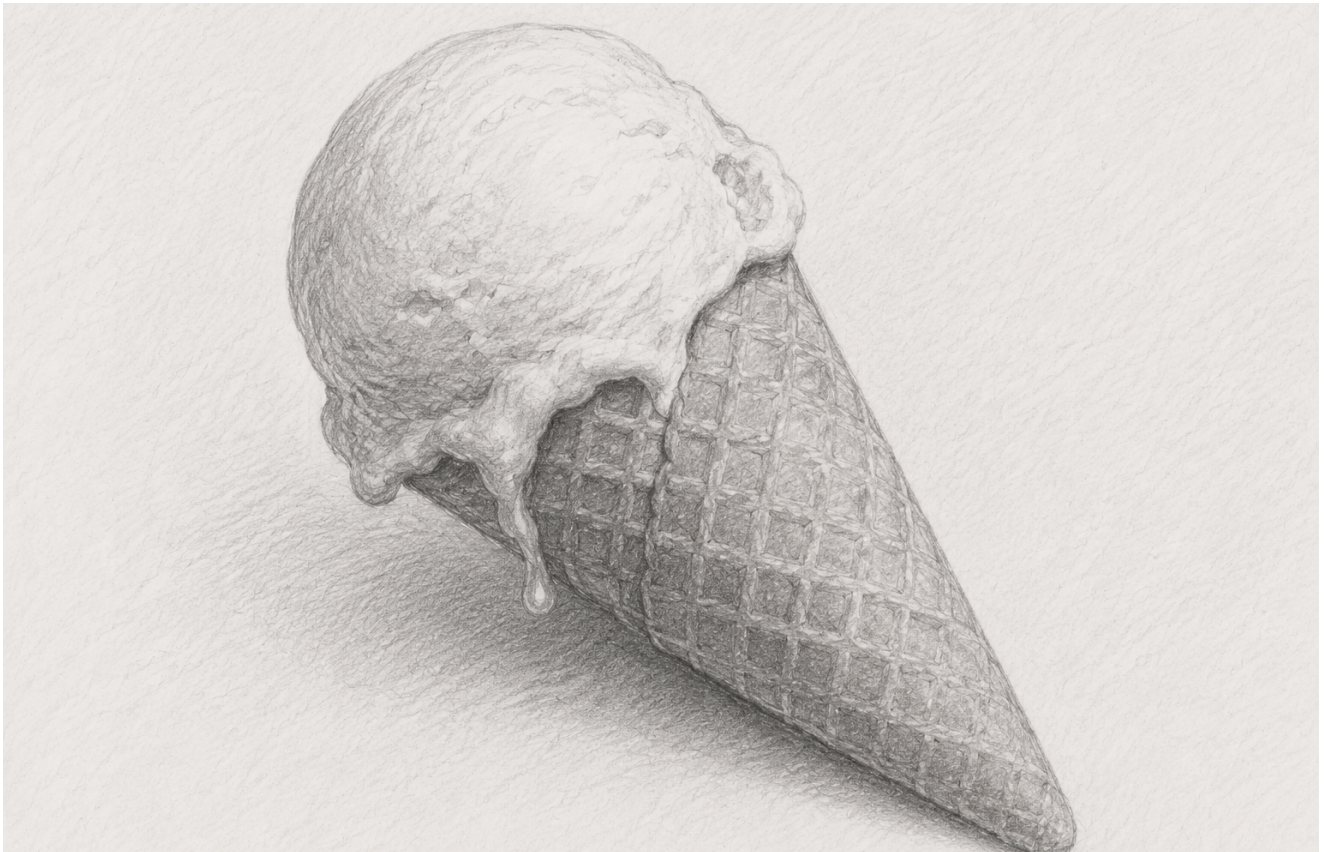


THE HOMEWORK AND THE ICE-CREAM



An excuse

I didn't like school.

Bells, rules, desks, and questions I had no interest in answering. Then, as if the day was not already long enough, homework followed me home. It was like school had climbed into my back pack and refused to leave.

So I became good at doing the least amount possible, or nothing at all.

One day, my teacher asked an all too familiar question.

"Where's your homework?"

I went straight to the usual place. Not in my back pack, but in my mind.

Excuse drawer. Top shelf.

"I left it on the kitchen table," I said.

He nodded.

"Ah yes. I understand. You didn't have any ice cream."

I stared at him.

"No. I said I left my homework on the kitchen table."

He nodded again.

"Yes. You didn't have any ice cream."

Now I was annoyed. I had built the lie. He was meant to walk inside it.

"What has ice cream got to do with my homework?"

He smiled.

"One excuse is as good as the next."

And there it was.

No shouting. No punishment. Just a small sentence with teeth.

I thought the detail made the excuse stronger.

He heard none of it.

He heard the shape.

And the shape was: I didn't do it.

Since then, when someone gives me a reason that sounds too neat, too polished, too quick off the tongue, I think back to that moment.

Maybe the homework was on the kitchen table.

Or maybe they just didn't have any ice cream.