

# StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

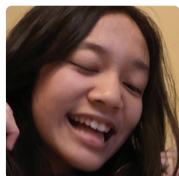
## Editor's Note

What is home? A sanctuary, a place of rest, a feeling, a family, a specific house or town or state or sky. Home is the way you feel when you feel "at home"—relaxed, comfortable, open. It is in our homes where we are most physically vulnerable—taking showers, getting dressed, going to the bathroom, eating—and also where we are most emotionally vulnerable as well—where we yell and cry and hug, celebrate and grieve.

In many ways (and especially in a pandemic and post-pandemic world), home is where life happens.

The art and writing in this issue circles the idea of home—what makes a home home—and also celebrates the idea of home, and the joy of the homecoming. There is nothing like returning home after a long trip—or of finding one's new home.

From my home to yours,



On the cover:  
*Horse in Dreamland*  
(Oil pastel)  
Tutu Lin, 13  
Texas

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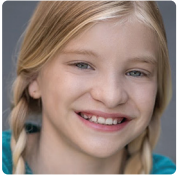


*Sitting in Nature* (Pastels)  
Leticia Cheng, 9  
California



# Under the New Mexico Sky

It is the year 1826, and Narna dreams of a better life away from her demanding father



By Tatum Lovely, 12  
Pennsylvania

*“En las cimas de las montañas al norte  
... on the peaks of the mountains to  
the north ... crecen flores pequeñas ...  
small flowers grow ... bajo el mismo  
cielo que nosotros conocemos ...  
underneath the very sky we know ...”*

The lullaby was soft and comforting. It echoed through the dry, dusty room.

“I still can’t sleep,” Narna complained.

“It must be your thoughts. What are you thinking? Tell me,” Lana urged softly.

Narna groaned, but reluctantly mumbled: “Mamá. I’m thinking about Mamá. It’s just not fair. Why must Papá treat her practically like a servant!”

“She does work so hard.”

---

It’s the year 1826, and Narna and her sister Lana are whispering to each other underneath the cracking roof of their adobe house in the Mexican territory of New Mexico.

Narna and Lana are very different. Narna, a tall ten-year-old, has straight, dark hair and narrow eyes. She is practical, but always thinking about

all the “shouldn’t be’s” of their poor family and community.

Lana is a small, meek, daydreamy seven-year-old with wispy light curls and misty gray eyes. But one difference that Narna thinks the biggest is that Lana is blind. Blind not from birth, but from a sickness four long years ago. Narna had never thought of them being similar after that.

---

“Pablo, stop crying!” Narna demanded, plucking their chubby baby brother from his cot and marching him into the open kitchen. She dropped him gently on the woven rug on the floor, surrounded him with toy blocks, and ordered him to sit and play. Narna had never liked babies. In her mind, they sat around crying and drooling and took an unnecessary portion of food. She supposed Pablo sensed this was what his big sister thought of him, which was why he chose the exact moments when he and Narna were alone together to throw his biggest of tantrums.

Narna took a piece of cold cornbread and poured herself a tin cup of milk. She took the breakfast

**Narna turned away, and blinked back tears. It broke her heart to see her parents fighting.**

out onto the veranda and scanned the landscape with disapproval. Everything was dry and dusty, and Narna wished she could see beautiful, lush trees with trimmed branches in neat lines in place of the ugly, prickly cactuses scattered around. She took a nibble at her cornbread and kicked the dry, cracking earth. She stepped off the veranda and turned to look at their adobe house. Tufts of brown grass poked up through the veranda. The windows were just square holes in the walls. Many of the rooms had openings with awnings, letting the fresh air come in so the house did not get stuffy.

Then Narna heard arguing voices from the side of the house. She set down her breakfast, which she had hardly touched, and hurried over to see what all the fuss was about. When she got around the corner, she saw her parents. Her papá was sitting atop a tall brown stallion, and her mamá was standing nearby, staring up at him while clutching a washcloth.

"Ah, Francisca!" her papá was saying. "That hole in the roof of my bedroom! It's been there for weeks! Why haven't you mended it?"

"Why, Diego, you haven't asked me to," her mamá said calmly.

"Well, Francisca! That is hardly an excuse! I thought I would not have to demand a woman to fix a mere hole in my bedroom roof! It seems only practical that you would not have to be asked."

"Diego, I don't believe that—"

"I don't want to hear it! Now, you

shall go to my bedroom and fix that hole. What if it rains tonight? Now, you wouldn't want me getting soaked!"

"I think that it's—"

"This business has been settled!"

Narna's papá boomed, before riding importantly away.

Narna turned away and blinked back tears. It broke her heart to see her parents fighting. And her mamá did not have the choice of leaving her papá. All their money came from him. The house was his, all the horses were his, and the few workers who lived on their property were his. Only papá could choose to leave mamá.

Narna ran back to the veranda and sat stoutly down on the veranda step. She snatched up a nearby stick and drew scribbles in the dirt with it. She didn't realize how hard she was pushing until the stick snapped. She groaned, sat back on her heels, and pulled her rebozo over her shoulders.

"What's troubling you, Narna?"

Lana asked, coming up from the stream with a large basket of clean, scrubbed clothes. Even though Lana was blind, she could wash clothes in the shallow stream. Only getting to the stream was tricky, because of the narrow path, but their mamá had tied a rope from a little post near the adobe house to a tree down near the little stream. Lana would hold the basket of clothes in one hand and the rope in the other. It would guide her down, and now she could make it to the stream and back easily.

Narna looked her little sister in

the eye, even though Narna knew she could not see her, and Lana looked back.

"Mamá and Papá were arguing again," Narna told her. She looked down at the ground where she had scribbled with her stick. "It isn't right. It isn't fair!"

Lana came and sat with her, and Narna guided her down onto the step. She didn't say a word, but even Lana's understanding and sympathetic sigh was comforting.

"I must go to Pablo," Lana finally said, so Narna helped her to her feet. "Things will get better," Lana whispered.

"How do you know?" Narna dropped her head. She knew somehow Lana did know, but Narna did not know how. But her sister's words were comforting, and Narna almost believed her.

---

"Girl, run along now and get me my last sack from my bedroom. Hurry!" Narna's papá urged.

"Yes, sir," Narna mumbled, and ran back into the adobe house. Her papá was going on a trip to the market. And he wouldn't be back for several days! Hope filled Narna's heart. At last: three whole days of just her, Lana, Pablo, and Mamá. No arguing. Just peace and happiness. Narna couldn't imagine what they would do without Papá's strict orders making them rush about daily.

One wonderful day went by, and Narna was at ease. Her papá was gone, and he had said that he didn't expect to be back for at least four days. Though Narna had noticed that

Mamá, and Lana too, did not act as peaceful as she felt. They still seemed to be rushing about.

That day, Narna was lying on a little raft, floating around in the shallow stream. The raft was too wide and heavy to be carried away in the gentle current. It bobbed around, every once in a while getting stuck on the bottom. Then Narna would have to climb out and give it a little nudge. Today she was as open and carefree as the shining, teal, New Mexico sky glazed above her.

She had been on the raft for hours and never noticed the sun dropping in the sky, casting a magic spell of darkness across New Mexico. Shady evening air brushed lightly on her cheeks, and she had to force herself to pull the raft to shore. She flopped onto the pebbly earth and pulled on her boots and shawl. It was early summer, and even the nights were hot and still. Narna trudged up the path to the adobe house and met her mamá on the veranda. The two did not speak, but clasped each other's hands, leaned on each other's shoulders, and walked into the familiar house.

---

"I'll get Pablo and you wake Narna . . ."

" . . . yes, Mamá."

"Careful, don't carry too many bundles . . ."

" . . . do we have enough blankets?"

Narna heard whispering voices, but her mind did not process the words. She drifted back to sleep. But soon after, she felt someone shaking her.

"Narna. Narna, wake up."

"Huh?"

"We must go in the dark of night."

## And slowly and gallantly the sun did appear, spreading its comforting light around Narna and her worries.

“Where?”

“Narna, it’s Lana. Come on.”

---

Narna and her family were lifting packed bundles onto their backs and readying to go. They were leaving. Leaving their little adobe house, leaving their papá.

“It’s our only chance,” Mamá had said. She and Lana had been packing many of their belongings and food into bundles yesterday while Narna was oblivious on the raft. They had been planning and preparing for weeks. Narna was a little upset that her mamá had told Lana and not her. But she understood. The secret would not have been safe with her.

So her Mamá had finally had enough of her husband! Narna had too. But she still had no clues on where they would be going. Or how they would get there. And she was so scared! What would happen to them without a man? Would Mamá remarry? How could they leave this darling little adobe house they had called home since Narna was born? Lana clearly sensed her sister’s unease, for she took her hand and said softly and determinedly, “If we are brave enough to say goodbye, then life will reward us with a new hello.”

Narna smiled in the darkness, and her heart swelled in her chest as she squeezed her sister’s hand in gratitude.

---

The warm night wind whipped thick

at their faces. Narna was grateful they had taken two horses from their stable and did not have to travel on foot.

“Is there a moon tonight, Narna?”

Lana asked from behind Narna on the horse they shared.

“Yes,” Narna answered. “A crescent moon. Slim, small, but bright.”

“The air smells like rain,” Mamá said from the other horse, where she rode tall and determined while clutching Pablo to her chest. And soon enough, there was a soft drizzle damping the air. But it did not stop there. A single flash of lightning struck the sky ahead, illuminating everything silver for a split second. Then the rain picked up, soft and drizzly, then hard and steady, then drenching and heavy. More lightning continued, and within five minutes booms of thunder followed. Narna believed the thunder sounded like towering giants marching across the Earth toward them. But she was grateful for the thunder and noise of the thick rain to drown out her frightened whimpers.

Hours passed.

Narna had not noticed that Pablo had been wailing until the thunder ceased and the rain softened. Slowly, huge rays of light peered up from behind the distant mountains, preparing for the sun to appear. And slowly and gallantly the sun did appear, spreading its comforting light around Narna and her worries. But, oh, couldn’t it rise any faster?

Narna thought it was rising as slow as molasses on a cold day! Narna was not cold—in fact, she was the opposite. But she still longed to feel the powerful light of the sun against her cheeks.

She felt the ends of her lips curl upward into a little smile when she thought of her cruel papá, with his disagreeable look, awfully bushy brows, firm face, and unruly, baggy clothes shaking his fist in the air when he realized that they had gone.

“Look!” Mamá cried, pointing forward with her free hand. Narna looked. Just barely visible on the horizon was a little village of adobe houses, just like their own, but smaller, and these had no windows.

“What do you see?” Lana asked. As Narna described the scene to her sister, the sun rose higher and higher in the New Mexico sky.

“Girls,” Mamá said, smiling, “we’re only a mere six miles from Santa Fe!”

Narna cheered with Lana, though she knew they wouldn’t actually ever see Santa Fe; they would be staying with her aunt and uncle in their community, several miles from the border of “The City Different.”

---

Finally, the horses walked into the little community of adobe houses. Mamá led them to one of the smaller houses and pulled the reins for her horse to stop. Narna stopped her horse too.

“Oh, Carlos! ¡Es tu hermana! It’s your sister!”

“Ah, Francisca! ¡Buenos días! Good morning!”

“Tío Carlos!” Narna cried as her

uncle lifted Lana from the horse. Narna hadn’t seen her uncle since she was quite young, but he had written many letters.

“Narna, Lana, you remember my wife, Tía Ramira?” Narna ran to hug her aunt, who wore a brilliant crimson rebozo over her long, dark hair.

“And I’d like you to meet our daughter, Isa,” Tía Ramira said when a little girl ran out of the adobe house.

“¡Hola!” the girl said. She looked about Lana’s age. She had thick hair and long lashes, and carried a platter of red peppers, which she handed to Tía Ramira.

“Would you like me to show you our house?” she asked cheerfully. Narna glanced at Lana, who was holding Pablo while Mamá untied their bundles. Then she ran after Isa, her cousin, into the little adobe house.

It had three small rooms. The largest room doubled as the kitchen and living room, and the second room was a bedroom with a bed that took up all the floor space. The third room was the smallest room, with three little cots all side by side against one wall.

“I sleep here,” Isa said, pointing to the left cot. “You can sleep here,” she continued, pointing to the right cot, “and Lana will sleep here,” she finished, pointing to the middle cot. Narna nodded with approval.

“And your mamá can sleep in the main room. We have a bed set up for her and your little brother. What is his name?” Isa asked.

“Pablo,” Narna answered absently, looking about the room. Now she felt ashamed that she had ever thought that her adobe house had been dry,



dusty, or tiny. This one was truly all those things. The cots were the only furniture in the room, and cobwebs hung in every corner. And it had a dirt floor! Luckily, the main room had a wood floor.

The house was clearly insignificant, and yet Isa had shown her around with such pride and satisfaction. Narna could not understand how.

---

“Hehehe!” Pablo giggled as Lana and Isa tickled him all over. They scooped the baby up and rushed him outside into the morning air. He waved his arms at the birds soaring overhead. The two girls laughed as they tickled his toes and kissed his hands.

“I wish I had a little sibling!” Isa exclaimed, sitting down with Pablo on her lap.

“No, you don’t,” Narna insisted, coming out from the adobe house. She sat down too, on the woven straw rug outside the door. Lana laughed, and explained to Isa how Narna despised babies. Isa laughed too, and Narna frowned.

“What are those?” she asked, pointing to a pile of straight, smooth sticks lying by the door.

“Broomsticks,” Isa answered. “We are going to make them into brooms for the June fiesta! Everyone brings something to share. We are going to bring brooms and paella.”

“Yum!” Lana exclaimed. Paella was one of Narna and Lana’s favorite dishes.

“Can we help make the brooms?” Lana asked. Isa hesitated.

“It—it might be difficult for you.”

Lana’s happy expression did not fade.

“Then I can help with the paella. I’ve done it before.”

Isa nodded, and Lana went inside.

“Would you like to help me with the brooms, Narna?” Isa asked. Narna shrugged. She was all for traditions, and she knew how to weave brooms.

“Alright.”

“I’ll gather the hay. You can get the twine!” Isa ran off, and Narna slipped into the adobe house to ask for twine.

In a few minutes, Narna and Isa were sitting in front of the adobe house (which had no veranda, Narna had noticed with a frown).

They were weaving the straw onto the long sticks and tying it all into place with the twine. They had finished three broomsticks already and had enough materials to make many more. Narna watched Isa very closely and soon observed she was an exceptional broom weaver.

Both girls’ cheeks were rosy, partly from the burning sun and partly because of the joy and fun of . . . well, weaving brooms? No, it wasn’t that. Narna decided it was the joy of making a friend. She knew that she had not had a friend back at her adobe house because it was far from other houses. But here, the little adobe houses were no more than a few feet apart! It was a small village, but it must have had at least twenty other houses. Narna was just imagining all the other girls her age that might be living in the other houses.

---

The day of the June fiesta had arrived! It was a majestic evening, and inside

**Narna thought back to what Lana had told her the night they had escaped: “If we are brave enough to say goodbye, then life will reward us with a new hello.”**

the little adobe houses, families were happily preparing.

Narna skipped into the main room and gushed when she spotted her aunt. Tía Ramira was wearing a murky blue dress with little brown buttons fastened all the way from the hem up to her neck. And she wore a thin crimson shawl over her shoulders.

Isa then appeared from behind her mother’s big skirt. She wore a long lavender skirt and loose white top, and her dark hair was done up and tied with bright blue and red hair ribbons.

Tío Carlos was, unsurprisingly, not dressed up, but he had combed his hair. Narna’s mamá came out from behind her. She had on her brown dress and green shawl. Lana was wearing a light teal dress made from a curtain. And her hair was tied with smooth brown yarn.

“I think we are all ready!” Tía Ramira exclaimed.

Narna had not noticed the little village square when she had arrived, but now the sight could not be missed. String lights were hung between houses and across the village square, illuminating the area. Many tables were lined up in front of every house, and much food, treats, and household goods were piled.

A circular area had been cleared in the middle for dancing!

Narna set down her armful of brooms in a barrel and her basket of cornmeal scones on the table next to it. Noises filled the village around

her: people laughing, footsteps dancing, children playing, and happy, eager voices.

Narna saw Tío Carlos reaching out his arm to Tía Ramira, and then her aunt hurrying to set down her basket of potatoes. Narna rushed over.

“Tío Carlos, are you going to dance?” she asked.

“Well, what else is a fellow supposed to do at a fiesta like this, eh?” he replied, smiling. Narna giggled and stepped back to watch everyone.

*This village might be poor, she thought, but it’s not about the place itself, but the people who live in it!*

Soon, Narna knew, Tío Carlos and Tía Ramira would begin helping Mamá build an adobe house of their own here!

Narna thought back to what Lana had told her the night they had escaped: “If we are brave enough to say goodbye, then life will reward us with a new hello.”

And this, the little village, and her aunt and uncle, and new cousin Isa, were Narna’s new hello. How had her little sister known?

Narna tilted her head back and gazed up at the smooth, purple-pink sky and decided that wherever she went, she always wanted to be able to look up at her big New Mexico sky.



*Meadow* (Acrylic)  
 Brook Taintor, 10  
 Alaska

# Arrival



By Mia Ella Antonio, 13  
California

At dawn, I ran to  
the edge of  
Olive Border.  
All I see is  
the field of  
flowing gold  
and the  
morning fog  
coming in over  
Charlotte's Hill  
like a tidal  
wave.  
The shrubs  
alongside  
Gracious Court  
sway in the  
eye-opening breeze,  
pointing to the  
horizon.  
I waited for what  
seemed like  
hours. Like  
I was waiting  
for a fish to  
bite the bait in  
the middle of a  
storm. Like  
waiting no longer

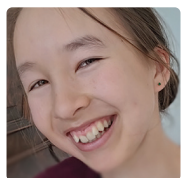
meant anything  
compared to the  
soul-wrecking suspense  
awaiting Father's  
arrival.

Mother had warned me  
not to go out too early  
in case I caught a cold  
but I had insisted  
that I would be the  
second loveliest,  
welcoming sight  
he saw after  
the village.

I was about to  
turn, settling  
on the fact that  
Mother was right and  
Father would be home much  
later, when I saw  
Macho the  
donkey on  
Charlotte's Hill, then  
to my delight  
the familiar figure  
in my heart  
appeared right by  
his side, arms open  
wide.

"Anna Maria, I'm  
home!"





*Home* (Knitted square with embroidery)  
 Savarna Yang, 13  
 New Zealand

# The House

A lonely, empty house does everything it can to attract new occupants



By Tvisha Chaswal Raj, 9  
Florida

Once upon a time there was a lonely house. It had not always been lonely. The house had become very unmodern after all the years. On one fine morning the house thought, *Why don't I become modern?* After thinking this, the house changed its inside and changed its outside to be more modern.

The next day many people were looking and thinking, *Maybe we should buy the "new" house.* Finally, a couple called the Fans bought the house, and they had two kids. They thought the house was great and loved it. But they had to leave because Mrs. Fan got a job. As the house watched their car speed off, it thought, *Maybe I need to become more high tech than the other houses?* So once again, the house upgraded its inside and upgraded its outside to become more high tech than the others.

This time, a couple called the Meadows bought it. The Meadows had three kids. They also loved the house. But after two years they had to go on an important business trip and found a new house there. So, the house thought, *What is all this worth? Every time I change, a family comes and then goes. So, what's the point?*

And then after this thought, it changed back into the old unmodern house that it had been. And after a long wait, vines started creeping up and growing flowers. Birds started to make nests on the roof. But the house looked beautiful no matter what.

Then after some time, an old couple bought it and lived in it forever.



*Rustic Cottage (Pen)*  
Selene Wong, 12  
Illinois



# The Escalofriante Hotel

Winnie and her mom check into a hotel where all is not as it seems



By Lila Mackenzie, 11  
Florida

Waiting.

Winnie and her mom had finished checking in their car at the Escalofriante Hotel valet twenty minutes ago, and now Winnie was in the lobby. Hotel check-ins were so slow. Where was her mom? She looked around the hotel lobby. Old people were sitting in swirly chairs. The carpet was the hard kind that parents don't care about you stepping on with shoes. All the old people were wearing small, fragile glasses. "Strange," she whispered to herself.

"Hi!"

Winnie looked up to see a blonde front desk lady standing in front of her. She had on bright red lipstick. Her voice was sickeningly sweet. Winne made a face at her. Like she smelt something bad.

"Are you lost?" the lady asked.

"No, I'm looking for my mom."

Winnie read the lady's name tag. It read *Jessica*.

"I'm Jessica!" said Jessica, handing her the keys to her room. "Do you want a Merry-Berry lollipop?"

"No, thank you." Winnie took the keys and put them in her pocket and backed away from the lady. Winnie

was still on the hunt for her mom. She stopped in front of a row of TVs. *Boring*. Nothing good was playing, and in fact, the screen was black. Then she noticed that all of the old people were watching the black TVs. A shiver ran down her back.

In the elevator, Winnie waited as the numbers went from the first floor to the second floor to the fifth floor and the eighth floor. Suddenly it stopped, not helping Winnie's nerves. The rusty door creaked open, and an old man got in. He was wearing the same glasses as all the other elders. As the rusty doors closed her in, Winnie held her breath. The old man peered down at her.

"My, where are your glasses?" He squinted at her.

"I don't wear glasses." Winnie turned away from him and stared at the elevator wall. On it, there was a window that let you see all the cords and cables holding the elevator up. *Ding!* The elevator stopped, and Winnie slipped out, grateful to be away from the man. She hurried to find door 1013. She reached for the three keys, safe in her pocket, and stared at them, longing to be a key



*Glimmer* (Panasonic ZS200)  
Sage Millen, 13  
British Columbia, Canada



safe in someone's pocket. She tried each of the keys, the first two failing. The last key was a brass one with swirls on top, and she tried it. The lock clicked and the door swung open. Winnie gasped. Instead of a room, there was a cavern that looked similar to the elevator shaft. Winnie didn't run or go hide in a corner. Instead, she just calmly closed the door and headed for the elevator.

At the front desk, Jessica was on the phone, blabbing away to someone named Chrissy. Winnie cleared her throat with an *ahem* and waited. Jessica turned to look at her. "What?" she asked.

"I was wondering if I could have a pair of glasses." Winnie stood on her toes to see eye to eye with her.

"No. Those are for elders." She turned back to the phone.

Quick as she could, Winnie ducked behind the front desk. At last she found a pair of glasses and ran, fumbling to put them on. Now the TV had a cooking show on it, and the elevator wasn't as old as it looked. As she looked around the room, she noticed that the "elders" were young teens, and the man from the elevator was now a little boy. She pressed the "Floor 10" button and rode up to her room.

Opening the door to her room, what had looked like an elevator shaft had now turned into a beautiful suite! She flung herself into it, her eye catching a brown trapdoor on the floor of the bedroom. She opened it and found her mom. She looked tired.

"Winnie!" she called.

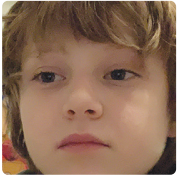
"Don't worry, Mom! I'll get you out of there!" Winnie reached for the bed covers and thrust them down to her

mom. She grabbed them, and Winnie pulled her up.

"Let's go, Mom. I don't think that this hotel will work for us."

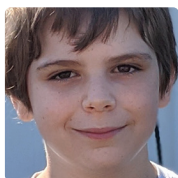
Together, they walked out of the door, down the elevator, and through the front doors, not looking back once.

# Them



By Steven Cavros, 9  
Florida

They are someone no one.  
They died and lived,  
struggled and knew,  
under the sky,  
our sky.  
But nobody sees  
them, and they  
see us and stand  
beneath our trees.  
But nobody sees them,  
and their vision and life fades,  
and they stand upon our soil.  
But nobody sees them,  
and they no longer  
see us.  
And they fade  
without being seen.



*The Sunset* (Watercolor, crayon, chalk)  
 Oliver DeFrancesco, 8  
 Florida

# Two Poems



By Nova Macknik-Conde, 9  
New York

## Questions about *The Banks of the Loire*

Stream of consciousness—  
What is a stream of consciousness?  
Does it flow like the Loire  
In J. M. W. Turner's painting?

Is it a river of thoughts?  
Is it the blue of the sky  
Reflective like the water  
Or the pure white of the clouds on the canvas?

How do we think?  
Why do we think?  
What is thinking?  
Am I thinking right now?

How is thinking possible?  
Why did Descartes say  
"I think, therefore I am?"  
Do we have to think to be?

Do plants think?  
Why am I having a stream of consciousness  
About a stream of consciousness?  
What is the meaning of consciousness?

Why does the world exist?  
Why does the universe exist?  
If something created the world  
How did that something get created?

Why is it possible to exist?  
Can anything come from nothing?  
But if it can't  
How did anything get started?

Has anything existed forever?  
What happened before the Big Bang?  
Did the Big Bang happen?  
Is the simulation theory right?

Am I part of a computer or am I real?  
Is anyone real?  
But if no one is real  
Who made the simulation?  
Why am I thinking about this?  
Why am I even thinking?  
Am I thinking in circles?  
What is a circle?

Was Plato right about the world of ideas  
Where a perfect circle exists  
As the starting point for all other circles  
Like a circular cookie cutter?

What is the meaning of life?  
Why? When? Where? What? Who? How?  
Why do I have so many questions?  
What's knowledge? What is anything?

Who am I? What am I? When am I?  
Where am I? Why am I? How am I?  
What? Am I?  
What's going on? What's not going on?



When J.M.W. Turner painted *The Banks of the Loire*  
Did he create a parallel universe  
Where the girl staring at the river wonders  
If her consciousness flows like a stream?

What are questions?

# On the Road, Dreaming of a Garden

Driving in a rented car  
We stop for a second  
I observe the diamond  
Tessellation on a fence

I look at the one-way sign  
Then turn my head  
I see bricks  
And yellow paint

And beautiful  
Pink, purple and white  
Flowers

I see green  
And four trees  
And yellow flowers

I close my eyes  
And think about  
The move  
And how  
Our new house  
Might have a  
Roof garden

I will plant  
Roses and shrubs,  
Broccoli, celery,  
Tulips and proteas

Orchids and hibiscuses  
Spinach, mint, dandelions

Rosemary, garlic and  
Onions and thyme

There will be  
Tomatoes and  
Potatoes and  
Lilies and buttercups  
I blink my eyes and  
I'm no longer in my garden  
I'm in a tunnel  
I watch the white  
And blue and yellow  
Go flashing by

I think of blue proteas,  
Yellow buttercups,  
White roses,  
Chicory

Then I'm back  
In my garden  
I sit down  
Among the plants and  
Read my favorite book

# Trapped

Stuck on a ride at an indoor water park, the narrator panics



By Mengxin Sun, 13  
New Jersey

“Fine! Let’s just get it over with.”

I let out a sigh as I listlessly dragged my body toward the slide.

It was a cold, unforgiving winter day five years ago. My sister, two friends, and I were at an indoor water park at Great Wolf’s Lodge somewhere in Pennsylvania, voting on which slide should end our little adventure. I had voted against a daunting and unnerving slide named “Twist & Turns,” which I absolutely loathed because of my nyctophobia, but everybody else wanted to give it a try due to its engrossing appearance. My redundant protests went unnoticed, and I felt trapped. But with no other choice, I just went with the flow.

As we settled into our raft, I shut my eyes, not wanting to see the darkness swallow me up. It had only been a few seconds, but I was already sweating profusely, despite the cool air that drifted through the tunnel. Emotions violently swirled around inside me while the raft swayed gently. Expecting to plunge into the next section, I squeezed the handles tightly. But . . . nothing happened. There was no swoosh accompanied with a floating sensation, nor was

there a splash followed by the shaking of the raft.

*Huh?* I thought. *What’s happening?*

I opened my eyes and blinked. It was completely dark except for some muted shades of purple around us. If not for the sloshing sound of water and our breaths, time might as well have stopped.

No, we had stopped.

Trying to calculate what was going on, my mind ran wild attempting to come up with possible answers to this predicament.

“Are we stuck?” someone called out.

*Probably,* I thought. We reached over the raft and tried to push the walls, which was futile, since, except for some water getting splashed around, nothing happened. We screamed for help, hoping for someone to hear us. During the mayhem, my mind raced, imagining all sorts of scenarios: the lifeguards using extensions, someone coming down to push us, even getting out of the raft. But nothing happened.

If only I could share how I felt: stuck, boxed in, trapped with nowhere to go, with desperate screams serving as my only solace.

I was only seven that year, so I felt extremely hopeless and frantic. I felt lost as I clawed the edges of my rationality to stay sane, to devise a way out. There must be a way, *some* way, for us to escape.

At the precipice of giving up, a thought floated into my consciousness in the midst of the turmoil; it whispered to me a path, a way out.

"Hey, how about we shake together?" I spoke up. I heard a ripple of murmurs of agreement, along with some invisible nods of consensus. *Three, Two, One!*

Slowly, amidst the silent tension, the sound of rubber on plastic could be heard. And we slowly relaxed our bodies as the raft made a small woosh and fell down into darkness.

It worked! We were free!

Sighing in relief, I leaned back and enjoyed the rest of the ride. After all, *moving* is much better than *not* moving. Still a bit fearful of pausing midway in some other awkward place, we smoothly glided along the current until we saw the light at the end of the slide.



*Rainbow Duck (Oil)*  
 Laura Hu, 11  
 Illinois

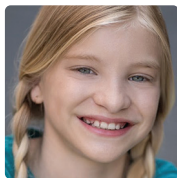
# Perspective



By Svitra Rajkumar, 13  
California

Ducks aren't beautiful  
They aren't even pretty  
Yet when you look at a duck  
Your mind feels at rest  
You feel content  
Like you are in a trance  
But in reality  
You are just amazed  
At how serene the duck is  
You can't tell what made you  
Stop and stare so you move on  
But there is a flicker of envy  
In your heart because  
You truly wish you could be  
As composed as that duck  
You shake your head  
At the thought and walk on  
Who could be jealous of  
An ugly duckling?  
Yet in the right perspective  
You are the ugly duckling  
And the duck is the graceful swan.





*Light from Behind* (iPhone 8)  
Tatum Lovely, 12  
Pennsylvania

# Thunder

A violent thunderstorm shakes Leanne to her core



By Sophie Daniel, 13  
Ohio

*Crack! Boom!* Lightning and thunder raged throughout the storm. Leanne clutched onto her teddy bear as tightly as possible and looked out of the window from the couch in the living room, a blanket wrapped around her entire body, watching as the rain poured down so hard it made the pond splash into endless waves. The large trees (the ones which Leanne's mother had joked about, saying they were so tall they could reach the heavens) swayed to the movement of the rain. The garden of daisies (still wilting and gray) that Leanne's mother had planted a while back were drowning in the endless flow of the rainfall.

"Now now, dear. Don't be in such a hurry to hide," Mother said while lighting a candle. The power had gone out not too long ago, and probably wouldn't be coming back on anytime soon.

"It's scary, Mother," Leanne whispered. "Will the storm pass soon?"

Mother got up from the kitchen stool and closed the curtains instead of answering the question. The hills and the pond hid behind the curtains

along with the thunder and rain.

"How about a story, Leanne," Mother said. "One about snakes and flamingos and elephants!"

"No. Snakes are scary, and flamingos don't do anything exciting—all they do is stand on one leg," Leanne huffed. "And elephants remind me of the thunder."

Mother sighed. She was obviously displeased by her daughter's stubbornness. "Why don't we play a game?" Mother suggested just as another crack of thunder burst into Leanne's ears, making her shake from head to toe.

"What about bingo? Or checkers?" Mother continued.

Leanne shook her head. Nothing could distract her from the terrible storm outside. Mother sighed. "Oh, darling. There really is nothing to be afraid of," she insisted.

Leanne continued to sit still on the couch, the blanket covering her head, but not her face. Mother frowned and sat on the couch with Leanne.

"How about this?" Mother reasoned. "We confess to everything that scares us and why. Would that make you feel better?"

Pondering what her mother had said, Leanne sat silently for a few moments. She nodded her head.

"Alright," Mother said. "I am afraid of dogs."

Leanne couldn't help but laugh. "Dogs? Why?"

"Because they have large teeth and can bite people!" Mother replied anxiously. "Now, what are you afraid of?"

Outside, Leanne heard another booming noise. The thunder was getting louder. She sighed. "I'm afraid of thunder," Leanne spilled, "because it's loud and frightening. And it usually comes with lightning, which can kill you. Also, it's really quite loud. Did I say that already?"

Mother burst into laughter. "I used to be afraid of thunder as well at your age," she admitted.

Leanne was shocked. She didn't think that her own mother would be afraid of thunder. Or dogs, for that matter.

"Just remember this—as long as there is thunder, there is rain. The rain helps the flowers grow. Once the flowers grow nice and tall, they become beautiful. And besides, as long as you're safe and sound inside, you can't be hit by lightning."

Leanne started fiddling with her thumbs. The thunder was getting softer.

"The fireworks that we watch every Fourth of July are much louder than the thunder you hear," Mother said. "You enjoy the fireworks. However, you don't seem to enjoy the thunder."

Leanne turned red. And the more she thought about it, the more it made sense. The rain grew softer as

Leanne felt growing courage spread throughout her body. "I guess maybe it isn't that bad after all."

Mother smiled. "Let's open the curtains and see."

Mother took Leanne's hand, and together they got up from the couch and trotted over to the window. With her other hand, Mother opened the curtains to reveal the world outside. The storm was dying down. It was surprisingly soothing. The thunder now sounded like a stampede of elephants running off into the distance. Leanne smiled a bit. The elephants were soon long gone. Leanne looked down at the garden below. Beautiful flowers were beginning to sprout.

*Perhaps thunder isn't as bad as I thought,* Leanne pondered. Together, she and her mother stared in awe out the window. Birds were flying through the air, singing their song. The trees, which had been moving to the wind of the storm, were now at a steady resting position. The sun peeked out of the clouds, though it was still raining outside. A rainbow was beginning to form, as the sound of thunder had completely disappeared, leaving Leanne nothing but her new, full courage.

# Two Poems



By Lucy Watkins, 10  
Illinois

## Rainy Night

Dark, wet, scary  
The world outside quivers

Raindrops above our heads  
Two umbrellas black

We sit on wet earth  
The world darkens

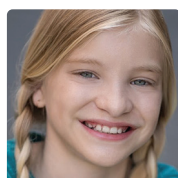
One umbrella leaves  
One umbrella alone

Crickets quiet  
Cicadas chirp and flee

One umbrella returns  
Two umbrellas moving

Across the rainy night





*Lighthouse in the Rain* (iPhone 8, Lightleap)  
Tatum Lovely, 12  
Pennsylvania



# Rainy Dawn

Warm & soft  
at waking

You wonder &  
remember the night

before when rain  
was falling gray & dark

The world is silent  
with thoughts

I place my right hand  
on the glass

I see joy in the sky  
pink & yellow

I see rain drizzling  
down the dawn



*Pears and Wine* (Acrylic)  
Brook Taintor, 10  
Alaska

# Love Language

The writer recalls two different moments when she and her grandparents connected, despite a large cultural and linguistic gap



By Marti Wong, 13  
New York

The door to my grandparents' house in Queens greets me, worn and grayed. Inside, the familiar setting smells faintly of fruit, maybe the Asian pears my *Nainai* always sends us home with. The left opens to the kitchen and dining table, with its fruit-print tablecloth, overhung by a huge old fan. Right leads to the dimly lit living room, with its leather couch. Creepy-looking dolls and framed pictures line the windowsill.

I mirror what my brother and dad do, leaving my shoes on the mat by the door, handing my coat to my dad to hang. A simple routine, same as ever. I give my *Gonggong* a hug, his face just as I remember, never aging, thin black hair, dimples and crinkling eyes. He wears his usual, old jeans and a soft, ribbed sweater.

Then, I turn to hug my *Nainai*, meeting her deep-set eyes under thin eyebrows and dark curls. The only words I manage are, "Hi, how are you?" even though I know I won't get a reply, and even if I did, it wouldn't carry on for more than a few words. And *oh, this is so awkward*, the scratchy knit of her sweater rubbing my cheek, and I'm only ten

years old, but I have to lean down slightly because we're almost the same height, silent because I have no idea of what else to say. She pats my back, a gesture that could have some semblance of comfort but feels awkward and stiff. At least she tried. When I pull away, the unfamiliar words of a language I can't understand fill my ears. I move behind my mom, turning invisible, the only one they can't talk to.

Once we've gotten settled, greetings, updates on life, all that, we all sit at the dining table, padded wooden chairs squeaking and screeching against the floor. Then comes a seemingly endless supply of dishes: soup, meat, vegetables. You name it, it's there. I reach out gingerly with my chopsticks, my hands shaking. I've only just learned how to use them, and I should probably just get a fork, but I don't.

Again, I mirror whatever my brother does and eats, and he rolls his eyes at me. "You don't have to do everything I do," he whispers.

"I'm not!" I whisper back. I always speak quietly here for some reason, like my hand will get slapped with a

**I sit tight until she returns, perched stiffly, a little scared that if I move, I'll ruin it all.**

ruler if I talk out of turn.

We eat until we can't eat anymore, until the dishes are half empty and we've exhausted all topics of conversation. My mom taps my shoulder. "*Hao chi*," she says, her eyes urging me to follow her lead. By now, I know what these two words mean: "The food is very good." So simple and yet impossible to say. My face burns. *I can't*, I think. Yes, *I can*. *I can do this. It can't be that hard. It's just two syllables*. These two syllables are impossibly difficult to articulate. I open my mouth to repeat after my mom, but the only words I can manage are: "Thank you."

I look down as Nainai nods, a small smile on her face. I feel bad for not trying, but what if I had messed the words up, or my voice had cracked, or I'd stuttered? I would've made such a fool of myself. So, like so many times before, I stand and help clear the table, piling dishes and cups by the sink before moving to stand behind my dad, using him as a shield.

We travel to the living room, where I settle on the couch, escaping into my book. A little while later, I hear shuffling and look up to see Nainai holding a plate of fruit. I look to my mom for help, and she shrugs. *Help, help! Please help me. Do something—translate, distract her, anything!* Nainai gestures to the slices of peach, pushing the plate at me. I take one, saying a quiet "Thank you," before eating it in three bites. It's sweet and crunchy and perfect, and I nod to her eager face.

"Good?" she asks.

"Very good. Thank you!" I respond, hesitant, but trying to stay steady.

She hands me slice after slice, completely silent, and I take more, even though I've just eaten lunch. Once I've finished, she gives me a pleased smile, puts the plate down on the little glass coffee table, and turns around, walking up the stairs. I'm a little confused, but I go with it because, honestly, what else am I supposed to do? I sit tight until she returns, perched stiffly, a little scared that if I move, I'll ruin it all. She returns holding two bright-green sweaters. She says something to my mom but holds my eyes the whole time.

"She says these are for you. She got them in China. She says you shouldn't wear so much black. The green will suit you."

My heart swells. She bought me a present. She saw something, thought of me, and decided to buy it. And I nod, ignoring the comment about how I dress, and take the brighter of the two sweaters, with its scratchy fabric and blinding color, and slip it over my head, awkwardly pulling it over my black shirt. I give her what I hope is a smile, and she smiles back.

"Wow. Nice, right?" she says enthusiastically.

"Yup. Thank you so much! I like it!" I reply with as much enthusiasm as I can muster. Am I really that excited about these itchy, green, mock-neck sweaters? No. Am I going to lie so as to not hurt her feelings? Absolutely. She bought me a gift, and now it's my turn to show her that I appreciate it.

Anyway, it's the thought that counts. I begin to understand that this is how we communicate. I think back to similar moments from when I was little, when she used to braid my hair for what felt like hours, feed me unfamiliar foods and bring me hand-me-downs from my cousins. Then, I didn't get it. Now, I do. We can't exactly hold a conversation, but somehow, we can still communicate.

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Halfway across the world, on summer break, I carefully step into the cabin of my *Nonno*, my mother's father. The Italian mountain air is fresh and cool, but his house smells slightly stale from being closed up for too long. *It's tiny*, I think. *Minuscule*. The kitchenette has a minifridge and a propane burner, a wood-burning stove and a small table with wooden crates tucked underneath and benches on either side. I set my things on the flatbed under the stairs and read, waiting for Nonno to say something.

A few hours later, he decides to give me a tour of his little domain: the house surrounded by rolling hills, trees that wave in the wind, thick clumps of flowers and berry bushes. Through a few words and lots of hand gestures, he tells me a story about the cabin and its surroundings. When he first decided to live in a *casetta* (little house), my *Nonna* said it would be too dangerous to be so far in the woods. The mud would slide off the mountain and crush his house. The lightning would strike and start a fire. Trees would fall on him.

He tells me that when he'd arrived, he spoke to Nature and said that he

needed his little cabin to be a safe space, that he needed to be protected. He says that in response, the trees turned the other way and leaned over his house, their long, arm-like branches forming a wall to protect him from the rain, snow, mud, and hot sun. He uses his arms to show the trees leaning, wiggling his fingers to make rain, and then making a knobby, long-nosed Pinocchio face with his hands to represent Nonna.

He says everything has a spirit, you just have to listen and learn for them to help you. He smiles wide telling this story, eyes wild, forehead wrinkling, bushy eyebrows rising and falling comically.

That night, we light candles before sitting down to eat. After we shovel down mouthfuls of steaming minestrone, he tells me more about the wood spirits, and then passes his finger through the tiny candle flame—without burning himself! The fire is kind to him, he says, and doesn't want to hurt him. Delighted, I clap and cheer. He shows me things he's gotten in return for his offerings to the spirits, the porcelain figure of a little baby in the fruit basket on his table, or a piece of shimmering green sea glass. We boil almond flour pasta as a gift for the woods and set it by the window, then stay up late, feeding chopped wood to the bright, dancing fire in the stove and making hot cocoa, two mugs for us and one for the forest.

In the morning, he ushers me to the window, a clay blue-grey bird statue pinched between his rough fingers. He smiles wide, and I grin back. We check the mug of cocoa

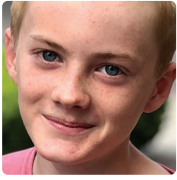


and the bowl of pasta and find them empty. He says the spirits have given us a gift in exchange for food, and we laugh while setting our little bird on the shelf.

Looking back now, I realize that he was just trying his best to entertain his American granddaughter, who could barely speak any Italian. But part of me still wonders, did the forest spirits really give us a bird? How did the trees form a canopy over the casetta? Who ate the pasta and drank the cocoa? We found a new understanding of each other through these tall tales and tiny objects. I still managed to understand his stories, even translated through hand gestures and a jumbled mix of English and Italian.

Somehow, these memories from different sides of my family, in different languages on separate continents, feel similar. My grandparents and I, so different, yet so similar, finding ways to communicate hardly using words at all. These moments are crisp and clear in my mind, never lost in translation.

# Hairs



By Zaid Nazif, 13  
California

Everybody in my family has different hair. My papa's hair is russet, like freshly watered soil, sometimes charcoal when it gets wet. Laith's hair is light brown like lush potatoes straight out of the garden, like the crisp part of a cookie. Layla's hair is yellow, like pasta in the pot; it's darker on the top and gets bleached towards the bottom. My hair is strawberry blonde, all yellow inside, and redder in the sunlight.

But my mother's hair—perfect blonde, all bleached on top and tan underneath, sunbathed and splashed with a dose of light like it laid down on the beach for hours. It is dough sprinkled with flowers, flowing with a variation of colors in every strand. It is the color you see in your dreams, the color that is neither fake nor real. You feel its beauty when you sit by her, and the long flowing strands on your skin, and everyone laughing inside, and the thunder clouds rolling in. The thunder clouds rolling in, everyone laughing, and Mama's hair that looks like a dream.



*Boy in the Moonlight* (iPhone 11 Pro)  
Ethan Zhang, 9  
Virginia

# Silver Swirl



By Alice Robinson-McVety, 8  
New York

A silver swirl  
lay upon  
a silver button  
left on the rock hard floor  
its keeper,  
    an  
        unknown  
            person

A silver swirl  
in my palm  
like a whirlpool in the sea  
I could  
almost feel the cool water

A silver swirl  
lay upon  
    a silver button  
left on the hard rock floor  
its keeper,  
    an  
        unknown  
            person.

# Highlight from Stonesoup.com

## from Flash Contest #44



### Last Vacation

By Caroline Gao, 11  
California

Dear Ela,

I know this is weird, me, I mean you from the future, writing to you. This is very important though. Vacation is very special to you, but I am begging that you spend less time re-reading your novels and watching the waves crash onto the shore endlessly at Cancun. Just forget trying to glimpse a moment where the whole ocean is still. It won't happen.

You haven't really spent much time with your family lately, just endless piles of homework and doodling on scraps of paper. All those times they tried to make you talk about your day at dinner, they were helping you open up.

I get it, your brother was—is—very annoying, but please stop calling him that name. And try to spend some more time with him. At least take him to a corner store for churros, which he will be crazy for a few days later. Or maybe to the putt putt place. He always wanted to go try even though you hated it. It's not real golf. He's into video games, right? What about the arcade room in the hotel? I guess that's as close as it gets.

Two days before you received this letter, he brought home a trophy from a swimming competition. But you being you, you just had to knock it off the shelf, breaking it into eleven giant shards of glass. Because he was constantly bragging. That's what you told yourself. Yes, he is extremely angry right now, but making up with him is very important.

And if you don't even try? Just wait a little less than a month and you'll feel like you're floating in another dimension, waves of agony crashing into you that you can't relieve. I still feel the same way, standing in my bedroom, face pressed against the window, as I stare at the waves.

Destiny cannot be changed. This is the last vacation you'll spend with him, so laugh your head off at his lame jokes and watch *SpongeBob SquarePants* on the giant black television with him until you realize you never want to see a sponge again in your life.

Best wishes,  
Ela

*Stone Soup* holds a flash contest during the first week of every month. The month's first Weekly Creativity prompt provides the contest challenge. Submissions are due by midnight on Sunday of the same week. Up to five winners are chosen for publication on our blog. The winners, along with up to five honorable mentions, are announced in the following Saturday newsletter. Find all the details at [stonesoup.com/post/stone-soup-monthly-flash-contest-winners-roll/](https://stonesoup.com/post/stone-soup-monthly-flash-contest-winners-roll/).



# 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

Maya Morozov, 12  
Bix Overath-Pierce, 10  
Dominic Pogue, 13  
Ismeni Vasiloglou, 13  
Darius Zokaei, 11

## MEMOIR

Sadie Green, 11

## POEMS

Teddy Hamilton, 9  
Tresina Johnson, 11  
Gyara Rodrigues, 12

## ART

Skylar Chen, 7  
Lah-Yim Yoon, 13

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