

StoneSoup



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StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

Editor's Note

As you may have noticed just from holding it in your hands, this issue is longer than usual. That's because in addition to the regular forty-eight pages of writing and art, you'll find an extra ten pages of art in this, our new art edition of the magazine. We've decided to make a special art issue at least an annual event. Why? Because art submissions have really exploded in the past couple of years; we get so much wonderful art that we love and want to publish, and it's difficult to find space for it alongside all the incredible writing we also love and want to publish. So, instead of temporarily suspending art submissions or accepting even less art, we decided to make space to publish as much as we can.

The art in this issue represents the full range of work that we publish—you'll find photographs, paintings, pencil drawings, pastel drawings, digital art created with Procreate. You'll find work from our Refugee Project, portraits and landscapes, pastorals and street scenes.

Thank you to all of our artists—past and present—for bringing us inspiration and beauty. Happy new year! And happy FIFTIETH birthday to *Stone Soup*!



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Reflections
(OPPO Find X2 Lite)
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New Zealand

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Tacit Tracks (iPhone 11 Pro)
Sabrina Lu, 13
Virginia

One Day Old



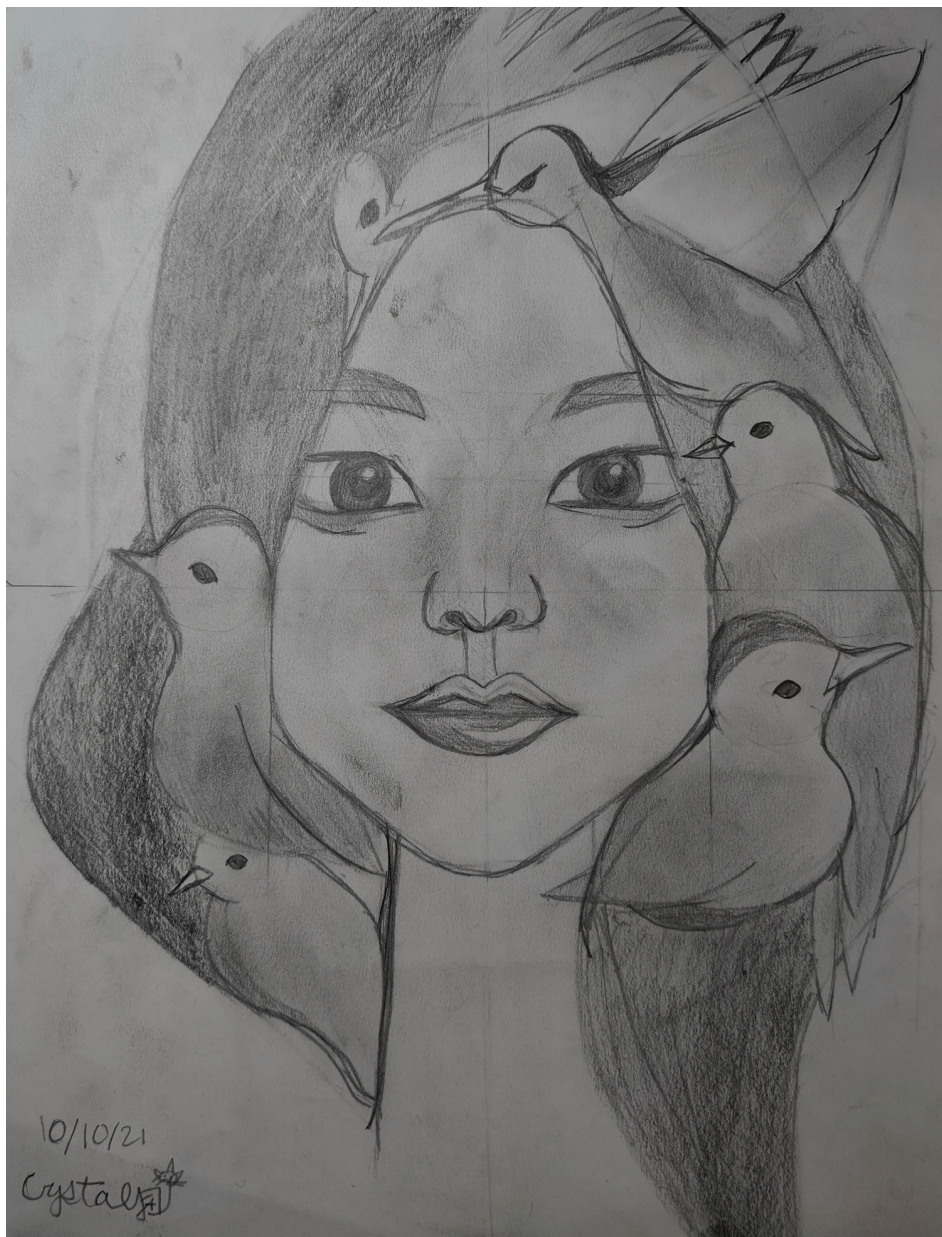
By Elijah Osmond, 13
Ontario, Canada

What a wonderful time of year it is, winter.
Snow fills the air, soft and cold
Tumbling down white dunes, forever bold
Standing atop it, I seem never to shiver

Technically I was born a day ago,
Made by children with smiles that glowed
Alas I cannot play with them, for I have no legs
Only a wool scarf set round my neck

During the day, the children keep me company
Striking up one-sided conversations, or offering me tea
But at night the stars are my friends
Shining down and making my eyes look like one of them

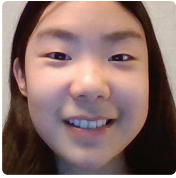
Then my kin come dancing down,
Swirling and twirling around
And I know I am home
And only one day old



Girl with Birds (Pencil)
Crystal Fu, 11
New York

Snow Day

A year after the snow day that changed her life forever, Anna finds a wounded bird



By Emily Chang, 13
New York

On Tuesday morning, a sheath of crystalline white over the bedroom window obstructed Anna's view of anything else outside. Snow day, she thought, and without explanation, a feeling of dread crept over her. School would be canceled, she knew, and the fact was confirmed by her mother at breakfast.

Anna stared out the kitchen window, which the snow had somehow bypassed. The trees sagged, deposits of heavy whiteness weighing them down. Beside the window, an evergreen dropped a load of snow suddenly and then sprang back up, splattering white powder over the glass windowpane.

What was there to do if school was out? Anna wandered listlessly around the house, did some simple extra-credit homework from her fourth-grade class, and finally sat down with a book and tried to focus. But her mind kept wandering away from the lines of print on the pages, and her mother, taking notice, said, "Maybe if you go outside and play, you'll feel better."

Inside, Anna disagreed. Her mother couldn't possibly understand

what she was thinking, what the snow was reminding her of. But Anna obeyed anyway, slowly tugging on her big boots and throwing a jacket around her shoulders. She didn't want to go out, even if staying inside meant doing nothing at all. Because last winter, on the first snow day of the year, Anna had done a terrible thing.

She didn't want to think about it.

Slowly, perhaps because the boots were half a size too big, Anna trudged outside into the snowdrifts that greeted her on the front doorstep. She shut the door quickly so that cold air would not invade and displace the natural warmth of the house. It had snowed just a little more than a foot last night, and the texture of the snow was just right for shaping snowballs or rolling up a gargantuan snowman. It should have been a perfect day.

But it wasn't.

Anna tried to have fun. She had piled up about fourteen snowballs before she realized that there was no one to have a snowball fight with. She had rolled the three individual sections of a snowman before she remembered that she could not stack up the sections by herself; they were

Except Sharie wasn't here, and the only chatter Anna could hear was that of the birds. And it was probably her own fault.

too heavy and bulky for her to lift on her own. So after exhausting her efforts, she collapsed onto the soft snow. The impact of her body on the ground was gentle, and a spray of clean flakes drifted onto her face, refreshing and cooling.

Still, something was wrong. It was too . . . quiet. The front lawn was so empty. And Anna knew why, although she didn't like to think about it.

If Sharie were here, she would have broken the silence that kept Anna forever trapped in her head. She would have let loose her storehouse of silly jokes, filled the frigid air with her ringing laughter. She would have chattered away about starfish and robots and the books that they both liked.

Except Sharie wasn't here, and the only chatter Anna could hear was that of the birds. And it was probably her own fault.

One year ago . . .

"Bye, Anna," came the voice from the other end of the telephone, and then there was the *click* of that person hanging up. Anna put down the phone too, then called loudly to her mother: "Can Sharie come over and play today?" She crossed her fingers, then waited for a response.

"There's no school today, so I don't see why not," was her mother's answer. "I'll check with Sharie's parents first."

"I can do it," Anna said hurriedly, because she already *had* done it,

calling Sharie's house beforehand because she knew her own mother would say yes. This way, Sharie would be able to come over a few minutes sooner, and they would have a few more minutes' worth of fun. A few more minutes meant a lot more than it sounded.

Anna waited anxiously by the door in her coat, hat, and waterproof mittens. When her friend's familiar car rolled up in front of the driveway, she threw open the door and ran out, yelling. Sharie was there, bundled up in a snowsuit and smiling, as she always did. Anna's mother came out too, exchanged some quick words with Sharie's father in the driver's seat, then took one of the snow shovels propped up against the side of the house as the car drove away. (Sharie's parents always seemed to be in a rush, Anna had realized some time ago, but she also knew it was scarcely their fault.)

But that didn't matter now. Now, it was time for them to have fun. Anna and Sharie played joyfully in the snow together. They tried to see how high they could throw the snowballs into the sky, instead of at each other, shouting "We're freeeee!" until crabby Mrs. Rayley from next door yelled at them to stop. They accompanied Anna's mother in shoveling snow from the front walk, although they soon got distracted before making much progress. They built a snow fort, and even when it collapsed, they didn't mind.

"Let's have a snowman contest,"

Anna suggested, after the two of them had taken a short break from play, lying on the ground and sprinkling snow on each other's heads. Sharie giggled and nodded enthusiastically, and immediately set about finding a hard chunk of snow to roll around. Anna looked for one too, though it took her a while to find a good piece. When she finally found an icy lump, she packed it over with snow and rolled the snowball over the front yard, around and around. This took quite a while, and Anna began to think about the possibility of making a two-tiered snowman instead of one that needed three snowballs.

When she decided her base was large enough, she rolled it over to where Sharie was building and began rolling a second part. This took less time, but by the end, Anna was exhausted from pushing the wedge of snow around. She tried to lift it onto the base of the snowman, but to her dismay, it wouldn't budge.

She tried and tried, straining every muscle in her arms and torso. But even after that, the stubborn snowball refused to move but a few inches.

Suddenly Anna looked over at Sharie, and she was shocked to see her friend lifting a snowball onto the top of two already stacked ones. The now-finished snowman was almost the same height as she was. "My snowman's name is Binker Bonker," Sharie said triumphantly. "What about yours?"

Anna felt her face grow hot. Binker Bonker's form seemed to blur into a white smudge before her eyes. She wasn't exactly mad at Sharie, but she just felt awful. *Why was Sharie*

able to lift giant pieces of snow and not her? Why was Sharie able to build a snowman in record time like this? Acting from sudden impulse, Anna snatched up her little blue snow shovel lying nearby and lifted it high in the air, preparing to bring it down with a crack upon her own ugly, unfinished snowman's body.

But it didn't hit the ground, not right away. It struck Sharie's nose with a hard blow, and suddenly her face was covered in red, red all over, warm red that dripped onto the snow and left tiny crater-like holes in the ice, dark and accusing. Red was Sharie's favorite color, Anna suddenly remembered, but at that moment, the awful thought only made her want to throw up.

She didn't, though—she couldn't move. She stood there, gaping in shock until Sharie began to cry. And that was when Anna's mother came to the rescue, rushing over and taking Sharie inside. Anna followed numbly, leaving the snow shovel stuck in the ground.

As her mother cleaned Sharie up, Anna tried to open her mouth and apologize. But the words refused to come out. The next half hour was excruciatingly quiet, with Sharie holding tissues to her nose to slow the blood, and Anna sitting uncomfortably beside her. It seemed a relief when Sharie's father finally returned to pick her up.

But in a few hours, the phone rang. Anna's mother went to pick it up while Anna herself was sitting glumly in her room. She pressed her ear to the wall, half of her hoping that the call was just for her mother's work or

A few feet away lay a dark shape, twitching violently in the snow.

something of the sort, while the other half longed for Sharie's voice on the phone. The words for an apology were ready to come out now, and Anna would say them in a second if only—

"Yes, of course I'll tell her." Anna's mother spoke into the phone quickly. "Goodbye, Sharie. Good luck with your family's move."

And when Anna heard those words, she felt her heart drop.

A cool wind brushed Anna's face, and that was when she realized there were tears on her cheeks. She angrily brushed them off. Why should she cry because of a simple memory? She should just bear the pain, and she chided herself. It was less pain than Sharie had endured that day, and probably for many days afterward.

Sharie had to move around the country; she was never in one place for more than three-quarters of a school year. Did she even have new friends now? Because Anna sure didn't. The kids at school barely spoke to her. Kaiden, the smartest girl in the fourth grade, virtually ignored her. Anna never used to care, not when she actually had a friend here. But now, with Sharie halfway across the country, it was different.

Suddenly, a dark streak in the sky interrupted Anna's thoughts. It passed overhead so quickly that when she blinked, it was gone. Had it just been her imagination? She couldn't be sure. Sitting up, she glanced around the crystal-white front yard.

There. A few feet away lay a dark shape, twitching violently in the snow. Anna ran over to investigate. As she approached, her breath caught in her throat. Blood was splattered on the snow, a glaring crimson against the no-longer-pristine white. For an instant, Anna saw the shovel in her mind, her own clenched fists throwing it down, and then the drops of red . . . but no. This was a bird, a small one, who was injured.

Injured! Anna turned and ran back to the house as quickly as her boots would allow her. She threw open the front door, gasping. "Mama!"

"Wait a minute, Anna."

"But there's—a bird—and it's hurt! Help!" Anna tried to catch her breath.

That got her mother over quickly, with a cloth in her hands and a confused expression on her face. "Where?"

"Outside in the snow," Anna said, pointing outside. "I think it was flying, and I just saw it fall . . ." She faltered, the rest of the words stuck inside a lump that was forming inside her throat.

Her mother hurried outside, but Anna hung back for a second. What if the bird had broken a wing, or a leg? Or worse, what if . . . what if they were too late? She swallowed hard, but forced her feet to move in the direction of the door.

Her mother had been examining the bird closely without picking it up. When she saw Anna cautiously approach, she stood up. "I think it'll be okay. Get a box from the kitchen."

Anna obeyed and quickly

returned with a box, one she hoped would be the right size.

Back outside, Anna's mother gently took the bird out of the snow, her hands wrapped in a cloth. She placed it into the box that Anna held out. The little bird—it looked like a sparrow—was shivering, but it lifted its head to see the human hands above it.

Anna tried to smile at the small creature. It was probably just her imagination, but she thought she saw it smile back. Could birds even smile? Anna didn't know. She followed her mother, carrying the box carefully into the house and setting it down beside the door.

She sat by the door and stared at the bird for a while, without bothering to take off her wet boots. Well! This gave her something to do on an awful snow day, without being constantly reminded of last year's events by the cold air and white powder. Yet as she watched the little animal, she couldn't help but feel sad. She couldn't help but wonder if her mother was wrong and it was really severely hurt. She couldn't help but wonder if the bird perhaps missed its family, was lost and had been flying in the wrong direction for days.

Anna began taking off her wraps while still keeping an eye on the bird. It chirped weakly when she finally got her boots and coat off. In spite of herself, she smiled and kept watching the bird until her mother called her for lunch.

The next day, the layers of snow had turned to muddy brown slush that

made the roads slippery, and school had reopened. Things were back to normal, more or less, and to Anna, that was a relief. School was routine; life was now routine.

Throughout the day, throughout the usual fourth-grade class when Kaiden and the other kids said nothing to her, Anna's mind kept wandering back to the bird. When the bell signaled the end of the school day, it was a relief to hop on the bus and get back home. Upon entering the house, Anna immediately went to check on the little brown bird—her homework could wait.

The bird was sitting in the box, surrounded by bits of seeds. In the back of her mind, Anna wondered where that birdseed could have come from. But to her disappointment, the bird itself didn't seem to have healed at all. Anna tried to tell herself that it had only been a day since she found it, and she was no doctor anyway—still, that was cold comfort compared to the sight of the weak little animal moving around, shaking its head and trying to look over the walls of its enclosure. She carefully took the box outside, making sure not to wobble it as she opened the front door. Maybe the bird needed fresh air.

After she set the box down beside her, Anna sat down on the doorstep glumly with her chin in her hands. Would it ever heal completely? Did anything ever heal completely?

In her experience, nothing ever did. There were some things in her life that just never came back. Sharie would never come back. Sharie was the only person who understood Anna, and she was never

coming back. Now Anna had no one to confide in, no one who could understand her loneliness. That was why she had started spending so much time with this creature, this little bird, who couldn't possibly understand a word she said.

Suddenly the front door behind her swung open. Anna nearly jumped off the doorstep in surprise. But it was only her mother.

"Hi, Anna," she said, smiling as she shut the door. "How was your day?"

"It was fine," Anna replied. "Normal, I guess. But I wanted to come home." She kept her gaze focused on the animal in the box, even as her mother sat down beside her on the step.

"Are you okay?" Anna's mother sounded concerned. "I know you've missed Sharie for a while." When her mother spoke those words so suddenly, out of nowhere, Anna looked up in surprise. "I'm sorry that she had to move away. I know you felt bad about the day before—"

"How did you know?" Anna blurted out. But as soon as the words came out of her mouth, she realized the answer. It was her mother who had brought in the bird that fateful snow day, wrapped in cloth. It was her mother who had provided that mysterious birdseed, which should not have been mysterious at all. And now it was her mother who knew what she had been thinking for the entire past year.

"But . . . you're right, Mama," Anna said quietly, and she finally looked up. "You're right. I was just thinking about Sharie today. I really"—she had to cough to clear away the sadness

welling up inside her throat—"I really miss her."

Anna tried to ignore the threat of tears that hammered against her throat. It would be stupid to cry now, she knew, especially in front of her mother. But she had to continue truthfully. "I'm sort of lonely," she choked out. "People aren't mean or anything like that . . . but no one talks to me at school. No one ever did, besides Sharie."

Anna's mother gently wrapped an arm around her. "I'm sorry," she said softly. "You know, I'm always here if you need me. I would hate for you to be lonely when you live in a house with someone else." She sighed. "Maybe I can get Sharie's address for you. I know it's been a long time, but . . ."

"Sharie's address?" Anna looked up in surprise. "How could you find that?"

"By digging through my contacts and asking her parents. I'm sorry I didn't think of it sooner."

"It's okay," Anna said. "I didn't want to ask about it. I know you're busy, and Sharie's parents are too. Did you know that she has three siblings?"

"No, I didn't know that." It was Anna's mother's turn to be surprised. "But you're right, I didn't want to bother them, either. I know that both her parents have jobs in different places, and they have to move around a lot. I guess I was afraid to ask them anything."

Afraid to ask. The words struck Anna in a strange way. Hadn't she been that way this entire year too? She hadn't spoken to people at school, and that was why they didn't speak

She hadn't asked her mother about Sharie or how to take care of the bird or how to stop being lonely. But maybe her mother had the answers she needed.

to her, of course. She hadn't spoken much to her own mother either, Anna realized guiltily. She hadn't asked her mother about Sharie or how to take care of the bird or how to stop being lonely. But maybe her mother had the answers she needed.

"Well, I would like that," Anna said honestly. "I'd like to write to Sharie. I wonder if she still remembers me."

"I'm sure she does," Anna's mother said, hugging her daughter. "Though people change, so I wouldn't expect her to be exactly the same as you remember."

That would be scary too, Anna thought. If Sharie responded and didn't seem the same person . . . but that was getting ahead of herself. *Things might turn out okay*, she told herself. *They just might*.

A week had passed, and it was Tuesday again. Anna ran home from the bus stop and into the house, where her mother was waiting. Today had been a good day; Anna had been able to help Kaiden with a math problem. They had talked a little together, without too many awkward pauses in between. Anna told her mother about it as they walked, side by side, out of the house.

As soon as they stepped away from the door, the bird stirred from the box that Anna's mother was holding in her arms. It suddenly flew up, then seemed to be confused, and alighted on the bare branch of

a shrub nearby. For a moment, the slightest bit of apprehension crept into Anna's mind. But she silenced it quickly and reached for her mother's hand. They both watched as the bird quivered on the branch, then suddenly launched into the air—it had apparently recalled how to fly, to Anna's relief. It circled once overhead, then began to fly away, it seemed, southward.

Anna grasped her mother's hand tightly, smiling. Now they could just barely see the faint shape of the bird in the distance. It dipped and soared in the open sky, and Anna's heart soared with it.



Bicycle, Elevated (Canon EOS Rebel T7)
Joey Vasaturo, 12
Connecticut



Chromatic Cardinal (Canon EOS Rebel T7)

The Samara's Flight

A strong wind sends the samara seed on a journey to find her new home



By Miranda Yesser, 12
Oregon

When the wind began to blow, the whole world seemed to be angled in the exact same way, swaying in the same gentle pattern. The clouds traveled across the gray sky, the branches of the trees bending and creaking as they were pulled to the side. Leaves and vibrant flower petals swirled through the air. In between it all, a single samara seed was carried along, floating on its light-pink wings.

The grass was damp and green, covered in bugs clinging to each blade for their lives, trying to escape the strong pull of the wind. The samara watched them; it had learned to allow the wind to carry it.

I am so much smarter than those foolish bugs, it thought as it drifted by.

The samara eventually lost sight of the cluster of maple trees it came from. Now it was time to wait and see where it would land once the wind died down. Eventually, it glided over a farmer frantically pulling his cows every which way as the cold rain soaked their shivering bodies. The samara hadn't seen many cows before.

I must be very far from home now, it thought to itself as the cows faded out

of view.

Not much later, the samara reached a rickety wooden play structure. The children had abandoned it, but the wind still made the swing set rock back and forth, its rusty chains rattling like a quarter in a tin can. The samara hadn't ever seen children on a play structure before—it had only seen them climbing trees, or sitting with their backs pressed against the bark of a tree as they read a book.

I must be miles from home now, the samara thought as it left the play structure behind.

Soon after, the samara saw a beautiful cottage ahead. It had a thatched roof and was surrounded by colorful flowers and had vegetables growing in its garden. The old windows were bolted shut in an attempt to keep the draft out. Even from all the way up in the sky the samara could hear the faint whistling of a hot teapot coming from inside the house. The samara gazed at the strange plants around the house; it hadn't seen so many different kinds of plants in one place before.

I wonder if any other seed has



The Temple of Many Towers (Watercolor)
Ben Taylor, 11
England

I've landed so far from home. What if this new life is too hard? What if I'm not ready to land?

traveled this far before, it thought. At first this whole adventure had been exciting, but now the samara was scared. Would it ever find a home? Would the storm ever stop?

Eventually the whistling was gone and the cottage was out of sight, just in time for the samara to spot a campground with men quickly carrying supplies inside tents and putting covers over the firewood to keep it dry. The only experience the samara had had with fire was seeing a thick plume of smoke rising from over the trees when it still lived in the grove of maple trees.

Could this be the source of the smoke? the samara thought. No, *that's impossible. This campground is probably thousands of miles away. It must be a different one.*

The samara came to a small village with uneven cobblestone streets that was surrounded by trees. People were ripping the clothes off the lines that hung between the rows of houses and shops. The air was filled with cloaks, shirts, scarves, and pants that had escaped and now joined the samara on its journey over the countryside. The samara had not seen many people dressed like the people who dashed up and down the slippery streets.

Maybe I'm out of the country. I wonder if they still speak my language here.

The samara traveled over the outskirts of the bustling village, where all the small and secluded huts sat. It saw the old stables that housed

beautiful and majestic horses. The horses neighed and stomped their heavy feet inside their stalls. The samara was glad it hadn't landed here; the smell of horse dung was overpowering.

I pity whatever seed has the misfortune of landing here.

When it came to the center of town, the samara could now see inside the large windows. Some people sat in tea shops sipping steaming mugs of tea to warm their bodies. Some were examining products from inside the store that sat in display cases, ignoring the wide eyes of the curious window-shoppers who had their faces pressed against the glass. Others were sprinting home from work with a book or coat held over their heads.

What a waste of books. Where the samara came from, books were rare and treasured items. *This foreign country must be very wealthy,* it thought.

The samara looked over the town, not realizing it was slowing down. The heavy drops of rain became smaller and less frequent until they had disappeared completely. The samara found its gentle path through the sky turning into a fast spiraling motion as the ground came closer and closer. It arrived at the other end of town, where there was grass and space to grow, just in time. The samara found itself losing the feeling of weightlessness as it slowly descended.

It looked around. I've landed so far from home. What if this new life

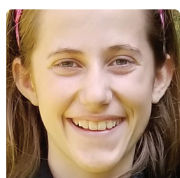
is too hard? What if I'm not ready to land? But there was nothing it could do now. The wind, which before had been violent and unforgiving, gently carried the samara onto the grass, carefully placing it in the perfect spot. The samara felt the soft, cool grass welcome it.

Many years later . . .

It was finally the morning—the morning, when the pale sun rose over the maple tree that had finally grown over the village wall. The maple tree looked out over the countryside. It could finally see all the way to the other side of the village, over to the campground, the quaint cottage, the play structure, and the familiar cluster of maples that had once been home, not too far from where the maple tree stood.

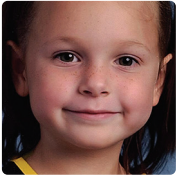


Bovine Vignette (Watercolor, pen)
Selena Shen, 11
Florida



Sweet Nothings (Canon PowerShot XS600)
Sage Millen, 13
British Columbia, Canada

Two Poems



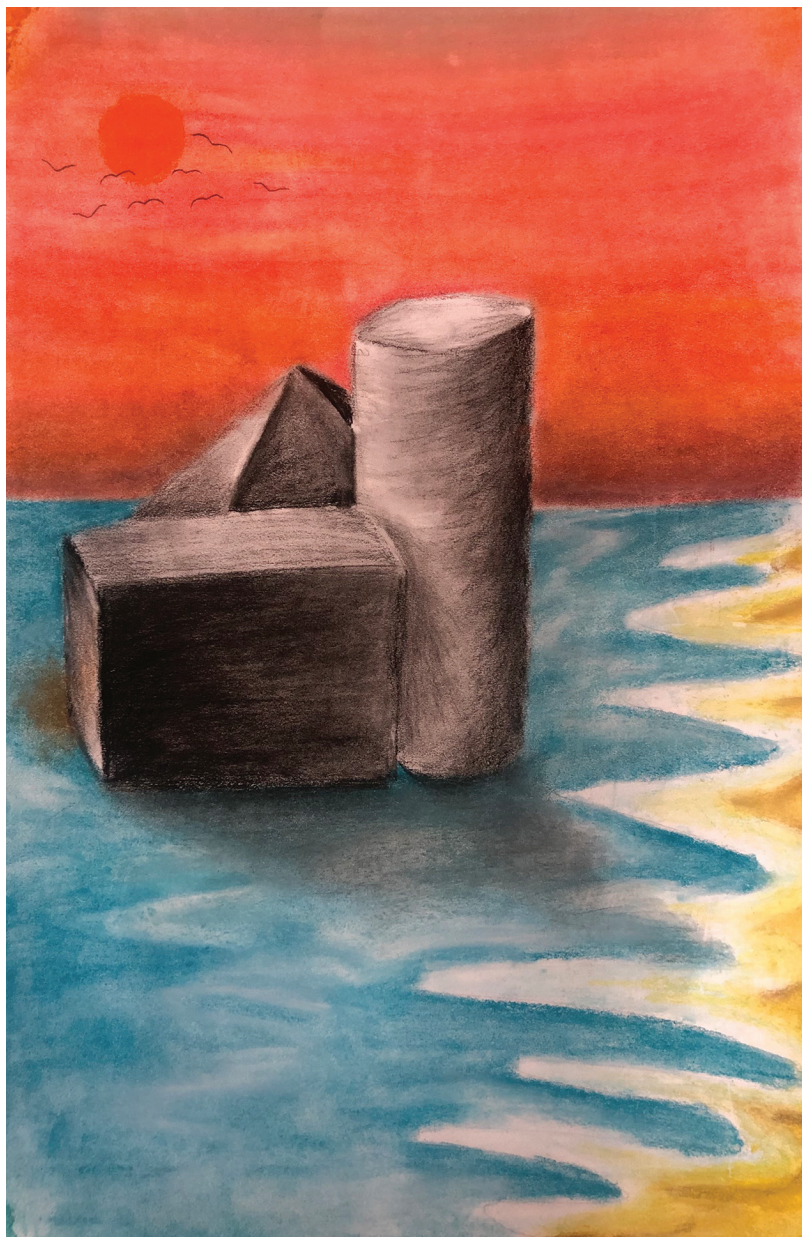
By Leucine Peck, 7
Georgia

Birds

Birds are wonderful
They make life better
They sing and bring us joy
They are so sweet
With a little tweet, tweet
They fly up high
In the sky

Rain

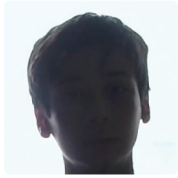
Dark clouds mean
Rain is going to come
BOOM, BOOM, BOOM
At your window
Hard rain
Soft rain
Hurricane
When I walk outside
There is a surprise
Puddles here
Puddles there
Puddles, puddles
Everywhere



Floating on the Ocean (Pencil, oil pastel)
Leticia Cheng, 12
California

Underwater

Is the sea a dark, terrifying force? Or is his fear unwarranted?
The narrator wonders during a family vacation



By Luca Molinaro, 12
New Mexico

Golden sunrays flowed through the open window of my train. My anticipation burned as hard as the surface of the sun. My ears were suddenly assaulted by the screeching of the train stopping. The wheels crawled to a stop as we arrived at the station. I picked up my heavy luggage and lumbered to the exit, where I jumped off. I was welcomed by a beautiful view, with copious sand dunes and a beautiful, crisp, blue sea. We were in Romania, near the Black Sea. I smelled the salt in the air and prepared for an amazing adventure—little did I know what would happen upon me.

We arrived at the resort and got our keys. My grandma, my mom, and I went up to the seventh floor. I dragged my luggage across the carpeted floor and arrived at our room. My grandma inserted the key, and with three turns, we stumbled into our room.

Pristine white sheets covered our two beds, and a wide window revealed a gorgeous view of the beach. A green carpet with red threads woven in, a marble countertop in a mini kitchen, and a small balcony to see the beautiful sea welcomed us. I ran to the balcony

to look at the sea, where I noticed the massive waves crashing on the shore.

I ran back inside and helped my mom. We laid our luggage down and unpacked it. After around an hour, we were settled in.

My grandma said, “*Sa mergem*” as I was putting my shoes on. As my Romanian wasn’t too good at the time, I stayed quiet, unsure how to respond. I tied a double knot with my shoelaces and jumped up. I gripped my hand on the brass knob and opened the door. I couldn’t wait to go to Fried Fish. As their name suggests, their fried fish is simply divine.

I ran to the elevator and waited for my mom and grandma. After waiting forever, they came. I elbowed the button and tapped my foot on the colorful carpet while waiting. A loud ding rang through my ears as a set of metal doors opened up. We crammed into the elevator and went down to the ground floor.

Another ding sounded, and the doors opened as we spilled out. I ran outside and felt the fresh air around me. I kicked up some sand and jogged to the restaurant. My family arrived, and a waiter escorted us to our table.

We sat down and ordered our food. I asked for their delicious fried fish, my mom the mahi-mahi, and my grandmother opted for the Fisherman's Feast. In a mere fifteen minutes our food, all steamy and fresh, arrived. I laid my knife on the crisp fish and cut off a piece. A smell of spices floated up to my nose. I sank my teeth into the crunchy outside, feeling the soft white flesh. I could taste the delicious spices individually: red pepper, oregano, turmeric. In minutes, the full filet was long gone, and I was full of fish.

I leaned back on the booth, feeling the soft material on my back. A waiter took our credit card and swiped it through the mobile cashier. We sat up from our table and sleepily walked back to the hotel.

I heard the crashing sea and looked at it. Then a thought suddenly flashed through my mind. I wondered what would happen if I got hit by one of those big waves. I tried to get rid of the thought, but it stayed firmly in my mind. *I'll be fine*, I said to myself, not really believing it.

We opened the glass doors and headed to the stainless steel doors of the elevator. We pressed the up button and got in. Seven dings later, the doors opened again. We walked to our room and crashed into our beds. A deep sleep with no dreams came easily after a long journey on the train.

I awoke to golden sunlight coming through the windows. My mom said, "Get out of bed, you sleepyhead," playfully. I rolled out of bed and fell on the blue carpet.

"Oof," I said as I got up. I walked to the mini kitchen, sat down, and

took out a bottle of water. I took a refreshing sip, put on some day clothes, and asked, "When can we go down for breakfast?"

"In a sec," my grandma responded. My grandma finally got ready, and we went down for breakfast. I vacuumed up an omelet, three waffles, and a bowl of milk and cereal. We went back to our room and prepared to go to the beach.

I felt the golden rays burning through my sunblock on my face. Silky white sand covered my feet and splashed whenever I set my feet down. An endless blue force retreated and attacked the beach ahead. I broke into a run, closing in on the sea, when a wave splashed down. Suddenly, my excitement turned into fear. It was almost as if the once calm sea knew my feelings and turned violent and nebulous, a dark force. I rooted my feet in the warm sand and steadied myself. *It's just the sea. I'm fine*, I thought to myself.

I looked again at the sea and started going to it. A wave crashed in front of me, but I kept running. Before I knew it, I was waist deep in the water. A shiver flowed through me as the cold water encompassed me. *If I move, I'll stay warm*, I said to myself. I turned to see my mom planting down the beach chairs. As I looked back ahead, a massive wave loomed over me. I tried to run back to the coast, my legs buzzing with adrenaline. My feet tried to dig into the wet ground, but they simply threw sand in the water. The area around me turned muddy. My foot slid on a rock in the seabed and I crashed in the water. My back was on the ground as the massive wave crashed on me. I couldn't see anything in the water; my

worst fear had come to life.

The wave that crashed on me receded back and dragged me into deep water. I swam to the surface and took a deep breath. My vision was covered with water. I found myself twenty feet away from shore. I tried to grip my feet in the sand, but I couldn't touch the bottom. Fear ran through my body. I began to swim back when I felt something on my leg—a wet and curly thing attached itself to me. My breathing became raspy, my heart throbbing in my head. I yanked my leg free and realized it had only been some kelp. *Ten feet left* rushed through my mind, and then I turned around and saw an even bigger wave five feet above me, frothing at the edges and blue as a clear day. Even though I knew that I couldn't outswim it, I tried. And then it crashed on me, and my world turned into water.

I opened my eyes in the water and found myself five feet below the surface. I swam upward and realized that I was above the surface and on the waves. But instead of trying to fight the wave again, I let the wave drag me without protest. The wave didn't drag me under, but kept me above the surface. And then the wave succumbed to gravity, and I fell back to the surface. I grazed my feet on the sand of the ocean floor. I steadied myself and realized I was three feet away from the shore. I calmly walked back out of the water. *I made it*, I said to myself.

As I walked back to our camp, I slowly became groggy after my adrenaline-filled encounter with the sea. I couldn't help but wonder if maybe my fear of the sea was unwarranted. I laid down on the soft

blue towel and wondered what to do next. I saw some other children running around and decided to play with them. We ran around and played together, and I enjoyed the rest of my day. When my mom finally called me over to help pack up, I folded the parasol and chairs, watching the sea as it foamed, and headed back to the hotel.

I skipped ahead of my family and looked at a corn-on-the-cob vendor. A feeling of desire overcame me. I walked over to my mom and asked her, "Can I have corn, please?"

My mom replied, "Of course." She walked over to the vendor, handed over some money, and then I was holding a beautiful, yellow ear of corn. I took a bite and felt the salt dry my mouth, tasted the intense sweetness of the corn.

We walked back to the hotel while I ate my corn. We went up the seven floors and came to our room. We got ready for dinner, for our last meal near the Black Sea.

We went to Fried Fish once more, and ordered the same dishes. As we returned to our hotel, I looked wistfully at the sea one last time before helping my mom pack. My mom returned our keys, and we waited for our train to arrive.

The evening sunset showered the weeds in light, leaving shadows all over. I smelled the salt in the air one last time, and suddenly a whistle blew. Our train screeched against the rails and stopped in front of us. We boarded and sat down. The train started chugging again as I looked out the window and saw the beach before it faded out of view. I wondered, *What will I do when I get back?*



At the Beach with My Family (Pastel)
Vyshavi Nandan, 12
Malaysia



London (Pastel)
Leticia Cheng, 12
California

The Lion & the Lizard



By Isley T. Bloom, 11
Washington, DC

A rose is as delicate as the wind,
While however,
A lion is fearless
It keeps its ground,
Rooted like a tree,
And when it roars,
The dirt floor
Rumbles beneath

But sometimes
It's hard
To be
Fearless

A lizard is quick
But
Runs from you
A lizard is
Aware
But afraid
Quiet
But camouflaged
The thing about lizards
Is that
They can regrow
And start over
Their tail
And their
Tale

A lion
Rough as a vine
Tough as time
Will stand its ground

Lost Memories

A soldier reflects on the random nature of war while on the battlefield



By Deeksha Rajesh, 12
Pennsylvania

All I could see was death. The constant shots of gunfire rattled my eardrums and sent chills all the way to my bones. A continuous torrent of fire came from behind every tree in the forest. And the blood, the blood was everywhere. It painted my uniform. It was on my grimy hands, and it formed a pool on the ground underneath a body. Dead and dying bodies littered the ground. Their horrible stench filled my nose and refused to leave. The wind howled, and the naked trees swayed ominously over us. I tasted metal from subconsciously biting my tongue too hard.

I saw bullets flying through the air at rapid speeds. Soldiers falling too fast and the thudding of guns next to them. Everything seemed sped up, but focusing on a single bullet almost slowed it all down.

In war, you never knew what would be your last battle. You could never be sure if you'd still be on your feet the following second. The precision of a stranger could be the difference between life and death.

I fingered my collection of photos in my pocket from dead soldiers I had found throughout the war. I caught a

quick glimpse of a familiar face. He was sitting at a table, surrounded by family. Twinkling lights adorned the Christmas tree, creating a halo around the room. I could almost smell the warm aroma of fresh-baked cookies. I recognized the man, who had kept me company through countless battles. I remembered a time when we had just fought one and were sitting in the cold rain.

"It's crazy how in a battle you never think about who you're killing," he had said.

"It only makes shooting more difficult," I had replied.

What I had said stood true, but after that conversation, it was hard for me not to think about it.

But I had no time for reminiscing about the past. I regained my strength, lifting my heavy boot out of the mud and trudging a few steps forward to have better aim at an enemy. I loaded my gun again and held it up, ready to shoot, but I couldn't bring myself to, even with my newfound strength. The pictures I had touched just seconds earlier held memories of soldiers with their families. Shoot now, and I'd be destroying another soldier's further

memories. Their family wouldn't ever see them alive again. I'd be destroying their future, and all the possibilities that lay ahead of them.

But life on the battlefield is like that. One second, you're alive and thinking. You notice how loose your uniform is and how tight your left boot is, digging into your ankle. You are conscious of your dirty, matted hair and filthy fingers. Then the next second, you can't bring yourself to move out of the way of a skin-splitting, bone-cutting, life-ending bullet fast enough.

I realized what I had done before I could change my mind.

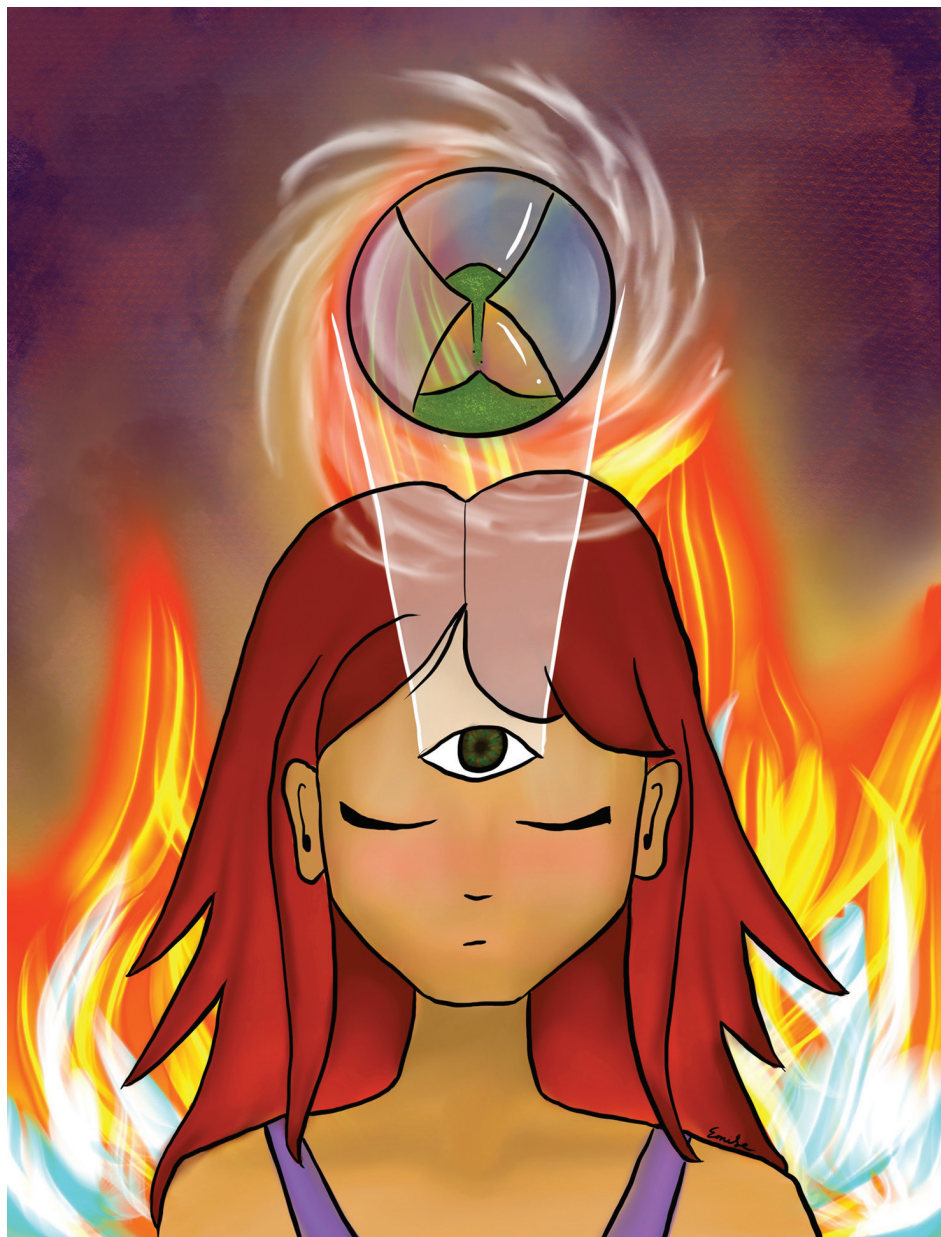
I'd saved another soldier's life by giving my own.

The battlefield dissipated from in front of me, and in its place was a vast abyss of redness. The redness quickly turned to black darkness and then I couldn't hold myself upright anymore. Soon, all I could see was my own death, a feeling of doom, looming over me like a gray cloud.

As my life was cut short, I was thinking, *I let my own future perish in order to let another persist.*



Hero (Acrylic)
Alyssa Wu, 12
California



Third Eye (Procreate)
Emi Le, 13
California

Inside Mr. Vinden's Library

When they take a trip, Millie and her mother must stay with surly, strict Mr. Vinden



By Hadley Taylor, 12
New Jersey

Mr. Vinden didn't enjoy houseguests. Mr. Vinden didn't like people in general—but houseguests were particularly bad. Today was one of the dreaded days that he would have a houseguest. Actually, he would have two: Mrs. Perdy and her daughter, Mildred. He had never met them, but they were friends of his cousin and needed a place to stay. They sounded awful.

No more than a week, he thought bitterly. If this woman tries to stay for any longer than a week, I won't have it.

He looked around the dusty bedrooms that his guests would be staying in.

"This better do," Mr. Vinden muttered, throwing some extra pillows onto the bed and brushing some of the accumulated grime off the nightstand with his forearm.

"Where's Ms. Amalie when we need her?" He was, of course, referring to his old maid, who had been working for him since he was a teenager.

After making the bedroom look acceptable, he grabbed a hat and got his horses ready for the trip to the train station, which was a mere three miles away.

Mr. Vinden was hardly ever seen by his neighbors, as he never left the house. Because of this, he found himself at the center of attention when he reached the town.

Mr. Vinden hated attention from what he called "lower folks" almost as much as he hated houseguests—which was to say, he hated it very much. However, while he wasn't very agreeable, he was very precise, so he arrived at the train station mere minutes before Mrs. Perdy's train was to arrive.

She was stern-faced, in a prim, purple dress. Her daughter, on the other hand, always seemed to have a smile on her face and was dressed in a very simple blue dress that Mr. Vinden thought was very unsuitable.

"You must be Mr. Vinden!" Mrs. Perdy called, her shrill voice causing a few heads to turn toward them. "My daughter and I have been wanting to meet you for quite a time, haven't we, Mildred?"

Mrs. Perdy said this last bit with a tone that seemed to say, "I know I posed this as a question, but you had better answer it right, missy."

"Yes, Mother," Mildred replied, her

voice hardly above a whisper. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Vinden."

Mr. Vinden could already tell he didn't like them. For one thing, he tended to avoid anybody who attracted unnecessary attention toward him. Mrs. Perdy seemed to do exactly that.

He wasn't sure about the girl yet: the ugly dress could have been the mother's choice, and besides this, he hadn't interacted with children of that age in a long time, so maybe this was one of the good ones. If "good ones" even existed, that is.

"Ah yes, Mrs. Perdy. Mildred, it is nice to be of your acquaintance." Mr. Vinden's mouth stayed in one straight line even as he said this.

"Right this way." And Mr. Vinden, though this was the polite thing to do at the time, did not offer to help Mrs. Perdy and Mildred carry their luggage or get into the rather high carriage.

Mrs. Perdy whispered something in Mildred's ear as they settled into the carriage. When Mr. Vinden glanced back at them, Mildred was nodding, a sad look on her face. Mr. Vinden's tight face softened a little. As much as he disliked people, he wanted people to be pleased with him.

By the time Mr. Vinden pulled his carriage into the rocky driveway and asked his servant to put the horses away in the stable, the sky had turned a soft, pinky color.

"Dinner is at seven. I assume you want a tour?" Mr. Vinden's face was back in a tight line, unexpressive and plain.

"Yes, Mr. Vinden. That would be lovely," Mrs. Perdy answered, dipping into a rather forced curtsy and

motioning to Mildred to do the same. Hers was even more forced, and her eyes were wandering everywhere, taking in the new scenery. Her eyes paused at the great willow tree, with its soft blossoms and gently woven branches.

"Your house is lovely, Mr. Vinden," Mildred murmured, which, Mr. Vinden realized, was the first time that Mildred had addressed him without being ordered by her mother.

"Thank you, Mildred," Mr. Vinden replied curtly, without smiling.

"And I prefer to be called Millie, if you don't mind, sir." She didn't say it in an unkind way; however, Mr. Vinden's face still grew sourer.

"Very well then, Mrs. and Miss Perdy. Right this way is the dining hall, and to your left is the parlor. You will find other living rooms off of that one, and the kitchen is to the left of the dining hall." Mr. Vinden made no effort to walk into each room; instead, he pointed at them with an air of great disinterest. Mrs. Perdy smiled just the same, but when Mr. Vinden turned away, he thought he saw Mildred frowning.

MILLIE

Millie didn't like Mr. Vinden. That was strange as Millie disliked very few things. She was overall a very agreeable child; however, she sometimes had a hard time being as polite as most other girls her age.

Besides this, she always found her mind somewhere far, far away from where she was in reality. She longed to be outdoors, away from everybody and everything that might make a fuss over something.

"Millie, come on. We're going up to our rooms to get changed for dinner," her mother whispered, squeezing her shoulder before leading her up the great marble staircase.

"Mother, I don't like it here," Millie whispered as she followed her mother upstairs. "Mr. Vinden is so rude, and I just want to go home!"

She sighed and wiped dust from the banister. *Seriously, does this man ever dust?*

"Now Millie, dear. Don't be like that. I'm sure Mr. Vinden will be a very fine man once we get to know him."

The way she worded it made Millie wonder if, deep down, her mother agreed with her.

Besides the dust and cold Mr. Vinden, the house really was gorgeous. It had beautiful oil paintings and soft woven rugs in every room, and the furniture, while out of date, was quite pretty.

Millie's mother showed her to her room, then hurried off to get changed herself.

Millie's room was quite simple, with just three pieces of furniture. However, the bed looked comfy and the desk had a fancy mirror above it. Millie's house only had one mirror, and it was in her mother's room, so she hardly got to look at herself in it.

"Cool! It has a window seat!" Millie exclaimed, running over to sit on it.

"Wait . . . I don't remember this bay window from the tour!"

Millie was sure she would remember if she had seen it, as there was a beautiful cherry blossom tree outside, and falling blossoms made the scene look like a painting—too pretty and perfect to be real.

Millie quickly changed into one of her fanciest dresses. As I mentioned before, Millie is overall an agreeable person, but another thing she disliked was fancy dresses. The poofy skirts made it nearly impossible to run around. Though, even if they weren't poofy, Millie probably wouldn't be allowed to run and play in them anyway.

"Ready, darling?" came her mother's voice.

"Yes, Mother!" Millie finished buttoning the pink dress and flounced out to her mother, who, in Millie's opinion, looked especially pretty in her pale green, very fitted dress.

"Let's go!" Millie's mom took her hand and led her down the steps.

MR. VINDEN

Mr. Vinden's grandfather clock struck five. His guests *still* weren't downstairs yet. Mr. Vinden despised people being late, especially to Sunday dinner. He glanced at his pocket watch to make sure his clock was showing the right time: 5:01. His guests were definitely late. Just then, Mildred, with a flushed face and wrinkled dress, came sprinting down the hall.

"Sorry we're late, Mr. Vinden!" She curtsied and, following Mr. Vinden's wrinkled nose, slid into an empty seat. "Mother will be down in a minute—she's just slow."

Mr. Vinden, who certainly didn't approve of Mildred talking poorly of her mother, simply nodded and stated, "Yes, I'm sure you had your reasons."

Mildred squirmed uncomfortably in her pink dress and clacked her shoes against the chair, making a very annoying sound.

According to her (and most other people in this town), Mr. Vinden was a devil who deserved loud, clomping feet and children poking fun at him.

"Stop that!" Mr. Vinden didn't mean to be sharp (well, actually he did, but in his head he thought of himself as an agreeable person) but this was too much.

A few minutes later, Mildred's mother gracefully came into the room, giving a light curtsy before taking her seat. "Good evening, Mr. Vinden."

Mr. Vinden noticed she didn't mention or apologize for being late, which he found appalling.

Before long, Ms. Amalie, along with a handful of other servants, brought out a large turkey and butternut soup.

"Mr. Vinden," Mildred said, before letting him enjoy his dinner, "do you have a library?" She put down her fork and looked at Mr. Vinden, her eyes shining.

"Yes, Mildred. Of course I have a library. It is in the basement. Now sit down and eat your dinner."

If Mildred found it strange that the library was in the basement, she didn't say. She did something resembling an eye roll and ate her dinner.

"Well, am I allowed to read there? I have an assignment due for school."

"Yes, Mildred. Just don't touch anything from my back-left wall. That is my special collection."

"Okay."

"This dinner is delectable, Mr. Vinden," Mrs. Perdy complimented after a long, awkward silence. Her eyes sparkled in a way that was very similar to her daughter.

"Thank you," Mr. Vinden

answered, forcing his face muscles to scratch into a tight, painful smile. Judging by Mildred's snort, he ended up looking like something between a demon and a businessman who had just come across something disgusting.

"Don't laugh at me, young lady. Children such as you should hardly be allowed to sit at the dinner table, much less poke fun at the other people at it."

Mildred looked noticeably stunned by the words for a second, then bounced back to her normal self.

"May I be excused from the table?" Mildred asked, setting down her napkin.

Worried that she might start with that dreadful kicking again, Mr. Vinden let her go.

MILLIE

Millie raced back upstairs, her shoes making loud clomping noises on every step. She didn't care that the entire house could probably hear her. According to her (and most other people in this town), Mr. Vinden was a devil who deserved loud, clomping feet and children poking fun at him.

Once she had successfully stomped all the way up the stairs, she kicked over a flower pot and slammed the door to her room behind her.

Then, after thinking for a moment, she realized that the nice-looking Ms. Amalie would probably be the one who had to clean the flower pot up.

So, she got up, fixed the flower pot, and slammed her door shut again.

She heard her mother's forced laughter from downstairs. Millie knew this wasn't her real laugh—her real laugh made birds sing and grumpy old raccoons happy. This one sounded more like she was choking.

Millie put on her nightclothes and flopped onto her bed, wondering if Mr. Vinden had anything for kids to do. Judging by his attitude toward her, Millie decided he most likely didn't.

Millie tried to be good and stay in her room—she really did. The sun was starting to set, but it wasn't dark outside yet. A storm was approaching, and the wind was howling outside.

Millie loved storms. She loved the way the wind rustled the trees, making it seem as though they were whispering secrets to each other. She loved the way the rain went pitter-patter against the windows like a beating drum. She loved the way the birds perked up right before the storm, then settled down. The anticipation took some of the sting out of Millie's situation. She disliked Mr. Vinden and his creaky old house, but at least she had the storm and her mother.

The first loud strike of thunder rattled the house, and Millie bounced up, a smile lighting up her young face.

She put on her ballet flats and opened the creaky old door. Surely nobody expected her to stay put at such an exciting time, right?

MR. VINDEN

Mr. Vinden flopped into his favorite armchair in his library and massaged his face, which was exhausted from

having to smile for Mrs. Perdy for so long. Mr. Vinden deeply despised chatterboxes. *I mean honestly, did they ever stop talking?*

He put on his glasses and picked up a book from the bookshelf closest to him. One thing to know about Mr. Vinden was that he read while sitting perfectly straight—not at all in a way that normal people could ever be comfortable.

Mr. Vinden waited until the scurrying footsteps and screeching chairs from the servants had died down upstairs. He then put down the boring book he was reading and went over to his special collection of books.

Careful not to disturb the books next to it, Mr. Vinden took the book he was reading off the shelf. He sat back in his armchair and slowly opened the book. He tapped the spine three times, flipped to page 657, tapped a word, then finally flipped to the page he was on and began to read.

MILLIE

Millie crept downstairs and into the basement, where Mr. Vinden said the library was. While she didn't see the appeal of having a library in the basement, Mr. Vinden seemed to do things a little differently.

She crept into the room and froze when she saw Mr. Vinden's familiar tall figure sitting perfectly straight with his back to her.

"Phew," Millie breathed, tiptoeing behind a bookshelf. She was glad she had thought to wear her ballet slippers—though it wasn't good for them to be doing so much walking, they kept her footsteps quiet.

Millie hoped Mr. Vinden didn't

come back to where she was hiding as she crouched down. She hugged her knees and watched a spider crawl up the wall. She didn't even know why she was still there.

Actually—she knew exactly why she was there. She wanted to see why Mr. Vinden hadn't wanted her reading from his "special collection." I mean, as long as she was careful to cover her tracks, nobody would even know she was there. What was the worst that could happen? It was just a couple of books.

Millie dozed off for a bit, and when she woke up, Mr. Vinden was gone. She crept out of her hiding place and dusted off her knees. For some reason, even though nobody could see her, Millie was terrified that somebody would jump out and scare her, like the mean kids had done in her school back home.

She walked over to the shelf labeled "Special collection—personal property! Do not touch!" and picked out a book that had a garden-vine design on the spine. The wind howled outside, and for some reason, instead of making Millie feel homey and comfortable, it made her nervous. It seemed to howl warnings and fear, telling stories of troubles and suffering. Overall, it gave Millie a prickle on her neck that she couldn't get to go away.

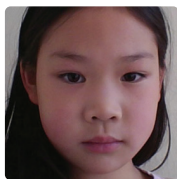
At first, she took the book and brought it to Mr. Vinden's armchair. But that was lumpy in strange places since he was so tall. So instead she simply sat on the floor. She opened up the book to the first chapter and began to read. However, she was only a few sentences in when a large green

vine, just like the one on the cover, came out and snapped at her!

Millie screamed and threw the book across the room, jumping into Mr. Vinden's lumpy armchair. She hid behind the pillow as the vine grew longer, wrapping around bookshelves in an attempt to reach her.

The vine slithered like a snake over to Millie, faster than any human could ever move. She realized right then that she had no chance of escaping it. So, crouching behind that pillow on the armchair in mean old Mr. Vinden's library, Millie let the vines wrap around her and slowly take her away.

Untitled



By Kieran Fong, 13
British Columbia, Canada

The evening dims the light of day,
The moon glows brightly above the world,
The hilltops rest, the mountains lay,
The clouds shine silver, all starlight curled.
Stars peep their golden heads across the sky,
Moonlight casts its sullen webs of light over the ground,
Beaming with a chilling light from way up high,
The day was warm, the night is sound.
Each rainfall ripples in tumbling mirth,
Shadows flow and curl,
Beams flowing gracefully illuminate the Earth,
Flowers' moonlit petals unfurl.
The sun pokes tentatively over the hills,
Dawn breaks the dead of night
Each darkened space, the sunlight fills.
Now comes the golden time of light.



Moonlight Miracles (Procreate)
Arjun Nair, 9
Virginia

Say “Salt, Salt”

A translation of a Turkish fable about a very forgetful man tasked with buying some “hik”



Translated from Urdu by Zahraa Haq, 9

In Turkey there was a farmer. He had a servant. The servant's name was Hasan.

Hasan was a very good man. He was very good indeed, but there was a small problem. Hasan was very forgetful. Here he hears, over there he forgets.

One day the farmer gave Hasan money and said, “Go to the shops and buy ‘hik.’”

In Turkey they call salt *hik*, and *hik* also means “nothing.”

Hasan thought, *Is there some way to not forget . . . ? Aha! I know! I'm going to keep on repeating “Hik! Hik!” Now I'm not going to forget.*

Hasan was loudly saying “hik hik” and going straight to the shops. On the way to the shops there was a river. Under the bridge was a man fishing. Hasan really liked fishing. When Hasan was walking on the bridge saying “hik, hik hik,” the fisherman thought he was saying “nothing, nothing.” The fisherman was angry. “Why are you saying ‘hik!’” shouted the man.

“Then what should I say?” asked Hasan.

“Say, ‘May God give you ten or twelve.’”

Now Hasan forgot the word *hik* and loudly said, “May God give you ten or twelve! May God give you ten or twelve!”

When Hasan walked for a bit longer, he found a funeral prayer. At the funeral, there were lots of ladies and gentlemen crying. Hasan was still saying, “May God give you ten or twelve! May God give you ten or twelve!”

People became very angry. A man said, “What are you saying? Get away from here!”

“Then what should I say?” asked Hasan.

“Say, ‘May God forgive him,’” said the man.

Now Hasan was saying that.

After a while, Hasan saw a dead fish on the road. Hasan was staring at the fish. He was still saying, “May God forgive him!”

Then another man came. He said to Hasan, “Silly, what are you saying?”

“Then what should I say?” Hasan asked.

“Say, ‘Eww! It smells bad,’” said the man.

Now Hasan was saying that.

A bit further along, there were

three ladies walking. The ladies were wearing fancy clothes. Hasan was walking behind them and he was also loudly saying, 'Eww! It smells bad!'"

The ladies were cross and gave him a good beating. Then they said, "Where's the bad smell coming from?"

"Then what should I say?" asked Hasan.

"Say, 'Wow! Very good!'" said the ladies.

"I will say that," said Hasan, and kept on repeating it.

A bit further along, Hasan saw two men fighting. The first man punched the second man and Hasan said, "Wow." Then the second man kicked the first man, and Hasan said, "Very good."

When the men heard that, they said, "What are you saying?"

"Then what should I say?" asked Hasan.

"Say, 'Brothers, don't fight!'" said the men.

"Okay," Hasan said, and he started saying that.

Hasan saw two dogs fighting. He said, "Brothers, don't fight."

An old man was passing by. He started laughing. He said, "Son, what are you saying?"

"Then what should I say?" asked Hasan.

"Say, 'Run away, dogs.'"

Now Hasan was repeating that. Hasan came to the shops, and there was a cobbler. Hasan was also saying, "Run away, dogs."

The cobbler said, "How dare you call me a dog!"

"Then what should I say?" asked Hasan.

The cobbler said, "Hik!" ("Nothing!").

When Hasan heard this, he said, "Cobbler, thank you very much. You reminded me why I'm here!"

Hasan quickly went to the shop and said, "Hello, can I have hik, please?"

Hasan bought the salt and went happily home.



Stone
Soup
Refugee
Project

Untitled (acrylic on canvas)
From the "Group Portrait" Workshop (2019)
Run by Hands on Art Workshops, at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya



Untitled (acrylic on canvas)

The Discovery

A British soldier, lost in the desert, stumbles upon an enemy camp



By Nate Varga, 13
United Kingdom

The evening sky—infused with soft pink and purple hues of twilight from the last dying rays of the sun—was beginning to darken, and a silvery, pale crescent moon was emerging, along with the first pinpricks of light from the stars, bathing the barren landscape underneath with their warm glow. Fine, powdery sand whipped into the air in unpredictable spurts and swirled about like gentle whirlpools before settling down in sinuous ripples—fragile patterns that could easily be effaced by a wave of the hand. Somehow, these tiny specks of grain gathered, in unquantifiable amounts, to create giant dunes, piles and piles of differing heights. In the dimness, their silhouettes dipped and peaked like a surreal mountain landscape, except these were continuously changing shapes, continuously moving, continuously being molded by the direction of the wind. In this place, time almost holds still—like a land that has not been polluted by human touch.

Almost, but not quite—in the distance, an open-topped, weather-beaten Jeep crawled slowly and laboriously up the side of a sand dune.

Its searching headlamps jolted here and there as it worked its way through the desert, finally coming to a halt at the crest of the last dune, before the drop to the valley. Leaning back from the illuminated dashboard—where a flashing red light indicated he was out of gas—a young, ginger-haired man with doleful eyes peered over the windshield.

From below, a melancholy, hollow sound drifted up with the cool night breeze. It was the song of the Arabian ney, an instrument capable of making the most mournful melody that reaches the depth of one's soul. He suddenly succumbed to an overwhelming sense of sadness. It brought back memories of his tragic loss, so many years ago, so distant yet still so fresh, and of his solitary journey through life ever since. Dejectedly, he wiped away the tears from his cheek and hopped out of the Jeep, feet sinking deeply into the soft, fine sand, still a touch warm from the searing heat of the day.

Looking down, he saw with much relief the inviting sight of a flickering fire dancing and twirling in the midst of a tented Bedouin camp. He could



Fiery World (Acrylic)
Emily Yu, 14
China

“Well, soldier, you came on a very unique night.”

make out tiny, dark figures striding about, some carrying plates, others sitting cross-legged on ornate carpets laid about the fire. Weary but still vigilant, he hesitated slightly until the wafting aroma of skewered lamb, along with the tang of frankincense, reached him. He shivered in the chill of the evening, his stomach growling plaintively, in need of a satisfying meal. He could resist no longer.

Guided by the scent of the food and the welcoming warmth, he treaded down the dune, tripping occasionally on a parched, desiccated shrub in the semi-darkness. Bleary-eyed, he adjusted to the glowing light ahead as he approached the camp. Robed men wearing *thawbs* were crouched on the sand, consuming chargrilled chicken and lamb kebabs that had been roasted above the seething fire. A platter of rice, strewn with barbecued prawns and dolloped with spicy sauce, was being passed around and spooned generously upon plates. He closed his eyes as he envisioned the tantalizing morsels sliding down his throat.

A low, raspy voice behind jerked him violently out of his trance. He whipped around to see a man, face cloaked in shadow.

“Welcome, stranger,” said the dark figure. “You have strayed upon the camp of Walaba. Tonight, however, we receive you in peace. For tonight is a special night.” He motioned with his arm and a tilt of his head. “Please, join us.”

Heart racing, but tempted by desperate hunger and thirst, he

followed obediently to the circle of men around the fire. They looked up in unison, interested but unalarmed, as their leader spoke to them in Arabic, seemingly explaining this unplanned arrival. The weathered, crinkled faces, partially illuminated by the crackling firelight, stared up at him, nodding, before resuming their low chattering. He sat down cautiously upon a beautiful, intricate carpet and could have cried with relief when he was handed a goblet overflowing with cold water. Gulping it, along with a plate of wonderfully seasoned, possibly the best, food he’d ever tasted, he lay down at last, content, upon the rug.

The leader of the group studied him carefully and looked genuinely pleased that his unexpected guest was satisfied with his meal. He brought out a hookah and lit the coals beneath the large water pipe to smoke.

“I am Ahmed. And you? What brings you to our humble tent tonight?”

“I am a British soldier. My troop sent me on an errand across the desert and I . . . lost my way.”

Ahmed nodded. “Well, soldier, you came on a very unique night.” He continued to smoke, slowly. The gurgling of his water pipe was very calming to the soldier. After a long while, Ahmed raised himself off the ground and signaled to the rest of the group. One by one, they got up and followed him silently. The soldier, suddenly feeling uneasy again, remained seated until the group turned to wait for him. Reluctantly, he

followed them out of the camp.

They passed the slumbering herd of camels, whose single humps were visible in the moonlit night. The soldier marveled at how much larger these creatures were than he had imagined. The camels were quiet, huddled in a group after what must have been a long day of toil. Ahmed led the men on and on through a winding track in the valley until they were very far from the camp. The first thoughts of panic started to grip the young soldier. Where were they taking him?

Suddenly, an intoxicating scent washed over him. It wafted sweetly through the air and brought back memories of his mother's garden—filled with wild mixes of peonies, delphiniums, hollyhocks, and rambling roses that she loved. He was reminded of the cottage they lived in, near the Chiltern Hills. Those pleasant afternoon teas with his family in the backyard—sitting around the table together, eating buttery scones with luscious homemade strawberry jam and drinking iced lemonade—as the sun flitted down through the sheltering branches of the ancient oak tree in watery shafts of light. And the croquet games with his older brothers and sisters while his parents sipped tea . . .

He felt momentarily at a loss as he remembered that fateful day.

It was the loveliest of British summer days. He remembered skipping up the road, proud to be allowed to go to the corner shop on his own for the first time. The coins jiggled in his pocket after he purchased his ice cream. Just a block away, his family was waiting

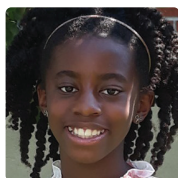
with the rest of the town to see the parade of British soldiers pass by. Then came the seismic explosion that shook the shop and knocked everything to the ground, smashing bottles and shattering windows. As he struggled to his feet and ran out onto the pavement, he saw with horror the catastrophic effects of the bomb, the smoldering wrecks of vehicles, and the bodies . . . bodies everywhere. The waning screams of people all around filled his ears. And where, where was his family?

"We are here," declared Ahmed, looking at him inquisitively. He pointed with his finger to a patch of field. Below, each as delicate, fragile, and ornate as a porcelain teapot, were a dozen large flowers in full bloom, with creamy-white, waxy petals that opened up to the night sky. This was the source of the intoxicating sweet scent they had been following for a quarter of a mile.

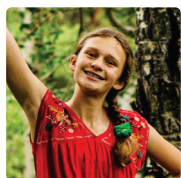
"The Queen of the Night," Ahmed gestured proudly. "Blossoms only once a year for the night. She will wilt before the sunrise, leaving behind only her fragrant phantom scent . . . so rare and so precious."

The soldier sank to his knees, breathed in a sigh of deep relief, and then uncontrollably began to weep. *Such beauty, such beauty exists in this place.* Concerned, Ahmed trudged over and patted him gently on the shoulder. Somehow, he seemed to understand. "Please, my brother. You are welcome to join us in prayer."

As all the men kneeled in one direction for the nighttime prayer, the first of the wilting white petals began to drop.



New Species, the SnodGrass (Acrylic)
Eden George, 10
New York



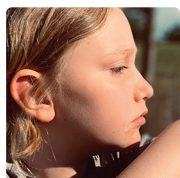
Ballet of the Jellies (iPhone SE)
Aspen Clayton, 11
Connecticut

The Desert



By Bryson Mendolera, 10
New York

The sand is an eagle as it flies across the desert and eventually forms a mountain.
They fly together in a pack across the Sahara of nothingness.
As the wind blows, it forms sweet ripples in the smooth sand.
As the sand flies, the dry cactuses are just dots to them.
As the cactuses watch, they look for water.
But they see none.
But then they see gray in the clouds, and a couple drops come down and it starts
raining, pouring.
They have been blessed.
They collect the water after almost dying from the drought.



Tarantula (iPhone 6)
Anna Weinberg, 12
Washington, DC

Highlight from Stonesoup.com

From William's Writing Workshop, #68: Sense of Place

The Writing Challenge: Describe a place or a setting in which a story will take place from the point of view of a character.



Arctic Winter

By Pearl Coogan, 10
Virginia

Cold, howling wind whipped through my fur, blowing endlessly. The deep snow crunched under my paws, stretching as far as my keen blue eyes could see. Snow-covered mounds that were once gray cliffs rose out of the white sea, not a hint of rock visible on them. Farther beyond the once-cliffs were the towering mountains, also covered in snow that was continuously piling higher and higher. The streams that ran and pulled in spring were now completely frozen over with ice. Everything was beautiful.

But like many things, the looks of the tundra didn't say much about the tundra. I couldn't see or smell any other animals except the six other wolves in my pack, all of them my relatives. The prey, even the caribou, had disappeared, like all the other animals, having hidden in their snow-covered burrows or migrated south. To make it even worse, the falling snow prevented me from seeing far. I was an Arctic wolf living in my Arctic habitat with a thick winter coat, but I was still shivering. The snow, though beautiful, covered up all of the hares' burrows, and even rocks that I could fall and hurt myself on. Hunger, as ruthless as ever, gnawed at my stomach. But I had survived one cruel Arctic winter before and could live through another, even if I wasn't thriving.

"Taiga!" my cousin Icicle called, standing on top of one of the snow mounds, clearly

trying to find prey like me and the rest of my pack. But, unlike me and the pack, he wasn't a good hunter. At all.

"Leave her alone, Icicle! She's a much better hunter than you," Icicle's mother and my father's younger sister, Snowclaw, growled.

Icicle bowed his small head and padded down from the mound he was standing on. I couldn't help but feel sorry for him. He was still young, with plenty of room to improve his hunting skills, and Snowclaw didn't seem to like him at all.

Smelling a wisp of deeply buried hare, I started digging into the endless sea of snow. The smell grew stronger, more vivid, as I dug. Crackly brown grass started to appear, a hole in the middle of it. Lighting up, I started digging in the hole.

Surprised yellow eyes glared at me. The snowshoe hare leaped up and started sprinting away from me, but he was tired from his hibernation and wasn't used to running in such deep snow. My paws pattered on the ground, barely touching the snow before they lifted up. The howling wind was even louder and stronger as I ran, flurries snaking down faster. Suddenly I wasn't cold anymore. Suddenly the Arctic winter wasn't as menacing anymore.

You can read the rest of Pearl's piece at <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-writing-workshop/>.

About the Stone Soup Blog

The Stone Soup Writing Workshop began in March 2020 during the COVID-19-related school closures. In every session, a *Stone Soup* team member gives a short presentation and then we all spend half an hour writing something inspired by the week's topic or theme. We leave our sound on so we feel as though we are in a virtual café, writing together in companionable semi-silence! Then, participants are invited to read their work to the group and afterward submit what they wrote to a special Writing Workshop submissions category. Those submissions are published as part of the workshop report on our blog every week. You can read more workshop pieces, and find information on how to register and join the workshop, at <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-writing-workshop>.

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.

STORIES

Celia Chen, 11
Cecilia Hodgman, 13
Mila Klotz, 10
Iwan Lee, 11
Catherine Park, 9

MEMOIR

Philip Gu, 9

POETRY

Casey Barnett, 9
Thea Dugas, 12
Franny Odell Mealer, 6
Ella Yehuda, 10

ART

Nyla Kurapati, 9
Bala Harini Ramesh, 10
Natalie Yue, 10

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