

# StoneSoup

The Magazine Written and Illustrated by Kids

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

VOLUME 51 / ISSUE 7

# StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

## Editor's Note

This issue is full of storms—actual storms that strike trees with lightning and shipwreck brothers and cause huge waves to crash onto the deck of a beach house—as well as metaphorical ones: “I am a thunderstorm” Pauline McAndrew writes in a poem about being mixed race. A number of characters experience internal storms as well: the protagonist in “Imaginary Friend” struggles to help others see what she sees; Nicky’s anger at her cousin Laila reaches a peak in *Cousins*; and in “Kindergarten,” Avaline describes the fear and anxiety that filled her when she had to start kindergarten in America—without speaking or understanding English.

Storms can be scary, but they are also usually cathartic: all the tension and energy that was building is released in the storm, and afterwards the world—whether external or internal—is calm and peaceful.

I hope you will take the time in the next couple of months to explore storms in your writing and your artwork.

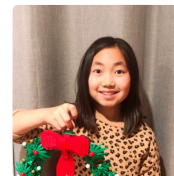
Rainily Yours,



## Thank You to Our Donors!

Production and publication of this issue is made possible by our Jane Austen donors (\$1,000 and above):

The Allen & Eve Foundation, Sandy & Tom Allen, Anonymous (4), James Evarts, Amanda Fox & Ulysses Hui, Brian & Cindy Harlan, Gerry Mandel, Sage Millen, Brion Sprinsock & Kristine Albrecht, Kristina Wilson, and Sally & Clem Wood.



Cover:  
*Set Sail by Moonlight*  
(Pencil)  
Leticia Cheng, 10  
California

Director & Editor  
**Emma Wood**

Operations  
**Sophia Opitz**

Production Coordinator  
**Carmela Furio**

Typesetter  
**Jeff Piekarz**

Communications  
**Tayleigh Greene**

Blog Editor  
**Caleb Berg**

Refugee Project  
**Laura Moran**

Director Emeritus  
**William Rubel**

*Stone Soup* (ISSN 0094 579X) is published bimonthly, six times per year. Copyright © 2023 by the Children's Art Foundation—Stone Soup Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Santa Cruz, California. All rights reserved.

Thirty-five percent of our subscription price is tax-deductible. Consider further supporting *Stone Soup*—visit [stonesoup.com/donate](https://stonesoup.com/donate).

To request the braille edition of *Stone Soup* from the National Library of Congress, call +1 800-424-8567. To request access to the audio edition via the National Federation of the Blind's NFB-NEWSLINE®, call +1 866-504-7300, or visit [Nfbnewsline.org](https://Nfbnewsline.org).

# Stone Soup Contents

## STORIES

- 8 **The Cheese Tree**  
Naaman Garcia
- 17 **The Island of the Three Princes**  
Adler Savikas
- 37 **How the Northern Lights Were Made**  
Roxy Pilcher
- 41 **Imaginary Friend**  
Natasha Dolinsky
- 47 **A Warning Tale to Chickens**  
Eliana Vitti
- 53 **Cousins (Part III)**  
Emily Chang

## MEMOIR

- 5 **What the Waves Told Me**  
Xi Huang
- 26 **Kindergarten**  
Avaline Mikhasiuta

## POETRY

- 7 **Three Expressions of Rain**  
Lindsay Gale
- 12 **Two Poems**  
Pauline McAndrew
- 23 **Storm (Sonnet)**  
Ava Luangkesorn
- 25 **Summer to Fall**  
Clark Li
- 29 **Five Poems**  
Madeline Male
- 35 **A Bowl of Water**  
Zar Rezwan Pavri
- 39 **Storm**  
Ohad Harosh
- 45 **The Train Window**  
Beatrice Milasan
- 49 **Three Poems**  
Sonia Kamnitzer

## ART

- Cover: Set Sail by Moonlight**  
Leticia Cheng
- 4 **Fortitude**  
Emma Hadzhieva
- 8 **Raindrops, or Sharpie Doodles?**  
Madeline Male
- 9 **Beaming Basil**  
Sabrina Lu
- 16 **Seaside**  
Ivory Vanover
- 24 **Celebration**  
Savarna Yang
- 34 **Bamboo Water Fountain**  
Enzo Moscola
- 36 **Rothko Mountain**  
Dongeun Lucy Rhee

- 40 **My Sister**  
Crystal Fu
- 46 **Hen and Chicks**  
Leticia Cheng
- 48 **The Contrasting**  
Tutu Lin
- 52 **Long Live the Queen**  
Yu-bin Bae
- 69 **Outline**  
Sage Millen
- 71 **Honor Roll**





*Fortitude* (Watercolor)  
Emma Hadzhieva, 12  
Texas

# What the Waves Told Me

After a powerful storm, the narrator's relationship with the ocean is forever changed.



By Xi Huang, 10  
New York

Our house in Florida was situated right next to the ocean. There was a big deck, and I liked to stand on it and watch the waves, and whenever I went outside, the salty wind made my hair stick together. At a corner of the deck was a long flight of stairs that led directly to the shore.

In the beginning the ocean did not frighten me. What place could be more wonderful than the beach? I loved to find shells, and build sandcastles, and soak my feet in the ocean, laughing while I played. But something happened that made me understand the ocean better.

The first storm we encountered was in November. The rain poured down all day long. That night, there was a power outage. I was terrified by the dark.

A day later, the wind and waves rose so that we could not go outside. Mother completely refused to let anyone go outside.

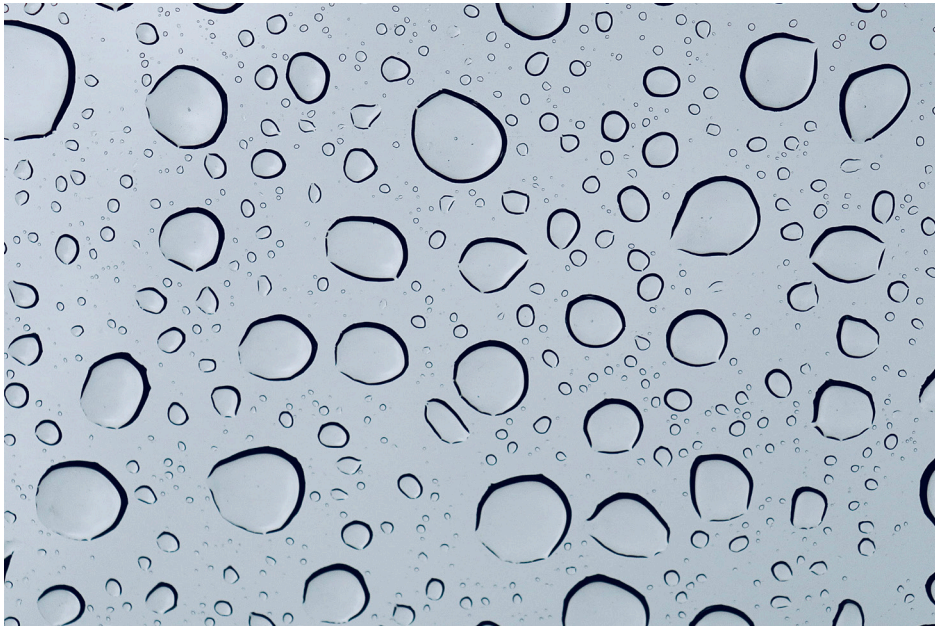
But I, seized by some imaginary power, had to go and watch the waves. I walked to the deck and regretted my decision. It was terrifying! The water reached six meters farther than usual days—and the noise! The waves crashed and tumbled. They beat the stairs connecting the deck and the beach without a hint of mercy. I did not get wet. The deck was high enough for that. But the fear that the waves struck in me! The water hit the rough rocks near the stairs, and water poured out of the rocks in waterfalls. The tiny streams running along the sand were long ribbons of white sticky silk. Then—oh!—a huge wave rose up and pounced on the stairs. It buried the rocks in matcha-green foam, and for the first time I felt the power of the ocean. I could imagine an earthquake rumbling in the deepest parts of the sea, the cresting and crashing waves, and how they vowed to destroy anything blocking their path with tenacious efforts! And yet, this incident filled me more with wonder than with fear, and I saw another face of the ocean.

What did it matter that the wind whizzed and swirled furiously around me? What did it matter that my hands, legs, and feet were numb with cold?<sup>1</sup> What did it matter that my face was red and nearly frozen? I was awestruck, and paralyzed with the realization of the magnificence of the ocean.

<sup>1</sup> I had put on a jacket, but I had forgotten to wear long pants and shoes.



# Three Expressions of Rain



*Raindrops, or Sharpie Doodles?* (Canon Rebel)  
Madeline Male, 14  
Kansas



By Lindsay Gale, 10  
Ohio

1:

The mist that dances on the water  
wisps of light contained in tiny, glistening droplets  
like fragments of crystal  
the sound mystical and delicate

2:

Thick, gray sheets  
pounding on the roof with giant fists  
unrelenting and violent  
a tempest that swirls in the sky

3:

A nonstop drizzle  
muted and bleak  
full of nothingness  
muffled and subdued

# The Cheese Tree

A struggling farmer finds a special seed that transforms his life



By Naaman Garcia, 8  
California

One day, there was a guy named Bob. He was a farmer. He thought he made decent money, until the bills hit him real good in the face. While walking on Dry Creek, which was his favorite place to go, he stumbled upon a seed. It looked strange. It was riddled with holes.

He looked at the seed long and hard. It looked like cheese. He said to himself, "I am going to study this."

Bob boosted out like a rocket back to his farm. He rushed to his computer, his shoes squeaking like a mouse. Looking online, the farmer found no data on the seed. He decided to use his farmer instincts. He rushed to the kitchen, opened the cabinet door, and pulled out his music box and a cup. Bob wound up the music box, and out played the familiar tune: *Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down* . . . He poured himself a cup of coffee and drank it silently while he listened to the music box.

When the song ended, he grabbed the seed and barged through the door.

Bob planted the seed.

Days passed. Weeks passed. Months passed.

Summer arrived. Birds tweeted like a quiet waterfall. Bob looked out his window and saw a large, fully grown tree right where he had planted the seed. He ran as fast as he could. Then he put on his brakes, staring up at something he thought he would never see. Attached to the tree was a giant block of gorgeous American cheese.

It amazed him. His curiosity overflowed with cheese love! He grabbed the hanging cheese and walked it carefully back inside. After setting the block on the counter, Bob removed a chunk of feta from his refrigerator, sprinkling it on the block of American. Bob tasted both at the same time. He ate it ALL. "Wait," he said, slapping his own face. "I should have just tasted the American by itself!"

Then a lightbulb fell from the fan fixture above, whacking his head. "Ow," he said, but at that exact moment an idea also hit him. *What if I grab a new seed from the cheese tree and sprinkle feta on top of that, then plant it?*

Bob followed his idea through. While he waited for the seed to grow into a tree, he made a stand—a cheese stand. He ran back inside his house with plans

*continued on p. 10*



*Beaming Basil* (iPhone 11 Pro)  
Sabrina Lu, 13  
Virginia



**“Jofist, I have a problem,” he said. “A cheese problem.”**

for new cheese experiments. He waited for summer. He waited, and waited, and waited.

Finally it arrived—the tree was there! Bob went to the cabinet, poured himself a cup of coffee, drank it faster than ever, and barged back out the door. Running towards the tree, he opened his hand and waited for the cheese to fall. When the cheese fell, it was larger than Bob’s whole body! It was as big as a giant Newfoundland dog.

At the last moment he jumped out of its way, and an idea hit him instead. He ran back inside, grabbing some wood from a nearby wood stack next to his house. Bob grabbed a rusty metal chicken coop roof and cut it into the shape of a perfect square. He did a few other things to it until he had created a sturdy guillotine to cut the cheese.

The cheese was so big that Bob required the help of his neighbor, Jofist. He banged on his neighbor’s door.

“Jofist, I have a problem,” he said. “A cheese problem.”

“Should I get my forks?” Jofist said.

“We’re just moving the cheese.”

Bob and Jofist carried the gigantic, 100-pound cheese to the guillotine, which was in the backyard.

Jofist said, “Remember the movie about the flying guillotine?”

“Ahhhhh, yeah,” said Bob.

“Are you sure you remember the film?”

“Oh, look! We’re here,” Bob said, scratching his head.

The two men put the cheese on the guillotine, slicing it into itty-bitty squares. Then they put the squares into a bucket and walked to the cheese stand. Jofist and Bob took a seat at the stand and waited for customers to roll in. And they rolled in alright.

Bob counted about 200 customers. Jofist watched the stand while Bob brought more freshly picked cheese.

At night, Bob and Jofist split the cheese. Bob carried his cheese to the left. Jofist took his to the right.

Every day, the two neighbors repeated the same thing. Bob’s wealth grew big, and he split it with his neighbor. Until one day, after finishing up their day, a thunderstorm hit. They ran back inside. Jofist was worried that his house would be struck by lightning. But Bob was worried about something else. His concern was the trees!

He hoped and hoped. The night grew darker and wetter. He went to bed. He heard a crack, a crook, and a zing. He fell asleep. He woke up, nervous about his trees. Skipping his coffee and music box, Bob ran in his pajamas out the door and stopped in the middle of his field. He was surrounded by burnt trees. The cheese trees were burnt to a crisp.

Bob looked at what had been the feta tree, but there were no seeds. Then he inspected the American tree. He looked around and around, losing hope and walking away. BUT, one branch above him dropped a seed onto his head. It bounced, and landed in his hand.

Bob leaped with joy! But looking down it was still burnt. There was still one thing on it—C1. He ran to town looking for an address—C1. He found none.

Walking back home, he saw Jofist waving at him. Bob did nothing but look down at the ground, thinking about his precious tree. So he went back home and went to bed.

But one day while he was shopping, he was looking around to cross the street, and he saw the address—it was C1. He went to the house with “C1” and knocked on the door, but nobody was there. He pushed open the door and right in front of him there was a seed with “C1” written all over it on a desk. He heard footsteps. He wanted to hide, but he stood firm and confronted the maker of the seed. The maker was walking up to him with a banana. He was shoving a banana in his mouth.

Bob asked the maker, “How did you make this?”

The maker said, “I don’t know. It just came up to me.”

Bob was confused, but he just said, “Okay. Can I take the seed?”

The maker was surprisingly nice and he said, “Sure, Bob.”

Bob was relieved—he was going to get his tree back. Bob said goodbye to the maker.

Bob was off to his farm. His stand was back in business.

Bob grew really rich and became good friends with the maker, but one day, sadly, he heard of the death of the maker. So, in his honor, he made a statue of him.

That’s the story of the cheese tree.

# Two Poems



By Pauline McAndrew, 14  
New York

## I Am a Thunderstorm

"I'm mixed."  
A pause,  
just a second,  
barely noticeable,  
before the gears begin to turn.  
The pinched brow,  
the searching gaze,  
the uncertain tilt  
of the head,  
slowly recede in relief.

My new friend now has an answer  
and a box  
to put me in:  
"Oh, like *café au lait*!"  
"Well . . . sure . . . I guess."  
A smile,  
a reassuring nod,  
and our conversation moves on.  
Yet all the while I'm thinking that inside,  
inside,  
I'm not like *café au lait* at all.  
No.  
I am a thunderstorm.

On the outside  
I am too light  
to be dark and

I am too dark  
to be light.  
My hair is not too straight  
nor too curly.  
I am right in the middle.  
A pleasant blend  
of both sides of my family.  
It's a box,  
but it's a safe, comfortable box.  
I am a symbol  
of unity,  
of harmony,  
of How Far We Have Come.  
The type of kid they now use in ads to sell overpriced leisure wear  
and complacency.

But inside  
these two sides of me come together  
not in peace,  
not in harmony,  
but in tension  
and conflict.  
Like a thunderstorm.

If half of me is hot and dry,  
the other half must be cold and humid.  
My disparate elements clash and contrast.  
They fight and repel.  
The collision is  
terrifying,  
disruptive, and yet  
productive,  
for it creates  
force,  
light,  
energy, and, eventually,  
change.

I have come to embrace  
this storm inside of me  
and all of the thunder and wind and rain  
and life  
it promises.



## Pauline on PAUSE

In the early hours of the day  
when the lonely owl is interrupted  
by the small twitters of rising birds  
and the first blush appears in the sky,  
I sit in my blue chair  
and listen to the world around me.  
The house is perfectly silent,  
but soon the cries  
of the little kids in the neighborhood will fade in.  
So I treasure this time.  
And this chair.

My sister would much rather have a queen-sized bed  
to lounge spread-eagle on,  
but I remain in this little blue chair,  
my midpoint  
between sleep and life,  
between childhood and adulthood.  
My sister can't fit in here anyway—  
she's too big  
and too old.  
So it is only me who curls up in this space  
to watch the sun slowly advance  
across the floor to warm my feet.  
It is all mine.

I've come to know this chair  
with all that's been going on.  
Right now,  
I should be slouching against the rigid metal backing  
of the stools in the chilly geometry room.  
Yet here I am,  
observing my world  
in a little bubble of peace.

From here,  
I can see the trees in the backyard  
looming over the garage  
they have entwined with time.  
And on the windowsill  
my lavender,

remaining hostile inside  
its yet-to-bloom bulb.

Next to me,  
a spindly side table trembles  
with the weight of my childhood.  
Or at least the books that were a part of it.  
*My Father's Dragon*,  
*Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse*,  
and, obviously,  
*Harry Potter*,  
although you can't really make poor Harry out  
through this film of dust.

Eventually,  
when the remainder of my tea  
has gone cold,  
I do have to get myself up  
and truly begin my day.  
As things go back to normal,  
whatever that is,  
I know that my little blue chair  
will soon become a part of the background again.  
A spot to toss blankets  
and other miscellaneous items.  
This period of serenity  
will fade as the world returns.  
It will be as if I had been living underwater,  
and the sounds of life will trickle back  
as I rise to the surface.

# The Island of the Three Princes

Young triplet princes, the descendants of legendary King Corv the Twenty-First, set off on their first sea voyage



*Seaside (Oil)*  
Ivory Vanover, 12  
Texas



By Adler Savikas, 10  
Illinois

Once upon a time, on a green, lush island in the middle of a raging blue sea sat a kingdom called Malvapor. It was a beautiful place. Sunbeams danced on the surface of its neighboring waters, and waves crashed on its pale, soft, sandy beaches. The sun above shone with a white, brilliant light which was marred by tall cliffsides that cast dark, fine shadows upon the rocky paths lined by thin woods of evergreens and apple trees; ivy curled around their tall, rough trunks like snakes coiling around the tips of boulders. White, fluffy clouds drifted lazily across the sky, such as water lilies would drift across a peaceful river, dancing slowly on the surface with no purpose or reason. Birds perched in the trees; frogs hopped in the ponds; deer danced in the meadows and through the forests. It was all a brilliant collage of color and nature and life. And yet, of course, every kingdom needs people, and here, in the glistening kingdom, atop the tallest hill on the whole island, in a towering medieval castle, is where our story begins.

A great wall surrounded the castle. It was crafted completely from stone, and every hundred yards or so, there was a tower with several guards standing in the open room at the top of it. They would occasionally walk along the top of the wall, from tower to tower, in the rare instances when replacements became necessary, giving them a break from the stuffiness of their stations and a taste of the crisp breeze that always seemed to be blowing across the island, no matter the season. The chirp of the birds and the calls of the monkeys in the forest were amazing sounds to hear, and they, combined with the beautiful images of the island, made for a wonderful experience for all who set foot upon the sacred grounds of this mysterious and beautiful haven in the middle of nowhere.

Back when people first discovered this wondrous place that I have described to you, of course they were excited. They saw endless opportunities of creation and expansion. And after many long years of debating and settling and farming and all the sorts of things that must be done to create the beginnings of a beautiful kingdom, there came the rise of the grand Kingdom of Malvapor, ruled



**Dangers and escapes, victories and defeats were woven together as an intricate quilt of stories that had no resemblance to truth and, after years of exaggeration, lost all sense of logic.**

by King Corv the Twenty-First, First King of Malvapor. And Malvapor became the Paradise of the Ocean.

King Corv the Twenty-First became a legend to the people of the lands beyond. King Corv the Twenty-First had been a powerful adventurer until one day, all of his ships and warriors vanished, inspiring many searches. Travelers journeyed through raging seas, through two-story-tall waves emerging from the violent ocean like fangs jutting from a mouth, through thunderstorms that sent lightning racing through the air as if someone had cracked open the sky, with thunder booming so powerfully it would cause all the bravery of the bravest person in the world to vanish on the spot. Brave warriors, adventurers, voyagers, sailors, mapmakers, scholars, and plenty of others journeyed far and wide in search of King Corv the Twenty-First and his lost fleet. But finally, after much hunting and no finding, King Corv the Twenty-First was declared missing in action, and after a while, the searches and journeys and voyages and missions, and all that sort of thing, ended, and people seemed to accept that King Corv the Twenty-First was gone, lost forever.

Of course, among the people of the empires in the outer world, many tales were told about what had happened to King Corv the Twenty-First. Hardly any of them were even close to being true. Dangers and escapes, victories and defeats were woven together as an intricate quilt of stories that had no resemblance to truth and, after years of exaggeration, lost all sense of logic. Telling one of these stories became about as wise as saying  $2+2$  equals 3. But as the days, years, decades, and centuries went by, soon the story of King Corv the Twenty-First was forgotten.

This turned out to be a good thing for the descendants of King Corv the Twenty-First, because all those stories had made people much less likely to believe anything they were told about the Paradise of the Ocean and its current king. And of course, as the stories faded and vanished over time, his descendants had time to expand, settle, and renovate the island to make it better suited for the population, which was growing faster and faster. The Corv family was a good, kind one, one that respected nature and the animals they lived alongside. Soon the island came to be known as Corv Isle.

King Corv the Twenty-First's tenth descendant, King Edmund Corv the Third, was a kind, loyal, but incredibly determined man. Sometimes he was so determined that he became a little stubborn. He was, of course, an excellent king, and his wife, Queen June, was there to calm him down when he needed it. Their children, however—triplets named Mar, Tar, and Var—inherited all of their father's stubborn attitude and little of their mother's gentle behavior. They looked practically identical—brown, rich skin, pale green eyes, black hair. If it weren't for their crowns (Mar's having a blue jewel, Tar's having a black jewel, and Var's having a white jewel), the citizens of Corv Isle would have never figured out who was who.

The brothers, known as the Corv Triplets, were loyal and kind people, of course, yet their temper caused many problems. It was like lava: it came out unpredictably, flowed in an unstoppable wave, and you never knew when it would cool. The triplets knew what people thought about their attitude, and understood it (being from the kind and generous Corv family), but not many things were done to change it.

Mar Corv, Tar Corv, and Var Corv: triplets. That was how they functioned—together. Or at least, they functioned together until things got unpredictably confusing, and events changed the course of the boys' lives.

At the age of eleven, the boys were granted their first voyage. Led by Queen June's most trusted captains, each boy entered his own boat, and each, along with a crew of twenty, sailed off into the vast, blue sea beyond Corv Isle.

The experience was exhilaratingly incredible. The cool breeze blew through the Corvs' hair, the water whipped their faces, and the sound of the island cockatoos became more distant as the noise of the squawking seagulls above became clear. Soon, Corv Isle was no more than a speck of dust in the distance.

Their first night at sea, the children lay in hammocks below deck, eating fish and lobster and wondering what was to come in the days ahead. The stars cast brilliant bluish-whitish light upon the wooden decks of the three boats.

Around midnight, a horrible wind blew the boats off course. The captains and the crews struggled desperately to keep the boats together, but alas, their united efforts were useless against the storm's wrath. A strong gust of wind caught in the soft sails of the boats, and the three vessels collided. Of course the Corv princes awoke with a start. The three, being brave and stubborn, climbed to the tops of their decks in search of what was causing all the shaking and the bumping until, one by one, they fell into the turbulent ocean below.

For a little while the waves seemed to play with their Corven victims, until finally, each of the three brothers hit shore. They slept until the sun shone down upon the sleeping world with a light that seemed to say, "Come! It's playtime!" And of course the princes awoke.

I think we'd better start with the tale of Mar Corv. He was always more courageous than his brothers, and also more rebellious. He had a tendency to exaggerate the urgency of problems even to himself.

He awoke to find himself on a sandy beach, alone. This sand was more rough and coarse than the sand back at Corv Isle, and darker too. The brilliant blue sky stretched on and on above; clouds drifted past flocks of seagulls. Judging from the position of the sun, it was almost noon.

Mar stood up and took in his surroundings. Rocks stretched higher and higher until they became a cliffside. Seagulls nested in recesses in the rocky surface. The sharp stone looked like a warning to all who dared trespass. To a normal person—even a particularly brave person—it would have been intimidating.

To a person like Grand Prince Mar Corv of Corv Isle, however, it had the exact opposite effect. It immediately triggered his fight/flight/freeze instinct.

He dashed toward the cliffside, scaring away seagulls and making them squawk at him (he squawked back) and began climbing the rough terrain.

When he reached the top—sweaty and pale but somehow more determined than he had been when he started off, if that was even possible—he discovered that a green hillside stretched out around him. Below him were fields of dandelions, a river snaking throughout the island, and a dense forest in the distance. He stared for a while, taking in the moist, soft grass and the sweet breeze with the faint smell of pineapple in the distance. It was an excellent place, and he was glad he was so lucky as to come across such a pleasant camping ground.

He immediately set off down the hill, following the river toward the dandelion fields. He walked at the brisk pace one walks if they are happy and yet also terribly determined, not stopping for a minute longer to enjoy the sounds of nature. *Don't you go smelling the roses*, he scolded himself. *You are a prince, a voyager, an explorer, and an adventurer. You are Grand Prince Mar Corv of Corv Isle. No time to stop. There might be wolves, or bears, or something else. This isn't a walk through the monkey-infested forests back at home. This is real life.*

The walk down was much longer than it had looked from above, and it took most of an hour to get down. Plopping down on the grass in the middle of the dandelion field, he took a short rest, during which he ate the whole of a protein bar from his pocket. Then he got up and gazed toward the forest in the distance. It looked like a good shelter.

Mar soon found that he was too tired to walk any further. He had not eaten anything all day except for the protein bar. He tried to force himself onward but was too sleepy, and lay down on the soft, green grass, the dandelions tickling his neck and ankles. No sooner had he collapsed than he drifted into a deep, deep sleep.

When he awoke, he saw the sun was almost setting. For the first time, he wished for his brothers. They would have been good company. He wondered what faraway islands they must have landed on. He got up, brushed the grass off his brown jeans and blue T-shirt, and set off once again for the forest.

It was not long before he reached the outskirts of the woods, the area where the trees are thin and far apart and a good amount of sunshine can come through the spaces between the trees. This seemed like an excellent place. He looked toward the deeper woods, realizing he'd need a campfire if he wanted to survive in such a place. The deeper parts of the forest looked like perfect places to gather firewood and berries and the sort of necessities you might need if you were in such a difficult situation as Mar.

Eventually, when he reached the heart of the woods, where there was no light at all, a noise came from ahead of him. He heard twigs crack and something heavy crash into a tree. Mar grabbed a stick for defense but then tripped, rolling downhill, sticks and leaves scraping and bruising him until he landed at the very bottom, where he promptly threw up.

***Well, this isn't so bad, he thought to himself. I hope my brothers, wherever they are, landed somewhere as nice as this.***

---

And now we must leave Mar for a little while and learn the story of our next prince: Tar. Now, Tar wasn't nearly as curious or adventurous as Mar. But he was incredibly wise. He valued knowledge; some would say this increased his chances of success, and others would say it lessened them. My opinion? Well, I know it affected his decisions greatly, as you'll soon see.

When Tar woke up, he didn't open his eyes for a good five minutes. Finally, he stood up, brushed sand off his dirty jeans, and took in his surroundings.

He appeared to be on a beach. A peaceful ocean stretched out in every direction. He could see hints of coral through the cool, clear water. He quickly washed off his hands, feet, and head; shook himself off; and looked toward the island for the first time.

Grassy hills stretched up and up as far as the eye could see. Rabbits hopped across the smooth, wet grass. Parrots rested on the branches of the peach trees that dotted the beach.

Tar walked across the rough sand, careful to watch for seashells, toward the nearest peach tree. He snatched a peach off of a branch and took a big bite out of it. It had a sweet taste, as if it had been dunked in sunshine, so sweet it was a little sour. After taking a few more quick bites, wiping the peach juice from his mouth, and throwing the core to the ground, he set off quickly up the hills.

The sweet fragrance of the roses and the lilies and the violets hit him sharply. He breathed in and sighed happily. Unlike Mar, he was very into nature, no matter what the situation. He was content. The beautiful smells of the flowers and the sweet aftertaste of the peach, along with the salty breeze, created an interesting effect. It was nothing like the one back at Corv Isle. That experience was the sweet, happy kind; this one was sharp and sleepy. It was overwhelming.

He remembered Mar and Var, and wondered where they had gotten to. Only now, it seemed, did the reality of his situation begin to sink in.

Finally, he came to the top of the hill. Staring up at the sky, he noted that it was probably around one o'clock in the afternoon. He stared into the distance. More hills stretched up far away, on the opposite end of the island. Below the hills was a field of dandelions, and closest to him was a thick forest.

*Well, this isn't so bad*, he thought to himself. *I hope my brothers, wherever they are, landed somewhere as nice as this.*

He decided to journey toward the forest below. Setting off quickly, he walked for a long while until he finally reached the outskirts of the woods, the sort of place that would make a good camping ground. He didn't stop there, except to quickly grab a protein bar from his pocket; he journeyed farther and farther into the woods.

In the heart of the forest, he accidentally bumped into a tree. Rubbing his head, he suddenly heard a series of loud crashes straight ahead of him. He tried to run from them, but slipped and tumbled downhill with a loud *THUMP, THUMP, THUMP*.



When Tar realized who he was lying on top of, and he and Mar both realized what had happened, they burst out laughing at themselves.

---

And now, of course, we must learn what happened to Var, the third and final brother. Mar had found himself on the northern side of the island, and Tar on the southern, but Var had landed to the west. When he awoke and saw where he was, he didn't waste a moment before beginning his climb up hills similar to the ones Tar had faced. He climbed and climbed, never stopping to take in his surroundings, until he reached the stream that flowed across the island. Unfortunately, he fell into the stream and ended up leaving a trail of muddy footprints through the forest (which, of course, was what Mar and Tar had tripped on in the woods). Var was the smartest of the brothers and knew there must be food somewhere (he had not noticed the peach trees in his hurry to get to high ground). He searched for food while Mar and Tar searched for him, until finally the three crossed paths in the dandelion field. They all told their stories, and they laughed (all except Var, who was much too serious to laugh about such things).

Soon a ship reached the island's shore and carried the three princes back toward Corv Isle, and back toward home. From then on, the island they left behind became known as the Island of the Three Princes.

## Storm (Sonnet)



By Ava Luangkesorn, 8  
Pennsylvania

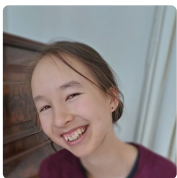
Fragile, and weak, like delicate glasswork,  
Flocks of birds ran away, weakened like retreat.  
Wind blew and tsunamis wrecked, and they are ones that lurk.  
How the birds remember this was a crystal sea of dew,  
But now, lightning, tsunamis, and winds flooded the trees and nests.  
And then, the cause of this was a terrible wreck, and flocks and flocks of birds flew.  
Saltwater waves were peaceful, and were no problems for sandpipers, but now,  
the birds were hopeless  
And soaked. Birds chirped for help as hatchlings closed their eyes and heard  
everything.  
Grown birds took care of their bird children and sheltered them like coats.  
The birds sat down in their nests, desperate for the moth-eaten storm to end.  
The birds waited for a long eternity, and the sun rose as birds chirped with relief.  
The sun was like a gift that people could lend.  
A rainbow shined down at the end of the storm; the birds were amazed.  
The water was clear and crystalized. Again.

# Summer to Fall



By Clark Liu, 9  
Washington

On some cool days, we wear wool  
because of the breeze,  
with a little sneeze,  
like the wind will never freeze.  
The chatter of the trees,  
the red of the leaves  
that have flooded the streets  
like a stream,  
like a dream,  
with some steam.



*Celebration* (OPPO Find X2 Lite)  
Savarna Yang, 13  
New Zealand

# Kindergarten

## Avaline is afraid to start kindergarten



By Avaline Mikhasiuta, 11  
New York

It was May 2016. I had just turned five. My mom and I were sitting at our large glass table in our New York apartment drinking matcha tea.

"Kindergarten will be a change of scenery for you, and you'll meet a lot of friends," my mom said.

"Kindergarten?" I raised my eyebrows.

Kindergarten sounded to me like something cold and lonely. Not because I didn't want to meet new friends, but because I didn't really know what kindergarten was. I had always been around my mom or my grandparents for all my five years, and never went anywhere without them. Besides, I didn't speak any English at all.

A few days later, my mom found a girl from our building who was going to be in the same school as me. She was my age and her name was Lily. We invited Lily and her mom to come over. I was very excited to meet Lily. I took out all my toys from the boxes and carefully laid them out in my room. As soon as the doorbell rang, I ran to the door and opened it. Lily was shyly standing behind her mother and smiling at me.

"Privet," I said, trying to be as polite as possible.

"Hello," said Lily.

*Oh!* I thought to myself, *I forgot that I don't speak any English.* I looked at my mom with confusion.

"Avaline, show Lily your room," my mom said, helping me to feel more comfortable. I took Lily's hand and we walked together to my room.

I had all my stuffed animals neatly seated next to each other on my bed, and the dolls took the chair spot. Board games were lying on the floor.

"Would you like to play a board game?" I asked.

Lily was staring at me and smiling.

"Would you like to play with the dolls?" I continued.

But Lily was only smiling. She didn't understand what I was saying. I really didn't know what else to say, so I tried another approach. I started pointing my fingers to the stuffed animals and calling their names.

"Tasha." I pointed at my black fluffy cat. "Lena." I pointed at my teddy bear.

"Lucky!" Lily shrieked with excitement, grabbing my pink poodle plushie. She was trying to explain that she has the same one. And I understood her.

"Yes, Lucky," I laughed.

For the rest of the hour, we just played with the dolls, dressing them up and pretending they were at the fashion show. Surprisingly, without understanding each other's language, we had a good time together.

For the whole last week of August I thought only about the word "kindergarten."

The sooner the first day of school came, the more scary it sounded. And finally it came! I was very nervous. It turned out Lily was not in my class, which made me even more anxious. *How am I going to talk to other kids? How am I going to understand them? Is my mom going to leave me there? What if she forgets to pick me up? What if she is going to leave me there forever?* My head was full of doubts and fears.

As we came closer to the school, I was mesmerized by its tall red doors and huge lion statues. We entered; the ceilings were really far away from my head. At the end of the hall, I saw a group of kids who were going to be in my class. Everyone was dressed up and looked happy.

The teacher introduced herself to everyone, and it was time for parents to leave. And here that awful moment came! All those doubts and fears came back to me in triple size! I started sobbing and squeezing my mom's hand. I couldn't hear anything or anyone. My mom was trying to calm me down, saying that she'd pick me up soon. But nothing helped. I kept squeezing her hand harder and harder, and finally I bit my mom's arm!

Everyone was trying to talk to me, but I cried harder and harder. I looked briefly at my mom, and she looked like she was about to cry too.

Suddenly, a great idea came to her mind. She decided to talk to the principal and see if she could stay with me at school. And the principal agreed. I was tremendously happy! A huge smile remained on my face till the end of the day. And so my mom ended up going with me to school for two whole weeks.

Every morning we had breakfast and headed to school together. My mom helped the teacher with preparations for the lessons and other errands. I followed my mom everywhere like a tail. She translated everything the teacher was saying to me. After two weeks, I became more comfortable at school; it didn't look so scary anymore.

In October, a new girl joined our class. And guess what? She also didn't speak any English. She was from Japan and only spoke Japanese. Her name was Samiko. We became friends. Because we had a great common thing together—we both didn't speak English!

*I am not alone anymore!* I thought to myself. Samiko and I always took out a big geographical book with no words and pointed to our favorite characters and pictures. We drew together. We played together. We had lunch together. Sometimes I would see Lily at recess and we would all play catch.

In about three months, I was able to understand some basic English and communicate with my peers. I started feeling more confident.



I really enjoyed my time in kindergarten, even though it started in quite an unusual way. Every time I remember it, it puts a smile on my face.

For the next three years, I attended a different school and had to make new friends again. But in fourth grade I rejoined the same school that I had gone to for kindergarten. Most of the kids I knew were not there anymore. Samiko was not there either.

Right now I am in sixth grade and can fluently read, write, and speak in English. My friendship with Samiko will always have a special place in my heart, and I will always remember it. It taught me that you don't really have to speak the same language to make a great friendship.

# Five Poems



By Madeline Male, 14  
Kansas

## A Star

A city is sad  
with not a star in sight  
so let us make them:

. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . .

A memory of Joy . . . . .

## Rising

Goodbye, Earth:

I am rising                      rising                      rising  
above the grass,  
and falling toward the moon.

## The Car Window

The backseat car window  
holds a view  
I never want to lose:

A normal-looking house.  
Our house.  
Becoming

smaller

smaller

smaller

until I can barely see it in the  
horizon  
of blue, sympathetic sky  
and wide wheat prairie  
tousled in the breeze.

My favorite sight  
is out of sight  
forever.

I turn back around  
and see a new sight—  
our new house—  
now I will get used to  
seeing and living in  
it.

## Time

Distracting myself,  
busy all day,  
cannot accept another day lost to  
time.

Time—  
the old enemy,  
yet friend,  
it makes me a day older  
yet wiser.

Another day of my life is  
gone.  
Past.

But I know that I did something that day;  
I did not sit around,  
waiting  
waiting  
waiting  
for it to pass, and  
waiting  
waiting  
waiting for the next day to come.

I read  
wrote  
learned  
asked questions  
and went outside to the park  
in that day.

So maybe it is worth being another day  
older,  
another second older—  
not that it's my choice anyway.

I'll enjoy it,  
I'll love it,  
and I will not look back.

## What is Now?

You are reading this poem now.

I wrote it “now,”  
but by the time you're reading it,

I will have written the poem in the past.

Oh, the functions of time!

Past, now, soon . . .

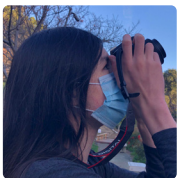
Time commands every word.

What is now?

It is gone, but will come again,  
  
right now.



# A Bowl of Water



*Bamboo Water Fountain* (Canon EOS Digital Rebel XS)  
Enzo Moscola, 13  
California



By Zar Rezwan Pavri, 12  
California

I watched the water. It was still. No ripples, no waves, no tides. No fish of any kind. It was not a pond, a stream, an ocean, or a lake. It was a pot. A pot filled with water. And then it began to bubble, and then it began to boil. And I made soup. However, I had no carrots, no cabbage, no cucumbers. No vegetables of any kind. It was not a broth, nor a bouillon, neither a bisque or a consommé. It was water. It was all I had. So I drank it.



*Rothko Mountain (Acrylic)*  
Dongeun Lucy Rhee, 13  
South Korea

# How the Northern Lights Were Made

The moon invites the animals to help light up the night sky



By Roxy Pilcher, 10  
Maryland

One night, on a tall mountain, a river ran through a rocky forest. Everyone was asleep on the mountain except a bear, a mountain lion, a fox, an eagle, and a mountain goat. They were all sitting together, talking quietly by the river. Suddenly, the river slowed and was covered by what looked like a liquified moon. A tall figure appeared at the top of it. They were hooded, with a dark green cloak and silver cuffs and lining. You could not see their face.

"I am the Moon," said the figure. "And I have come to ask you for help. I cannot light up the night sky by myself." They gestured to the east. The Sun refuses to give me any of their light to help me. So, I have asked you to help me."

The animals looked around at each other. They did not know what they would turn into, or where they would go. After a few minutes of arguing, the Moon interrupted them, hearing that they did not know where they would go or what they would turn into.

"You will become what I call stars—balls of light in the sky to light it up. Next to me and the Sun. And with all your friends." The figure pointed to the sky.

The animals decided to help the Moon and become stars. They nodded to the Moon. There were many uncountable dots of bright light on the surface the Moon was standing on. The bear stepped forward first, putting a paw on one dot of light. He turned into glittering ashes which floated into the sky and formed a beautiful ball of light.

"The first star," said the Moon quietly.

Then the eagle flew forward, landing on another dot. Then the fox and the goat came forward.

The whooshing noises of them turning into ashes woke all the other animals on the mountain. They all came to see what it was. The Moon explained it all to them. They all quickly rushed forward, stepping onto the dots of light and becoming stars. Some became constellations too. The Moon laughed and smiled to see all the help they were getting.

But once all the other animals had become stars and constellations, there was not a single dot left for the mountain lion once it was his turn. He looked at the bright sky. The stars and constellations looked bright and powerful.

**But once all the other animals had become stars and constellations,  
there was not a single dot left for the mountain lion once it was his turn.**

He looked back at the river and stepped onto its surface. He jumped all around the river, looking for a dot. The Moon noticed after a few minutes the mountain lion jumping all around the river frantically.

“What’s wrong?” they asked.

The mountain lion sat down sadly and looked at them. “There are no more dots for me to become a star or a constellation. I cannot help light up the sky with my friends. All the other animals got them, but not me.”

“It’s no matter. I have something better.” They stepped away from where they had been standing to reveal a large puddle of green, blue, and purple behind them. The mountain lion looked back at them before stepping onto the dot.

“Thank you.”

He was whisked away into the sky with an explosion of color. As he looked around him, he saw he was leading a ribbon of blue and green and purple into the sky and past the bright stars and constellations. He had also become that ribbon. His tail and hind legs and everything behind his front legs were no more, only the ribbon. He ran through the night sky, looking to the mountain he had been on just seconds before, leading the northern lights behind him.

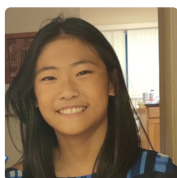
## Storm



By Ohad Harosh, 10  
New York

As the clouds grow dark, we start to relax.  
We play a game of shapes of clouds. All of a sudden,  
water starts to fall and we still lie there,  
all wet and out of breath.

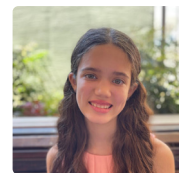




*My Sister* (Pencil)  
Crystal Fu, 12  
New York

# Imaginary Friend

A therapist tries to convince Madeline her only friend isn't real



By Natasha Dolinsky, 12  
North Carolina

They tell me you're not real.

I know that's wrong.

If you weren't real, I wouldn't see you, hear you, feel you.

I didn't want to go at first. It's pointless. I know you're there, and it doesn't matter if anyone else does. But you tell me it does matter. You need help, and I need to help you.

On the first day, I have to mentally prepare myself for whatever is coming. My sister leads me into a room where a pretty lady in a pretty blue dress is waiting.

"Hello there," she says. "I'm Dr. Amber. What's your name?" She asks the question, but not like she actually wants to know. Just like something she's saying. I glance at Emma, and she smiles encouragingly.

"Madeline," I answer.

She nods. "So Madeline, your sister tells me you have a friend, is that right?" Her words are pretty. Her tone isn't.

"Yeah."

*Obviously. How is this woman supposed to help you if she doesn't even know who you are?* You look at me, Emma, and raise one eyebrow. I never had to tell you what I was thinking. You always just knew. So maybe this will or won't get better. But I'll try anyway. For you. Because if I don't want to help you, I must need fixing too.

"Can you fix us?" I ask the doctor, not knowing what the response will be, or what I want the response to be.

"Oh, honey," she says, smiling sadly. "Of course I can fix you." I grin. "All I need is for you to want to be fixed, and then it'll be easy. I promise." My smile falters. That wasn't quite the response I was looking for.

"Now, Madeline, what's your friend's name?" The question takes me by surprise.

"Oh, um, Emma."

"And how long have you known Emma?"

"My entire life. She was there before my parents died."

Dr. Amber nods. "I understand you've been through some things, but I'm going to ask you some questions, alright? And I need you to answer them honestly."

"Okay," I say in a small voice. You nod reassuringly.

## “Madeline, do you think Emma is real?”

“When did they die?”

“I was three. They got in a car crash while my sister and I were at home.”

“Has anyone seen Emma before?”

“Not that they’ve said.”

“Who’s been taking care of you?”

“My sister.”

“Were you in any sort of foster program or home?”

“No, our parents had a lot of money, so my sister raised me off of that until she could start working to provide for us.” At this Dr. Amber frowns but nods and continues.

“How old is she?”

“24.”

“Is Emma here right now? Has she been listening to our conversation?”

“Yes.”

Dr. Amber stands up and leans across the table.

“Madeline, do you think Emma is real?”

The concern on her face worries me, but I brush it aside.

“Of course she is.”

---

The next time I visit (my sister makes weekly appointments), I am greeted by Dr. Amber and a tall man with unusually long fingers that wrap around mine when we shake hands.

“This is Dr. Smith. He’s more specialized in pediatric care.” We sit down on the couch, and you are there too, yet the doctors pay you no attention.

Dr. Smith clears his throat. “Ms. Madeline, I want you to understand that imaginary fr—”

“She’s real,” I argue. *You’re here with me now, aren’t you, Emma?* Dr. Amber takes out a clipboard and writes something down.

“Yes, of course,” he says quickly as if to cover up a mistake. *Don’t worry, you aren’t a mistake. They’re wrong. They don’t understand how to fix you yet.*

“However, for this purpose, we shall refer to them as imaginary.”

I frown but say nothing. Arguing won’t get me anywhere.

“Now, when you’re younger, imaginary friends are the use of your creativity, if you’re lonely or need someone to talk to or play with. And that’s perfectly normal. Sometimes, they’re also from the effect of traumatic experiences, a way of coping. And based on what Dr. Amber here has told me, you have experienced some of these . . . experiences.”

“Madeline,” Dr. Amber butts in and looks up from her clipboard. “Do you want Emma to go away, or do you like talking with her?”

“I like her,” I say, smiling at you. More clipboard writing and pursing of lips.

“As I was saying,” Dr. Smith continues. “Imaginary friends are not a bad thing when you’re younger. In fact, it’s a great way of learning how to better socialize, especially for those who are shy. But as you start to get older, they tend to come in the way of things, and that’s not good. So I’m going to give you a task, Madeline. I want you to go out, leave your friend at home, and tell them you need some alone time. Then I want you to take a class, go to the park, or do things similar to that. I want you to make one new friend.”

“I have a friend. Emma.”

“I know, but I think it would be good for you to have two friends.” I smile and nod my head, even though I don’t understand. You told me that, Emma. That I should go to these sessions to help you, but if something strange happens or there’s something I can’t understand, just smile and nod and you’ll talk to me about it later. I don’t see how making a friend will help you, but I guess there’s no harm in trying.

“Oh, and,” Dr. Amber adds, “I presume it was just you and your sister at home? No one else?”

“Just us,” I say. “She raised me. Goodbye.” I stand up to leave, but Dr. Smith stops me.

“Where are you going? We still have fifteen minutes.”

“Emma was making some stew for dinner, and if we don’t get home soon it’ll burn our apartment down.” I smile sweetly at them, not missing the exchange of glances. “Bye bye.”

---

The next few sessions pass in a blur, mostly the doctors asking about my life, my sister, and about my friends. They never tell me what’s wrong with me, even though it seems like they’re trying to. “Don’t worry,” I tell them. I know why. There is nothing wrong with me, even though they seem to think so. There’s something wrong with you. But I am not a judgy person, so you have no reason to worry.

---

I’m on my seventh visit now, and today I am only with Dr. Amber.

“Dr. Smith is out of town,” she explains. “It’s just you and me today.” She whips out her clipboard and asks me all the usual questions:

“What have you done today?”

“Well, I ate breakfast, read a book, and then came here.”

“Is Emma here today?”

“Yes.” She always is.

“Have you made any new friends?”

“No.” Other kids aren’t very nice around here, not like Emma.

“Have you missed your parents?”

“No.”

“Have you talked to your sister?”

“Every day.”

"Do you like coming here?"

"Well, I mean, it's very important."

And then she asks me a new question.

"Do you think these sessions have changed you?"

"Of course not," I tell her. And I swear she almost looks surprised. "These aren't for me. They're for Emma. I'm just her translator. You guys can't see or hear her, and that's her problem." I smile at you, and you give me a thumbs-up back.

"They're for Emma," Dr. Amber repeats, scribbling furiously. She turns a few pages and looks at her notes. You grimace and rest your head against me, Emma.

Finally Dr. Amber looks up from her notes, a disbelieving expression on her face.

"Madeline, what is your sister's name?"

I scoff. "You know her name. We've been talking about her all this time."

Dr. Amber shakes slightly.

"Just tell me. Once more."

I shrug and sigh.

"Her name is Emma."

# The Train Window



By Beatrice Milasan, 14  
Ontario, Canada

Gazing out the window, I observe the teal ocean. Its waves thrash against the biggest rocks I've ever seen, but in its violence, I see only beauty.

Its blue is that of a turquoise crayon six-year-old me would firmly grip in her tiny hands. She would scribble on a blank page, filling it with what she saw in her tiny green eyes as the most wonderful drawing in the world. She'd be eager to get home and show her disastrous "artwork" to her parents, who would, in turn, smile their strained smiles and nod to each other, knowing there's no way their little girl could ever pursue art as a career.

Outside, I notice the sun seems to be getting sleepy. It has decided to rest its weary head upon the horizon, sinking peacefully into the now calm, quiet ocean. In a few hours, the explosion of colors that we know as a sunset will die down, fading into a dark inky blue, then purple, then black. The stars will come out, and the moon will do its best to shine as bright as our majestic sun. It won't come too close, but that's okay. Our tiny moon tries its best.

In the end, I'll still be here, staring out the tiny window of this little brown train. Seasons, tides, and weather may change, but here I remain. Staring out the tiny window of this little brown train.



# A Warning Tale to Chickens



By Eliana Vitti, 9  
California

Once upon a time there was a pretty red hen. She was young and happy and looked forward to laying her first egg.

On Tuesday, she tried to lay an egg, but couldn't.

On Wednesday, she tried again. She tried all that day, but her effort was useless.

Finally, on Friday, she laid a cream-colored egg. In excitement, she clucked and squawked and flapped her wings. Lil' Red had laid an egg!

She caressed her egg lovingly and tucked it under her belly. "I'll name you Stewie," she soothed.

Suddenly, the wall beside her opened and a huge hand stuck in and grabbed Lil' Red's egg. Lil' Red flapped in fury, but it was useless.

For days, Lil' Red's eggs were stolen. Days melted into weeks, weeks into months, and months into almost a year.

Two days before New Year's Eve, Lil' Red decided to stop laying eggs. She was tired of getting her eggs stolen by the children, Molly Mae and Jason Jon.

On New Year's Eve, Mrs. Tatianna, the farmer's wife, wanted to make a cake. Since Lil' Red had decided to stop laying eggs, she wasn't able to bake it. To make up for it, her husband decided to make a special rotisserie chicken treat. He strolled over to the chicken coop. Who should he butcher? Not Pam, she was the best layer. Not Jane, Katie, or Molly—they also were good. Finally, he came to Lil' Red.

"Aha!" he cried. "You'll be roasted before you know it."

So that's the tale of Lil' Red, who got a knife put in her head.

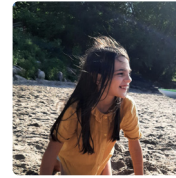


*Hen and Chicks (Pastel)*  
Leticia Cheng, 8  
California

# Three Poems



*The Contrasting* (Oil-based colored pencil)  
Tutu Lin, 13  
Texas



By Sonia Kamnitzer, 10  
Ontario, Canada

## A Noisy Night

As I climbed onto the ladder to my bunk bed,  
Cries exploded from the open window.  
I tried to eavesdrop  
But heard only  
Blabbering voices.

## Early Morning

As I lie in my bed,  
I smell  
The cold winter air  
And my pajamas.

It is early morning,  
About six o'clock.  
I yawn,  
And lean back down on my pillow.  
I sigh.

## A Truthful Clock

Clock's on the oven.  
It says it's time to get up.  
The clock tells the truth.





*Long Live the Queen* (Acrylic and colored pencil)  
Yu-bin Bae, 10  
Washington

# Cousins (Part III)

A trip to Hyacinth Cove brings the cousins closer



By Emily Chang, 14  
New York

*This is the final installment of Emily Chang's novella, which received honorable mention in our 2022 Book Contest. If you are a new subscriber, you can read the first two installments online in the May/June and July/August issues.*

## Chapter 11: Why Laila Ran Away Just for Ice Cream

The car windows were open, and a breeze from the lake was blowing in as we parked by the beach. The drive to the Hyacinth Cove lake had taken over half an hour. By the time we got there, I was tired already, and not just of Julien's endless ukulele strumming.

I stumbled out of the car and into the sunny parking lot, leaving the blue journal on the seat. My right leg had fallen asleep, and I shook it to get the feeling back in.

Uncle Pierre opened the trunk, and we each took some beach chairs to bring to the lakeside. We'd parked a little distance away from the little cousins, and I could see them waving at us through their car's back window.

"We have to get the kayaks from their car since they have a roof rack and we don't," Julien explained as we walked across the crowded parking lot toward them. "I got the kayaks for my birthday."

"You mean, I bought them for your birthday, good sir," Adrian said, stopping to give an elaborate bow.

"Yeah, what you said." Julien shifted the beach chairs he was holding and the ukulele he still had on his back.

"Do you seriously need to bring the uke? We've heard enough of it today," Adrian said, and received a kick on the heel from Julien in return.

"Anyway, like I was saying," Julien continued, "there are two seats in both boats. So Nicky, Aunt Illy, do you want to come and try them out with us?"

I shrugged. "Maybe." Kayaking might be a nice distraction, but I didn't feel like a nice distraction.

"Aunt Illy?"

"I would like to," she said. "The last time I went kayaking was a few years ago.



And—oh, but actually, I'm not sure you'd want to risk having me in the boat with you."

"Why? What happened?" Adrian and Julien were both interested.

"Well, I'm not the most graceful with a paddle," Aunt Illy said. "I went with a friend, but let's just say his right ear will never be quite the same again."

"You hit him in the ear with a paddle?" Adrian was incredulous. "Wow, not even Julien's that clumsy."

"You're one to talk, Mister Man Overboard," Julien said.

"Did I say I hit him with a paddle? Did I?" Aunt Illy's expression was so comical that I did feel the urge to smile, even through my worry. "Adrian, you jump to conclusions. Though unfortunately, yes," she sighed, "that was the right conclusion. But what about Laila? Are you two forgetting her?"

"I don't need to go," Laila mumbled, and it seemed like the first time she'd spoken since the sapphire blue ordeal, since she'd been silent the whole car ride here. "I've been kayaking with you guys. Anyway, Adrian, you have . . . accidents."

Julien laughed loudly at that. "Exactly," he said. "Your clumsiness rivals hitting anyone in the ear with a paddle, Mister Man Overboard. Maybe I shouldn't trust you with my new kayaks."

"You mean the ones I bought for you, good sir," Adrian said back. "Of course you will."

We got to where Tilly and Alex were waiting for us, next to their parents (who were maneuvering the folded tent out of the car) and my mom (who was holding the cooler with our lunches, and Rose's removable car seat where she was sleeping). Julien and Adrian took the kayaks off the roof rack.

"How old are you, Julien? I forgot," Alex said, swinging a bucket full of sand toys around.

"I'm seventeen," Julien told him.

"Oh." Alex nodded. "Are you in college?"

"Not yet. I'm still in high school right now."

"Did you already go to college?"

"No, college is after high school. I haven't been there yet," Julien explained patiently.

"Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"Tank."

"Tank who?"

"You're welcome!" Alex sang, swinging the bucket in circles again and accidentally hitting Tilly in the stomach.

"Ow!" She stumbled backwards. "Alex, you are not under control," Tilly said sternly, trying to grab the bucket from him. A small scuffle ensued, which Aunt Illy broke up yet again.

Rose had just woken up and started to wail. My mom put down the car seat and the cooler to hold her instead.

Then there was a thump and the sound of metal scratching pavement. I turned around to see the tent finally out of the minivan's trunk, and Uncle Benjamin

carrying it awkwardly. Aunt Carissa shut the trunk and picked up the car seat and cooler that were on the ground.

"All right, crew!" Aunt Illy said. "We're ready now. Onward!"

All of us, carrying something, made our way to the lake beach. Lots of people had taken advantage of the weather today, and the beach was full of tents and towels and people. We walked a long distance to try and find a less crowded area to set up.

We put down the beach chairs. Alex and Tilly immediately sat down in the sand and started digging together. Apparently, they'd been planning a grand sandcastle for a few days, though they were still discussing and debating heatedly. Laila came over, and Tilly made room for her on the ground while Alex started giving her orders.

"Attention, large people in this family!" I heard Aunt Illy call. "Please assist the valiant in a wrestling match against the tent!"

I was the fourth-shortest person in this family, but I figured they might need my help anyway. Adrian and Julien, who were about to launch their kayaks, turned and came back too.

Uncle Benjamin was shouting instructions, and I took one corner of the tent beside Aunt Illy. With the other "large people," we pulled out the tent's base in four directions. The top expanded and rose until it stood six feet high. The base was even wider. We put pegs in to anchor the tent to the sand, and Aunt Illy declared victory.

Now the tent was up, almost everyone was settled. But I had no idea what to do. I sat down on the sand beside the architects at work and watched them build. I didn't feel like joining in, though.

I looked toward the lake, where Adrian and Julien had just set out on their kayaks. They paddled farther and farther out until their boats became smudges of orange on the water.

"Did you want to go with them?" I hadn't heard Aunt Illy come up behind me until then.

"Not really," I said, slowly turning around to face her.

"You've been sort of quiet today," she said gently. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I was about to say, but I didn't want to lie. Suddenly I wished for nothing more but to confide in Aunt Illy, to tell her about my worries and everything about Ms. Fleming, but I knew it would all take too long to explain, and I couldn't bring myself to go back and relive those awful moments. And I realized that I had never mentioned Ms. Fleming to Aunt Illy before. Not even in my letters. Why hadn't I? Wasn't she important to me?

"I'm . . . worried about someone. And I don't know how to control . . . what's going on," I ended up mumbling as an answer to Aunt Illy.

She sat down on the sand beside me and sighed softly, staring out towards the lake. "I'm sorry you have to go through that," she finally said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

I shook my head no. Aunt Illy was the kind of person who didn't push, and I was grateful for that.

**I wished I could go hide in a dark corner and not come out until this was all over.**

Just then, Tilly came over to where we were sitting. “Aunt Illy, can you help us build?” she asked.

Aunt Illy glanced at me and I nodded, telling her I’d be okay for now. “Yes ma’am,” she told Tilly, and scooted over to where the sandcastle was shaping up under the hands of Alex and Laila.

I thought I saw Laila shoot a look at me, but when I turned back to her, she was facing the other way again, helping Alex dig sand out of the castle’s moat.

---

I managed to make it through the rest of our time and past lunch (which we ate in the tent, though not even mochi donuts from Aunt Illy could make me feel better). I went kayaking for a few minutes with the boys when they got back from their first run, though it was hard to talk or laugh with anyone, even when Adrian was capsized (it seemed half on purpose). The tent had tried to escape from its pegs twice during the bigger winds, and the grown-ups routinely checked to make sure it was secure. And since the morning, the little cousins’ sandcastle had grown to Tilly’s height and featured a moat filled with lake water, a bridge, and several stories with windows.

But I just wanted to leave.

Knowing Aunt Illy was willing to listen only stopped up the worry a little. I knew she had good intentions, but I still couldn’t explain anything to her.

I wished I could go hide in a dark corner and not come out until this was all over. Or, better yet, I wished I could run out of here, run away, run home, run to the hospital so I could know if Ms. Fleming was okay. Every minute took an agonizing effort to act normally.

Unable to do any of that, I went toward the tent, hoping to be left alone there. But a gust of wind had just yanked a corner of the tent from the ground again, and Uncle Benjamin was putting it back in. In the distance, I heard the tinkling music of an ice cream truck.

Alex came over to me. “Knock, knock.”

“Who’s there?” I mumbled.

“Europe.”

“Europe—”

I was cut off by a piercing shriek from behind me. I spun around to see Tilly no longer working on the sandcastle but screaming her head off.

Aunt Illy took Tilly in her arms, trying to find out what was wrong. I came over, just as confused as she was.

It was Alex who had the answer.

“It’s the ice cream truck,” he said. “She’s scared of the ice cream truck. At home, she always starts crying when she hears it.”

Glue sticks and now the ice cream truck! But Aunt Illy didn’t laugh; she only hugged Tilly and tried to calm her down.

“I have an idea,” she said. “How about we get some ice cream for her? Then she’ll know the ice cream truck is nothing to worry about. It’s nothing to worry about, okay, Tilly? Come on, we’ll go together.” She stood up, but Tilly’s hysterics only got louder.

“I can get the ice cream if she doesn’t want to go,” Laila said from behind me.

“Did someone say ice cream?” Adrian had paddled over when he heard Tilly, though I was surprised he could hear the words “ice cream” over her cries. “Count me in. Can you get me a double cherry dip, Laila?”

“Okay, fine,” Laila said. “But you—come back here!” Adrian had paddled away again.

Tilly’s heaving sobs had calmed down a little by now, but she didn’t say anything when Aunt Illy asked her what flavor she wanted. “She likes strawberry,” Alex said. “I like strawberry too, with rainbow sprinkles. Let’s get that.”

“How about you, Nicky?” Aunt Illy asked, turning to me. “Since we’re all getting ice cream, it seems.”

If she thought ice cream would make me feel better, she was wrong. But I shrugged and said “Chocolate’s fine” because I understood her efforts.

Laila reviewed the orders while Aunt Illy counted out money for the ice cream and handed it to her. Strawberry with rainbow sprinkles for Alex and Tilly, double cherry dip for Adrian, chocolate for me, a chocolate caramel swirl waffle cone with peanut butter morsels for Laila, and a vanilla cup for Aunt Illy “if it wasn’t too much trouble.” Six ice cream cones in total.

“You sure?” Aunt Illy raised her eyebrows at Laila when she heard all of this. “I can come with you. It’s a lot to hold all at—”

But she was cut off when Alex sounded a cry of alarm, just as Tilly’s was fading. Aunt Illy dove to catch the crumbling turrets of the sandcastle before they were washed into the tiny surrounding moat. Tilly stopped sniffing long enough to toddle over and try to pat some sand back on, but she ended up brushing off more than she replaced.

“You’ve got your hands full too,” Laila said to Aunt Illy. “I can manage. It’s just across the lake. See you later!”

And she tucked the money into a little pink purse that she had in her pocket, then began running off in the direction of the ice cream truck.

“Laila, it’s six ice cream cones,” Aunt Illy yelled, but Laila was starting to disappear from sight.

Aunt Illy sighed, trying to dig out the moat again as Alex ordered. “I’m sorry. Nicky, can you go with her?”

“Me?” I glanced around to try and find someone else who would help hold six ice cream cones. But Julien and Adrian were far away in the water, my mom was holding Rose who was asleep in her arms, Uncle Pierre was putting away the remains of lunch, and I saw Aunt Carissa and Uncle Benjamin wrestling the tent yet again. I looked back again and saw Laila far off now.

So I had no choice but to follow her.

## Chapter 12: Why I Traded My Sandals for a Friend

Sighing, I turned to run after Laila. Why was she running, anyway? There was no point in moving so fast. Unless she really was anxious for ice cream, which was stupid.

I caught up with Laila just as she was going through a tall gate. “What’s the rush?” I asked, annoyed.

“Oh, it’s you.” She threw a glance at me but didn’t answer my question. I worked to keep the pace she was going at, but she seemed to be trying to go faster than me. I was exasperated, but I kept running. I knew I wasn’t any slower than she was.

I ran along the lakeshore, across a field, through two more gateways, and over a gravel pathway, following Laila and the music from the ice cream truck. Through another gate, past a brick building, and then to the street. I passed Laila. The ice cream truck was coming into view.

But right when I got close, the truck’s engine suddenly started up.

“Wait!” I yelled, running even faster.

To my dismay, the ice cream truck started rolling away. “Hold on!” I waved my arms in the air as I ran to get the driver’s attention.

When I finally caught up to it, the truck stopped and the driver came over to the window.

I slowed down, my sandals slapping the ground as I tried to catch my breath. But Laila had the money, so I had to wait for her. I heard her jogging up from behind.

Laila brushed past me to the truck window and rattled off our orders to the ice cream man so fast that he had to ask her to repeat them. She did, slower.

The ice cream man started preparing the orders, but then paused. “Sorry, we’re out of chocolate caramel swirl.”

“Oh, okay,” Laila said. “I think I’ll just have vanilla, then.”

One by one the man handed ice cream cones to Laila, who passed them on to me.

“I don’t have that many hands,” I hissed as Laila tried to shove the fourth ice cream cone at me. “Simple math. You hold three, I hold three.” I was already trying to hold two cones between the fingers of one hand. Not so easy. But she still held out the ice cream like she expected me to take it.

“Thank you, sir,” Laila said to the ice cream man, ignoring me. She had turned away, and now I was forced to take the double cherry dip cone in front of my face. Two ice cream cones in each hand.

“Laila,” I growled.

Still I was ignored. Laila only took the money from her little pink purse and handed it to the ice cream man. “Have a nice day, ladies,” he said, handing Laila the change and then retreating from the window to the driver’s seat. In a moment, the truck revved up and began driving away.

I turned on Laila. “Take the ice cream cone already,” I snapped.

But still she didn’t. “I have to—” she glanced around. “Is there a bathroom around here?”

## Who was she to totally ignore me, refuse to hold the ice cream, and then just leave?

“Seriously?!” I groaned. “You have to go right now?”

“Uh, yeah. I think we passed one just now.” She held out the one other ice cream cone and Aunt Illy’s vanilla cup. “Take these.”

“Can’t you hold it or something?” I asked.

“Um, can you hold it?” It took me a second to realize she was talking about the ice cream.

Before I knew what was happening, Laila had shoved the ice cream at me and disappeared into the brick building by the side of the street, leaving me to balance six ice cream cones in my hands now.

I stared after her. I wanted to yell. I wanted to scream. I wanted to throw all the ice cream at the wall. Or better yet, at Laila’s head.

Who was she to totally ignore me, refuse to hold the ice cream, and then just leave? I put the ice cream cones on the ground, all the while seething at Laila’s rudeness and selfishness and insensitivity. My chocolate ice cream cone was there, but I was absolutely not in the mood for ice cream anymore.

I sat down on the ground, staring bitterly towards the lake. Behind me, an old speaker from the side of the building played crackly announcements and music at intervals. “South gate on . . . closes at . . . Five o’clock promptly . . . North . . . closes . . . dusk . . .”

Finally, finally, the bathroom door swung open and Laila walked out.

“Why did you just—” I started furiously, but didn’t know how to finish. Anger clogged up my words. Anger at mostly Laila, but somehow also the ice cream man, Tilly, everyone who had ordered stupid ice cream, even Aunt Illy. Though it wasn’t really the ice cream I was mad about. It was just that I’d never asked to be here. I’d never asked to help Laila with ice cream. I’d never asked to come on this lake trip today. I’d never asked for Ms. Fleming to end up where she was right now—

Feigning calmness, I picked up three ice cream cones, she picked up three ice cream cones, and we started walking back the way we came. My words were still stopped up inside my throat. The silence was tense.

Then, when we came back to the gravel pathway, a huge closed iron gate loomed above us.

“Wasn’t this open before?” Laila said, frowning.

Well, yeah, it was. How did she think we got through the first time?

She started walking beside the fence that the gate was connected to. “I wonder if we can get around it.”

Obviously not. What would be the point of a gate if you could get around it?

“Now how are we supposed to get back? Aren’t there always announcements for when they close things up? You should have been listening.”

I should have been listening? I wasn’t the one who insisted on going to the stupid bathroom when we had ice cream cones to take care of. And Laila was blaming me?

"What? Why are you looking at me like that?" Laila said crossly, taking a lick of her ice cream and glaring at me.

At that moment, I just exploded.

"You," I shouted at Laila. "You can't just try to run faster than me, ignore me, shove the ice cream at me like that, say it's my fault we're stuck here and expect to get your own way. Why are you so selfish? What's wrong with you today? Scrap that—not just today. You've always been like this and I just. Can't. Stand it. What is wrong with you?"

For a moment, Laila's face pinched up as if she were about to cry. But she didn't.

Instead she shot back just as fast. "Me? You're pointing at me. You're calling me selfish. And you're ignoring the fact that you've been a grouch all day," she said fiercely. "Seriously? You think I don't care about other people? You're the one who never seems to care."

"Never seems to care?" I screamed. "Well, maybe I don't care about you, but—"

Laila interrupted loudly. "And I bet you'd never be smart enough to realize it, but—"

"I'm just worried about Ms. Fleming," we said at the same time.

I blinked, not sure if I had imagined it.

Laila stared at me.

I stared back.

She was the one who broke the silence.

"Well, I am," she said quietly, dropping her gaze to the ground. "My mom told me what happened. And . . . you were there, weren't you?"

"Yeah, I was there."

I fiddled with the wrapper on my ice cream cone, trying not to think too much about how scary yesterday had been.

"Sorry," Laila looked back up at me again. "I don't know what's gonna happen either, and, well . . ."

For some reason, I had to make a hard effort to keep the tears from spilling out. Everything felt so mixed up. And the only person who understood was probably . . . Laila.

And in some strange way, that made me feel just a little better.

A long pause. Then Laila spoke again.

"So how do you think we can get back?" She looked past the gate, then behind us at the path that wound far away into a grove of trees.

"We could see if that path goes anywhere," I offered.

So we started following the trail. But before it really took us anywhere, we hit another closed gate and had to go back.

"I can see them right there," Laila sighed, looking out across the lake. "Adrian and Julien in their silly kayaks."

I had a sudden inspiration. "What if we yell at them to come over? And they could take us back to the other side of the lake."

"Sure." Laila accepted this idea surprisingly quickly.

We started screaming for her brothers.

"Julien! Adrian!"

"Get over here, you clowns!" (That was Laila.)

But their kayaks stayed tiny specks in the distance against the sinking sun, not coming any closer. "That must have been a whole minute," I gasped, trying to catch my breath. "I don't think it's going to work."

Laila scowled. "This is so annoying. I can see the big tent right—there." She pointed, and I saw it too. Amid the thinning crowds of people on the other side of the lake, there was a small blue smudge. Half of it was tamped down and the other half was blowing in the wind.

"If only we could . . ."

Both of us were silent for a while, contemplating the problem.

Then Laila said suddenly, "Swim it."

"What?" I wasn't sure if I'd heard her correctly.

"We can swim it."

"What?"

"We can swim across the lake, Nicky! Are you deaf or something? I mean"—she let out a breath—"Yeah. Do you think we can make it?"

"I think . . . we might be able to," I said, feeling hope growing in my chest. Swim it! Of course. The other side of the lake looked just under a thousand meters away, so Laila and I, both on the swim team, could probably make it across. I glanced at Laila, who was wearing shorts and a T-shirt like I was. Not optimal swimwear, but if Laila didn't care about her clothes, of course I wouldn't either. We could make it!

But my hope stopped abruptly when I realized what was in my hands.

"What about these?" I held up an ice cream cone—to be exact, Adrian's double cherry dip ice cream cone, which was starting to drip all over my hand.

"We can . . . eat them, I guess," Laila said, shrugging. "Sorry, Tilly."

So we did. Laila had already started on her vanilla cone. She agreed to eat Alex's and Tilly's ice cream, while I had my own cone, Adrian's, and Aunt Illy's.

"I'm not usually supposed to have this much ice cream at a time," Laila commented. And at first, it was indeed nice to have it all to ourselves. But by the time I neared the end of Adrian's huge double cone, I was starting to feel sick of ice cream. When I was done with that one, I eyed the vanilla cup with distaste. It wasn't really ice cream now, more like warm melted vanilla sludge. But I slurped it up anyway, and gladly tossed the empty cup into a nearby trash can when it was all gone.

Laila, too, had finished her ice cream by then. "Ready?" she asked me. I nodded.

We walked to the edge of the lake and slipped off our sandals. The cool water lapped at our bare feet.

Laila checked her pink purse. There were a few coins still in it. They'd get wet, but that didn't matter.

"Freestyle?" I asked Laila. The stroke was fast enough and not too tiring. She agreed.

"You know, I—" Laila started, then stopped.



“What?”

“Never mind. Let’s go.”

I took a deep breath.

And together, we plunged into the water.

---

Pull, pull, pull, breathe. I settled into the rhythms of the freestyle stroke, feeling the water wrap around me like a cool blanket and the droplets slicking down my nose whenever I turned for a breath. I watched Laila as we moved through the water. She seemed to know which direction to go in, so I followed her.

This was the first time I’d been in the water since my ankle accident—which, I realized with a pang, had been at Ms. Fleming’s house. But it felt wonderful to be back and swimming again, even if it was in slightly murky lake water, even if it was just so we could get back after our mistake.

Well, it felt wonderful at first.

But by the time we had reached the middle of the lake, a cramp started in my stomach.

Oh, no. It must have been from the pile of ice cream we’d just eaten. But that didn’t matter, I told myself. We were halfway through. We could make it. Maybe.

My clothes began to feel heavy with water. I dragged myself forward for each stroke and kicked as hard as I could manage with my sore legs. It felt like even the gentle lake current was pushing against us, pushing us back. All of this—and all of our walking around from before—was taking a toll on my ankle too, which was starting to feel as if it would fall off.

The ache in my side grew to a burning pain. Whenever I looked to the side to breathe, it didn’t seem like the opposite shore was any closer. When I faltered for a second to try and feel the bottom of the lake, there was nothing but more water below my feet.

I struggled on, trying to keep Laila in my line of sight. It felt like she was getting slower too.

My breaths became ragged gasps. My sloppy form would have enraged Coach Hattie.

And then, just when I felt like I couldn’t swim another stroke, I felt the sand of the shore beneath my feet.

We made it.

We made it!

I pulled myself out of the water and stumbled onto the shore after Laila, both of us gasping for air. We collapsed on the sand.

When I finally caught my breath, I got to my feet slowly, and so did Laila. Though we hadn’t landed right where our own family was, I could see them a short distance away. I turned to look back across the lake.

We had swum all that way. Full of ice cream. And with clothes on.

But when I looked back at Laila, her expression wasn’t one of triumph. She seemed . . . distracted.

“What’s up?” I asked her.

“I just—” She paused. “Are you afraid of anything?”

The question caught me off guard. The first thing that came to mind was Tilly’s myriad fears. “Um, not of glue sticks,” I blurted out. Laila cracked a grin.

“But yeah. I guess I am. Isn’t everyone?” I said cautiously. Laila had never asked me anything like this.

“I was scared of losing the two-hundred free,” she said softly, looking back at the lake we had just crossed. “I knew you would have won if you swam it. I was scared that if I didn’t, I’d be . . . letting everyone down.”

“I wouldn’t have beaten Caihong Cui,” I said. I was recovering from my mild shock of Laila discussing fear openly with me, and the fact that I actually wanted, for some reason, to make her feel better about it. “And besides, you didn’t let everyone down. Seriously—” and I fought back the twinge of jealousy before I said this—“you’re going to the H<sub>2</sub>O World Heights!”

“Yeah. I guess so. Though I know you could have made it too.”

“Maybe,” I said, though I was more reassured than I wanted to show. I’d felt a little better about the swim meet after reading Aunt Illy’s letter, but Laila’s firm conviction gave me a strange sort of comfort.

“Oh, and thanks for the card, by the way,” she said, turning back to me.

“What card?”

“The birthday card you gave me. You really are clueless, Nicky.” Laila rolled her eyes, and I couldn’t help grinning a little. But I stopped when I realized I hadn’t smiled otherwise all day, because of—

“Well, about your question . . . I’m kind of scared—right now, I mean—about, you know. Ms. Fleming,” I heard myself saying then. “I need her to be okay.”

“Me too,” Laila said. There was a hitch in her voice. When I looked up, I saw her face was wet, and I knew it wasn’t just from the lake water.

Slowly, we started back to the family. It looked like they were just about to pack up. The boys were holding their kayaks, and the tent was coming down. Alex and Tilly were running around, celebrating their finished sandcastle.

Aunt Illy saw us then, and rushed over. “Where have you two been?” she asked frantically. “You were gone for so long. I was just about to go and look for you. What happened—where are your shoes?”

“And where’s my ice cream?” Adrian butted in.

I only realized then that we had forgotten our shoes on the other side of the lake. And Adrian’s ice cream?

I looked to Laila, who was barefoot, dripping wet, her hair a mess and her clothes covered with sand. I knew I was just as much of a wreck.

Adrian’s ice cream? Laila looked back at me. Her face twitched with the hint of a suppressed smile.

And then, wonder of wonders, we burst out laughing together.

---

After the exhausting day, it was a relief to come home and get ready for bed.

**“I’m so sorry,” my mom repeated, and now there were tears spilling out of her eyes. “I didn’t want to be the one to tell you, but—”**

When I went downstairs to say goodnight to my mom, I was reviewing all of today’s events in my head again—especially the swim across the lake with Laila. I had never really figured her out until then. But as I went through everything she had said before and after the lake, I was surprised to find that it all made sense somehow.

My mom was sitting at the kitchen table, holding her phone in front of her. When she heard me coming over, she jerked her head up quickly and flipped her phone over, face down, on the table.

“Oh, Nicky—” she started, but then slumped back against the chair. Her eyes were red.

“What is it?” I asked, confused. A tiny voice of trepidation was tugging at me too, but I tried to ignore it.

“I wish I didn’t—you didn’t—she didn’t—oh, I’m so sorry.” My mom stood up and tried to wrap me in a hug, but I drew back, wanting to know what was going on. The anxious voice inside grew to a ringing alarm.

“What happened?” I insisted.

“I’m so sorry,” my mom repeated, and now there were tears spilling out of her eyes. “I didn’t want to be the one to tell you, but—”

A bunch of possibilities flew through my head as I tried to decipher what she was saying.

But none of them prepared me for the truth.

## Chapter 13: Why?

When Ms. Fleming was in the hospital, they figured out that she had had dementia. For a long time. And that it had reached a really bad stage.

And now I was seeing all the signs that I never picked up between odd jobs and conversations and cookies from over the years. How had I not picked them up? How had I just dismissed it all as her occasional forgetfulness? How could I have been so oblivious?

Hadn’t I cared enough to notice?

That night, and every night afterwards for a week, I cried myself to sleep. I don’t remember what I did with the days.

Why?

Why had this happened?

Why hadn’t I been paying attention?

Ms. Fleming didn’t have any family to take care of her. But I could have noticed. I could have listened. I could have left her with fewer worries, and maybe she wouldn’t have—

But it was too late now.

---

It took a while for reality to sink in. I didn’t want reality to sink in.

She was really gone.

Some parts of me thought this was a bad dream. And why should I have to believe in a bad dream?

---

In my mind, I can see her. I can still see her right there, maybe in the kitchen, taking a fresh batch of gingersnaps out of the oven, or showing me how to take care of her potted plants.

I can still hear her voice. I can still see her.

---

In my dreams I look everywhere for her.

In the bathtub where we found her alarm clock.

In the microwave where we found her slippers.

In the attic, where unsorted items still stand like ghostly sentinels.

I check WIG SHAMPOO and WIG SHAMPOO, USE FIRST. Laila helps me reach the top shelf.

The kitchen table is still littered with photographs, but she’s not in any of them.

Knock, knock.

Who’s there?

Are you there, Ms. Fleming?

Where are you?

Why can’t I find you?

## Chapter 14: Why All Dresses Should Be Made with Pockets

On the morning Ms. Fleming’s funeral would be held, I was sitting on the floor of my room and leaning against my bed, staring numbly out the window instead of putting on my dress. The sun was shining outside, the trees rustling gently, the sky a soft blue. It seemed all wrong.

My thoughts were churning, just as they had been for days.

Memories kept on spinning and spinning. Gingersnaps. Wig shampoo. French horn. Journals.

I kept staring out the window. Cloudless and blue, blue, blue. Almost like it had been that day.

But the storm had snuck up so quickly.

I heard my mom coming upstairs.

“Nicky? Are you ready to go?”

I didn’t answer. I wasn’t ready.

"Nicky?" She stopped beside the door of my room.

"No," I whispered. "No, I don't want to go."

Somehow my mom had heard me, even from the doorway. She came over and sat down next to me on the floor, putting an arm around my shoulders.

"Why don't you?" she asked gently.

"I don't want to see the other people," I said, my voice trembling. But no, it wasn't just that. I didn't know how to explain it. "I don't want to hear them—if they—when they talk about—" Ms. Fleming, as if she were only a memory. Ms. Fleming, as if she weren't a real person, a real person whose loss had left an empty space that could never be filled again.

"I know what you mean." There was something strangely heavy in my mom's voice.

"I know. Sometimes you'd rather be alone. I... feel that way myself." She sighed.

"But all these other people are just there to show you they care too," she continued. "So, we'll go together, okay? And if you need to, we'll excuse ourselves and go to a back room or something."

"Okay," I said quietly. I looked up into my mom's glassy eyes, suddenly realizing that she did understand. My dad had died before I was born. Was this how she'd gotten through it?

"I'll be downstairs while you get ready," she said, wrapping me in a hug.

"Thanks," I whispered into her shoulder. Somehow, talking to her had given me the bit of strength I needed.

So once she left, I put on a dress and a brave face and got ready to go.

When I was leaving my room, I saw the wrinkled photo of Ms. Fleming with her horn, which was still lying in the corner of my desk. I tucked it into my dress pocket.

---

The carpeted room of the funeral home was about half full with people, most of whom were from our neighborhood, all of whom were talking quietly.

When we walked in, I saw Laila and her family in one corner. Aunt Kay looked as if she hadn't slept for a week.

Already I was starting to feel uncomfortable. I definitely wasn't in the mood to talk right now, and I was afraid that if someone came over to me, I'd lose it.

I stayed around, though, not wanting to be rude by leaving right away. There were purple flowers in vases against the walls, and I wondered if whoever arranged them knew that Ms. Fleming's favorite color was purple. Maybe Aunt Kay had had a hand in it.

There was also a photo display against one wall, and it suddenly occurred to me that maybe the photos we'd been looking through had been used. I didn't go over to look at it closely, afraid that I'd see something familiar. Odd thoughts started popping into my head, like if Ms. Fleming had no living relatives, who took care of all this stuff, and how much could Aunt Kay possibly have done, and would Ms. Fleming mind any of this if she were here?

Then, I don't know why, my dress started to get itchy and the smell of the purple flowers was too sweet and the room was too stuffy and it was just too strange that I was here, wandering around at Ms. Fleming's funeral, and I just had to get out because I couldn't take it anymore.

I left the room as discreetly as I could. When I got to the long hallway, I could finally breathe again.

I wandered down the hall slowly, looking into any open doorways for an empty room. The first one I saw was small and had a few soft chairs in it, and I ducked in. I sat down in one of the chairs, taking a deep breath and leaning against the headboard.

I took the photo of Ms. Fleming out of my pocket and stared at it for a while. She looked so happy in the picture. Thinking back, I realized that she had been happy most of the time I saw her. It wouldn't be such a bad thing, I thought, to be remembered happy.

Then I heard someone else come in.

"Hey, Nicky," a quiet voice said. It was Laila Alicie.

"Hi," I said, looking up.

Laila came over and sat down in the chair beside me. Her eyes were red and puffy, but she gave me a small smile.

Her face changed when she saw the photo I was holding. "That's . . . Ms. Fleming, right?"

I nodded.

"How did you get the picture?"

And so I told her.

I told her all about cleaning out Ms. Fleming's attic and finding the French horn and the music and pictures, and even before that. I told her about the jobs I had helped Ms. Fleming with, including finding the wig in the garbage can the day Laila came over, the day I sprained my ankle.

And Laila listened. She listened to everything I described, which I wouldn't have thought possible a week ago or before. But by now, I was realizing how wrong I had been for more than eleven years. How wrong we both had been.

By the time I finished, I was blinking back tears. Laila said, "She really does make the best cookies."

I felt myself smile. "Yeah."

"Well, I—" Laila began, and then turned away to dig out something from her pink purse, which was now dry and free of lake water.

And she took out the hot pink journal that I had bought for her birthday.

"Maybe my mom told you that I like journaling," she said shyly. "I write things down sometimes, to . . . deal with them, you know. It's pretty helpful. And I'm trying to write about everything that's happened recently, so I can make sense of it."

Maybe that was why Ms. Fleming had kept journals too. The thought came with a tinge of bittersweetness.

Laila opened the cover and showed me the first few sentences, highlighted pink, that she had written on the front page.



"If you asked me what my biggest problem was during the first eleven years of my life, I would have told you it was Nicole Kenton. Also known as my cousin. Also known as the most annoying person on the planet.

"But the summer right before seventh grade changed all that completely."

## Chapter 15: Why I Finally Finished My Summer Homework

It's funny how time can seem to stop for you but the rest of the world will keep on going. I had blinked for a second and suddenly the start of seventh grade was in my face.

And my summer homework still wasn't done. An entire essay loomed before me, and I had no clue where to start.

It was evening now, and I was sitting at my desk and staring at the last question in the giant packet. "Write an essay or story about your past summer. You may choose to use the pages attached in this packet, or to use your own paper. Minimum length 5 pages."

My eyes wandered over my desk. There was the blue leather journal that Aunt Illy had given me, which reminded me of Laila's journal.

"I write things down sometimes, to deal with them, you know."

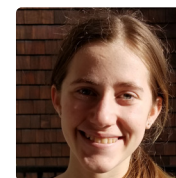
There was my unfinished letter to Aunt Illy, which I would much rather be writing, since she didn't require five pages from me.

"Your letters to me often seem like stories."

And there was the photograph of Ms. Fleming, which had taken up permanent residence in the neatest corner of my desk.

I knew the urge to cry wouldn't ever go away when I thought back to her. But I could remember other things besides the sad day. Like her gingersnaps. Her French horn. Her laugh. And how she accomplished the impossible . . . bringing Laila and me together.

The beginnings of an idea started coming together in my head. So I opened my blue journal to the first page, put my pencil to the paper, and began to write.



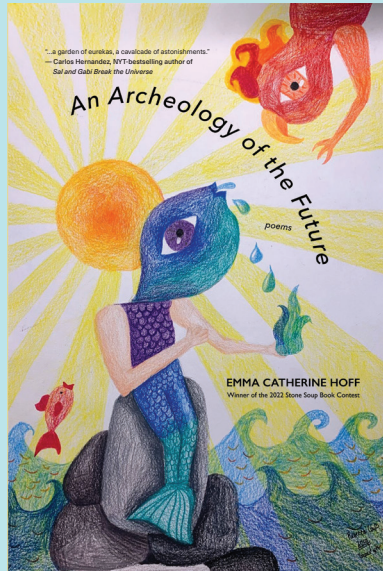
*Outline* (Panasonic ZS-200, Adobe Lightroom)  
Sage Millen, 13  
British Columbia, Canada

# An Archeology of the Future

An Collection of Poems by Emma Catherine Hoff

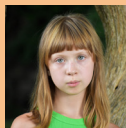
Winner of the 2022 Stone Soup Book Contest

Available now at Barnes & Noble online and at the Stone Soup Store: [Amazon.com/StoneSoup](https://Amazon.com/StoneSoup)



Cover:

*The Little Mermaid* by Rebecca Wu, 9 (WA)  
Originally appeared in the  
January 2021 issue of Stone Soup



Emma Catherine Hoff is a writer and poet from New York City, where she lives with her parents and her cat, Gavroche. Her poems have appeared in the *Rattle Young Poets Anthology*, *The Louisville Review*, and *Stone Soup Magazine*. Her podcast, *Poetry Soup*, as well as book reviews and essays, appear regularly on the Stone Soup Blog.

"The darkness isn't as bad / as people think."

So ends the first poem in Emma Catherine Hoff's numinous debut, *An Archeology of the Future*—before proceeding calmly, curiously into the dark. People weep in the streets. The snow closes its eyes. Birds scream, a question begs the world for its answer, everything is "frozen yet moving."

Hoff's world, like ours, is ending, and yet this is not a tragedy: "there was peace for Earth / with no one there." Walking the tightrope between humor and despair, rationality and absurdism, the sublime and the material, Hoff's poems are elegant, wise, ageless.

These are poems written against eternity.

Like the Surrealists before her, Hoff can see into the emotional lives of the things we use every day, things we toss around carelessly ... If one of my friends had written this beautifully when I was starting out, I would have probably quit, and doffed my cap to her and said "you go on ahead" or more likely, "you're already there."

— Matthew Rohrer, author of *The Others*

Is there any form that Emma Hoff can't undertake? The delights to be uncovered in *An Archeology of the Future* strike me with awe, urgency, solace, and compassion. How daring, how beautiful, how extraordinary it is, in this moment of the world when our world feels so broken, that Mt. Parnassus is still at work, and Hoff is a voice so richly sowed.

— Jenny Bouilly, author of *Between and Between: Essays on the Writing Life*

This collection is a garden of eureka's, a cavalcade of astonishments ... unified by a passionate yet quiet reverence and a love of language that would have made Auden sit up a little straighter.

— Carlos Hernandez, NY Times bestselling author of *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe*

## 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

Ellen Booth, 11  
Han-Ya Chen, 11  
Brooke Frey, 12  
Cooper Garcia, 11  
Meleah Goldman, 13  
Hazel Leiderman, 11  
Andrew Li, 10  
Payton Lubinski, 13  
Zoë Schall, 10  
Sol Smith, 13

### POETRY

Daniela de Galbert, 11  
Athena Evangelia, 11  
Tanvi Iyer, 9  
Jaslene Kwack, 13  
Marcus Paek, 13  
Angela Wang, 12

### MEMOIR

Eleanor Bailey, 10  
Julia Berisha, 11  
Azariah Hoch, 12  
Yanling Lin, 12  
Julia Mirvois, 12  
Vienna Yang, 11  
Eleni Yozzo, 11

### ART

Dylan Natelli, 10  
Sol Smith, 13

## Visit the Stone Soup Store at [Amazon.com/stonesoup](https://Amazon.com/stonesoup)

At our store, you will find . . .

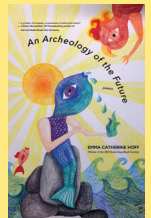
- Current and back issues of *Stone Soup*
- Our growing collection of books by young authors, as well as themed anthologies
- Journals and sketchbooks

. . . and more!

Finally, don't forget to visit [Stonesoup.com](https://Stonesoup.com) to browse our bonus materials. There you will find:

- Information about our writing workshops
- Monthly flash contests and weekly creativity prompts
- Blog posts from our young bloggers on everything from sports to sewing
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors

. . . and more content by young creators!



Scan this to visit *Stone Soup* online!

