

# Storm Clouds

by Sophie Chen

Thin bodies dressed in tattered clothing, gaunt faces painted with desperation - this is what everyone in Eliza's area looks like. Every loner, couple and family struggle to stay alive as each day passes.

You would think that families and friends might stick by each other's sides in times of need. You would be wrong. Friends die at each other's feet, just over a scrap of food. Eliza has seen this happen through her own eyes: a skinny girl finds a hunk of stale bread, but a bony, grimy hand snatches it away from her grasp. The girl reaches to take the morsel back, but instead receives a lashing kick in return. The injured girl gives the older girl a look of shock, hurt and anger, all mixed together. The look says: I thought we were friends . . . How could you do this to me? The maimed girl then relents, giving in to the hollowess of hunger, leaving the older one to give the victim one last pleading look, before guiltily slinking away.

Eliza knows the injured girl from the past will not be able to survive.

It seems this is the only solution to the poverty now: steal food from other's mouths . . . But that's not what Eliza's family does. To give a mouthful to others, her family often gulps water to take away the pain of hunger.

Today she finds a large chunk of cheese in the dumps of the wealthier districts - this will definitely be able to feed Eliza's family, with spares.

Her mother nods silently to Eliza. Eliza wants to give the scraps to the orphan on the street. No-one can manage with an extra mouth to feed, so sadly, he stays on the streets.

Eliza's older sister can't endure the pain of constant hunger in her stomach anymore. "No, don't be ridiculous - we need that for ourselves! Can't you see how we're hardly coping?"

Eliza feels shell-shocked. Her sister has never delivered an outburst like this, but she has been acting in a queer manner ever since one of her friends died at the hands of another.

Maybe now the harsh reality of this cruel world is seeping into her, and she is panicking and becoming desperate.

Eliza struggles to ignore her outburst, but manages to turn and start walking stiffly towards the door. Her sister's hand grabs Eliza by the shoulder, and then proceeds to slap her on the face. Eliza's cheek tingles painfully, and for the first time in a long while, her eyes fill with hot, salty tears.

She drops the cheese, and dashes out the door, sprinting as fast as she can to the riverside.

Please, don't let my family turn on one another . . .

Eliza looks upwards, towards the sky. The sky is crowded with dark storm clouds . . . An ominous warning of things to come . . .



Sophie Chen from Templeton Primary School was awarded First Prize in the Primary School section with her piece "Storm Clouds".

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Janet Claringbold of SWCN awarding Sophie her prize