let that affect us.

We go on singing

And sharing

And loving

And caring.

We are just like you.

Now you know.

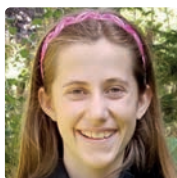
So don't hurt my stride,

Don't take away my happy vibe.

Just know,

Your blanket is there too,

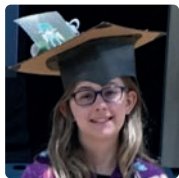
Or maybe you'll create one.



*Rainbow Lake* (Canon Powershot XS600)  
Sage Millen, 11  
Vancouver, Canada

# Yellowstone, a Fresh Start

When Ruby, a wolf, gets separated from her pack, she must find a new one—or survive on her own



by Emily Carver, 11  
Bellevue, WA

Red eyes sparkled in the shadows of night and injected fear like a shot into any animal that glanced in their direction. This proved true for the deer that was staring, lost in the eyes, wondering if her blood would be as red as the pulsing pupils. A furry, red creature sprang into the air and collapsed onto the deer.

It was a wolf. Alone. She had been alone for a week. The wolf hadn't expected that a little run to clear her mind would get her lost from her pack. She chewed the deer in sadness and confusion, wondering why she couldn't sniff her way back. The stars peppered the sky in dots of glowing life. So still, so quiet. It had been a hard week, but somehow she had powered through it.

"Ruby, why haven't you returned yet?" her mom would be asking.

Suddenly, a beating of air sounded through the still night, and Ruby looked up. A strange metal bird with huge propellers on top created a whirlwind of snow, questions, and fear as two strange, furless animals emerged from it. *Hoomans*, thought Ruby. Her pack had talked about how dangerous they were and about the

shooting object they used to poach: a gun. They were also horribly naked, without any fur covering their bodies. Instead, they wore fake fur to cover up. They each held a gun. Fear struck like lightning at her heart as she snarled, but one of their gun's shots hit her in the neck with a loud, cracking peal. A sharp pain shot through her body, and she collapsed.

Ruby woke up to the sound of a voice. The two hoomans were chattering. "That wolf is a beauty—the reddest coat I ever saw," one said.

"Agreed," said the other. "And the eyes. Got a perfect ruby sparkle, like an albino. Except her coat is red too!"

Ruby felt sick from the swaying that was going on beneath her feet. A cage of cold metal bars surrounded her, and Ruby shivered in fright. *How long have I been asleep?* Suddenly, the pit of her stomach dropped, and a feeling of descent made her insides lurch. Then she felt a sting on her neck, and she fell over. Her eyes caught a glimpse of the gun that had made the shot as she closed her eyes. *This is the end*, she thought.

Ruby woke to a hot sun beating down on her red coat, which glistened

**“You,” he said. Ruby didn’t know what to say.  
“I’m Ash,” said the new wolf.**

like a flower against the green grass. She looked up at the sky; a soft blue lake dotted with clouds greeted her eyes.

She sniffed the air and a flurry of smells played in her nostrils, some of them new and unrecognizable. *Where am I?* Ruby wondered. She looked around and saw a forest and a stream beside her. She trotted over and drank. Cool, refreshing water slipped down her dry throat. *This place is amazing,* thought Ruby. But this new land hadn’t fixed anything about being alone. She still needed a pack. Ruby looked around and took off into the forest. A few days passed, and soon, Ruby knew the park well. She knew it was called Yellowstone, and she knew hoomans often visited here for a trip.

It took a little bit to get used to the heat. She stayed in caves at night. After a while, however, she realized that she had been seeing a lot of deer. Too many deer. The sun sank beneath the mountains as she traveled to Old Faithful, a famous geyser in her new home. She often saw wolf packs over there, hunting and talking about the geyser. That was how she heard its name and learned about its popularity among the hoomans. She never joined these packs. *They’re just a gang of nutheads,* she thought. They said things differently too. Humans. “Must just be a mispronunciation,” Ruby whispered to herself. But if she wanted to fit in, she had to say it like the Yellowstoners.

Soon after she had set out, a waning crescent moon sent a luminous glow across the hills. She soon arrived at

Old Faithful and saw signs around the shop that was next to it. *Become a Yellowstone Junior Ranger! Bike to Morning Glory Pool! Bikes are allowed on the paved path between the Old Faithful Lodge and Morning Glory Pool.* What were these mysterious letters? Probably advertisements, like humans like to do. All of sudden, a huge, roaring wave of water shot up from the earth, steaming and boiling.

Ruby flinched as the geyser erupted, laughing and gurgling, churning and broiling at 204° Fahrenheit, until she saw a deer. She ran toward it just as the geyser’s water ceased; the deer took off into the forest. For some reason, it turned around, right into Ruby’s paws. It fell, dead, as Ruby swiped at its neck. She looked over to where the deer had suddenly turned and saw a young, grey, wolf, probably around four years old—Ruby’s age.

“You,” he said. Ruby didn’t know what to say. “I’m Ash,” said the new wolf.

“Go back to that last part. What are you talking about? You’ve heard of me?” said Ruby in surprise.

The wolf just stared. “Of course. It’s not like you see a red wolf just wandering around with no pack. You should seriously join one, but not with the morons that hang out by the geyser. Those guys are twerps.” *Ash thought they were idiots too!*

“Yeah,” Ruby replied. “My name’s Ruby, by the way.”

The wolf looked around. “Okay, Ruby. We should get back.”

"Back to where? You're all alone. What happened to your pack?"

Ash chuckled. "I got lost, but I know my way back. Tonight they're meeting at Den Four." Separate meeting dens? *I wish my pack were that organized,* thought Ruby. "You could come with us if you want."

"Really?" said Ruby. "I was looking for a pack even before I came here!" Ash nodded.

"Of course," he said. "We're a huge pack because we always give homes to the new wolves that are brought here. In fact, I was sent to find you. Did you know that we all came here the same way? It's for the 'Bring the Wolves Back' project."

Ruby was filled with pride. *A pack, sent a wolf... just for her? It was amazing.* "Let's get heading back," said Ash. Ruby nodded. Then they took off into the night.

All through the trees, black shadows followed them like the creeping panthers up in the mountains where she used to live. She was worried something would jump out at any second. Her thoughts were confirmed a minute later when a large, snarling, angry puma jumped into their path.

Ash yelped and leapt back. Ruby pulled back her teeth in a snarl and circled the puma. Ash gathered his senses and helped look intimidating with Ruby. "Back off, pal," snarled Ruby.

"I'd say it's you who should back off," said the puma. "Wouldn't want you to get hurt." At that moment, Ruby sprang and locked her jaws around his throat. Howling, the puma swung wildly. Ash slammed into the puma's

side and bit but was kicked back. Ruby knew she had to use her special power. She unlocked her aching, bloody jaws and sprang to the side. The puma backed her up against the thick trunk of a white pine. She stared at the puma, into his deep soul... The cat froze.

Red eyes glared back at him with a killing stare. The cat suddenly snapped back to his senses and took a running start toward Ruby. She gracefully jumped over him, and with her hind legs, kicked him into the trunk behind her. She sank her jaws into his stomach, killing him. Horrified, Ash went over to her. "Nice... job..." he said with a wobbly voice.

"Thanks," said Ruby. *She had shown that puma who was boss!* The pride from the battle enhanced Ruby's healing of her sore jaws and fueled her legs to run to Den Four. Ash pointed out flowers along the way. "That's phlox," said Ash. "And there's lupine, and ooh, my favorite—Indian paintbrushes!" Ash rushed over to a striking red flower.

"We should be here now," said Ash. He looked recovered except for a nasty bruise on his side. As soon as they entered the huge cave, a silvery wolf ran over to Ash and nuzzled him.

"Oh, Ash, I was so worried when you didn't come back! But you found her! And what happened to your side?"

"Mom," grunted Ash, pushing her away. He grinned back at her. "Don't worry, Mom, I missed yah. This is Ruby," he said.

A darker-grey wolf with white paws bounded over to Ash. "My son, you're back!"

"Dad!" said Ash happily. "This is Ruby, the red wolf I was sent to find.

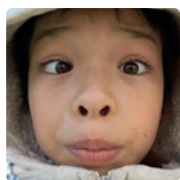
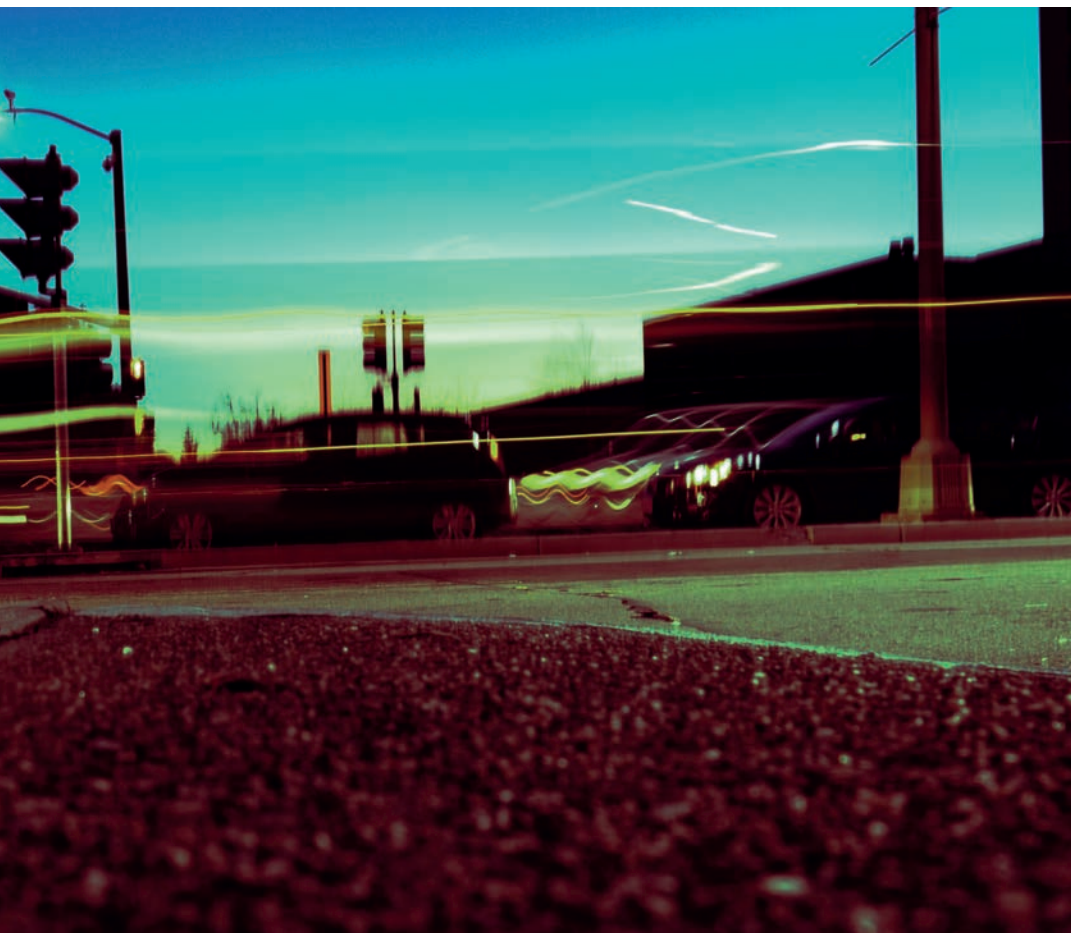


Ruby, this is my mom and dad.” Ruby didn’t answer. What she saw filled her insides with happiness—a huge pack, full of wolves that would help each other out, wolves that would care if she got lost, wolves that would send a wolf to find a missing one!

“Welcome home,” said Ash, smiling. “Do you like it?”

“I love it! This is a pack that will take care of each other, a pack that will stick together through tough situations, a pack that will care for every wolf like a brother or sister.” *Just like mine*, thought Ruby. She knew that she had finally, after a long, lonely, frightening journey, found her home.

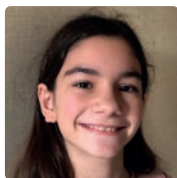




*McArthur Lights* (Canon PowerShot G15)  
Oskar Cross, 10  
Oakland, CA

# Swirling Arabesques

A foggy bus ride home invokes a dreamy state of mind



by Zoe Kyriakakis, 10  
Philadelphia, PA

The long, yellow school bus is full of noise—laughing, yelling, chatting, gossiping, squealing, groaning, and singing (a bunch of third-graders, all of whom are rather loud and out of tune). Kids shout across the narrow aisle, crowding over iPads and other electronics and noisily chattering away. I quietly stare out the window, watching the crowded roads as the bus zooms by. Cars swarm the busy intersection and large, green route signs hang overhead proclaiming “Boulevard This” or “Lane That” in shiny, white lettering. There is noise outside the bus as well as in—honking, beeping, shouting, car engines, and the occasional urgent wail of an ambulance or cheerful chirp of a bird in a nearby tree. Cars zip by at breakneck speed, flashing white lights in front and reddish-yellow in the back. Nobody on the road is dawdling around or wasting time. Everyone on the busy road seems to have a place to be, a person to be, a thing that must be done. In the distance is the skyline of the city of Philadelphia—bright, massive, crowded with skyscrapers and normal-sized houses alike.

Although the intersection is all very

interesting, it isn't what I'm watching. I've been on this homeward-bound school bus route precisely 157 times (and counting) every Friday for the past four-and-a-half-ish years. It's safe to say that I'm familiar enough with this particular intersection. What I'm really staring at through the window is the fog.

A thick white blanket of fog hangs over Philadelphia and seemingly everywhere around it, stretching out as far as the eye can see. There isn't a trace of blue in the sky, and judging from the gloomy whiteness, it almost seems like there never was. The fog is so moist that the bus's windows, one for every seat, have misted over. It's so thick that it hangs in the air damply, temporarily shielding Philadelphia's citizens and tourists from any view of the outside world. But it doesn't just hang in the air either. It is the air, and it is the sky, and it is stretched out for miles and miles of white nothingness. A little bit of fog once in a while is natural, but this fog has beaten the standards. Fog like this? In San Francisco, maybe. In *Philadelphia*? Absolutely not.

The bus jerks to a halt in front of

*If only everyone knew that they were so beautiful and twirling and alive.*

the first stop, scaring the bejeezus out of me. That just goes to show what happens when I get lost in thought. About a third of the bus's contents file out to greet parents. I remain sitting in my seat, staring out the window after a quick recollection. My bus stop isn't yet, though I'm grateful for 45 percent less noise than before. My stop is one of the last, and I probably won't arrive there for another 40 minutes. I stare out the window again, into the hazy fog, just as the school bus veers off. I see you, the fog seems to say. I gaze back intently.

I undo and redo my knotted, brown ponytail and sigh. I undo it, redo it again, undo it, redo it again. Sometimes I seem to be flowing with nervous energy, and the only thing I can do about it is keep my hands busy. For that reason, I make sure to have a hair tie with me at all times. My eyes wander back to the window and my brain drifts back to my day, reflecting on everything that happened.

Today we had a field trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which was pretty much our whole school day. We went because of what our class is studying in social studies, which is the Golden Age of Islam. The museum had an interesting display of Islamic art, which included mosaic wall tile patterns and lots of beautiful carpets. The mosaics spoke to me the most, though. They were beautiful glimmering turquoise, full of spiraling shapes and patterns. Now, staring at the bland whiteness stretching through the sky, I was longing for the

splash of gorgeous colors and shapes.

After our class got back to school from the museum, our teacher pointed out all the different features that appeared in Islamic art. There were patterns, shapes, and symmetry, blossoming floral designs, tiny figures of people and animals, and once in a while, flowing Arabic calligraphy. One thing my teacher told us about really stood out to me, though. She used two words to describe the spiraling lines that seemed to weave in and out through everything else, two words that sang to me like graceful angels—*swirling arabesques*.

*Swirling arabesques*. Those words reminded me of dancing ballerinas, twirling with flouncy full skirts. *Swirling arabesques*. They reminded me of the rising of the sun in the morning, warm on my face the second before I opened my eyes. *Swirling arabesques*. They reminded me of crowds among crowds of exuberant people, cheering and supporting each other and staying strong for something they believed in. *Swirling arabesques* reminded me of a phoenix emerging anew from the ashes, soon to regrow its vibrant plumage and begin life again.

My writing brain had started to whirl the second I had heard those words. They were so beautiful, so meant to be, but I didn't think I would ever write something that dramatic. Still, they tasted good in my mouth. I could feel them breathing, every bit as alive as I was. I think. *If only everyone knew that they were so beautiful and twirling and alive.*

I stare once again at the endless white sky and sigh, but a content sigh. Despite the sort of miserable blandness of the white heavens, the sky has almost done me a favor. The sad, dreary fog forced me to think about brighter things, beautiful things. Now I could see the words dancing in my head, alive and waiting for me. Beautiful, bright, and alive.

The bus once again jerks to an abrupt halt, bringing my thoughts back to Earth. It takes me a second to realize that the bus is almost empty.

"Third an' Pine!" Ms. Anthena, our bus driver, calls.

This is my stop. I can't believe I've zoned out for so long.

I swing my backpack over my shoulder and walk down the aisle with a few other kids, one of whom is my little brother, George. "Thank you," I say to Ms. Anthena, and she says, "You're welcome, Zo'," and zooms off after the automatic folding doors snap shut behind me. I hug my mom hello and begin to walk home in a trance in the misty, enchanted fog, wondering what the next lively, *swirling arabesque* words will be.

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**Second place in the Fall 2019  
Personal Narrative Contest with the  
Society of Young Inklings.**



# The Schnitzelbird

Life in a small town is disrupted when a special bird disappears



Elaina Heinitz, 10  
Falls Church, VA

Once there was a town named Schnitzelberg, and every morning a bird would fly over the town singing a four-note song. The bird was soon named after the town; everyone called it the Schnitzelbird. Not one person through the whole town of Schnitzelberg had an alarm clock. The bird woke them up every day, and everyone loved it. That is, everyone except Jack.

Jack was a middle-aged man who loved his sleep. He thought the bird woke up much too early every morning and that the people of Schnitzelberg might feel better if they slept more. So he devised a plan.

The next morning, when the Schnitzelbird came around for its wake-up call, he caught it and put it into a cage.

"Oh, don't complain," said Jack to the bird. "It's your fault you wake up so early. My people will be happy to have their sleep, you'll see."

But everyone woke up late that morning.

"Mommy, where is the Schnitzelbird?" A little girl asked, clutching her mother's arm. "I'm late to school!"

"Oh darling, I'm sure the bird will come back tomorrow—probably just needed its sleep. It must be exhausted flying around like that every morning."

Murmurs like that were heard all over the town. Everyone was telling their kid that it was going to be ok, that the bird would probably be back tomorrow, but worry was spread across all of their faces nonetheless.

"They'll thank me soon," Jack muttered. "Just let them see how life can be without that bird."

After work, Jack was back in his room eating his dinner, and the bird started shaking the bars.

"Oh, calm down, you!" he hissed. "You can live here with me, and no one will bother you. No responsibility, either. You're a lucky one." The truth was that Jack really did believe that. He had bought some bird food at the store so the bird could live with him. He hated his job and envied the bird, but the bird felt a responsibility to the town and shook the bars of the cage anyway.

"Quit that racket!!" Jack shouted at the bird. It stopped. Jack knew birds couldn't make expressions, but if they could, this bird would look hurt.

"I'm going to sleep. Goodnight," said

Jack sternly and lay down, ready for a peaceful night at last. Unfortunately, that's not what he got.

At two in the morning, the bird woke him up by banging on the cage with his long, slender beak.

"Stop that!" Jack yelled. He had been having the most pleasant dream. "I'm up! I'm up!" he said, waving his hands around, searching for his glasses, which now rested on the nightstand.

"Why isn't the bird here?" asked little girls and boys all around the town.

"I don't know, dear," said the parents, not hiding their sadness.

Everyone returned with alarm clocks that night, grief spread across their faces, and Jack moved into his guest room because of the bird's racket.

"You're not doing anyone any good, you know!" Jack yelled at the bird before shutting his door.

The next day everyone woke up on time, but all of their glum faces could prove to anyone that something was wrong. *The bird couldn't have affected these people that much, could it? Is it affecting their work? Is it affecting their life? No, silly me. They'll thank me soon. It's just an old bird, nothing more than that. An annoyance; yes, that's what it is. I helped my people in a way that the bird could never help,* Jack thought. And with that, he left for work.

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It was Saturday, Jack's favorite day. No work, nothing he needed to do. Nothing. It was perfect. But when he walked outside, no one was there to greet him. Where did they all go? Jack wondered as he walked over to a sign stapled to a

tree next to a walkway. The sign said,

### Group Gathering at the Three Trees.

The Three Trees was a popular place to have a gathering in Schnitzelberg, but they hadn't had one in a long time. *Wonder what this one's for?* he thought as he walked to the three trees. Once he arrived, however, he was completely overwhelmed by surprise.

Hanging from the three trees were gigantic banners of the Schnitzelbird that read:

To the great Schnitzelbird, we give  
you our hearts.

And the whole town was there! They were all listening to a man standing on a pedestal. The man was the mayor, Sir McMuffin (at least that's what everyone called him). And Jack would never forget what he said.

"Our bird was the greatest of all. We all loved him with all of our hearts, and I am sorry to tell you that we believe that his absence from this town could only mean his death. We believe that our bird was shot by a hunter and is now dead, but I warn you, our bird is not!" proclaimed the mayor. A murmur went through the crowd.

Jack was astounded! It was a funeral! A funeral for the bird, and not only that, every single towns person had come!

"He is not dead because he lives on inside each of us! He is not dead because he is still here! He is in you!" and when the mayor said "you," he pointed to a lady standing in front of him.

"And you!" he exclaimed to a man. "And you and you and you and you!" He said, pointing every which way. "He lives in all of us!" cried the mayor. Everyone screamed their applause, but tears were still in their eyes. Jack knew what he had to do. He ran back to his house, up the stairs, and into his old room.

"Hi, you," he said, reaching out his hand and petting the bird. Then he opened the cage. The bird just stood there, stunned.

"Well, what are you waiting for? You're free!" said Jack. The bird turned his head to Jack, and once again, he knew birds couldn't talk, but if they could, he knew exactly what this one would be saying.

"You're welcome. Now go give my

town a show," said Jack. And with that, the bird took flight.

Jack ran outside and could see the bird flying toward the funeral. He had to run to keep up with it, and then he heard gasps. He saw kids pointing and grown-ups staring. And then, just like that, the world snapped back together, and everyone started cheering.

The party lasted so long. Everyone burned their alarm clock and danced around the fire while the Schnitzelbird sat on a throne that kids had carved themselves and sang his four-note song till the very last second of the day.

That night, everyone went to bed with full tummies and happy thoughts, and Jack not once ever again wasn't happy to wake up to the Schnitzelbird, and his life, a little early every day.



*A Man's Friend* (Nikon D70)  
Hanna Gustafson, 13  
South Burlington, VT

# Gratitude

**A summer in rural China teaches the narrator not to take her life for granted**



by Alicia Xin, 13  
Scarsdale, NY

This summer, I was in the Liangshan mountains in rural Sichuan, China, for camp. At first, it seemed like an ordinary place, but those ten days taught me what gratitude is.

Liangshan is a historically poor county. Isolated by mountains, it was the last place in China to banish slavery. High illiteracy rates and AIDS have plagued it for years, keeping its inhabitants in a long cycle of poverty. Most of its population are of Yi descent, a minority ethnic group in China. They earn meager wages as farmers, maids, or janitors.

My camp, BLOOM, consisted of more than 100 kids. It was founded by a charity organization in an effort to offer more educational opportunities to kids in the mountains. Half of the campers are from big cities like New York, Toronto, and Shanghai. The other half are from Liangshan. We were paired up, and the kids from cities tutor the local kids in English for two hours a day. As city kids, we learned about Yi culture, took guitar classes, arts and crafts, softball lessons, and more. Most of the money we paid for the camp went to nearby schools, and the teachers and

counselors were all volunteers.

When I first arrived at the high school where the camp was located, I was instantly aware of the cracked tile floors, the dirty windows, and the creaky, flimsy doors. My roommates quickly helped me with my heavy suitcase, set up my sleeping linens, and showed me how to use a mosquito net. The dorms were bright, but the floors were always muddy, no matter how many times we tried mopping them. We were to sleep on wooden planks and shower with ice-cold water in the public bathhouse. Each small room housed seven or eight people. It was uncomfortable, but I was resolved not to complain about any of it. If the Liangshan kids had to live like this all year, I had no excuse for whining.

Over the next few days, my roommates and I quickly developed a collegial closeness that I've seldom experienced before. We shared inside jokes, told ghost stories, and talked late into the night every day. I felt like I belonged, even though they sometimes said things that I didn't understand. Sometimes I couldn't express myself in Chinese, and they'd all listen as I grasped for the right words, guessing



*Wrinkles* (acrylics)  
Claire Jiang, 13  
Princeton, NJ



at what I meant. They never seemed annoyed and explained everything with infinite patience. I was shocked to learn that none of my Liangshan friends had seen the ocean or been on a boat or plane. But we complained about homework and getting up early in the morning just like I did with my friends in New York. The kids there were just like me. It was so easy to connect with each other, despite our differences.

On the second night, we had a discussion activity. A few campers, chosen at random, sat in the front of the lecture hall and answered a simple question: "What would you do with 100 yuan (about \$15)?" Most kids wished for new clothes, books, or food. When it came to Gujin, a girl from Liangshan, she spoke with confidence and pride.

"My father works as a janitor. It doesn't pay very well. He comes home very late at night, always exhausted. I know that every cent is the result of his hard work, and I am lucky to have parents who care for me." She paused. "If I had 100 yuan, I would give it to my dad to take some pressure off his shoulders and to help pay the bills. Thank you."

Applause erupted from the lecture hall. I knew plenty of people at home who took their parents for granted. To some extent, I realized that I, too, was not fully grateful for all that my parents had done for me. I had never once worried about how I would afford food or lost sleep over the bills. That was all taken care of for me. Many of the kids around me knew what it felt like to go hungry at night, but they didn't pity themselves. Instead, they seemed even more

steadfastly determined and thankful for everything they had. It was rare to find such personalities.

A few days later, I asked my friend Anai about her family. She was a quiet girl who had a habit of speaking softly with a warm accent. "I have four siblings. My mom has to tend to the farm all day. If she has extra time, she finds work doing other people's laundry," she said.

"What about your dad?" I asked.

"He passed away two years ago," she said, suddenly seeming distant. I felt immediate regret for the question, and I bit my lip, not knowing what to say. She just shrugged. "I never really had a connection with him. He didn't talk to us. When my mom made a little money, she would have to hide it because otherwise my dad would just go out and buy liquor and drink until the money ran out again. I didn't like him because he never cared about us. But he was still my father."

"I'm so sorry," I murmured. She shrugged again, and we sat in silence.

On the sixth day, all the big-city kids went on a trip to a Yi village in the heart of the mountains. It was home to a boy named Geizuo. He went to our camp and was a tall, calm volunteer from the high school we were living in. BLOOM had raised enough money to send Geizuo to a private school in Changshu, a city near Shanghai, and was trying to do the same for many other kids in Liangshan. We boarded the bus around noon, expecting a two-hour drive. Four hours later, we were stuck in a ditch in the middle of the road.

I had never seen anything like it. I knew the roads were old and some

**Geizuo's mother and a few other village adults filed into the clearing, carrying bamboo baskets filled with rice, wooden basins of vegetable stew, and platters of beef.**

parts had crumbled away, but here it was: a big, two-meter-wide pothole where the asphalt had weathered away, creating a deep ditch in the road. After twenty minutes of pushing the bus and filling the ditch, we were finally on our way again. An hour later, we were stuck yet again, this time because the road was too narrow and winding. Two people had thrown up because of motion sickness, and I wondered how many times Geizuo had traveled over these mountain roads to his home. The “public bus” he rode was usually a tractor with people and other cargo loaded onto it. How many Liangshan kids had to go through this every time they wanted to see their family? All of the local campers went to boarding school, so they didn’t go home very often. In contrast, I rode a school bus for about ten minutes every day to school.

We had to walk the rest of the way after the bus couldn’t go on, and when we arrived, there was yet another surprise. The village consisted of wooden fences and mud huts. I saw no traces of electricity or running water. Pigs, goats, and cows stood in wooden pens while little dogs barked at us. I had seen places like these on TV, but seeing it wasn’t quite the same as being there. The smell of woody fire and savory food wafted around us, and the pebbles on the dirt paths crunched beneath my feet. The place was alive with chatter, and the friendly villagers were already at the entrance, waiting for us and cheering as we arrived. An

old man rushed to greet me, clasping my hands in his and grinning from ear to ear. He thanked me over and over for visiting them.

“It’s been no trouble, sir,” I replied respectfully. The first thing I noticed about him was his clothing—like the Yi outfits I’d seen at camp cultural night. Thick black fabric wrapped around their torsos, bright hand-embroidery swirling across their chests. Their long, flowing skirts floated an inch above the ground, swishing around their legs as they went. It seemed that most of the villagers wore these outfits every day.

My friend Kunling was there with me, and we distributed a bag of milk candies among the kids in the village. We also distributed the six small flashlights Kunling had brought for them. Some other kids toted crates of bottled water for the villagers, and the counselors had prepared BLOOM backpacks for the kids there.

We toured the place, looking inside the neat little mud huts and petting the horses and donkeys. The huts generally had no windows and were incredibly dim inside. The villagers slept on straw and sleeping rolls. I didn’t see much furniture or extra clothes.

For dinner, Geizuo’s mother and a few other village adults filed into the clearing, carrying bamboo baskets filled with rice, wooden basins of vegetable stew, and platters of beef. For a village of families that each make an annual income of about 10,000 yuan

per person (about \$1,500 USD), it was an unparalleled act of welcome. They had no dining table, so the food was set on the ground. The meat didn't taste like anything I've tasted before. It was tough and full of lean muscle, unlike the tender, fatty cows we eat at home. The fragrant flavor of beef was pure on my tongue, with no fancy seasoning. It tasted whole.

We all gathered for a Yi performance where everyone danced and sang with big torches. When the torches were whisked away and extinguished, the old man who had welcomed me earlier came forward with a flat, iron rod that was so hot it glowed red in the deepening twilight. He licked it. We all gasped, but he just laughed. He blew water onto the metal, and it sizzled and evaporated in a cloud of vapor. He did it again and again, and I could see that his tongue had turned white with burn scars over the years. The villagers explained that the performance was a Yi tradition usually performed at the Yi New Year, weddings, and other special occasions. I thought about all the times I'd been burned and couldn't imagine how painful that must be.

As we hiked back to the bus, the sun was setting behind a mountain, and the skies were streaked with orange and pink. The undulating mountainsides extended beyond the horizons, and the embryonic greens of summer seemed to cover it like a fuzzy carpet. Terraced fields and organized crops surrounded the little village. The trip hadn't been flawless, but it was unforgettable. I used to sympathize with the villagers—almost pity them for their financial problems and the

strenuous physical labor needed to tend their fields, but I realized that they were mostly happy and content with what they had.

I had so much at my disposal compared to most kids here. For the first time in my life, I acknowledged how fortunate I was. Many villagers couldn't afford two sets of clothes, nevermind piano lessons or ice-skating classes. Things I took for granted at home were luxuries to most children on this mountain. I was suddenly resolved to work harder than I ever had before, and to make a difference.

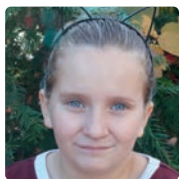
As my friends and I walked down that mountain path, singing our favorite songs at the top of our lungs, I felt free, like I could fly into the clouds and never come back.

Gratitude is not a saying. It's an emotion, felt with more than the heart and expressed with more than words. The world had given me a gift, and in turn, I'm bound to a promise.

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**Third place in the Fall 2019 Personal Narrative Contest with the Society of Young Inklings.**

# Everything I Love



by Liv Baker, 11  
Seattle, WA

The ride up the mountain  
The thousands of trees  
The pine and bark  
Smell  
Makes me feel  
Like I am  
Relaxed and calm  
The rain pattering  
Against the window  
The shower steam against my  
Warm hot skin  
Its smells like  
A clean start  
Leaves falling  
With the snow  
Is a wonderful sight  
Sliding down the soft  
And slick slopes  
Going up the bright  
Red gondola

## 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

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Phoebe Shatkin, 12

### POETRY

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Christian Goh, 12  
Freyja Land, 10

### ART

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Elise Ko, 10  
Ava Watford, 12

### CONTEST

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**Personal Narrative, with the Society of Young Inklings, Fall 2019**

**Winners (published in this issue)**

**First Place**

Kateri Escobar Doran, 12

**Second Place**

Zoe Kyriakakis, 10

**Third Place**

Alicia Xin, 13

**Honorable Mention**

"Cody's Last Day" by Elena Baltz, 10

"A Story" by Asher Jenvey, 10

"Life in the Jungle" by Arielle Kouyoumdjian, 13

"Writer" by Vandana Ravi, 13

"Believing" by Lily Shi, 11

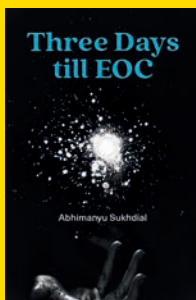
"Kingdom in the River" by Lydia Taylor, 13

"Gentle Hands" by Michelle Wang, 12

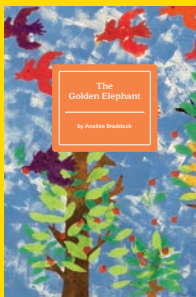
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