



StoneSoup

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StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

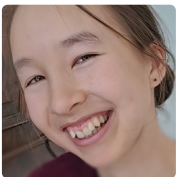
Editor's Note

Every October, I aim to bring a tiny bit of spookiness to *Stone Soup*. We tend to think spooky means ghosts and witches—and there is one witch in this issue!—but it is also so many other, subtler things: shutters banging against the side of a house, a lone owl on a branch in a silent forest, a mysterious note left in our favorite haunt. And this issue is full of those slightly spooky moments. But this issue is balanced with humor as well—I especially love the lighthearted energy and inventiveness Aaron Bogner brings to the world he creates in “Qrange’s Predicament,” starting with his characters’ names, of which he writes:

Qrange took great pleasure in playing with his friends. Their names were looooooop and Uf. They sound like weird names to us, but then we don’t live there. They might say our names sound weird!

I laughed out loud at these names, but also appreciated the sentences that followed. While I may never meet anyone from another planet, I will meet people from other countries, with names that sound as strange to me as “Uf” or “looooooop.” Like every inspiring piece of science fiction, Bogner’s bizarre world helps us to better see our own. Look around and see if there’s something you can, through your art, make similarly strange.

Happy Halloween from *Stone Soup*!



On the cover:
Kaleidoscope
(Japanese fabric scraps)
Savarna Yang, 13
New Zealand

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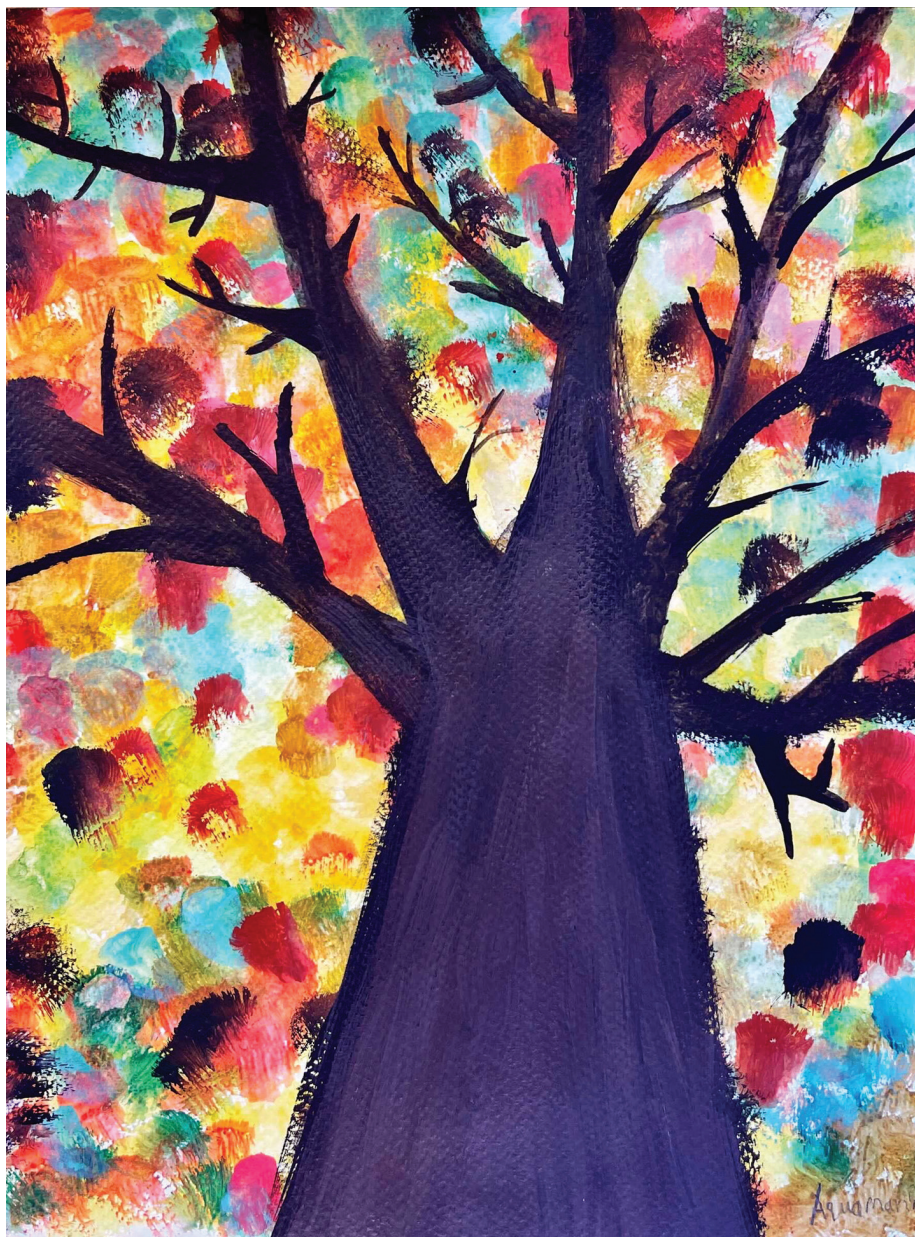
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The Fall Impression (Gouache)
 Serena Li, 10
 New York

Ode to Owls



By Raya Ilieva, 12
California

We wanted to see an owl.
My brother took me
out into the woods
behind our house,
the smell of pine needles
fresh in our noses
as we tramped through the
undergrowth,
the dead leaves as loud as
car horns as I stumbled.
Finally, we reached the spot
where my brother had seen him,
the owl.
Twisted oak trees stood like
sentries, guarding their patch of
forest,
their boughs laden
with dry pine cones and
sticky sap.
My brother peered intently at the tree,
searching for the bird.
But he wasn't there.
Disappointment crashed into me.
Suddenly
we heard a whoosh
as a huge shape swooped above us,
alighting on one of the enormous trees.
The owl!
He performed a shuffling dance
with his feet

and settled onto the branch.
He ruffled his feathers,
a mottled mix of
gray, brown, and white,
and folded his wings.
I nearly laughed—
he looked so funny
with his little white mustache
perched above the sharp beak
and yellow eyes roving
around the forest, finally
settling on us.
He looked down at us
as if to say,
“Oh, you humans. Watching me again.”
The term “wise owl” popped
into my head.
Now I understood
why people call them wise—
the owl was rather like an old man
full of secrets and knowledge
but unwilling to share.
My brother pulled me back
to reality,
handed me
his binoculars.
I stuck my eyes
to the rubber seals
and was rewarded
with a close-up view
of the beautiful bird,
his feathers now
in sharp detail.
I could even see
the wrinkles on his
fluffy, feathered feet.
My legs started
to go numb
from standing in one place

so long
but I didn't care
because I was watching the owl.
It was almost like
we were in an ancient tomb,
yellow light spilling
through windows
cut into brick walls.

Then the owl shook
his feathers and flew silently
off the branch, into
the dusky afternoon sky.
He was gone.



Queen of Cats (Watercolor and ink)
Rosemary Brandon, 10
Tennessee

Sisters

One freezing winter day, Marie finds a sickly kitten on the street



By Ava Jamieson, 13
Illinois

The wind stung Marie's cheek. She shivered, despite her warm jacket and hat.

"I knew I should have brought a scarf," she said out loud, but there was no one but the wind and her dog, Kora, to answer. It was the time of winter where people stopped being happy at the cold and the snow and instead stayed inside. All except the people who had dogs. Marie—though she loved Kora—did not necessarily want to be outside. But Kora needed to be walked, and so here Marie was, outside in the freezing temperature. The relentless winter. *Regina never walks Kora*, Marie thought grumpily. *It's always me*. Not that Marie minded when it was still warm out, but now it was all cold and unforgiving and Marie had no desire to be outside. *I'm making Regina do it tomorrow*, Marie thought with resoluteness. The weather reminded her of a poem she had read in English class just the day before, just before winter break started.

The whipping wind,
Red cheeks,
Cracked lip—
A winter cold and unforgiving

Yep, Marie thought bitterly, *that describes the weather right now*. That was the only stanza Marie remembered. There were probably more, but Marie was not known for her memory. It also probably didn't help that Marie spent much of her day daydreaming. She only remembered that stanza because she had liked the play on "cold" in the last line. The winter was literally cold, and it was also cold as if distant. Marie dug her face into her coat and kept walking at a brisk pace, dragging Kora behind a little.

"Come on, Kora!" Marie said, exasperated. "Don't you want to get out of the cold?"

Kora, in response, sat down. *Oh, the advantages of having a fur coat*, Marie thought wistfully. Not that Marie would ever buy an actual fur coat. She was an animal lover and could never stand even the thought of that. Marie bent down to scoop Kora up, meaning to carry her the last block to her house, when she saw something: a shivering kitten hidden in a bush. Its fur was covered in dirt in some areas but so shiny in others that, for a second, Marie thought she

Marie cradled the kitten and sang it a soft lullaby; it stirred a little but didn't wake.

was hallucinating. *Can frostbite do that to a person?* she wondered. *Can hypothermia? Did I slip on the ice and hit my head?* Marie closed her eyes, but when she opened them the kitten was still very much real, and very much in need of help.

Marie dropped to the ground and then sucked in a breath as the cold snow reached an unbearable temperature. But Marie kept crawling toward the kitty, who was shivering under the bush. Marie gently pulled the kitten out of the bush and ran the rest of the way home. Kora, remarkably, didn't put up much of a fight. Maybe she sensed that something was urgent, or maybe she just knew that Marie wouldn't stop for her.

"Regina!" Marie called, bursting through the door. "Look what I found."

"What?" Regina asked, gliding into the room and bending down to unbuckle Kora's leash.

"A kitten!" Marie explained, holding her out to Regina.

Regina sucked in a breath. "Yikes." Regina was a veterinarian major in college, home on winter break. "That cat's on death's door."

"Can you help it?" Marie asked, eagerly.

"I don't know," Regina said doubtfully.

"Oh, please, Regina. Please, please, please!" Marie begged.

"Alright! Fine . . . Go give the kitten a bath while I go get my kit."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" Marie exclaimed. She would have probably jumped up

and down as well, if not for the frail kitten in her arms.

"Bath," Regina said sternly, but Marie could see that she was smiling.

"Oh, right. I'll do that right now!" Marie said, hurrying up the stairs.

I have a pretty cool sister, Marie thought. Marie cradled the kitten and sang it a soft lullaby; it stirred a little but didn't wake. In fact, it wasn't until Marie started washing it that it fully opened its eyes. It took a while for Marie to clean the kitten, due to the fact that she was doing so slowly and carefully. She wasn't sure if the kitten had any open injuries, and she wanted to make sure to be extremely careful and thorough. When she was finally done, you could see the kitten's fur: it was beautiful, the color of an ocean pearl, with an adorable little black splotch on his left ear. Marie thought that he, for Regina had told her the gender, was the most beautiful kitten she had ever seen—not that she had seen many kittens—and nothing could sway her mind.

Marie had never really considered herself a cat person. Her family had had three dogs during the span of her lifetime alone, and up until now, she had never even held a cat. *Maybe I'm not a dog or a cat person. Maybe I'm both,* Marie thought while gently drying him with a towel. She carried the kitten downstairs to Regina, who had set up a makeshift veterinarian's office. Marie had wanted to stay while Regina did a checkup and diagnosis, but Regina insisted that she leave.

"That's not fair!" Marie protested.

"I found him!"

"And I'm fixing him," Regina said calmly.

"He doesn't need fixing!" Mare shot back.

"He does if he's sick. Marie, I'm not a professional—not yet anyway. I know enough, but if I have to operate I can't have you in the room. You'll just make me more stressed out," Regina said, in the same tone Marie found irritatingly calm.

"But it's just a simple diagnostic!"

"Maybe yes and maybe no. But if it is more, and I'm not saying that it will be, then I can't have you getting all anxious on me."

Marie protested, but eventually Regina won. Marie gave the kitten a quick kiss on the top of his head, then left. She ran upstairs, her hand trailing lazily on the wall. She waited in her peach room, decorated with lots of art and photos of her and her family and friends. She walked over to a photo of her and Regina from three years ago. They were on a beach, and Regina was laughing at something silly Marie had done. They each had an ice cream cone: pistachio for Marie, hazelnut for Regina. Marie smiled at the photo, letting her memory take her back to that day.

Marie and Regina used to be so close, but when Regina went off to college, they drifted apart a little. Those photos served as reminders to Marie of a time when her sister, her best friend, was still there every day.

Somehow Marie found herself in Regina's room. Most of Regina's books were about veterinary science. Marie studied their covers and chose one about cat anatomy. She took it back

to her room and sat in her beanbag chair, flipping through the pages. It used a lot of technical terms, and Marie didn't understand most of it, but the words comforted her regardless. It made Marie feel like she was in the room with Regina and the kitten, even though in reality she was a floor away. Marie got about halfway through the book, flipping through the pages, when she heard Regina's voice.

"Marie!" Regina was calling. Marie raced down the hallway and down the stairs.

"I'm here!" she responded, mere inches from the door.

"I need you to get my scalpel and stitches. No—actually, just bring me the blue kit." Regina's voice sounded strong, but Marie knew her sister well enough to hear the drop of fear in her voice.

"Is everything okay?" Marie asked, not even bothering to try to hide the obvious concern pouring into her words.

"That kit. Now," Regina replied, her tone leaving no room for argument. It was a voice she only used in an emergency, like the time when their mom had been at work and Marie broke her arm before school but tried to go anyway—there was going to be a bake sale! Marie was hopeless against double-chocolate brownies—and Regina had demanded they go to the hospital.

Marie ran quickly upstairs, located the blue kit, and ran back down. Regina opened the door just enough to grab the kit, but not enough for Marie to see what was going on. Marie opened her mouth to say something, then closed it. She didn't know what

She cried for whatever was wrong. She cried for the kitten she had just met. She cried for what might happen.

she would say, and she wasn't sure she even wanted to know the answer to whatever question she might ask.

Marie went to the kitchen, grabbed an apple from the counter, and fled to her room. Kora tried to follow, but Marie closed the door. She just wanted to be alone. Marie could hear Kora scratching against the door, trying to get inside. Marie ignored her and jammed her earbuds into her ears, drowning out all sounds. She closed her eyes and cried into her pillow. She cried for whatever was wrong. She cried for the kitten she had just met. She cried for what might happen.

She barely noticed when Regina came into the room, kitten in her arms. When she finally looked up, Regina just sighed and put the kitten down. She wrapped Marie into a hug. That only made Marie cry harder.

"Shh. It's okay. The kitten is going to be fine. You got him to me just in time. It's okay."

Marie just kept sobbing, and hugged Regina back.

"I'm going to miss you when you go back to college," Marie got out between sobs.

Regina smiled. "I know."

And they stayed there at that moment. Two sisters and a cat. Two sisters against the world.

Pumpkin Girl

Plagued by constant teasing, Mari makes a plan



By Beatrice C. de Baca, 8
California

Mari was sitting in her room when a brilliant idea hit her. She'd sell more pies, and with the money she'd buy a silk dress and then she could go to Lucy's quinceañera.

But, all the girls of Tulip Avenue laughed at her. And only because she lived in a pumpkin house!

"Then I'll make a plan," she said to herself. The next day, she bought a wig and got her sunglasses. She sold all of her pies and bought a dress made out of silk.

She went to the quinceañera, wig, sunglasses, and all. She came in and ate some cake. It was delicious!

But when she was eating, her wig fell off, revealing her face. Everybody started to laugh. "Pumpkin girl! Pumpkin girl!"

But then Lucy demanded, "Who is 'pumpkin girl?'" Everybody pointed at Mari. "She's my friend, not 'pumpkin girl,'" Lucy declared.

"Uhhmm. Hehe," they said nervously.

Now everything was fixed.

A Day in the Life of a Witch



By Luka Simpson-Khan, 12
Ontario, Canada

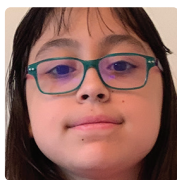
My soft, black cat licks me awake.
I eat my breakfast of cold, raw steak.
I go out into the dark woods and hunt
For ingredients for a potion to make my teeth blunt.
And when it grows dark, I look for mushrooms,
Soaring up high on my flying broom.
These mushrooms will help me with many things—
Growing long nails and leathery wings.
To tell my future, I see the local seer
Then I go back home to break a mirror.
They say this brings you good luck, you see,
Or perhaps that belief is unique to me.
At last I curl up in my spiderweb cot
And go on to sleep without a thought.



Toadstools (iPhone 7)
Brook Taintor, 9
Alaska

Bean

Bored during nap time, the narrator begins playing with a bean



By Carolina Ulloa-Compton, 11
Washington, DC

It was nap time, and the lights were out. I was four years old, and in preschool. As always, I couldn't sleep. I thought to myself: *Why can't the people who can't sleep go into a separate room and play?*

After a while I felt like I was in a box, and I had to move. As I slowly got up and turned around, I saw a box with beans. As I put my hand in the box, I thought of all the wonderful possibilities of things you could do with a bean. I was going to be the next queen, and I would tell my friends when nap time was over.

When I grabbed one bean out of the box, the bean was as smooth as my mom's purse. I kept touching the bean, and then I started poking the bean against my skin. The bean seemed even smoother like that. The bean touched my ear. I kept sliding the bean inside my ear. Then, by accident, I let go of the bean.

The bean was inside my ear. I had a slight moment of panic, as if everything had depended on me but I had failed. Then I noticed I could probably take the bean out very easily. I had confidence now. I tried to get the bean out. But my fingers were

too big to get it out. I kept on trying but the bean just went further in my ear until finally I gave up. I couldn't get the bean out.

For the rest of the day, I tried to forget that I had a bean in my ear. Occasionally my ear would hurt; I knew it was the bean, and that it was still in my ear, but I was hoping it would come out on its own. Whenever I lost something, and I couldn't find it, my parents always said to wait and let it appear. I hoped waiting was good in this situation. I thought it would be cool when the bean just popped out of my ear.

Once my dad came and picked me up, I was pretty sure he knew my ear hurt. My dad was trying to get me to say what was wrong. "Te duele algo?" *Does anything hurt?* His voice was a sweet voice, but I kept telling myself just to wait. The bean had to come out.

Then I said, as if nothing was happening, "No."

The whole fifteen-minute car ride seemed like an hour. Then when we got home, I finally let go of the idea of waiting for the bean to fall out. It was like choosing a multiple-choice answer. I chose to tell my dad that my

I was about to throw a fit when I remembered, It is my fault and no one else's that I have a bean in my ear.

ear hurt, and only that my ear hurt. I didn't tell him that I had put a bean in my ear at nap time.

That same day, we went to the doctor's office to examine me. Finally, when it was my turn, the nurse checked my ear. She lifted her eyebrows as she said, "There is a bean in there."

She hesitated, concern in her face. "You have to go to the foreign object removal clinic."

What a long name, I thought. When we were done with the appointment, my dad got an appointment scheduled at the foreign object removal clinic. My ear was hurting, and more intensely. Soon they would get it out, I told myself.

Then the lady scheduling the appointment said, "Sorry, we can only get an appointment for Thursday." I thought to myself, *But today's Tuesday.*

"Is Thursday okay?"

My dad said, "Yes."

My ear was hurting so bad. I needed the bean out of my ear, and soon. I didn't want to imagine what would happen. I was about to throw a fit when I remembered, *It is my fault and no one else's that I have a bean in my ear.*

Two days had passed—well, not two whole days—but it was Thursday, and today I was going to get the bean out of my ear. My dad and I were waiting until we got called. I could feel the cool breeze of the air conditioning and the clean air that was filtering through. I started getting nervous. I was realizing the bean was deep and

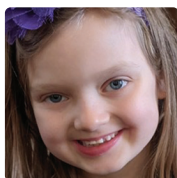
it might hurt a lot when they took the bean out, but hopefully it would be quick.

I was lying down on the chair where they were going to get the bean out, and I really felt restless; I wanted to move, but there was something preventing me. I didn't know what it was. I wasn't very sure when they were going to take the bean out. It wasn't very clear, but then I felt a second of so much pain, probably the worst pain I have ever experienced.

When we got out of the room, we saw a girl: not any girl, but a girl with a plant growing in her ear. The surgeons couldn't take it out, and so she had to go to real plastic surgery.

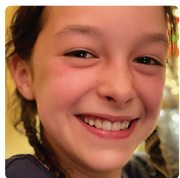
Later my parents asked me how I'd gotten a bean in my ear. I said that my friends and I had been playing doctor and I was the patient. The bean was medicine they prescribed for my ear but then it got stuck.

I told my parents the truth when I was older.



Fall Colors (Oil pastel and tempera)
Julia Hakanson, 9
Wisconsin

Two Poems



By Laylah Burstein, 11
California

Autumn

As autumn brings
a sense of spring,
I sigh and eat
another peach.

Whale Eye

in wood knot
in rainfall
in streetlight.

Calmly,
stoically,
her ancient eye
bores into mine.

I dance
upon what could be
boards,
what could be
a plain,
uninteresting dock.

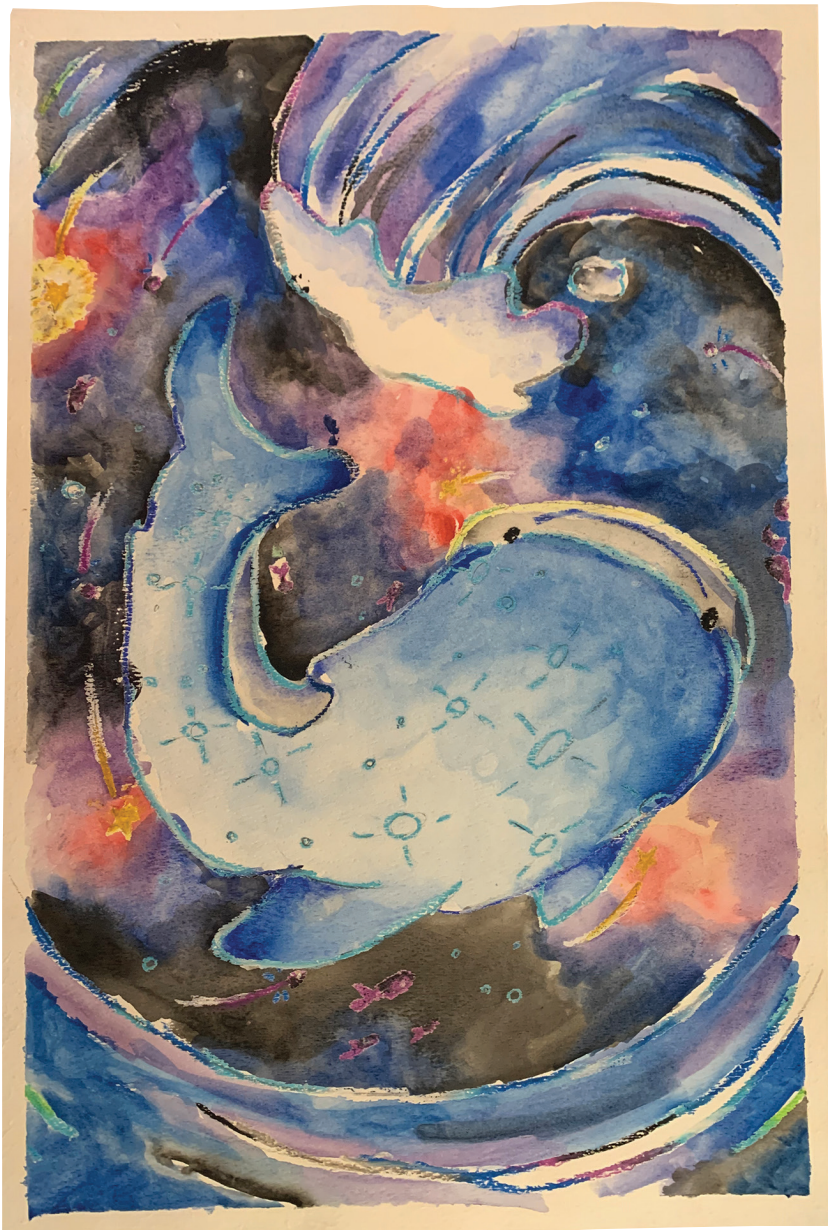
I dance
upon what
is an ancient
being, a
creature of
deep wisdom.

I dance
upon her slick,
rainwashed, grooved
body.

I dance upon
the whale.

She is far
from human
yet as complicated
as the knotted
seaweed of
her kingdom.

I danced
on her
yet she danced
with me—



The Dancing Whale (Watercolor and pastel)
Leticia Cheng, 9
California

the squelch
squelch of
my sneakers
and the groans
of her song,
our music.

She glittered
in the streetlamp
like gold,
the curse of
man.

Whales don't smile.

She is not
without emotion;
her eye tells
emotion in
its own
subtle ways.

I felt the deep drum of her heart.

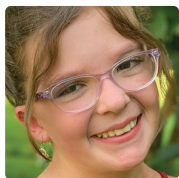
The thud
as I landed
that reverberated
through her
rib cage and
echoed in her
body and
the sea-sky beyond
pumped
blood through her
vessels.

A whale's heart can beat twice every minute.

Every second her
blood was building,
beating.

Shutters

A tornado warning disrupts a regular school day



By Lily Harlan, 11
Maryland

"This is not open book. You have twenty minutes. And . . . begin," says Mrs. Mulder, her eyes glancing at the clock.

I grip my pencil tightly in my hand, scanning the sheet in front of me. Two pages, front and back, all about grammar and phonics. Right at that exact moment, I swear I can hear about twenty-five inward groans from my classmates. I don't know about you, but everyone in my class hates phonics and grammar. I sigh and sign my name at the top of the paper.

But before I can answer any of the quiz questions, I hear a voice from the loudspeaker in our classroom. It's Mrs. Batangelo, our vice principal. "Students and staff, there is a tornado warning. This is not a drill. This is not a drill." Her voice clicks off and the room falls silent.

My heart hammers in my throat. *Wait. This isn't a drill?*

"Come on, kids," Mrs. Mulder says, ushering us to the door leading to the hallway. We follow Mrs. Shipley and Mrs. Foley's classes to the second- and third-grade common area.

"Lay down right here, friends,"

Mrs. Mulder says, pointing. "Tuck your hands over your head and tuck your legs into your stomach."

My classmates and I all get into this uncomfortable position. And we wait. And wait. And wait.

Minutes pass and feel as long as hours. I hear the teachers' hushed voices and the howling wind outside, playing with the shutters as if they were a toy. After about fifteen minutes, Mrs. Mulder taps me on the shoulder.

"You can get up," she says. For a split second, I think the not-a-drill is over, but no. I guess they just decided we shouldn't have to sit in such a position for the next hour, or however long this would take. I lean against a filing cabinet, with the curved handles poking into my back. I wonder if this is any more comfortable than the other position.

I look around the room and scan the area. The second-graders are crying and clinging to their teachers and to each other. Some of the third-graders are also crying and clinging to Mrs. Foley. Suddenly, someone touches my hand. It's my friend Alex.

"Lily," she whispers, "I'm scared." I



English Spin Wheel (Canon EOS Rebel T7)
Joey Vasaturo, 12
Connecticut

But would anyone remember this? Would it be a school legend? Or just a far-off memory?

look at the dancing shutters.

"Me too, Alex. Me too."

After about forty-five minutes, Mrs. Batangelo's voice comes on the intercom again. "Alright, everyone. The warning is over. Back to your class."

Sighs of relief ripple across the common area. I stand up, Alex still clutching my hand. The wind has stopped toying with the shutters, at least for now. We all shuttle back into the classroom. I realize that we have missed a lot of class time—and possibly, hopefully—our phonics test.

Those happy thoughts quickly fizzle. "Alright, class, remember: this is not an open book quiz. You have twenty minutes."

The rest of the day played out as normal. On the bus ride home, everyone acted like normal. *Was no one else affected by this?* I wonder. I knew at least Alex was, and Bailey too. They had both been crying afterward. The second-graders, of course, and those kids who huddled around Mrs. Foley, must have been afraid too. But would anyone remember this? Would it be a school legend? Or just a far-off memory?

Now, as a fifth-grader, I realize that no one ever really forgot that event. During our personal narrative topic in fourth grade, almost everyone wrote about the experience. This wasn't the only time there was a scary event at our school. One time, near the end of fourth grade, our speakers cut out before Mrs. Batangelo could say, "This is just a drill" during a routine

lockdown drill. Now that was scary. That experience was short, though. The tornado wasn't. It took up a big chunk of the day and left a lot of us scared for a long time. My memory of that day has become a bit foggy, but the most vivid piece was the shutters, the wind toying with them and blowing them hard against the school building, reminding us of the scary storm outside.

Two Poems



By Arjun Nair, 9
Virginia

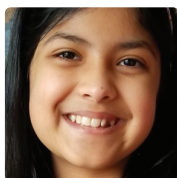
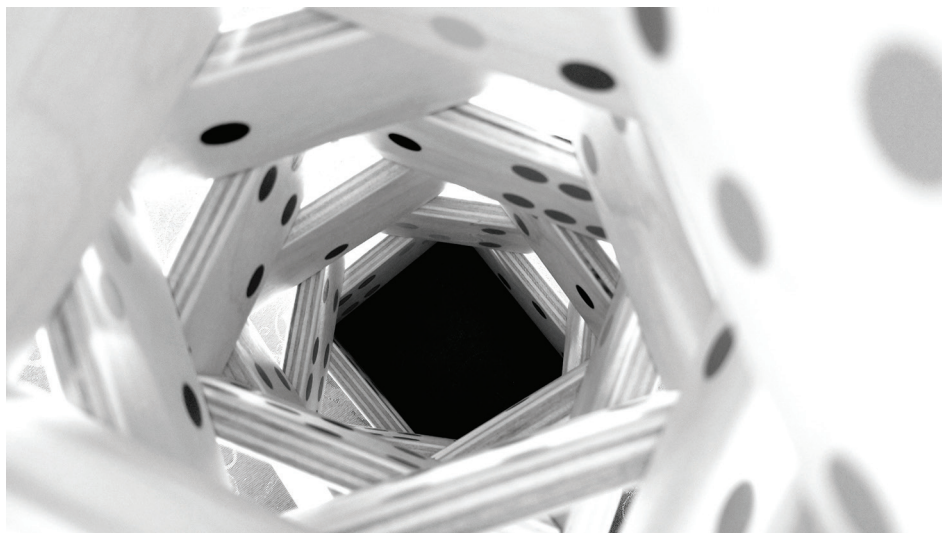
Life is good

Life is good.
Don't be like a piece of wood—
motionless,
silenced.
Life is good.

Phase Change

Water freezes while
dripping down from
the ledge of my house,
forming icicles
no bigger than a mouse.

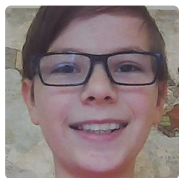
The moment the sun strikes—
a burning glare.
They turn into nothing but
a giant flare.



Dimensions (Samsung Galaxy S8)
Anushka Trivedi, 11
Maryland

Qrange's Predicament

Qrange finds what seems to be the best hide-and-seek hiding place ever—until he gets stuck



By Aaron Bogner, 12
Ohio

Qrange was stuck. No, I mean literally. He was having the time of his life playing hide-and-seek with his two friends when he hid inside a box that was out for delivery. The mail carrier sealed it, and here he is.

But let me explain more about Qrange.

Qrange was currently residing on the planet 999 in the state of Iek. Iek was the largest state on the planet. He lived in the city of Unaud. How big was the city? Come on, you've never heard of the city Unaud? It's the largest city in the Milky Way! It currently houses seven trillion people!

Qrange took great pleasure in playing with his friends. Their names were looooooop and Uf. They sound like weird names to us, but then we don't live there. They might say our names sound weird! Like all their games, their hide-and-seek was wild. looooooop was the seeker. He counted to sixty, then sprinted down the driveway to find Qrange and Uf.

Uf was hiding where Qrange should have hidden, in a rose bush. Uf was smart—just, applying it to life was the hard part. For example, when

Uf's family got a takeout meal to eat at home, Uf forgot about gravity and tipped the food he was carrying in. Splat! Nobody wanted to be Uf then. Back to the game. looooooop found Uf as soon as he started screaming in pain from the thorns. Neither could find Qrange, though. Probably because the mail carrier had already shipped him away. At about this time, Uf and looooooop started to question whether Qrange had hidden in a legal spot.

"He hid inside his house,"
looooooop said.

"No, his mom called him in," Uf replied.

"He hid inside."

"No, he . . ."

"Let's just ask his mom."

As soon as the mail carrier picked the box up, Qrange thought how fun it would be for his friends never to find him. Then he thought, *How am I going to get back? I'm being shipped in a box that's sealed with rubidium!* Rubidium is a metal that melts at 102.7 degrees Fahrenheit. They used it so no packages would break. The mail carrier first seals the box with tape. Then, at the post office, they soak the

Qrange finally realized his predicament. He would have to stay in the box until he arrived at his destination.

box in rubidium. Or the box seals itself if you buy a special kind of box. This is what Qrange's parents bought. It had sealed while Qrange was in the box.

"No, neither happened. I thought he was with you guys," Qrange's mom said.

"He's not," Uf replied.

"That's weird. Well, he must be hiding in the best spot ever thought of. Try to find him for me," Qrange's mom said.

By now Qrange was already in the mail truck. He tried to break open the box by sheer brute force. He pushed and pushed, and pulled and pulled. He couldn't get the box to open! The mail carrier looked back and said, "Huh?" Qrange immediately quieted down. He was too embarrassed to let anyone know what he had gotten himself into.

When this didn't work, he tried to melt the rubidium with his hands. He didn't succeed because, just like our bodies, his was working hard to keep itself at 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. In their measurement, it was 256.3 degrees Meirtable.

Qrange finally realized his predicament. He would have to stay in the box until he arrived at his destination. That meant the people he would arrive at would open his box with a heat opener! The rubidium would burn him! Qrange was sweating profusely because he was terrified. He reached into his pocket to see if anything was in there that might help him get out. He found his Computer Everything Tool that helped him fix computers in his free time.

Qrange passed the time by playing with the computer he was sitting on. He might have broken some of the pieces, but luckily, he was an expert at fixing computers. He fixed it up in a few hours and improved it! He gave it more storage and made it two times as fast. He even coded an "endless runner" game on it. He thought this would be a thank-you gift to whomever got him out of the box.

Qrange got out the next day. He suddenly found himself out of the truck and stopped on a solid surface. He thought this was the person's doorstep. He was correct. Fortunately, this family had kids, and they ran outside to grab the box. They couldn't pick it up, though, because of Qrange's weight.

As soon as the kids' parents grabbed the box, they quieted their kids and whisked the box upstairs to their room. Their version of Christmas was called Oiin, and all the parents gave a random family with kids a gift for their kids. It was this time, and one of the kids' gifts was the computer that Qrange had improved.

The mom took the heat opener and started to open the box. Most people had a heat opener to open boxes. Their boxes were cardboard on the inside and rubidium on the outside. Qrange stifled a gasp as the heat burned him. The mom opened the box and screamed. She wasn't used to having people in a box! She asked Qrange, "How did you get here?"

Qrange answered her, "I was playing hide-and-seek with my

friends when I hid in this box!" The mom immediately started laughing.

"I can pay for your bus ticket back home. This joke is enough to pay me back."

"Too late—I already improved your computer, and put a game on it," Qrange said.

"Ha-ha! Now the trouble is to hide you up here until I can get you home."

That night, when the kids were at their evening activities, Qrange got his chance to go home. The mom bought his bus ticket, and he got to ride home, this time not in a box.

Qrange opened the front door. His front door, thankfully. His mom opened the door and yelled, "He's home!" Immediately his dad ran to the door.

"He is!" His mom and dad wrapped him up in a big embrace.

The next day at school, Qrange tapped Uf on the back. Uf jumped, then looked behind him. "You're back! What happened?"

"I hid in a box and got sent halfway across the city."

Uf started laughing. The kids near him stared at him. When Qrange and Uf told the story to them, they started laughing too. Soon, the whole school was laughing, all 334,742,958 of them. Then the whole city, all 7,012,910,734,203 of them, laughed at Qrange's predicament.



Girl with Creature (Watercolor and ink)
Rosemary Brandon, 10
Tennessee

A New Yoda

The narrator recalls the day she brought her dog, Yoda, home



By Iwan Lee, 10
New Jersey

Screech!!! Our car came to a halt at a traffic light. I thought we were going to a nearby shop to pick out a gift before my birthday. It was exactly Halloween day.

Right now I was wondering where exactly we were going. I first thought we were going to the store closest to my house, but then we passed it and the next shop and the shop furthest from my house and still we were still going.

"Where are we going?" I asked my parents.

"Somewhere," they replied.

My dad swerved the car onto a highway and we zoomed our way through the highway. Then we got stuck in traffic. "Oh, great," I muttered. Then, when we were out of traffic, we started the wheels. Our car started going fast. Really fast. Just over the speed limit—maybe one mile per hour. Our car's outer metal and doors shone like the sun.

Once we arrived at our destination, which for some reason was the airport, I wondered why we were there. My mind was starting to fog up, and then suddenly I had one clear thought: *I must be getting my dog...*

We screeched into the parking lot. I lurched forward. I started feeling sick. My eyes were clouding up. I could hear the car roaring while the engines worked hard to go at the speed.

We hopped out of the car and dashed into the airport. Then we charged through the door like a herd of buffalos charging at other animals. I saw we were in Terminal 1, and I looked around.

There were few people; it was desolate as the Sahara Desert. I saw a couple of planes landing outside the airport. One was from Paris, another from Seoul, and another one from the UK. I saw another person and they came over to our side. Still six feet apart. I found out they were another owner who was supposed to get their dog—the dog that was the sister of my dog.

I had already named my dog Yoda. I'd named him that because he has super short legs just like Yoda. He also looked maybe a bit like Yoda. They had named Yoda's sister Luna.

I walked back and forth at the main entrance. Then I saw the crew start coming out. Their shoes clanked on the floor. I wasn't here to see the pilots,

though. I was here to see Yoda.

"Dad, when is my dog coming?" I asked.

"Yoda is going to come any moment now," my dad replied. The passengers started coming out. Passenger after passenger, and still no Yoda. I sighed.

Then came a cart with a crate—actually two crates—and we rushed over. I looked in the smaller one, but it didn't look like Yoda. Its name was something like Aronge. The other dog was a Korean Jindo mix, and its name was Buddy. Then something caught my eye. It was in a sack. I glanced inside it and what I saw was the dog I was looking for. The dog was Yoda!

I shouted to my parents in a low voice, "Yoda's in the sack!" They bolted next to me faster than the speed of light. I looked inside and I saw Yoda's face. He was so adorable. He licked me.

I said thank you to the person holding Yoda, and we jumped back in the car. After twenty minutes of driving, he escaped and jumped on me. I grabbed him and he felt fluffy and was the size of a mouse, I thought.

We walked out and heard the wind whistle.

My life is going to be very different from now on, I thought. And also, Yoda, you're home, not in any other place.



Countryside (Watercolor)
Crystal Fu, 11
New York

Two Poems



By Cordelia S.R. Woodard, 10
Massachusetts

Owlet

One quiet hour
the sky is
beautifully bright.
One quiet hour
darkness seeps
through the light.
But while you are slumbering
a noise splits the night—
a tiny owl breaks its shell
looking left and right!
Thinking its hollow
is the whole world,
thinking the Earth is small.

Coltsfoot

Coltsfoot
pokes its coltshead
through the melting ground.
Like a new butterfly
it unfolds its winglike petals.
So round
and the yellow
like a fresh sun
marks the start of spring.



Blooms (Watercolor with freehand dabbing technique)
Viviana Chen, 8
California

Now Is the Time

After weeks of practice and anticipation, the day of Susie's recital is finally here



By Lindsay Gale, 9
Ohio

My hands smoothed out the rose-colored dress I was wearing. The car hummed underneath me. We passed skyscrapers and other cars. I unfolded the music sheet, which was wrinkled and slightly ripped from all the times I'd inspected it.

"What if I forget this is an E instead of an A? What if I mess up..."

"You'll be fine, honey," my mom told me reassuringly. "You're gonna do it." Her optimism didn't miss its mark on me, but still, I was worried.

"We're here!" she said cheerfully, like it was an amazing day and not the scariest day of my life.

I mean, I had practiced for at least an hour every day, from six to seven, for the last two months, getting ready for this.

It was a large church, with a foyer in front. In the foyer, people were milling about, laughing and talking. My teacher finally found us. Mrs. Callie is an amazing teacher, and my favorite. She was wearing a sparkly blue dress that shimmered like the night sky. It reflected off of the chandelier, and I was so fixated on that little blue glint I didn't notice Mrs. Callie was walking away until the glint was gone.

The main hall stood full and proud. It had windows at the very top of its walls, and an open circle window right in the middle. Under the circle was a large Christmas tree, twinkling and shining. And under that... the stage. There were many filled pews, and suddenly I felt a wave of terror wash over me. I put my head in my hands. I could see myself playing the flute, but messing up terribly, me realizing my mistake, and everyone booing over and over like a horror scene replaying in my mind. But then I felt my mom's warm hand on my back.

"We believe in you," she whispered.

"First," Mrs. Callie read, "We have Alyssa Mcford. She will be playing 'Grand Central Station' by Nancy Faber."

Alyssa's song moved by in a quick minute. Then the next song, "French Minuet." Even though my turn was about twelve songs away, I began assembling my flute, sliding the parts into place.

The songs flew by. Finally, Mrs. Callie announced "Next we have Susie Jones, playing 'Golden Roses' on the flute."

Silence. I gripped my flute until my

I wished that I had that courage. The courage to speak to the bright, bold sun.

knuckles went white. It seemed like the flute would crumble. But I couldn't, for the life of me, move or sit up at all. No, I couldn't do this.

"Susie?"

Why was I doing this? Why?!

"Hold on a sec." Mrs. Callie started to walk over.

I covered my face with my hands. No, no, no! People were whispering, some were laughing.

"But Susie, don't you want to hear the crowds cheer?" Mrs. Callie asked gently.

I shook my head. "They won't! They probably hate me! I don't want to play anymore. Let me go!"

"Wait," Mrs. Callie replied. She walked away from me. "There's been a holdup. Next, we will have Mary Albert playing 'I Walk the Road Again.'"

Mary walked to the stage, and my world started to dissolve with terror.

"Come on, Susie," Mom said, guiding me gently.

I heard our footsteps. *Thump, thump, squeak, squeak.* The tile floor seemed to count our way slowly. I felt dozens of stares on us, on me. Finally, after what seemed like hours, we reached the door. I looked around. Everything was so bright outside. Birds chirped; quiet wind blew through the trees. They rustled. All of it was so . . . serene. Then I heard music wafting out of the church. It flowed, twisting and whirling. I knew that song: "Greensleeves."

Memories flashed in my mind. I remembered the time when I turned on the light in my room, walking to

the flute. My fingers found the keys, and they skipped from one key to another as I played the lulling song of "Greensleeves." I pictured myself: There was me, pleading with my mom to let me play some more. Me closing my eyes like I was right now, but as I played the flute. Me spending more time with the flute than with human friends. I loved the flute. It was part of me.

I looked down at the flute in my hand. It glowed, answering the sun's radiating light, pulling it down, then reflecting it back like a reply. I wished that I had that courage. The courage to speak to the bright, bold sun. Then I realized. Maybe I could.

"Let's go back in." The words jumped out of my mouth, loud and clear.

"Are you sure?" Mom asked me, concerned.

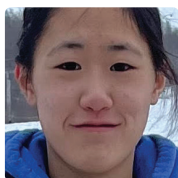
As an answer, I walked back into the church. She tailed me. I saw the kid playing. It was that boy I had never talked to. As I watched, he coaxed out the piano's tinny voice, pushing it out into the cool air. He looked . . . happy. Like he really loved being there. If he could feel such joy when he was usually so nervous and scared, I could too. I took a deep breath and walked to our pew.

As we sat back at our seats. I ran my hand over my instrument. The silver of the flute felt cool against my sweaty palms. Finally, again, it was my turn. I took a deep breath, walking onto the stage. My shoe squeaked against it.

“Hi, I’m Susie Jones, and I will be playing ‘Golden Roses.’”

“Stand tall and proud. Take a deep breath, and play,” I remembered Mrs. Callie saying, so I did.

I stood as high as possible, taking a lungful of air, and blew. I closed my eyes and began pressing the keys on the flute. As I opened my eyes again, I skimmed over the sea of people. I could pick out Mom, Mrs. Callie, the quiet boy, and many I didn’t recognize. But they were all smiling. And those smiles threw me into a world of daisies, lilies, and golden roses.



Rooting for You (Canon EOS 80D)
Audrey Li, 13
New York

The Note

A girl relishes the solitude of her favorite spot under an amazing tree



By Olivia Lee, 10
New York

The path that led to the tree went zigzag, but it wasn't very long. It had slight curves with small bumps. It was like a stone platform, with barely any cracks.

But what was really a sight was the tree. It was a very tall one, its leaves dark green as ripe cucumbers. The branches curled softly, like breezes tickling waves into the air. Under the tree was a spot to sit, with patches of grass covering the dirt. If you felt the grass, you knew that it was very soft. When gazing up, you would see many birds of different shapes and colors sitting on the high branches. You would feel safe under the tree, like it was protecting you from bad things. You would sit there for a long time, but then it would be time to go. The patches of grass would sit still, hoping you would come again.

I only saw someone else come once. She was a girl, one who sat quietly under the tree by herself. Often, she would fling one of her long legs over a thick branch while the other leg stayed hopelessly on the ground. I tried to say "Hi," but before I could, the girl went off into the forest behind the gates to the left of the tree.

I wanted to follow her but decided not to because if she saw me, she wouldn't want to be my friend. I sighed.

I came to visit the tree whenever I had time left in my day. Even if I had only a few minutes, I wouldn't miss a single moment to come to the stony pathway.

I'd come here before breakfast, before school, before anything, or after anything.

But sadly, I had no one to bring with me. I'd ask my mother, but she was always busy knitting with her sharp darning needle or busy dealing with my sister, who was always running around. I'd ask my father, but he was too busy changing into his work clothes. I'd ask my sister . . . actually, I wouldn't. She would be too loud and energetic to sit under a quiet, peaceful tree, and people would be annoyed. I'd ask my friend Cindy, but she was just like my sister. Talkative and energetic. I wanted someone who would enjoy the tree with me.

So I'd sit down under the tree alone, quietly reading a book, inspecting all the things that were near me—a tiny caterpillar resting on a thin leaf, squirrels hastily climbing

up the trunk. Or I'd try to climb up myself.

Day after day, I would sit under the tree with no one to talk to except myself and the birds, who didn't even answer me.

Now I was walking to the place where the tree was, carrying a book called *Atmosphere*. It was about a girl who wanted to touch the sky, so she tied 142 balloons to her wrist.

I skipped over to the small stone pathway. Before I placed a single foot on it, I inspected it carefully. It had dirt on it. I kicked it away carefully. Someone had been there.

I went over the path and lifted the leaves of the tree cautiously. Going under the leaves, I noticed something that hadn't been there before. It was a note that was taped harshly on a branch. The note was crumpled and looked like someone had stepped on it a million times.

The words were too tiny to read from where I was standing, so I went a little closer and carefully took the tape off.

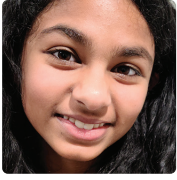
I picked it up delicately, and read the page as my eyes blinked:

Please meet me at this place:

Croygami Woods

Please don't be late! Hunters are attacking the animals

Night



By Disha Hebbar, 12
New Jersey

As I lay in my bed in the dark of the night when the world silently sleeps,
the trees rest and the sun grows dim
and the gleaming light of the moon casts a shine over the night-stained pond.
The poor old whip-poor-will rests from his journey to bask in the light of the stars
and the Moon-woman brushes past with a sudden sort of solemnness,
dabbing the tips of the grass with a silvery frost and leaving a diamond-like
dewdrop in the center of every flower.
The night is a gift to be enjoyed.

Windowpanes greet the stray leaves rapping against them.
The wind paints an invisible picture through the air whistling its way through,
raindrops adorning the leaves of the white oak tree like star-studded ornaments,
the frozen silver drops clinking together like chimes on a porch falling victim to
the wind.
The pattering like little footsteps.
The night is a song to be listened to.

The wind carries the subtle smell of fresh grass,
of the just-wet mud,
and the aromatic wildflowers adorning the side of the field like jewels on a crown,
and the sleeping willow—the freshness of soft, sleeping nature.
The night is a fragrance whose scent is rarely recognized,
but it is the sweetest smell for those who realize it.

The round, glass orb of the moon, shrouded by wispy gray clouds, too shy to
show its face.
The clouds, like gentle, lavender-grey tufts of cotton candy, inviting you to fly
amongst them.
The stars, like pieces of hope chipped off of dreams themselves.
You let the night slowly, and silently, rock you to sleep, and fall into the sound of
the rain.

Highlight from Stonesoup.com

From the Stone Soup Blog



A Review of *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea*

By April Yu, 14
New Jersey

Every year, May is celebrated as AAPI Month in honor of the Asian American and Pacific Islanders who have contributed to the world. With popular reading platforms like Goodreads publishing lists of AAPI authors, the month has been a lovely whirlwind of new #ownvoices books topping my to-be-read list. Through it all, the one that has completely taken my breath away is a Korean-coded fantasy debut to the beat of Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.

The gorgeous cover of Axie Oh's *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* depicts Mina, a young girl whose role has never yet been the protagonist. The loveliest girl in her village is Shim Cheong, but Cheong's beauty is as much of a blessing as it is a curse—every year, a girl bride is sacrificed to the Sea God in hopes of satiating the deadly storms that sweep the land. Legend says that only the Sea God's true bride will calm the floods forever.

Beautiful Cheong is set to be the annual sacrifice, but there is one problem: she loves Mina's brother. To save her brother's beloved, Mina jumps into the sea as a sacrifice instead, becoming the reckless heroine of her own story. In the watery depths, she enters the Spirit Realm, where spirits and creatures and gods abound.

But nothing is as it seems. As Mina tries to figure out why the Sea God is causing so many storms in the human world, her soul is stolen. From there, Mina must venture through a world of magic and lost stories and vengeful gods to seek answers about the Sea God, lest she become a spirit forever.

This book painted one of the lushest, most breathtaking settings I have ever had the pleasure to immerse myself in. Axie Oh brought the fascinating world of the Spirit Realm to life with such a detailed hand that I could feel the flurry of spirits, smell vendors' candies and desserts, see the gilded palaces and gardens. I loved the Korean culture incorporated into the book, from the twist on the tale of Shim Cheong to the Red String of Fate. There was something about the aesthetic of the book that felt wholly comforting.

Perhaps what I adored most were the themes. At first, I wasn't sure how I felt about Mina; she seemed like yet another perfect Mary Sue heroine, the clean-cut, selfless kind of girl about as real as a unicorn. As the book progressed, though, I began to see her flaws: her fear, her doubt, but her unwavering filial piety triumphing nevertheless. Mina stayed strong because of and for her family, which I deeply admired; it was steeped in the book's Asian roots and ideologies, untarnished by romance or ulterior motives. Flashbacks to her grandmother's wonder and storytelling ability were wonderfully written and executed. Even when Mina was struggling, she sought to comfort others and wove stories like her grandmother's that were more magical than anything in the Spirit Realm. Mina was wise beyond her years and wielded her vulnerabilities like knives, which is the bravest thing of all.

You can read the rest of April's review on our website.

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.

ART

Brianna Collins, 10
Enzo Moscola, 13

STORIES

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Miya Lin, 11
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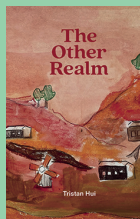
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CHILDREN'S ART FOUNDATION