

# StoneSoup



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# StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

## Editor's Note

A rainy day, a classroom, a special hill, Mars, Ancient Greece—this is an issue that celebrates place. The stories and much of the art—especially Delilah Prager's landscape paintings and Jay Nimchonok's photograph *Northern Ontario*—all provide a vivid sense of being in a specific place, whether that's a dry, lifeless planet or an idyllic forest.

I love works of art—in all mediums—that celebrate place. They tend to be very simple and yet surprisingly profound and beautiful, even if the setting is mundane or even ugly. But they remind us that we are rooted in space and time, that we are a part of the world even when we retreat from it, and that our surroundings influence how we think and feel. Finally, paying close attention to them—especially to the outdoors—can soothe us and lift our spirits, grounding us in more ways than one.

As you read this issue, please be attuned to how these writers and artists depict place, and then go out and try to do the same in your own work.



On the cover:  
*Midnight Buck*  
(Watercolor)  
Aspen Clayton, 11  
Lisle, IL

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# StoneSoup

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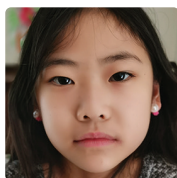
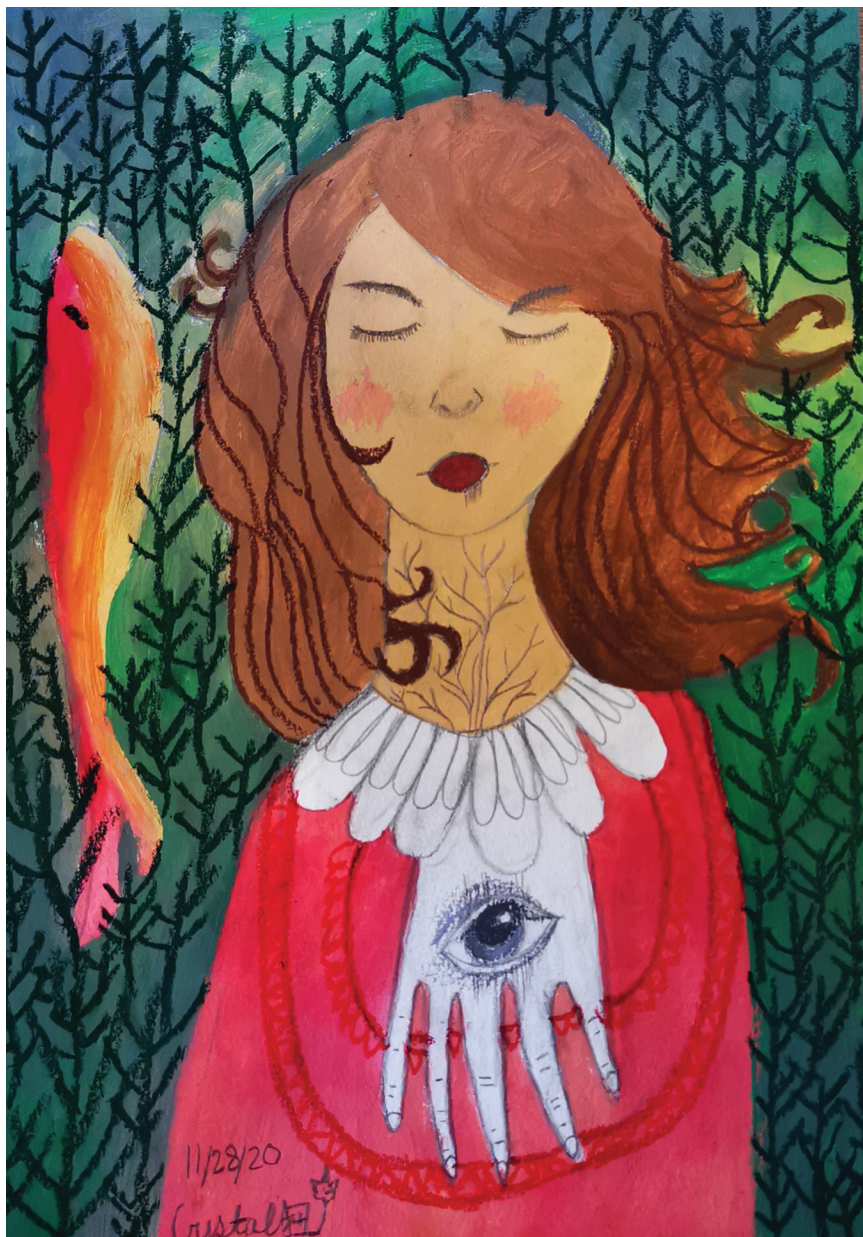
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 Chappaqua, NY

# Never Ask Me

Kelly recalls a time when her greatest fear in the classroom was realized



By Kelly Chan, 11  
New York, NY

I sat up on the cold stool and rested my hands on the large black surface in front of me. I could feel the abnormally cold tabletop freezing into my arms through my thick hoodie. I gazed around the huge classroom. Everyone sat on navy-blue stools at their assigned tables. The room was completely silent aside from the third-grade science teacher's voice.

*Tap.*

There were textbooks, printed-out articles, miniature models, and posters neatly stored and pinned across all four walls.

*Tap.*

There was also a massive Promethean board and projector set up at the front of the room.

*Tap.*

Glancing up at the clock and then the schedule pinned on the wall, I slightly groaned. There was still a good thirty minutes of class.

*Tap tap tap.*

*Tap tap tap tap tap—*

*Who is doing that?*

Turning to my right, I saw the culprit. Of course it would be him. Thomas, who sat next to me, was

repeatedly tapping his pen on the table. Knowing him, he was counting down the seconds till the end of the class. He was extremely impatient, and from what I've heard from others, he didn't get amazing grades last semester. I shouldn't judge him, though. Plus, I didn't blame him for being so jittery. He was the kind of kid who wanted to be outside playing soccer. Not stuck in a room with books lined up wall to wall.

Looking up at the board, I saw Mr. Campbell going through one of his Google Slides presentations. For the past few days it's felt like he's been repeating the same words over and over. That was probably better for me since I was a bit slow in science, but it was still tiring to hear the same lesson told in a different way every day.

I let out a small sigh and uncapped my pen. I didn't really know what my plan was, but I started making small doodles in the back of my notebook. I didn't get anything besides slight entertainment out of it, but it was better than nothing, I guess.

I kept mindlessly dragging my pen around until I realized my entire page was covered in ink. It was an image of



## That's my problem. I always feel like there's someone out there watching me, trying to make a stupid-looking image of me in their head.

a figure trying to present something with dozens of eyes staring back at them. Funny, huh?

Since I wasn't exactly the most talented person out there, my only hobbies were drawing and playing video games. It really wasn't that ideal. I wasn't musically gifted in the slightest, and I didn't like dancing, reading, writing, or anything that took more than five minutes and two re-reads to comprehend. That meant that the only way I had to express myself was art. Since I did nothing but draw all day, a good percentage of my art expressed my fears. I didn't really—

"Kelly! I would appreciate it if you turned your attention to the board here." I jumped and looked up to see the teacher's annoyed glare piercing through me. Oh. I didn't exactly want to make the situation any worse, so I quickly nodded in response. Even though I tried to play it off as just a small incident, I felt like everyone was staring at me. I shot a quick glance around the room and a slight wave of relief hit me. No one really cared about what had just happened. It was just me. Then my eyes slightly widened. What if someone had realized that I was going to turn around, catch them staring at me, and question them so they'd looked away? That could always happen. Or what if—

No. Stop it. I tried reassuring myself, telling myself that nothing like that was going to happen any time soon. I told myself that no one

was going to make fun of me after class, but for some reason it still felt like every eye in the room was on me. Judging me. Laughing at me. That's my problem. I always feel like there's someone out there watching me, trying to make a stupid-looking image of me in their head.

More specifically, this one kid in the class. Hunter. He was the one kid who always raised his hand first, he was part of the student council, he always got everything right, handed in his tests first, he was organized . . .

Anyone who didn't know him would ask, "Why is that a bad thing?" Well, alongside his occupation with being the smartest kid in the class, he took on the part-time job of being a jerk. He was pretty intelligent, sure. Didn't mean he wasn't stuck up and snobby, though. This is one of the worst combinations, in my opinion. I remembered this one time last week. Just thinking about it makes me slightly cringe at the way he acted.

---

Everyone in the room was completely silent, but at the same time, the tension in the air while the teacher handed back our test scores was so loud. We had just taken a pre-assessment for the new math unit, and no one was actually supposed to know any of the content, but that didn't stop us from trying to chase a good grade.

Watching where the teacher was heading, I saw the girl sitting to the left of the one-and-only Hunter get

her test back. Almost instantly I hear, “Wait, you got a 96%? How could you actually get something wrong?” Hunter whispered out. “It was so easy! I’m pretty sure that even someone like Thomas got it right . . .”

There was no reply. The girl shuffled in her chair, scratching the blue-gray tiled floor as the uneven chair legs rotated to face the left side of the room. The side of the room without an annoying kid who makes fun of you for getting one question wrong.

---

Suddenly, the room filled with voices. I blinked a few times, bringing my mind back to reality. *Right, science class. Forgot about that for a minute.* “So what do you guys think?” My friend Evelyn, who sat at the end of the table, was gazing at the rest of our group with questions swirling around in her bright, hazel eyes.

“Uh, sorry. What was the question? I wasn’t really paying attention,” I quietly asked, barely loud enough for the others to hear.

“It’s—” Evelyn started to answer, but Thomas quickly cut in.

“The question is asking what would happen to a plastic bottle if you left it in a freezer.”

“I was about to say that!” Evelyn sent the short brunette a death glare before sitting down on her stool quickly after realizing she had been leaning over the tabletop.

Exasperated, I let out a small sigh. Sometimes I forget that this table never gets anything done. I never liked telling others what crazy conclusions I came to, but knowing

the group, it was obvious that this discussion would end up being an argument if I didn’t do anything.

“Well, I think it would compress and—” Thomas and Evelyn’s eyes snapped from each other to look at me, and I quickly stopped talking. “I, uh, I don’t know. Sorry.”

“I don’t think anything would change. Y’know it’s just a bottle, right?” Thomas slightly tilted his head, expecting some kind of response. I couldn’t think of anything funny or practical to say, so I just gave him a small shrug.

Evelyn chimed in, agreeing with Thomas. “Yeah, he’s kinda right. It would stay the same. Plus, there isn’t any reason to believe something would happen.”

“I . . .”

*They’re wrong, right? It doesn’t make sense for nothing to happen. I guess it also doesn’t make sense for something to change, though. They’re probably right. There’s a reason they both got that answer. I don’t know. It doesn’t actually make any sense. I mean, I guess it does? No, it really doesn’t. I don’t get it.*

I pushed my stool back, making it stand on the two back legs. It’s not like water bottles in freezers mattered that much, but as entitled as this makes me sound, I hated being wrong.

After what felt like forever, Mr. Campbell asked everyone to be quiet. “Alright. So here’s what we’re going to do. By a show of hands, how many of you think something will change?”

Looking around the room, I realized that no one was raising their hand. I couldn’t tell if it was because everyone actually thought the bottle wouldn’t be affected or if no one

**“I . . .” Eyes. There were so many eyes. All focused on one person in the room. Me. Their stares were a hawk’s talons reaching for its helpless prey.**

bothered raising their hand because they didn’t want to be the first to do so.

Tap.

Seriously? Again?

Tap.

I turned my gaze to Thomas again. My expression transitioned from annoyance to confusion within a millisecond. He was poking the space on the table next to my splayed-out hand.

I gave him a look, trying to silently ask what he wanted. He let out a slightly annoyed sigh and pointed his pen directly at the ceiling. That only made me more confused. Apparently Evelyn was watching and understood, though.

I felt a soft nudge in my side and saw Evelyn’s hand slowly rising up in the air. *What? That doesn’t make sense. She thought—she—huh?*

I stared at her, shock and bewilderment flooding through me. She clearly saw my questioning eyes and quickly matched them with an equally expressive glare filled with anticipation. *Wait. She can’t be serious, right?* I must have interpreted that incorrectly.

Mr. Campbell seemed a bit taken aback. “Only one person?” Evelyn’s eyes were still focused on me. “No one else?” They bored into the side of my head. “Just Evelyn?” Her gaze was cold enough to give me frostbite. I knew she didn’t like sharing out. She was doing this because she wanted to get me to talk. She didn’t even agree with me.

I was going to regret this later.

Hesitantly, I pulled my hand up off the table. My arm felt heavier than usual.

“Alright, Evelyn, what do you think will change, and why do you think that will happen?” I don’t think she planned this far ahead, judging by the expression painted on her face.

“I—er—I don’t really know. I just think it would, y’know? It just kinda . . .” Her voice trailed off into silence. Her already pale skin seemed almost white at this point. “I just—it makes sense in my head?” Her voice got higher in pitch, making it sound like she was asking a question.

“Okay . . . well . . . what about you, Kelly?” *Oh. Oh no, no, no, no, nononononono.* My head started to spin. I could feel my palms sweating. My lungs seemed to be taking in less and less air with every breath. “Kelly?” *I don’t know the answer. Please don’t ask me. Never, ever ask me.*

**“I . . .” Eyes. There were so many eyes. All focused on one person in the room. Me. Their stares were a hawk’s talons reaching for its helpless prey.**

I let out an awkward laugh. It rang through the air, reaching every corner of the room.

*Well, that only made things worse.*

I let my eyes swerve to my right. Thomas was *tap, tap, tapping* at the table. The thing was that it seemed like it was on mute. I could see each tap with my own eyes, but there was no sound that followed it.

I swung my gaze around to the left. Evelyn’s face was brightly lit like



it always was. Then my pupils focused on something else. Someone behind her. Hunter. He had a hand in front of his mouth. Behind that hand, he was grinning. At what? At me, of course.

Next to him sat my best friend. I was expecting something like an encouraging smile, but it looked slightly different. It seemed like a smile filled with—not malice but, whatever it was, it didn't feel good.

I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be slouching on my beige couch, the TV quietly humming in the background. I wanted to be talking on a call with my best friend. Of course, I couldn't do those things. I was here, in my science class. There was no beige couch. There was no TV. On top of all that, and this was the worst of all, my best friend was laughing at me.

I closed my eyes and stuttered out, "I just . . . think it would do that . . ." I couldn't imagine anyone thought that was a valid answer. I was just repeating Evelyn's words. "I really . . . don't know . . ." Opening my eyes, I racked my brain for anything to say. Just to make a bit more sense. I wanted to add on, but my mind kept drawing blanks.

"Sorry," I quietly whispered out, only loud enough for me to hear. "I don't know what I'm saying."

Mr. Campbell was probably done with my garbage at this point. He decided to stop me before I dug my grave any deeper than it already was. "Right . . . uh, okay . . . would anyone like to explain why the bottle would stay the same?"

I looked down at my open notebook and almost laughed out of pure self-pity. The picture on the page

stared at me. The person on the lined paper wasn't anonymous anymore. It was me. It was a picture of me not knowing how to explain the answer to a basic question.

I closed my eyes for a second. When I opened them, I was confused. Why were there suddenly wet dots on the page? I blinked again and saw more wet spots appear. Wait.

Raising one finger to the corner of my eye, I understood what the dots were. They were tears. *Why, though?* Why was I crying?

I didn't care anymore. I closed the black composition notebook and buried my face in my arms on top of it. I quietly cried. I didn't know if anyone saw me, but if they did, then they didn't care enough to ask how I was doing. But that was fine with me.

Class continued on. They kept asking and answering questions like any other day. They moved on. I couldn't tell how much time had passed, but I didn't feel like checking. It didn't really matter anyway. I'd made a fool of myself. I'd messed up and everyone had seen it happen.

*Tap.*

I swear—

*Tap.*

*Are you kidding? Again? For the third time?*

"Hey, are you okay?" Instead of hearing Thomas's high-pitched voice, I heard a different but familiar one.

I raised my head slightly and standing right in front of me I saw none other than Mr. Campbell himself. The cause of all this.

"Did I catch you off guard?"

I wiped my eyes and simply shrugged at him.

“Well, here. Can I see your notebook for a second?” I hesitated. The last thing I wanted was for him to see the drawing. The fact that I was doodling at all was pretty bad, but I also just didn’t want him to realize that I was scared of something so stupid.

I carefully flipped to the front page to make sure he didn’t see the page I drew on and handed it to him.

I watched as he took out a pen and wrote a number down on the paper glued to the front cover. The paper where he would write your grade for that day. I completely forgot that it wasn’t filled out yet.

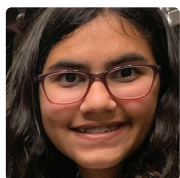
I felt too drained to be anxious, honestly. I already knew I wasn’t getting a good grade.

For some reason, when Mr. Campbell was done writing he smiled at me before sliding the notebook in front of me. Sighing, I looked for whatever terrible number he wrote down.

“Wait . . . what?” I muttered. I reread the writing over and over, trying to see if I misread or if my brain was messing with me.

*Four? You mean the exceeding-standards kind of four? What—but I messed up so bad. How did that happen?*

“You and Evelyn were actually the only two out of the class who got the question right.”

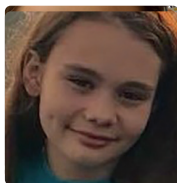


*Smile* (Acrylic)  
Saira Merchant, 12  
Bellaire, TX



# I Say It Drizzles, You Say It Pours

A meditation on what makes each of us unique—and strange



By Sonia Teodorescu, 13  
Tampa, FL

Lauren has declared that I am officially an alien.

She declared it when we stood, or rather huddled, by the door as the rain supposedly “poured” outside. The word “poured” was thought of by a group of abnormally dry and cold North Carolinians who claimed that a mere trickle was a waterfall. They began debating whether or not to bring out the van.

The rain intensified. It was a nice sort of intensifying-ness—the sort that makes a drizzle into a good, steady rain. All the while, Lauren felt my hair, mystified as to why it had nothing more than a drop of water on it when we had walked through the rain to get here. This led to her declaration of my alien-ness.

My nearly waterproof hair was not the only cause of her theory. There had been a number of other observations she had made: my sensitivity to what people deemed “normal” in terms of humidity, my fascination for humans, my unnatural love for alligators. This had brought her to conclude, “You know, you are

an alien. Some sort of waterproof, alligator-loving alien. You probably came here to study humans.”

Maybe she wasn’t wrong. I don’t know. I do have some strange qualities, most of which I’m really not sure could be considered normal.

I looked at the crowded room, filled with kids who refused to acknowledge they were kids, some with bright-green hair, others with words scrawled with marker (some permanent) on their arms, holding projects as unsuspicious as a piece of paper or as threatening as . . . well it wasn’t clear exactly what they were, but they were dangerous, no doubt. I looked at the kids who were smaller than most, and others who were taller than most, and the kids whose poems nobody could really understand, but which we liked anyways, and the kids who, for some reason, managed to draw unnervingly realistic scratches on their legs and faces with paint, in preparation for a Halloween months away.

I glanced at Lauren, standing next to the door, the same person who

Ah, yes. *I'm the alien.*

had dumped what could have been a pound of sprinkles on her ice cream at lunch, declared it tasted like plastic, and proceeded to eat it all anyways, the same person who asked me (quite logically) why I was having salad for lunch right after we both agreed that salad only makes people hungrier and was altogether useless. I thought about the time we sat upside down on the couches and untangled string for a group of kids who wanted to do something with it, which was most likely just as dangerous as the projects in other kids' hands.

I thought of the kids who talked excitedly about dancing before the dance, and then spent the entire time eating Cheez-Its out of the vending machines, and all the people who wanted to call for a van just because of a few drops of water.

Ah, yes. *I'm the alien.*

# The Word



By Ava Espinoza, 12  
Palo Alto, CA

I look through boxes for things  
I want to keep, taking out those  
I need, leaving in those I don't  
Need or want. Then suddenly I see,  
At the bottom of the box,  
A word.

It's a scary word, a horrible word,  
A terrifying word. I don't want that word.  
I don't see why I'd ever want that word.  
I close the box, but on the floor in front  
Of me, there I see  
The word.

It creeps closer. I start to run. Imagine!  
This disgusting word chasing me  
Away from the box, out of the room,  
Into the hallway. I look behind, and there,  
Still chasing me is  
The word.

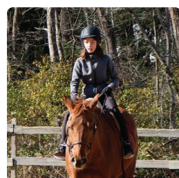
I trip on a memory. The word catches up and  
Before I can stop it, it jumps in my ear. I feel it  
Slide into my nerves, settle in my brain.  
I crouch on the ground as the word sends  
Vivid images and pains.  
That dreadful word.



Eventually the word quiets. If nobody  
Says anything it just sits in my brain,  
Sending me occasional sparks of electricity.  
But one day, as I simply exist,  
Someone dares to say  
That awful word.

The word fires a jolt to my brain.  
I jump up and run away. Running and  
Running and running from my own thoughts.  
But there's no escape. I wonder why I ever  
Went and found  
That stupid word.

But the most distressing thing  
Is the way other people  
Can say it. Without flinching or hesitating,  
Without lying down and dying,  
They simply say—somehow they can say—  
The word.



*Vibrance* (Fujifilm XP)  
Astrid Young, 12  
Brookline, MA

# A Time to Run

**When his uncle returns after a long separation, Hans must protect him from his mother's anger**



By Fiona Clare Altschuler, 11  
Parkton, MD

I was five years old when it happened, but I remember it well. I wish I could forget it, but that is not to be. The story begins before I was born, when my ma was a girl. My ma had a brother, Ferdinand, who one day disappeared. Then my ma's parents died and my ma married my da and had me, Hans. I was like any boy, except that I had magic.

One day when I was playing, a clear image of a man flashed through my head, hovered a moment, and flew away, leaving me wobbly and light-headed. I ran inside the cottage, calling.

My ma looked up from her knitting. Her dark eyes softened.

"My uncle's at the gate. He's wondering if his sister Thea is alive!" As always with the magic, the words tumbled out without me knowing what they meant.

My ma blanched. "Find your uncle, and bring him here."

"Yes, Ma," I said, turning, and dashed to the gate where our land ended, my sandals sinking into the sand, my tunic swishing around my legs. There I saw a man, cheeks hollow. I trotted up and said, "You're

Uncle Ferdinand—Ma's brother?"

He reeled back. "You are Thea's son?" he whispered.

"Yes," I said. "I'm Hans."

But then a vision came sweeping into my mind. I saw my ma, still knitting, but her face turned to the sky. And her face was terribly changed, her eyes were harsh and cold. She turned to my da and said, "I must kill my brother. He will pay for running when I needed him. He will feel my pain."

I fell, shaking hard. My mind whirled so I felt sick, and I stared at the ground without seeing. My ma wanted to kill Uncle Ferdinand.

"Hans," said my uncle urgently.

I looked up in terror. "Uncle," I said, "You mustn't come home. Ma is set on killing you, and she will not stop at anything."

My uncle stared. "How do you know this?"

"I am magic. I saw a vision. Ma aims to kill you!" I began to cry.

My uncle covered his face for a while. "I must see if this is true," he said finally.

"Don't! Ma aims to kill you!"

"I must see my Thea," my uncle

**I knew I couldn't stay with a ma so full of bitterness, even though it broke my heart.**

said firmly, though his shoulders shook.

I followed him. Soon the hut was in sight. Gabriel the dog began to bark, and my da smiled weakly.

"Where is my Thea?" asked my uncle.

"Inside," said my da nervously. "I'm Esteban. Ferdinand?"

"He." My uncle shook my da's hand and walked inside the hut. "Thea," he said when he saw my ma in her chair. "My Thea."

"I'm g-glad you're back," said Ma.

"And I'm glad you're safe," said my uncle.

I stared at them. Both were distant, but where Ma had fury in her eyes, Uncle Ferdinand had hurt.

"Come for supper. Esteban made soup," said Ma. I caught a glint in her eyes.

"Uncle isn't hungry," I said quickly.

My uncle looked at me in surprise, but he interpreted my look and said shakily, "I'm sorry, my Thea."

That supper was dismal. Uncle Ferdinand ate nothing and the rest of us next to nothing. Finally we were left alone.

"I can stay here no longer," said my uncle quietly. "I'll head for the city of Izak tonight."

"I will too," I said. As the words came out I knew I couldn't stay with a ma so full of bitterness, even though it broke my heart.

My uncle's eyes widened. "Your ma won't let you go. We'll have to leave secretly."

"Tonight?"

"Tonight," he replied.

Then I dashed for my bed and cried until I had no tears left.

Then I walked outside. I had to clear my head. I sat down on a sand dune. The brilliant colors of the setting sun filled my heart with warmth. For the first time since I saw the vision, I wasn't thinking of my ma's vengeance. But not for long.

I felt my ma's hand on my shoulder and I stiffened.

My ma had eyes like mine, dark and solemn. But for the first time I saw bitterness in them. When I stilled at her touch, that bitterness flared up. Then just as quickly died away.

"Hans, you're ill at ease." Her eyes searched me, and though she had no magic I felt she might read my mind. For the first time, I was afraid of my ma. I leapt up. "It's dark, Ma," I lied. "I'm going inside."

"It's not dark," said Ma. She sat down and stroked me, sorrow in her eyes. "Stay out with me. What's wrong?"

"It is dark," I insisted. "I'm scared!"

"No, you're not. Have you had any vision?"

"The dark's scary!"

"Why are you trembling?"

"Because I'm afraid of the dark!"

"Tell me if you have seen a vision!"

I couldn't lie, not to my ma. "Yes."

"Of what?"

"I'm scared of the dark!"

"ANSWER ME!"

I sat back down. "I'm sorry, Ma. What were you saying again?" I said, feigning confusion.



"TELL ME IF YOU'VE SEEN A VISION!"

"I—it is too dark!" I sobbed. Then I ran inside.

---

I'd just drifted to sleep when my uncle woke me. He had a sack of provisions slung over his shoulder.

"Hans. We must run," he whispered.

I sat up, shivering. "Yes, Uncle." I followed him outside. The night was dark. My uncle broke into a sprint, and I ran as fast as I could after him. Soon my chest ached, my legs screamed in protest. But I kept running. I had to. I had to keep running away from the only home I'd ever know.

Soon my uncle was ahead, and I couldn't go further. My uncle slowed and said, "You know the area. Where's Izak?"

"Northwest."

"Northwest?"

He didn't trust me? "Yes!" I said, incensed. "You say I know the area—I do!"

"Alright," said my uncle. "But today you said last time you went to Izak it was morning, and you walked towards the sun. That'd be east. You know east and west, Hans?"

His gentle tone enraged me. Without me he'd be dead! And he treated me like a child? "Yes!" I screamed.

"Shush! Well, you know the area better." He began to run, and I followed suit.

Hours later, dawn was hurling brilliant colors across the horizon and the land was unfamiliar. I was hungry,

thirsty, and scared. Uncle Ferdinand had filled me with recklessness. Had I made a rash mistake? Was Izak really to the northeast? Were we lost?

"Well, Hans," said my uncle. "We're lost. We'd be in Izak if not for you."

His words hurt. "I'd be safe at home if you hadn't run from Ma years ago."

"You've been fed lies." My uncle sounded tired and cold. "I was lost. I was lost in the woods and couldn't find my way back. Your mother was alone in the world? She found a husband and a home, even a son. I? I scraped a living for myself laboring day and night for a lord in the city of New Woodrow. No one loved me. No one loves me now. I thought escaping might bring me peace—maybe even happiness! I was wrong."

My anger melted away. "You're wrong! I love you. Let's find Izak!"

His eyes softened in a smile, and then hardened again. "Hans!" he shouted.

He pushed me away. A yard away I saw a wolf, his eyes bloodthirsty, his lips drawn back. A growl rumbled deep in his throat.

My uncle grabbed a stick and struck at the wolf. But the wolf sprang forth.

"Uncle!" I screamed.

Uncle Ferdinand was knocked to the ground. A blur of blood, a sickening yell, and I crumpled.

---

"My Hans!"

It was a voice I had heard many times. My eyes fluttered.

"Ma," I whispered.

"It's me." Her voice was choked with tears.

“Where’s Uncle Ferdinand?” I murmured. “He was brave. He saved me from the wolf. Is he hurt?”

“He’s hurt. We don’t know if he’ll live. But you aren’t hurt, dear. He saved you, didn’t he?”

“Yes. Without him—I’d be dead. Ma. You aren’t mad at him?”

“I’m not. He’s told me what happened. Oh, Hans, I’ve been so cruel!” Her voice cracked, and tears cascaded down her face. “Can you forgive me?”

For a moment I stared. She tried to kill my uncle. She poisoned his food and forced him to flee. But she was my ma. My ma I loved more than anyone or anything.

“Of course, Ma.”

# Two Poems



By Pei-Ying Olsen, 9  
Chattanooga, TN

## Over in the light

Oh a sound seems to peek into these  
Cursed grounds such a thing forbidden  
Oh it slurs  
It dances in its beauty  
Oh the power  
It paralyzes me  
But makes fountains of symphony  
The hummingbirds mingle  
In blush  
And the wild night groves shine through  
I bitter myself  
But that sound calls  
And puts a blanket of candles round me  
There awoke me in the sweet nectar  
Breeze.

## Sunset

As my days keep rolling on a film.  
I keep running up a hill.  
When a static note hits the terrain.  
A crisp melody comes in play. The piece  
sets the very moment in stone. Every note  
I play changes the rhythm of reality. As I  
close my eyes this nectar song becomes  
a pebble skipping down a stream. How I  
reappear in the shuffling streets. Where the  
moon-lit-up sky drains out sunlight into a  
navy breeze.

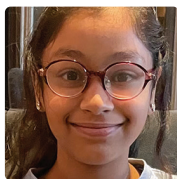


*Sun Goddess* (Panasonic Zoomix DC-ZS200, Adobe Lightroom)  
Sage Millen, 13  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada



# Pebbles on the Grass

After her mother's death, the narrator finds solace in nature



By Myiesha Jain, 11  
Tokyo, Japan

My pale, bare feet received tickles from the short, lime-green grass. My chocolate-brown eyes didn't shift their gaze. The burning, fiery sun bathed my back until it hurt, but I didn't change my speed. The large golden orb began to fall down. I looked back and started running to the grassy hill. I began climbing, my hands grasping the boulders buried in the dirt. A sharp rock met my right foot, and I let out an agonizing squeal. However, I kept climbing, up to the top.

I lay down and stared up above at the infinite pink-and-orange ceiling, covered in white cotton candy. The sun was too bright to look at. I sat back up onto my knees and gazed at the tall trees, with giant green party hats resting on top of their branches. A flock of birds passed over the hill, and I smiled, letting the sun seep into my olive-tinted body before it left too. Then, my eyes grew to the size of the moon.

Frantically, I searched for a pebble. After minutes of pebble hunting, there it was. Gray and shiny, round and perfect. I cupped it in my palms and kissed it. Then, I held it up to the sky, as if offering it to a friend. "I have

a gift for you, Mama. I know you loved the sunset, and I wanted to give you another pebble for your collection," I whispered.

The sun's round body was barely visible now, and the sky was turning navy blue, speckled with tiny white dots. My eyes turned glassy. "I love you," I quietly sobbed and threw it into the mouth of the sky.

I wiped the pool of tears from my eyes with my wrist, and stood up to leave. The stars were glittering together, like a family. Family. I took a deep breath and began sprinting back to an old tiny cottage with a red tiled roof and uncut grass, bushes and weeds sprouting out from every side and corner. I hurried inside my home and began supper. There was a note on the kitchen table.

I had to leave for the village. Will be back in a few days. Do all your chores.

Sincerely, Father.

I kicked a bronze chair leg with my bare feet, and even though the pain was excruciating, it felt good to let out all my anger. Every day, of every

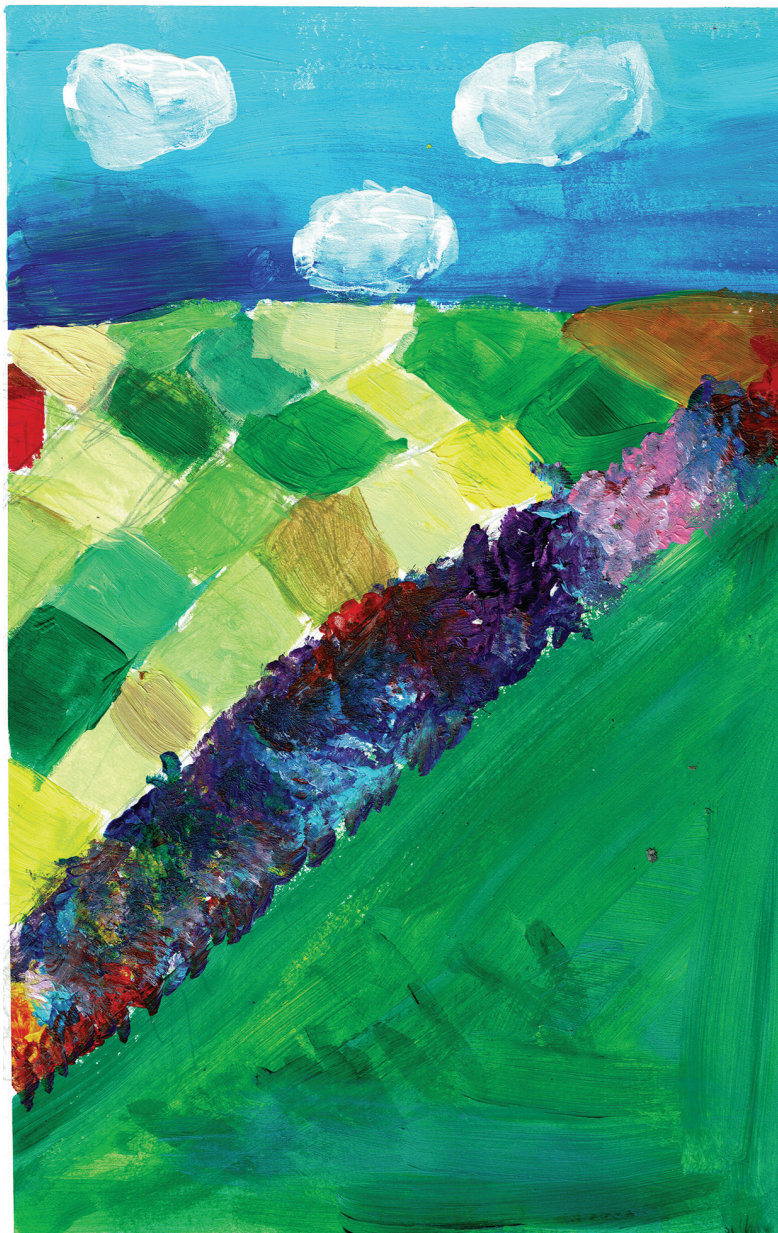
**They weren't happy tears, but they weren't sad either. They were just a mixture of everything.**

week, of every month, my dad would leave a similar note. I hadn't seen him for five months, three weeks, and two days. I began to question if he even wanted me. I sighed, and added some vegetables and water into the boiling pot. I seasoned it by sprinkling some pepper, and let the vegetable stew boil for a bit. Finally, the burning-hot stew was ready to eat. After pouring a few ladles of the stew into my bowl, my belly was stuffed, and I washed my dirty dishes in the sink until they became shiny and spotless. Then, I stomped up to my tiny, bland bedroom. The only colors in it were my periwinkle curtains and my bed, draped in a soft, violet blanket. I didn't even wash up, and immediately threw myself onto the bed. But no matter how hard I tried, sleep wouldn't come.

The next morning, I combed my silky, shimmering black hair. Its tips tickled my waist. My eyes were puffy and red, and I yawned several times. My eyes blinked slower and slower, but luckily, the loud caw of the crows got me back up to my senses. I quickly put my hair into a plait and rushed downstairs and out the door to grab some eggs. The red, tiny egg pen was my favorite part of my home. The chickens clucked, and I laughed. I gently grabbed some eggs and placed them in the basket. This was always the hardest part. I looked down at my toes and left. Whenever I picked the eggs, it made me feel like a monster. It reminded me of the war that killed my mama. I rushed back into the pen and laid out the eggs safe and sound with

their mothers. I wasn't going to let their family be taken away too.

I strolled up my favorite hill. Our favorite hill. When I was five, me and Mama would come up here and gaze at the sky until the sun was down. We would dance on this hill, play on this hill, and even sleep on this hill. If Mama was anywhere, it would be here. Wait. That was it. I widened my eyes, and laid out all the pebbles I could find, until I finished my masterpiece. I had formed the words, "Mama Hill." I buried my face in my hands as I hiccuped tears. They weren't happy tears, but they weren't sad either. They were just a mixture of everything. I sat on my knees. This was now officially Mama Hill.



*English Countryside* (Acrylic)  
Delilah Prager, 10  
Santa Monica, CA

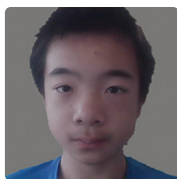


*Golden Sunset* (Acrylic)



# A Rainy Day

A collection of brief meditations on place



By Caden Wang, 12  
Chapel Hill, NC

Outside, I slowly stomped through the leaves on a path that connects two parts of my neighborhood. There, I sat, listening to the birds and squirrels scuffle and fly. A deer, surprised, ran past me into the forest, turning back after a few meters, watching. I picked up a leaf, rough and colored with age. A few acorns lay at my feet, swiftly blown side to side by the soft wind. The deer still watched me intently. Around it, several bushes, and trees surrounding the bushes. The smell of leaves and wood reached my nose. I picked up a stick and tossed it over at the deer, who was still standing defiantly, waiting for its spot back. It ran away with a last look of "I will be back." I finally stood up and walked away, crossing an old, rough wooden bridge, which creaked as I walked. Ancient, beautiful, convenient.

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I ran around the court, hitting the ball quickly without any thought other than *move, right position, right shot*. A quick breath of wind blew the ball partially offtrack before I was able to recover my shot, which knocked the ball to the right more than I'd

wanted. My friend and I continued to play rounds, passing the ball back and forth. The blue-green floor, hard under my feet, allowed me to maneuver quickly around. The smell of trees filled the air, and the sun shone a brilliant bright yellow to my right. The warmth targeted my right arm where my tennis racket was held. I sneezed.

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Sitting on my porch, I stared at that one tree which immersed the whole view from my spot. Its leaves were gone with age; only a few hung on. Water droplets hung from the branches, and the sound of light rain pattered against the rooftop. The cool morning air touched my skin. A water droplet landed on my forehead, blown by the wind. I inhaled and breathed. A bitter taste rested within my mouth, for the smell of cars and pollutants filled the air, as a procession of the rumbling vehicles passed by. I could not see them, for this tree still stood between me and the outside world.

---

I stood, peering out at the outside



world. A bush, standing among many others, rustled as a squirrel brushed by it. Farther forward, apartment complexes, painted blue, were laid out in a pattern. Some parts of the buildings were covered in shadow, the sun shining from the left. Its light brightly lit up a golden-leaved tree, swaying in front. The black asphalt roads that littered the ground looked unnatural in the area. Today was a humid day; the smell of mud reached my nose. The sky was a sad blue, completely, although nice-looking in its own way. In the background, I heard my brother and mother talking. I smiled.

# Four Poems



By Peter Shuster-Raizberg, 7  
New York, NY

## Love Water

Love water is a charm  
and a heart  
Teamwork is what I call fantastic  
part of a world, part of a  
world with never ending  
fun with never ending  
fun and the love of  
a heart

## There the Ocean Goes

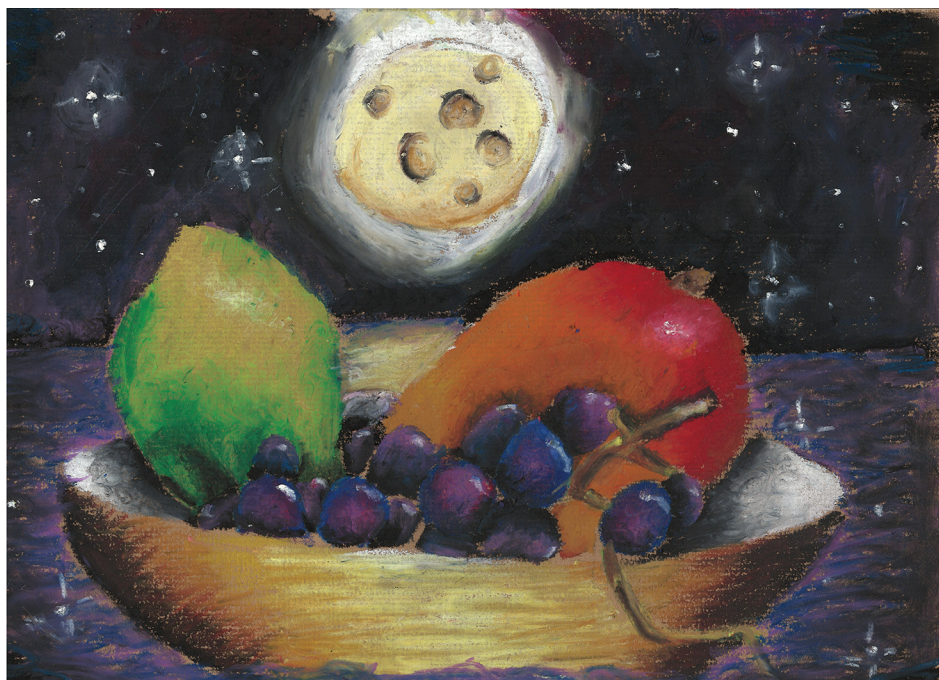
There the ocean goes  
There the ocean goes  
A place with Fish  
A place with Fish  
Place that has sharks  
and islands loved  
Place with treasure never found  
With the world around it  
With the world around it  
Population is disappearing  
Population is almost gone

## Volcano

Volcano, volcano with the world around it.  
In the circle of life.  
A mountain that shunts lava.  
Escape! Escape! Ran from it.  
Get a boat! And sail away.  
Volcano, volcano with the world around it.  
With the boat, find a new land.

## Cactus

Cactus weird cactus  
Dry standing next to a cactus  
It's pointy and hot  
Cactus weird  
Cactus dry  
You're standing next to a cactus  
Cactuses are nothing  
Cactuses are nothing



*The Fruit Bowl on the Ocean* (Oil pastel)  
Leticia Cheng, 8  
San Jose, CA

# A Busy Day in Mooga Basin

The search for life on Mars is punishing and seemingly hopeless until one exciting day . . .



By Eric Zhuang, 10  
Great Neck, NY

Mars, 2050.

"Just one more step. I can make it," I told myself again and again as I walked down a seemingly endless dirt road on Mars. My space suit weighed fifty pounds on Earth, but it didn't feel that heavy because the gravity of Mars was much weaker than that of Earth. But still, it got heavier every step I walked—though maybe this was all because I failed to make any progress. When I'd volunteered to help probe for life on this planet, I had expected the trail to be long, but not this long.

In the distance, all around me, giant volcanoes were a bold statement of the slowness of the time. In the pink sky, a meteor burned away like paper, bringing the promise of finding a trace of life slightly closer. I saw a light-blue object looming in front of me; it was the Rover-937 crater, found by a robot named Perseverance in the year 2021. It was as grand as an ocean and expanded forever through the rust-red soil. It stretched to the point where the reddish ground met the butterscotch

sky. All around me, near and far, were scattered many tiny rocks and craters. Approximately thirty people trudged along around me.

However, there was no time to waste. We had to go to Boogia Volcano and search for life there, if there was any. The leader of the team urged us on—"Hurry up. We can make it"—as everyone walked and panted like dogs.

At ten o'clock, we arrived at Boogia Camp A, located on the shallow slopes of the majestic volcano. Instantly, the camp leader started talking. "Today, we will continue searching for organic matter!"

The crowd was silent. Every face was tired after a month of fruitless searching.

"Mark, Bob, Ben, Jack . . . Casey, John, Naomi, Gabe, and Jeremy. You will go to the already-dug hole over there." He pointed into a hole so big that mammoths could play football in it. "And you will get saws and shovels to collect samples," he continued. "Oh, and the rest of you"—he pointed to me and some other people—"will use spectrophotometers to scan the



**Instantly, the life detector started whirring and buzzing, and in five seconds, it announced “No life found” in a dull, robotic voice.**

samples for life.”

Five minutes later, I inserted a sample into my Hyperboogie® life detector, as I had hundreds of times before. Instantly, the life detector started whirring and buzzing, and in five seconds, it announced “No life found” in a dull, robot voice. I tried another sample and the same boring message repeated. I could almost hear voices in my mind saying, *Nobody will discover life. Why are you trying? Give up!* I tried to ignore these.

For what felt like millions of times, I repeated this process. Sweat beaded down on my forehead. Many times I wanted to quit, but I thought of my lifelong dream—to find life on other planets—and kept myself from giving up.

Minutes grew into hours. Hours grew into days. The hole expanded slowly, just like my urge to give up. Soon the idea of quitting was as uncontrollable as a wild lion. *I shouldn't quit. We will do it*, I told myself once again, but it was not very reassuring. Two hours later, I'd finally had enough.

After another monotonous “No life detected” message, I snorted and stormed out of the cabin. Anyway, *there isn't going to be any life in this dumb desert*, I thought. I passed arid stretches of desert with the barren and gloomy peak of Boogia Volcano looming overhead. Finally, I reached the camp leader's cabin, which looked like a worn-down pile of rocks.

The camp leader led me in and asked in a flat voice, “What is your

concern?”

“I've had enough of this lifeless pla—I mean, I feel like I want to return to Earth and live a normal life,” I spat out. He replied unsurprisingly, “Fine. You are the thirteenth person who's decided to quit this week. Sign this form, put it in a Hypermetal® bottle, and give it to a form-reception robot. There—the yellow ones with wheels.” He picked up a piece of paper and pointed to a corner.

I scribbled my personal information on the blank spaces on the pale-white paper and tossed it into a stupid-looking hypermetal bottle. Then I picked up the bottle, aimed it at a reception robot, and shot it out of my portable object launcher for a quicker delivery.

It turned out my aim was so poor that the bottle smashed into the wall. A second later, I heard a loud cheering sound. *Had I broken something?* I thought. But then I realized it was coming from a place outside.

I was drawn toward the source of the noise, which my portable iPhone 100 said was building 3B.

I was not alone. People jostled into building 3B to figure out what was inside.

It was a seemingly normal room. But on further inspection, I gasped out loud. I couldn't believe my eyes. In the middle of the room, one of the three life detectors actually displayed the message “Life detected.”

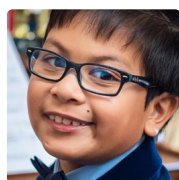
I pinched myself again and again. *This is a dream. This is a dream*, I told myself. But it wasn't. The room was

quiet for a moment before laughter and shouting exploded, so loud I bet people on Earth could hear us.

Then the leader of the camp, who had just walked in, pulled out a microscope and after a minute of observing, said, "This life form we found is a tetra-membrane prokaryote with two flagella and a disproportionately high amount of ammonium nitrate. We have never seen something like this before. In other words, WE FOUND LIFE!" I was too shocked to speak.

I ran back to my cabin. I heard a faint music and looked at my life detector. It also said "Life detected." Never once in my life was I so thankful for my poor aim: I'd missed the robot but caught my dream.

That night, there was a huge party afterward. Later at my cabin, as I ate one slice of 100% healthy synthetic pizza, I couldn't stop feeling proud of myself.



*Fire Eater* (Nikon D3500)  
Aaron D'Souza, 9  
San Diego, CA

# The Curse of Lemos

After tragedy strikes, Lemos lives a simple life with his dog



By T. Max Crowe, 12  
Wayland, MA

Long ago, there was a man named Lemos. Lemos was a simple man who lived in Ancient Greece during the time of the gods and monsters.

Lemos had a simple life in Greece. He lived in the city of Sparta, in a small hut a few miles off of the main villages. Lemos lived alone. Lemos was known for nothing, and nobody knew who he was. He did not have any friends, or family. He had one dog, who was named Alexander.

Lemos had found Alexander on the streets of Sparta while trying to buy some food from the local market. Lemos cared very much for Alexander, but as the years went on, he started giving less and less attention to Alexander. Alexander loved him and obeyed, but was at times saddened by how lonely his owner felt. Alexander could see him looking out the window of their small hut for hours on end, just staring. Since Lemos had no friends, he didn't have to tell anybody his secret because he didn't have anyone to tell. When Lemos had found Alexander, he was shriveled and starved. Lemos knew he had to help Alexander. Since the dog could not move very well, he

stayed in the same spot on the street behind the food shop every day. Every day, Lemos went behind the food shop to give him food and, occasionally, scratches. As time went on, Lemos began to love Alexander. Lemos had named the dog Alexander because of his son. His son's middle name was Alexander, and Lemos wanted to proudden the dog's name.

Lemos's son had died, and it had been Lemos's fault. One day, Lemos's son went to the swimming hole a few hundred feet from the house, and Lemos decided to let his son go on his own. He had never let his son go before, but his son snuck out of the house at night and down to the swimming hole. Lemos wanted to teach him a lesson.

His son cried out after an hour went by, "Father! Help! I got stuck in a mud hole!"

Lemos responded, "Son! Where are you? Surely you cannot be in the swimming hole without my permission!" Lemos thought that his son could get out on his own, and he decided to go to sleep and give his son a lecture in the morning.

Lemos woke. He walked out of his

**“Such a quick decision! Are you sure you are decided? It could haunt you forever.”**

bedroom and checked in on his son's room. Lemos started to panic, as his son was not there. He burst out of the house and ran over to the swimming hole as fast as possible, only to find that his son had suffocated trying to get out of the mud hole. Lemos burst into tears and cried for days on end mourning his son, on the verge of wanting to end his own life. But then a month later, he had found Alexander. After two months of caring for him on the streets, he took Alexander into his own home.

Now, three years later, a man appeared in his house the minute he walked in after buying food at the market. The man was wearing a green toga and nothing else, except for two sandals on his feet. His face was shaped roundly, and he had gray hair and green eyes. He spoke: “My name is Janus. Take a seat.” The strange man offered him a chair that Lemos was sure he had never owned, for he owned no furniture but his bed.

Lemos said nothing, but he sat in the chair. Suddenly, the man reached over and pressed his fingers against the temple of Lemos's forehead. Lemos's mind went black, and then it was flooded with a vision and memories of him with his son, times when he and his son played games around the house, went swimming together in the swimming hole, buying fun things and foods in the market—nothing but happy memories. All of a sudden, during another memory, he heard Janus's voice again speaking in his mind: “You miss that, don't you?”

The scene changed to the day his son had died. Lemos awoke from his memory slumber in tears. “Who are you?” he asked Janus in a choked voice.

Janus said, “I am a minor god, and I have come with an offer that can change your fate forever. If you give up your dog, Alexander, to me, you can have your son back, and this offer lasts forever.”

Lemos considered the offer. It made him very sad because he loved Alexander very much, but his son meant more to him.

Lemos said “Okay. I accept your offer, Janus.”

Janus responded, “Such a quick decision! Are you sure you are decided? It could haunt you forever.”

Lemos said, “I am sure.”

Swiftly, the god disappeared into thin air, leaving the chair wobbling. Lemos knew he shouldn't bother looking for Alexander.

“Dad! Dad?” Lemos heard his son cry. Oddly, the voice sounded faint.

Lemos ran for the door to find his son, but the minute he exited the door, he sank into the ground. Lemos fell into an extremely dark opening, no entrances visible. He heard a voice, but this time he could feel the power of the entity speaking to him. The voice was the almighty Hades.

“Lemos, you have disobeyed the laws of death by bringing your son back to life. It was once your decision to let your own son struggle against the claws of darkness. Once something has happened, it cannot

be changed. You should know that by now. If you had listened to Janus, you could have been rewarded, but now you will be punished. You shall sit in this hole eternally, and once you die you shall serve eternal punishment in the underworld.”

Hades disappeared with a massive rumble and shaking left behind, and Lemos’s loud crying, “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” carried out with the rumbling and quaked as far as 200 miles.

The earthquake also carried the whole story with it, and the story was told across Sparta through the rumbling. Now people say when there are earthquakes, you can still hear Lemos’s cry through the quaking. They say that earthquakes happen because Lemos is still trying to get his message across, begging for mercy from the underworld.



# Shadow

A walk in the woods takes an ominous turn



By Scarlet He, 10  
Scarsdale, NY

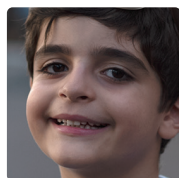
My heart sank as I peered around the looming forest.

The sunlight fell into gleaming ribbons on the muddy pathway as my shadow flashed under the trees. I panted, my heart beating as hard as a drum, my feet racing, touching the ground and picking up in a rhythm. I zoomed through the forest, leaving a dusty trail behind me, the type you would cough and sneeze at even if you didn't have an allergy. My baggy clothes billowed through the wind. As soon as I started running, I became famished and out of breath. The once blue and beautiful sky had turned as dark as a black cat, and the full moon glowed menacingly. I shivered, peering around me at the trees, which seemed like they had eyes. Hard, brown leaves cracked under my feet. At that moment, I saw a shadowy figure jump out from behind a tree.

"Peekaboo!" my sister shouted, and the world seemed normal again.



*Northern Ontario* (iPhone 12)  
Jay Nimchonok, 10  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

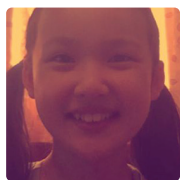


*Out of the Window* (iPhone 11)  
Ohad Harosh, 8  
New York, NY



# Honey Dipped in Celery

Ava feels trapped at school in her classroom during reading time



By Ava Cai, 12  
San Jose, CA

The quiet classroom was like a prison. The lights were dim, and a broken bulb flickered softly above me. I had never liked the dullness of this room, nor did I like the quietness of reading time. I sat in my assigned seat and flipped through a book about spaceships. The cover was slightly dented, and some of the pages were half torn. I managed to make out only the picture of the Apollo lunar module. I closed the book and placed it on my desk. I leaned back in my seat and let my head dangle off the tip of the blue plastic. I stretched, making all my muscles bunch up, then relax again. I let out a satisfied sigh and sat up, looking around the room. Everyone was still reading besides my teacher, who was swiping furiously at his phone. I shifted into a more comfortable position and began trying to count the leaves of a tree out the window. It was not too far away, but I could only make out the size and shape of it. It looked like a green cloud with two ears on top.

I rocked impatiently in my chair, waiting for the teacher to signal that class had ended. I looked up at the clock and then leaned back in

surprise. It was only 2:06! I slumped deeper into my chair at the fact that I had to wait fifty-four more minutes until the bell would grant my wishes. So I observed the white clock with its red arm ticking to the rhythm of my feet tapping, the long black arm inching forward slowly and the small black arm that was barely moving. I wondered if it was broken and if I should ask the teacher to fix it. Silently, I scolded the small black arm and turned my attention to my teacher.

He had sleek gray hair that lay respectfully on his head. He had a mustache that curved upwards as if he were always smiling. I observed that he wore a navy-blue tie today, the same dark blue that matched his striped shirt. He wore long, dark pants that seemed three inches too short, revealing his long blue socks. I imagined him picking flowers on a grassy clearing that stretched far off into the horizon. He wasn't the type of person who was going to sit on a grassy clearing to pick flowers, but I like to imagine people doing silly things. It always helps me pass the time.

I shook my head, covering up

## As I was walking, I couldn't help grinning. Stepping out of the classroom felt as if I had won a lottery of one bajillion dollars!

my giggles. Finally, I couldn't resist standing any longer. I jumped up, attracting eyes from all over the room. I flattened my skirt and flicked my hair, a nervous tick I use to cover up my embarrassment. After all, being the center of attention is a very unpleasant feeling. It was like having a crowd point their fingers at me. I felt my feet leading me to the doorway, with all eyes still on me. I walked faster and reached my hand out to the doorknob.

"Ava? Where are you going?" I heard a deep voice call out from behind me. It was my teacher.

I froze, not knowing if getting fresh air was a good reason to go outside. "Bathroom," I blurted, not realizing it until it escaped my mouth. I felt awkward saying it because I usually don't sneak off to the bathroom not to use the bathroom.

My teacher let out a deep grunt, which I figured meant that I was excused. I opened the door, and immediately the wind rushed toward me and slapped my face in an unmannerly way. I swatted my hair away from me and started walking toward the bathroom for no apparent reason. As I was walking, I couldn't help grinning. Stepping out of the classroom felt as if I had won a lottery of one bajillion dollars!

I hopped and skipped and smiled my huge billboard smile. My friends call me the "ten-minute person." It means that I can never sit still in my chair for more than ten minutes. My brother can sit for hours and hours

doing homework, and I admire that. I have to jump out of my chair every ten minutes to go to the kitchen to see what's cooking. And I'm always in a gloomy mood at night because I have to go to sleep.

Before I knew it, I was standing at the door of the bathroom, smelling the stench of honey dipped in celery sticks. That's how I always describe the smell of our school bathroom to my friends. To me, it also means "bad-smelling." Every one of my friends knows that celery sticks and honey are the stuff of my nightmares. (I despise the taste of celery sticks, and bees make my teeth chatter.)

I stood there for a few seconds to waste time, and then I thought I might as well go in because it was better than being trapped in the classroom. I played around with the water and squirted oily soap onto my hands and made bubbles with it. When I was satisfied with the bubbles, I turned back around to head back. I reminded myself that I was outside for fresh air.

Moments later, I stepped into the classroom, and it was surprisingly bright and noisy. I supposed that the teacher had announced something fascinating because the room was full of laughter and chatter. I looked around, expecting my friend Prisha to wave me over and feed me in on the news. But in her seat was a tall girl wearing black earrings and a baggy white T-shirt that read "Miller Band."

I paused and looked around the room with wide eyes. I did not see my classmates. In their places were

tall people who towered over me, although they were sitting. They were chattering and laughing as if I never existed. I turned toward the teacher's desk, and I saw a man with bushy black hair wearing a white T-shirt. He looked at me with expectant eyes as if I were a messenger from another class. I was happy for a second because I was not the center of attention. But it all faded away as the teacher cleared his throat, and the chattering stopped. Every single pupil stared at me, just the way my classmates had earlier. Instead of small, bright eyes, they were huge dull ones, glowering down at me. I wanted to scream to my feet to run out, but being the center of attention made my brain stop working. My feet stayed rooted to the ground as if someone had superglued them to the shiny white floor.

"Well?" the teacher said in a very sharp tone.

"I—sorry. Bye." I barely finished my sentence, if I could call it a sentence, as I whipped around and dashed outside again. I closed the door behind me and ran to my real classroom. I checked all around the door, making sure it read "Room 45" before I opened it. I wanted to return unnoticed, but the whining of the door gave me away. For a second, I was the center of attention once more, but I quickly walked toward my desk where Prisha sat. I observed that she wasn't a girl with black earrings and a baggy shirt that read "Miller Band." I sat down and sighed. For once, I liked the dim lights and the silence of the room.



# Highlight from Stonesoup.com

## From the Stone Soup Blog



### Apart Together

By Ena Bahk-Pi, 12  
San Francisco, CA



Last year, in the first few months of quarantine, I was feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, but most of all, alone. We have all had those moments of feeling a crushing loneliness, of wanting to dig a hole and stay there. These feelings of isolation have only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and sometimes it is hard to realize that many others are experiencing the same thing. On the surface, flowers are bright and blooming and the sky is blue and clear, but

underneath, the reality might be darker and lonelier.

Making this piece helped me express my emotions through art, which I didn't know was possible. I love how the different textures combined to show different aspects of what we are all going through. I hope this can encourage people to reach out to others who might be experiencing similar feelings during these difficult times.

### About the Stone Soup Blog

We publish original work—writing, art, book reviews, multimedia projects, and more—by young people on the Stone Soup Blog. You can read more posts by young bloggers, and find out more about submitting a blog post, here: <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-blog/>.

# 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, 10  
Mason Li, 8  
Ella Luo, 12  
Marielle Miller, 10  
Michelle Peng, 11  
Satya Villacorta, 12

## POETRY

Tahra Araujo, 9  
Alexander Cheng, 9  
Cole Gibson, 13  
Emily Han, 12  
Lucey Mullins, 11  
Aakanksha Sahoo, 8  
Cassi Sullivan, 12

## ARTWORK

Parker Broge, 13  
Hannah Francis, 11  
Tang Li, 9

## Visit the Stone Soup Store at [Stonesoupstore.com](http://Stonesoupstore.com)

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 and the *Stone Soup Annual*
- High-quality prints from our collection of children's art
- Journals and sketchbooks

. . . and more!

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

- More information about our writing workshops and book club
- 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!

