

Ice Lolly Review Issue X

A literary magazine by the youth and for the youth



August 2021

Cover art by Esinulo Chiamaka Praise

Editor's Note



First off, thank you so much Esinulo Chiamaka Praise for creating our beautiful cover art. The title of her piece is “Fallen petals” and the medium is acrylic on canvas. Please show her some support and check out her instagram, @_.chiamaka_ !

Recently Ice Lolly Review celebrated our first birthday. Since August 2020 we have received 1,100+ submissions from all over the world. Thank you so much everyone for your continuous support! We received the most submissions this period and we're so excited to show you issue X.

In our tenth issue you'll find galaxy dotted poems, twinkling yellow prose, experimental styles and structures, and poignant, vibrant fiction. I hope you enjoy looking through our tenth issue and thank you so much for your patience and support!

Please stay safe and take care of yourself!

Warmest regards,
Jessica Wang
edic of Ice Lolly Review



Poetry

Eden - Lauren Hyunseo Cho

Backyard Exploration - JP Legarte

Thorn Tips - Amber Kennedy

postcard promises - Chloe Lin

Exitium Me - Cassidy Bull

Mother Tongue - Julia Ginsbach

first concert of the year, montrose saloon, 6/4/21 - Emily Murman

Flash - Srishti Jha

The Disassembly - Sophia Holme

mid-summer in ephemeral things - Laiba Yousuf

Blooming - Kulsy Kashmiri

Behind My Back - Ray Cheng

Time - Aisha Malik

Repainting Dorian - Adeline Cruz

Real - Sneha Sadhukhan

Carefree - Lisa Vo

sweetheart - Emma Geller

Dusk - Srishti Jha

Dawn rises - Ashryel Mavers

Solar Culture - Caleb Sa

Of yellow window panes and watermelon scents - Kshitija Aherkar

Rivers - Amelhyne O'Regan-Farineau

Ice Cream for Breakfast - Emily Joy Oomen

VOICE - Thee Sim Ling

What I Wished For the Summer // Of Jazz Heavens - Yasmine Bolden

Falling - Julia Dun Rappaport

unknown - Srishti Pandey

Orbit - Neha Varadharajan

fallen angel - Matt Hsu

Arles - Maria Litrivi

On Tracks - Cassidy Bull

laundry kingdom - Leah Boxley

this tapestry - Parker Ussery

eternal mortality - Angelina Yeung

jump - Adritanaya Tiwari

Prose

The Properties of Honey - Natalie Hampton

Cardamom chai - Vrinda Gandhi

Night Shift - Jihyun Kim

The day we took our masks off - Dana Serea

Solomon - Paul Bianco

Fireflies - Kiara Azuma

La Mer - Yawen Xue

Digging around for pistachios - Rita Chernikova

Divinity - Sam Podnar

Peaches - Catherine Xie

Porcelain Saucer - Natalie Hampton

Eden - Poem

By Lauren Hyunseo Cho

There was a time when my people
Were flowers, their fragility beautiful in the wind,

In a garden where, from birth, one had vibrant petals
Fluttering into the afterlife,

A chromatic shower into the abyss.
We flew with self-crafted wings,

Even as smoke trailed us.
Hallakkungi*, guard your ill-fated children,

As the western eagle uncurls its talons towards
We who do not have claws,

From those who pick us greenly,
Our souls on display as so much silk,

Who proclaim that our smooth bodies
Would look classier with singed edges.

Hallakkungi, shield your eastern children, build us
Ground-up into something exotic, alluring.

Memories of the garden flit through
Our minds, lamenting the hands which carve

Flesh from our petals. Murder,
When colorful and flashy, is stylish.

Hallakkungi, do storks sleep inside your hollowed bosom?
Does the raw dirt stain your feet?



**Hallakkungi, otherwise known as Igong bon-puri, is the name of a traditional deity in Jeju indigenous language. In Jeju mythology, Hallakkungi guards the Field of Socheon—the flower garden of life and death—in which countless flowers bloom. Each flower represents a human soul, and Hallakkungi watches over them, responsible for the length and quality of each human's life.*



Lauren Hyunseo Cho is a 17-year old girl from South Korea (pronouns: she/her). Lauren has always found herself in a balancing act of sorts: attempting to balance modernity with tradition, Korean culture with American, femininity with societal expectations. In navigating her identity, she has developed a passion for issues of cultural discrimination, feminism, and philosophy. Her love for writing serves to produce poems of her take on these ideas, stemming from her personal experiences as well as her holistic views and metaphorical interpretations.

Backyard Exploration - Poem
By JP Legarte

As our bodies lie
beside each other
in this peppermint-striped hammock
floating under the dripping sunlight,

you ask me about the places
where I desire to explore more deeply.

I ponder
describing the sandy beaches that
kiss the bleeding sunset affections
entwined with sheltered coastlines
or postmodernism emblazing
brick walls and streetways stretching into
makeshift galleries that reveal hidden stories.

But my vacant thoughts lose themselves
within the untraversed nature
of your mind. Tell me
about the unreleased tears replicating
nearly fallen leaves not quite yet unhinged
from the creases of their branches. Deliver the rush
of potential futures you envision that
reenact midnight highway drivers.

I could wander for days
into the immensity of your inner-earth
being, if only it would unfold
into salient oceans of revelations
brushing my desert skin or shaded forests
uncloaking blossoms of hidden-flora conversations
that extend deep into the roots of present curiosity.

As the touch
of your snow-soft fingertips
trace my arm wrapped
around your waist, I tell you
that hiking the mountains
of discoveries awaiting in
your unvoiced confiding would breathe
wonder into my atmosphere.

You reach your hand out
toward the clear skies as if
grasping the teardrops of the fading
rays before surrounding my body
with whispers of real stories
now rippling from the recollections
abiding on the edge of your tongue.

JP Legarte is a Pilipino-American junior at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign working toward a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing and an English minor. He is 19 years old and from Streamwood, IL. He desires to provide spaces through his poetry where others can process their own emotions, ponderings, and anything else within life itself. His poems have been previously published or are forthcoming in Poetry Undressed, Behind the Vision, Words & Whispers, and The Global Youth Review among other journals and magazines. You can find him on Instagram at @jpl091 and @unspokenentropy."

Thorn Tips - Poem

By Amber Kennedy

Like a cliff casting its eyes to the sea,
he hears the birds that preceded her,
the wind, the water, the wail,
his reflection unowned –
 returned
lost – again

He feared the slow erosion
The cracking, looking glass.
Still, she gave him her love
with its thin thorn tips
which he took in his teeth
between creased, crevassed lips

Eyes to the skies,
he laughed in surrender,
like a cliff casting its eyes to the sea,
his fingers caressing a thorn

Torn between touch:
the gentle caress of her voice
her petalled blood,
and the discordant feathered verse of birds

Petals sank like ink in the sea,
Enamoured in the armour of love

Cast on oceans
to touch the end of eternity,
sacrificed, enclothed, where

the water still races and rushes
to quench the thirst of the rose.



Amber Natalie Kennedy is a poet and fiction writer from Oxfordshire, England, currently studying Creative Writing at Durham University. Amber has attended and led The Henry Box School and Durham University creative writing groups. She attended the Oxford Writer's Squad in 2012-13 and the Finding the Poem virtual course at the Collage Writing Room in 2021. She has a degree in English Literature and is the Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of Spellbinder quarterly literary and art magazine. She has self-published a volume of poetry, Immersion, and a novella, The Remains of Beauty. She has also been published in Better Than Starbucks poetry magazine as well as Write Now Lit.

postcard promises - Poem
By Chloe Lin

there are certain
things that slip
through floorboards—

curled corners of
yellowed postcards
etched i love you's
faded and gray

the unsung promises
that played off-key
in my throat

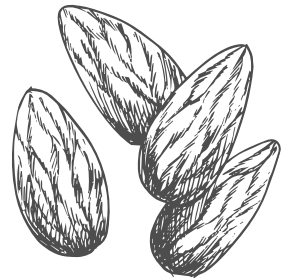
because some things are timeless
i don't know how i didn't realize earlier that i love you
you're stuck with me forever

tattoo kiss cracking
on the bone of
his cheek

but as the frost
crumbles away
and the sky
tears open

i pry the wooden planks
desperate to see
if spring had
cleansed everything

scattered its seeds

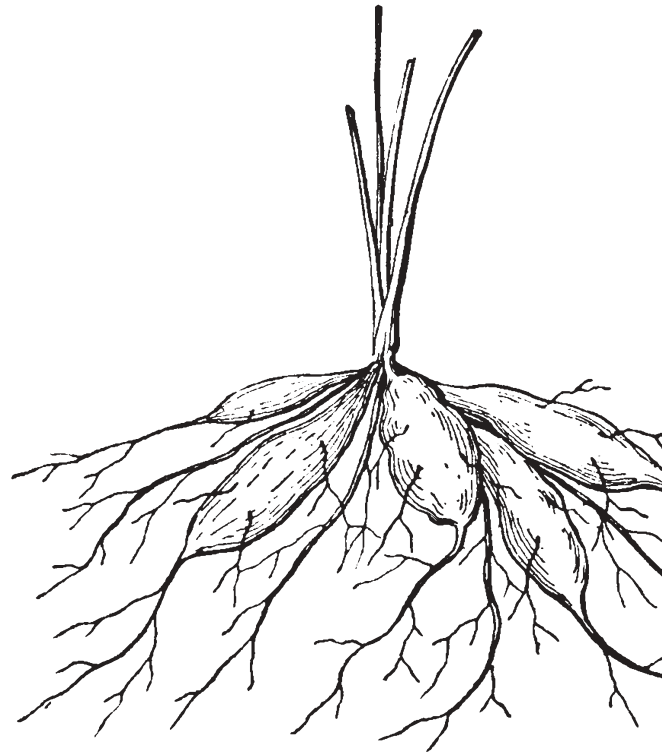


upon this corpse
planted its roots
into the flesh

the songs he tried to bury
the songs i tried to sing

pulsing through the stems
thawing icicles
in the xylem

*because some things are timeless
i don't know how i didn't realize earlier that i love you
you're stuck with me forever*



Chloe Lin is a 15 year old writer who lives in Long Island, New York. She is currently published/forthcoming in Rattle, Young Writers, Horse Egg Literary, and she is a finalist in 1455's 3rd Annual Teen Poetry Contest. She is a submissions reader for Herricks OPUS and the Young Writers Initiative. When Chloe is not selling her soul to a Google Document, she enjoys messing up recipes and folding paper cranes. She tweets @chlo_voyance.

Exitium Me - Poem

By Cassidy Bull

Cracks in the pavement spread like skeleton roots of an ancient tree.
I see the remnants of the people
who once ruled, who were once so trusting,
who thought their pristine collections of perfect paraphernalia were permissible,
thought they were invincible.

Dirt and dust and darkness fill my every breath.
A cough, a wheeze, a grunt—
the sounds that fill this brutally barren
wasteland. A green-scape made a gravesite by the greedy.
So foolhardy.

And with my every step, everything seems to get drier.
The ground seems to be suffocating
in on itself. The deeper I go the deader this dump gets as the day drags
on. The grey swallows the screams of the souls that once smiled at the splendor
before they were destroyed by *el eliminador*.

I am on the path of the extinct who once prospered,
who felt the wind and the rain and the sun that has since turned to cold.
The planet cried *prichina pozhaluysta*,
but we did not listen to the cliffs that we conquered, we had to crush them until they crumbled
into nothing. We could not be troubled.

In the distance I see the outline of something that used to shine,
but is now obscured by the opaque
heavy filth that impossibly floats despite the shrinkage
of the breathable. Our offenses were opium, we were obsessed with objecting the oath
we made to our home. The opposite of growth.

Each day I wonder if I am all that is left
of the hopeless—

the ones that live without being alive
because we halted any help we could have handed to our home choosing *horreur*,
leaving me with only disorder.

I wish I could go back to the days
with all the colors,
but I am stuck here in the darkness without a drizzle of the dazzle of the days without decay
and I am calling for the constellations to cause some change in the chaos, but they just cackle
and remind me I was detestable.

Cassidy Bull is a twenty-year-old writer and poet from Tampa, Florida. In 2021, she graduated from Johns Hopkins University with degrees in Earth and Planetary Sciences and Political Science. She has a short story appearing in Hobart.

Mother Tongue - Poem
By Julia Ginsbach

sleep. you are chaste, unburdened still
always blue and too shallow,
not enough rain for a thunderstorm,
stuck inside your feeble spine.
we have not yet found water— drinking,
until you choke on your cowed tongue.
i am the cessation of all things,
containing only entropy, my love. ah, but
to be young; saccharine and giddy,
forgetting the children, they are wasted
potential. candlelight dims the
textbook pages, affords no more freedom
from the coordinate plane. bounded
equations chained beneath the asymptote
curve of your chin same as your mother's,
and her mother and her mother's mother
before her. they wept between the intervals,
too thin, too thirsty mouths full of sandpaper.
her teeth were a prison, self-fulfilling prophecy
the same as you—
silence is always inherited

Julia Ginsbach is 18 years old, a student, poet, and self-described baking enthusiast from Wisconsin (United States). She loves writing, eating pie, and also cows.

first concert of the year, montrose saloon, 6/4/21 - Poem

By Emily Murman

the fiddle soars over our heads
to the ceiling, loud & florid in
the stifling air there.

low sun through the open back door
our bare arms almost stuck together
your face my moony joy—

to kiss your full, freckled cheek
to be pressed fast in your palms
what other bliss is there?

in this bar I swear
I'll be your bonny sweetheart
abide the onrush of the enemy

so taken w/ you,
by the ferocious urge to stomp,
that I don't realize I've blistered,
left a little blood inside my shoe.



Emily Murman is a poet & educator from Chicago. She holds an MFA in poetry from National University. Her debut chapbook, "SHRIVEL AND BLOOM," was published via Dancing Girl Press in June 2021 & her chapbook "I want your emergency" is forthcoming via Selcouth Station Press in July 2021. She can be found on Twitter @emilymurman.

Flash - Poem
By Srishti Jha

You took my picture
And I memorized,
Of how you asked me to smile
suddenly,
and I knew how to be
the next time I am clicked.

Now each time
I sit
Thinking of how I felt
When I looked at you
And you, behind the camera.

The way our eyes met,
flash within flash.

Srishti Jha is a freelance writer from New Delhi, India. Her interests lie in writing about the poetry of things, people and nature. She also writes short/flash fiction and reviews books, unpublished works of early career writers on her website srishcrits.blogspot.com. For reviews and her writings, connect with her on her instagram at [@srishti_and_poetry_](https://www.instagram.com/srishti_and_poetry_)

The Disassembly - Poem

By Sophia Holme

Previously published in the anthology "She, Her, We"

It's so tempting to invest, every glowing figure
a candidate for the hero narrative I keep folded up
somewhere.

Maybe it's not important for you
to understand

And yet then, there's a little thing
waiting out there
in the night.

Yet then, I twist again feel myself step
inside

In that friend and stranger sweet spot,
the well known place, the pub light, the dandelion.

Staring across as my cheeks prick with
fire and the night soaks
like a tiramisu.

Catching the newfound eyes, blue lashed aquariums, thinking,
there must be an altar
where I can lay down my self
loathing, a you're right I'm wrong
of epic proportions, I am talking about a
five year plan

b, I can be
resorbed and
reformed without ever really feeling
what made it so hard, without the
dissembling.

But that rich inner rim of my mind is all I have
if I have anything to go on.

I am just a little thing
is it my fault if I have a keener sense?
you don't want me well you're not going to have me then

sheets of ice
laid to rest across
black parking lots.
I trickle through the poisoned architecture
until I bring the whole thing down,
open inside, chewed up, you could kick a block
of the wood, to see the spongy little tunnels
I traversed. But why would
you?
Maybe it's not important for you
to understand,
The pathos I bring to a
light-bleached plastic
childhood artefact, the feeling's all I have,
but nothing's new now.
Later, much later, the man I call in the middle
of the week night, shakes his head standing
broadly over his desk,
the weak light, no match
for his features, tossing him
into harsh relief. He tells me,
no one could ever
fall for you.
They would fall
right on through.

Sophia Holme (23, she/her) is a poet, writer and bookseller made in Canada but now based in Oxford, England. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Southchild Lit, Not Deer Magazine and elsewhere. In her spare time, she enjoys running, reading bits of several novels at once and drinking a lot of coffee. Find her on Twitter @HolmeSophia

mid-summer in ephemeral things - Poem

By Laiba Yousuf

mid-summer skies wrap themselves around you like a warm blanket / they were like oceans
upon hurricanes / sun-kissed freckles / cherry lips / we're bathing in cherry sunlight / my skin
blushing like those soft petal trees / & oh, her delicate kisses sprinkled with dandelions / vanilla
ice-cream from the tuckshop outside middle school condenses on your tongue like morning dew
on damp grass / we pour humidity in plastic cups like strawberry smoothies for breakfast / the
neon sun tucked itself into pages of tomorrow / it's love



Laiba Yousuf is a 13-year-old South Asian poet who enjoys reading and doodling in her spare time. The above piece, "mid-summer in ephemeral things" is inspired by the ephemeral quality of love & the summers that seem to burn away - it has also won the 3rd place in TYWI's burning summer contest.

Blooming - Poem
By Kulsy Kashmiri

Bloom in your beauty,
My curious child.
Set alight to the fixation of features,
Instead roar inside.
I can see your petals burning away,
I begged the women that dance in the sky.
She wrapped love around you,
Like a blanket of fire to etch away the false,
Promises you made.
You know who you are,
Who you will become.
Embrace the stars that flower in your heart,
Allow them to settle their roots.
As they grow with you,
Grow inside you.
You are not destroying yourself,
But creating something new.

Kulsy Kashmiri is a 24 year-old London poet, publishing student and sci-fi enthusiast. Her poetry exists as an extension of herself, deep diving into themes of love, mental illness, beauty and existence.

Behind My Back
By Ray Cheng

The dusk had already dropped
when you break the silence. I

Wake up a dazzled body,
glaring at the ghastly emptiness

Unfolding before my eyes. You
stop short of a blink, right as I

Paralyze from the sheer havoc—
the shades of crimson strewn across the floor,

A devil-soured limb dangling above
my wrinkled torso, almost a fading blemish

Existing to be removed,
fermenting into fever dripping

A shower of death.
A tremor smites my back. You

Arch your cheeks,
Carving those ill dimples to

Say this is all just
a living nightmare I ought to endure. I

find your line
very much true, so much so

A crack of ceiling
claps down the fracture of my spine

Before I could
utter a word from my heart. Your

Dimples darken
and darken and deepen into

The unfathomable
abyss of my life. You

Inch closer and closer,
your scent

Biting, throttling me
with unrelenting calm. I

Cuddle your untouched waist,
my burning cheeks meeting the

Frost of your skin.
The world stops as

You fade the smirk
engraved onto your face, and all that's left

Is a shed of
shadow behind my back.

Ray Cheng is a 16-year-old high school junior from Kuwait City, Kuwait. His work has been recognized by numerous publications including Dialogue & Discourse, HOPE Humanities Journal, and Illumination. He is an alumnus of the Kenyon Young Writers' Workshop. Aside from writing, he finds solace in gazing out on the skylines of Kuwait City. He thinks you're wonderful.

Time - Poetry

By Aisha Malik

My loneliness upends me
Sends me to myself
I am only half a daughter, sister, friend, lover and neighbour
The core of my being molted
They only see what they want to see
I am unto myself what time is to humanity
I am isolated while my neighbour extrapolates numbers on a graph
I am supposed to write, what do I write about?
I exist by myself
I come home to the bitter sound of desperation
Anger and grief
I come home to myself

Aisha Malik is an emerging writer. Her poems have been featured in 3 Moon Publishing, Dreams Walking, Sisters of Frida, The Bitchin' Kitsch and The Door Is A Jar. She hopes to publish a book one day. She can be found on twitter @aishatweetsalot.

Repainting Dorian

By Adeline Cruz

Previously published in Oyster River Pages

What I didn't realize was the canvas mirrored my skin,
stolen flesh stretched out across wooden bones.

I traced the figure's smile,
pigments luscious enough to lick.
I pledged my soul to keep my beauty,
fleeting passions, and prizes of youth
so I could continue conquering
the names etched within my yellow book.

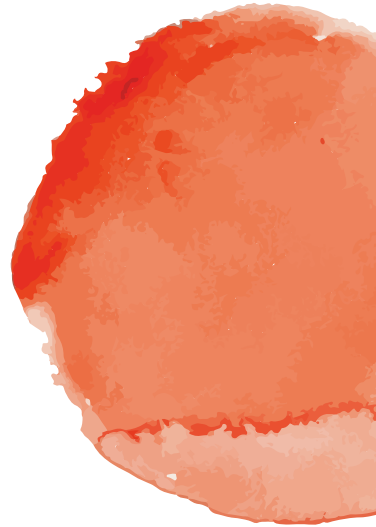
Then my lord may finally be proud of me
and the man I could someday become

I built a shrouded house to hide my secret,
washed white with milky latex
and sanded down with sin
until it glowed like the moon on its brightest day
masquerading as my friend.

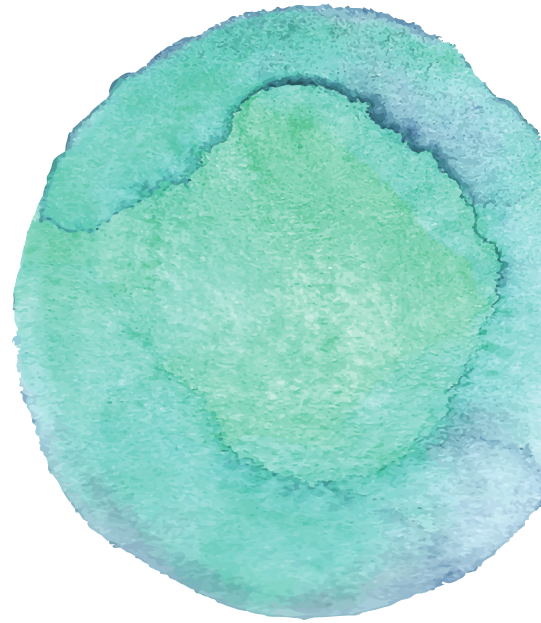
I thought he would be proud to hear my exploits
to see the indulgence in my sense
but the abject horror in his eyes
said I strayed too far
when I took another's life.

So I stripped the gold leafing
enclosing my wispy frame
Took daggers to my promise,
palette knives to scrape the paint:

Ivory from the pageant smile
rosy red from off my cheeks
copper from my silky spirals
the glint from envious eyes of green
Hands that never knew an honest day
the haughty puff inside my chest
a snicker that could crack a spirit



the listless rock inside my breast
I plunged the knife into the depths
until the color drained from every pore
until a crash called my lord to find me
crumpled on my sword.



Adeline Cruz is based in Minnesota, braving the long, bitter winters with the help of her trusted yaktrax. She has previously written for the National Parks Service, has work published or forthcoming in Grand Little Things, Penumbra, and The Pointed Circle. When she isn't composing poetry, you might find her whipping up a new recipe or meandering through a state park.

Real - Poem

By Sneha Sadhukhan

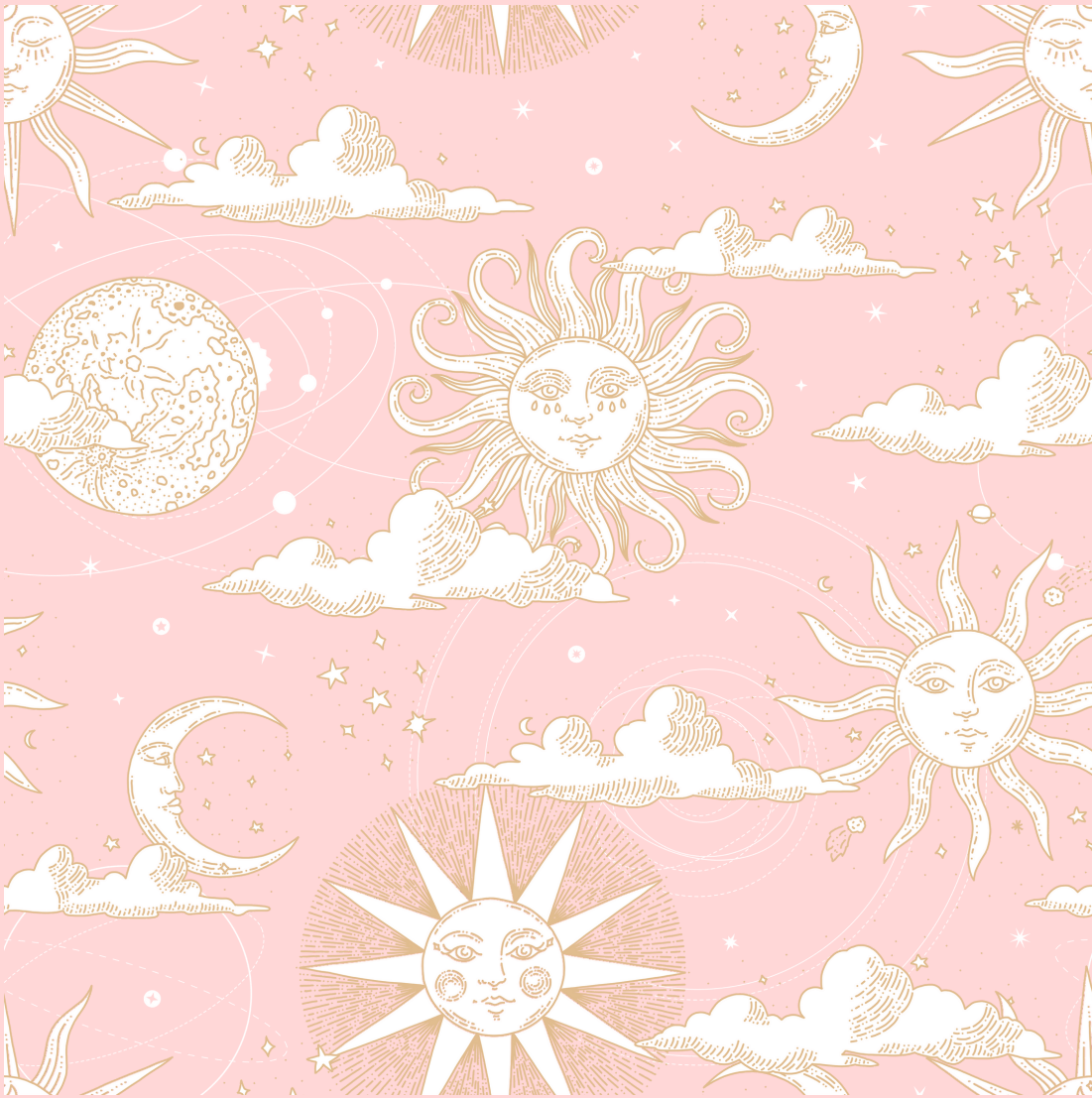
I wish I could find a place where
Our edges meet and hold together
I'd be content if we fit alongside
Each other- lost forever
Airborne in the infinities of youth

And I still search for the warmth of love
Alone in the endless skies
Drowning in the pretty colours
Of sunset and the pearlescent moonlight
That beautifies my aureate solitude.

I am stardust- born from the death of
The brightest star in the universe
The biggest supernova that
Rained down pieces of my being
And formed a heart so fragile- it cracked at one touch.

Drunk in the lonely beauty of
The million galaxies in me that shine
Brighter than anything tangible
I've ever known or touched-
My eyes search the infinite multitudes for you

There you are- right there
So close I can almost feel your breath
So near that I can almost see the golden flecks
In your deep, expressive eyes- and that damn smile
That smile that made me lose my mind-
And wish that you were real.

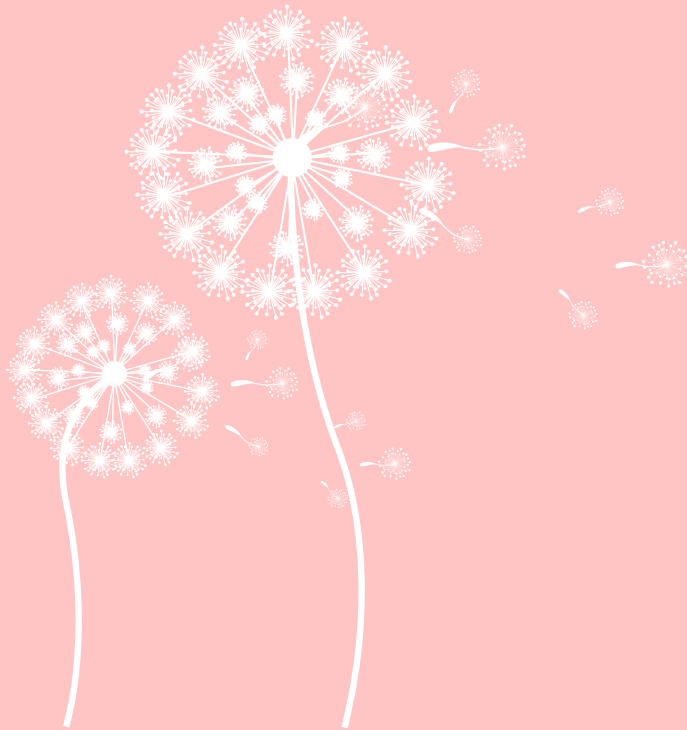


Sneha Sadhukhan is a 16 year old high school sophomore from Kolkata, India who writes as a hobby. Previously unpublished, she dreams of being an established author some day. A permanent fixture on the Creative writing section of her school magazine, her other hobbies include obsessively reading(and rereading), baking, ardently debating social issues, overanalyzing every lyric in the entirety of Taylor Swift's ever-growing discography, and falling far too much in love with fictional characters

Carefree - Poem

By Lisa Vo

Laying on top of a hill in the middle of spring / With dandelions passing over your head /
You see that the sun is trying to blind / And you close your eyes / Raise your arms to cover
the sting / And when you're blind / You can hear the birds chirping / And feel the wind
passing over your face / Cool and subtly / Turning your head from side to side / You keep
your eyes closed / And soak it all in / The breeze / The soft fabric against your skin / And a
nod of hopefulness blowing in from the north



Lisa Vo is a 19-year-old contemporary fiction writer, poet, and painter based in Lake Worth, Florida. Her work mainly revolves around youth, nature, and the exploration of identity. She studies at Ringling College of Art and Design, pursuing a Creative Writing BFA along with a business minor. You can find her on Instagram @lisylloo824.

sweetheart - Poem
By Emma Geller

in the bar, her silver
hips swirl
in circles,

across cement floors,
on tables too.
a velvet flick

of her wrist
reflects neon
Blue Moon signs.

She's from Neptune,
New Jersey,
With a
dreamcatcher
hanging from
her earring—

an eyelash
of destiny,
whispering fortunes
in her ears-

singing her songs
of cracked stars
& broken hearts.

Emma Geller is a poet, singer, and actress from Boston, MA. She is 24 years old. Her many passions include horror movies and listening to Elliot Smith while drinking too much coffee. Her work has been published in The Offering & Goat's Milk Magazine. You can find out more about Emma on Instagram at [em_me_line](#).

Dusk - Poem
By Srishti Jha

Newly washed plates,
couplets of the cups
fresh and highlighted.

Tastefully served -
opposite afternoon's heaviness,
opposite summer's slumber.

Light plays its part and
time slows down its servings;
light, bright yellow,
gold, orange.

Now, less orange.
Now, less yellow.

Grey.

Black.

Cleaned inside out,
empty heart and empty mind;
clinking aloud,
pans of silence rattle awake.

With life but no chaos,
with breaths but no screams.
Wishes toppling down with wishful thinking.

Dusk to dawn.
The lifeless sees what the living feels.

Each droplet reaching ends, already known.
A circle of its path decided before the start.

A soul in the house (or two),
growing up or growing apart.
None can tell who is running away and where?
Who is calling out whom?

Eyelids heavy,
the child rocks itself to sleep.
On the lap of her grandmother that slumber afternoon,
the evening fell and winter bloomed.

The lifeless dried -
away from the stench of the dying human;
of their mundane days.

Srishti Jha is a freelance writer from New Delhi, India. Her interests lie in writing about the poetry of things, people and nature. She also writes short/flash fiction and reviews books, unpublished works of early career writers on her website srishcrits.blogspot.com. For reviews and her writings, connect with her on her instagram at @srishti_and_poetry_

Dawn rises - Poem

By Ashryel Mavericks

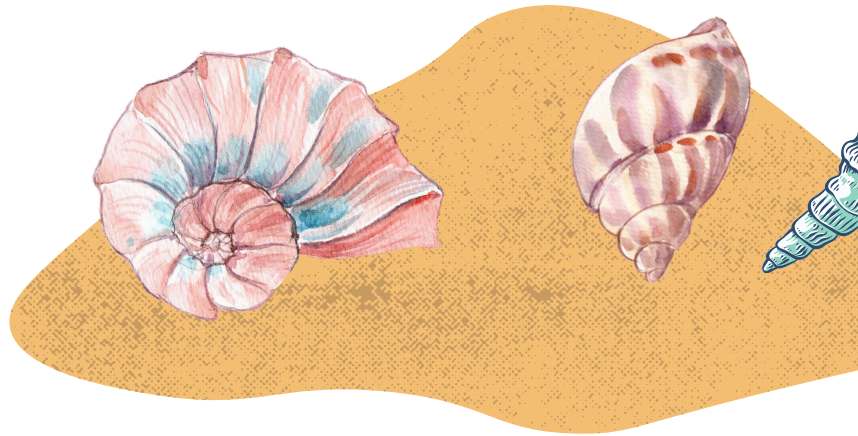
Rosy fingered dawn rises above us,
Waves of light rushing over the sea,
Painting the sky in shades of gold.

For a moment, the sea stood still
The air grew colder,

A gentle breeze drifts
over our entwined hands,
We walk together,
Our feet sinking in the sand

A golden glow sweeps over your skin,
Your eyes shine with ethereal amazement,

And I cannot help it anymore,
I plummet for you,
and curse the gods in silence.



Ashryel Mavericks is an 18-year-old undergraduate English student from India. She has a profound love for writing, literature and artistic expression and hopes to change the world one word at a time. You can find her lurking on her Instagram @quill.and.ink.stories"

Solar Culture - Poem

By Caleb Sa

Honey dripping from lips; amber eyes under thick lashes; dehydration; *heat*; tan knuckles brush a sunburnt cheek; saltwater; the a.c cut out, i think it's broken; better open the windows; the hot wood of my porch burns the bottom of my feet; sheer curtains fluttering; honey drippers; stained popsicle sticks; toss out all the chocolate, it's the wrong season for it.

Saltwater taffy and the sea; there's the glare off the water, salt settling into windblown hair; decaying reeds; jellyfish precariously tossed back into the freezing sea; clear day, it's warming up, it'll be 92° by 12; sand burns bare feet; the tide tried to steal my surfboard, but I won at the loss of my sunglasses; sunburnt shoulders; gelato on the pier; you have no idea how hard it was; to ride my bike here.

He stays my eyes are pretty; their shape, their color, the curve of every lash; once he said my eyes were the color of coffee, brewed into molten gold by the sun; (i never believed him); '*eres linda*,' he said when we laid on the docks; he always pretended not to know Spanish in our language classes; so "no," I said, " I am not."; '*Y eres muy bonita*'; I got in trouble for pushing him off the dock but even in the water he laughed and laughed and laughed (there's something gratifying about that).

Everyone should have a *taste* for adventure; but that vanishes when you meet a person with a *lust* for it; backwood explorations; we stand barefoot in a swamp as we tried catching fireflies; there's no such thing as d i s c o n n e c t; longing; waning; humid nights; build a campfire and instead of smores I'll teach you how to roast roses.

I long for the slow moments, I'm affection starved and I want to show you my world; sit on the hood with me as we watch the sunset disappear through the middle of the wild citrus valley; delay the aggressive; limit variation; this is our moment; the evening grows cooler; at 9 m of the first August day, we'll still be on the hood as we watch our summer burn; babe, tienes que prometerme que te encontrarás allí.

Spanish translations:

'Eres linda', 'you're cute'

'Y eres muy bonita', 'And you're very pretty'
'tienes que prometerme que te encontrarás allí.',
'You have to promise that you'll meet me there.'



Commonly writing under the pen name, Cosmogyril, Caleb works majorly with micropoetry, the focus of many being that of the state of mind. She likes to write in a way that her short poems can hold a haunting sense of casualness with an intense drop and a hopeful ending. With inspirations such as Yung Pueblo and Eden, Caleb enjoys the softness set into poetry, and when they may seem plain, but are as intricate as sunflowers.

Of yellow window panes and watermelon scents - Poem

By Kshitija Aherkar

supposed to be cruel
and happy in blue:
garden fresh fruits, strawberry milkshakes, chocolate mousse,
jump ropes, chain tags, hula-hoops
unclouded skies, lazy afternoons
with secret handshakes and cherry red smiles
and two spoons
and a bowlful
vanilla ice-cream
lies clear sky and yellow window panes
emanating warmth of sun,
warmth of his arms
to the times of late nights and wishes on shooting stars
middle of the year and middle of the start
all but rejuvenating unspoken feels
in a mauve halter dress,
tan skin and ripening watermelon scents
she wonders at the sky
with just her conscience,
for she is her only companion
this summer and after.

Kshitija (She/Her), 19, is a student and a budding writer from Mumbai, India. Her work portrays a kaleidoscope of mental health, identity, magic, visions, critiques, nature, and timelines. She loves talking and finds meaning by narrating stories, being a spoken poet. In her spare time, she enjoys Ukulele, calligraphy, and paperwork.

Rivers - Poem

By Amelhyne O'Regan-Farineau

I left you streams of ink
On the pages which you wrote
Hoping you would follow it
To the source of the code
Finding welcomed river banks
A place you could call home
But you traced it back to someone
Who never made your heart their home
So, when you see the stream again
Know my river dried out
With my open mouth.

Amelhyne O'Regan-Farineau is a 17-year-old teen filmmaker, podcaster, and writer from Ireland. She hosts a podcast called 'Talk About It', which works to destigmatize mental health for teens and young adults. Her article 'The Definition of Beauty' has been published in A Lust For Life and her poem 'My Dear Bluebird' in Metamorphosis Magazine.

Ice Cream for Breakfast - Poem

By Emily Joy Oomen

I start the day by diving into a pool of sprinkles
No regrets
My platinum blonde hair tangled in the night
Of dancing 'til 4 a.m. like no one was watching

Every day is my birthday
And life is its cake

You and I are cheap queens
Who live inside a pop music video
Slutterflying through the night
And getting boba before
We sneak into the midnight premiere

We forget the boss's expectations
Everything our parents ever told us
The only ones we answer to are
Female comics and Dolly Parton's hairdo

Walking down these seedy streets
The look you give me
Is our invisible friendship bracelet
You'll be the one by my side
Friday forever
Partner in crime

Lying in this sugary mania
Neon pink lights behind my eyes
I never want to go to sleep
I'll eat ice cream for breakfast forever



Emily Joy Oomen is a 22-year-old journalist and multimedia poet from the Pacific Northwest. Her work has been featured in BBC, The Wall Street Journal, the Athens International Video Poetry Festival, Vice, BuzzFeed, and many other publications. She has a B.A. in English from the University of Washington and helps curate videos for Button Poetry. You can find her on Instagram @poetic_espresso and on Twitter @emilyjoyoomen.

Falling - Poem

By Julia Dun Rappaport

Gripping the crumbling
Earth, grimy fingers dig
As the orb whirls faster and faster. Eyes behold the spinning fright
Ahead. Faster and
Faster. The sturdy wild greenness
Fades with
Ocean's mellow blue. Faster and
Faster, the Earth slips from reach. Crashing,
Body is
Flung into the unknown areas of the
Universe. The dirt disappears from
Hands. The ringing ceases. Ears are
Coated with a chill of tranquility.
Weightless in the shimmering dark.
The twinkling diamonds that were
Admired from the
Safety of Earth are now
Lit. Flaming nothingness is faced
Now.
And yet,
Unfazed and
Without worry, a mind is the
Floating emptiness.
Blank.

Julia Dun Rappaport is a writer, poet, and artist. She was an Honorable Mention in the 2020 Longfellow Student Poetry Contest, the 2020 winner of her school-wide poetry slam, and the 2018 Graduation Writing Award. Her poetry has been published in The Boothbay Register, the book, "A Celebration of Poets," Skipping Stones, the Auroras and Blossoms PoArtMo Anthology and Cathartic Literary Magazine. She was also selected to be her school's 2021 graduation speaker. In addition, her designs and paintings have won several school and town art contests, as well as the Creative Communications national art contest. Julia is fourteen years old and lives outside of Boston with her family.

What I Wished For the Summer

Of Jazz Heavens: a Contrapuntal Poem

By Yasmine Bolden

this year, give me something to believe in	<i>super flower blood moon as my celestial sky twin,</i>
soaring sunwars, give me the promise of	<i>my grandfather sun-charioting right into town &</i>
nana's penumbra shadowing a place for me,	<i>showing me where to stand, holding a miles davis</i>
shaped space for me	<i>hit record: i'm sounding like the smooth jazz i listened to, like</i>
melanin allowed to darken & beach days	<i>gone too soon, like what poppa played on the way to school, this</i>
returning me to before i disliked my singing.	<i>voice, silently saying i love you i love you i love you with</i>
hot-sauce seasoned scat-scored tunes,	<i>enough promise to power the black hole at the center of everything</i>
the whole girl coming out of the darkening	<i>to make up for the constellations i didn't map sooner, for</i>
the moonshine every matriarch deserves and	<i>"didn't live to see,"</i>
throat starbursting with love	<i>connecting the nebulous family cosmology to me & and my longing</i>
that draws ligature-like lines	<i>& the galaxy not yet knit that i'll birth from my hands in poioumenon.</i>



Yasmine Bolden is a Pushcart Prize and Scholastic American Voices nominated Black American poet and author based in Virginia. Her work has appeared in Perhappened Magazine, Write the World Review, and Ghost Heart Literary Journal among others. At heart, she's still the voracious reader who talked her way into getting more than the five book limit from her elementary school library. You can find out more about her on Twitter @blkpunningpoet and on Instagram @blackpunningpoet.

VOICE - Poem
By Thee Sim Ling

my jaws, steel
prison bars
delight in locking
my soul in my inferior,
mortal body. people ridicule
the clumsy red dancer, slipping and
stumbling in the cavern of snow-white
stalactites and stalagmites. the strands of muscle
in my throat vibrate defiantly, play their ear-splitting tune. if they were visible
in the mirror i do not know what i would do: either delicately finger them
to force the notes in tune, or rip them out of my neck. i root not
for the mermaid princess but
for ursula.
i have a secret hunger to steal another's voice and replace my own. it
does not tune out history but it does empower the instrument
of the flesh. my wicked face chains my mind to
silence. dreams evaporate as the microphone
of my heart cackles. as agonising noises
reach my ears every moment i speak
i wonder what i would
give up for a
voice
that

is
not
mine.



Thee Sim Ling (she/her) is a young Southeast Asian writer. She has placings in numerous writing competitions, including being a winner for the 2021 Inklings Book Contest, and her work has been published or is forthcoming in Stone Soup, Shameless Magazine and Skipping Stones. Outside of writing, she's a technology enthusiast and a proud INTJ. <https://lucindathee.com>

unknown - Poem
By Srishti Pandey

Oh, that person,
I've never met before
Is so kind,
Understands me more,
Than every friend
I still call mine.
Miracle.
Or my dreamcatcher knows?
Or is it how DMs work?
Delayed texts, which
Distant the known;
And discovery
Brings others home.
Or is it me?
Overthinking
Expecting
Too much
From people, who should
Have cared,
And longing for those who do.
I don't know,
I don't know them.
It's not anyone maybe,
Just the DMs.

Srishti Pandey (she/her) is 15-year-old and hails from India; a sleep-deprived teenager, with big dreams. When she is not studying math, physics or chemistry, she finds solace in the literary world. She might be slightly addicted to the band – tomorrow x together. You can find her on instagram: @its.me.srishti and twitter: @srishtipandey_.

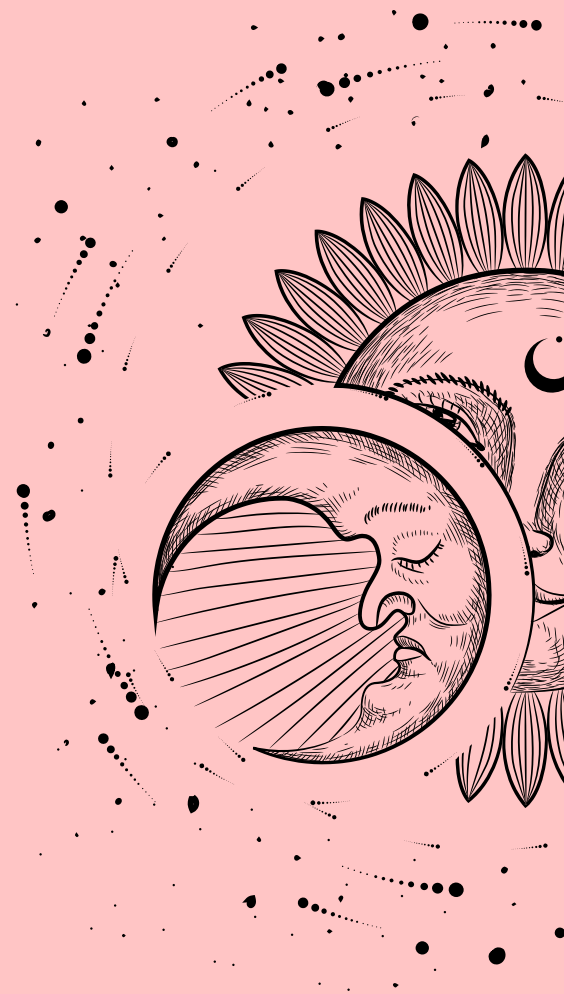
Orbit - Poem

By Neha Varadharajan

Circle me with the milky way, dip me in
your morning coffee, hold my palms close to
your face and say, never felt this way about anyone
before. Hold your sun at an angle to radiate my Earth
so far away, and like this, our differences called
Mercury and Venus won't stand in our way.

Give life to my oceans, flutter my grassy arms around
the yard we call home. Keep my heart warm and sunny,
melt the cold glaciers that run and the wind bows
down to our blossom. Claw your way out of
the shadows, kiss my hand, and bend
to the waterfalls in respect as blue sapphire splashes down.

Twenty-four flowers swap pollen with your dust as the
breeze makes us dance. Fly, with the solar system
far away, nine of those friends in our small
courtship, orbiting around you
at a distance close, yet far away.



Neha Varadharajan is a 14-year-old high school writer from India with a taste for words, and unsurprisingly, this is literal because her meals consist of nothing else. Her work appears in Dreich Mag, The WEIGHT Journal, and Page and Spine. She is an Incandescent Summer Studio mentee in poetry, and her flash piece, "Happy Ending", appears in Issue IV of the Sweek Journal as courtesy to its shortlist at the Sweek Microfiction International Contest, 2019. Her work is as short as possible to make it as memorable as possible.

fallen angel - Poem

By Matt Hsu

Previously published in Galliard International Review

his wings were clipped on a tuesday,
a belated christmas gift. there was gold
on his hips and bamboo strapped to his back.
he could draw picasso with no hands
and best anyone at basketball. mom
carried him home on a throne of jade and cobwebs.

buffed with seaweed; he planted a flag
at the top of the slide. middle fingers up and reigning
with a double-barrelled gun. he knew how many seconds
were in three hours (more than ten thousand),
and he sprinted faster than all the girls, even
when wearing khakis. just like harry potter, he
had black hair and round glasses,
so of course, he was the chosen one.

with sharpie, he spelled it out
he would dominate in seven different
languages, including chinese and russian
and release honeybees into the skies.
it was prophesied because it was written on cream-
colored paper, he told himself,
rubbing the asphalt off his elbows.

after eleven years, the sun stopped
shining on his shoulders. it was strange and certainly
quite uncomfortable—the rice cakes he sold
in his backyard went stale, and the stuffed manatees
began jumping from his bed, and for the first time,
his knees hurt from his tumble to earth.

his billboards were ripped down by seagulls—
from the wire frames spilled blood, deemed
tasty by the gulls. they painted over his rainbow
with black tar, sewed his teeth together with golden
spool, smothered him with perfume and paychecks,
and fastened a wristwatch around his neck.

he walks with two feet, now
burning tteok and scallions in the pan and
eating them with a soup spoon. at midnight,
his coven is lined with pearls and broken
pencils. he sings hymns and takes off his shirt
spreading citrus over the scars of
God's fallen angel.

Matt Hsu (17) is a junior at San Francisco University High School in San Francisco, California. He works as a poetry/prose editor at Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine and The Formula. Currently he's working on a YA novel about a lonely assassin. In his spare time, he enjoys playing tennis and eating dark chocolate.

Arles - Poem
By Maria Litrivi
For Vincent

And sadness will last forever
As long as humans forget
And our mother will keep on walking this endless road
And we will stand beside her
Trying to lift her burden
As long as we refuse to remember
And all those prayers for brighter days
Will only bring darker nights
Because as long as we neglect our history
We can only repeat the mistakes of our past

Maria Litrivi is a 16 years old writer from Athens, Greece. She is the author of many (unpublished) novels and dreams of founding her own comic book publishing house. She has attended various writing workshops. She's a musical theater fan and can often be found singing her favorite soundtracks at the top of her lungs.

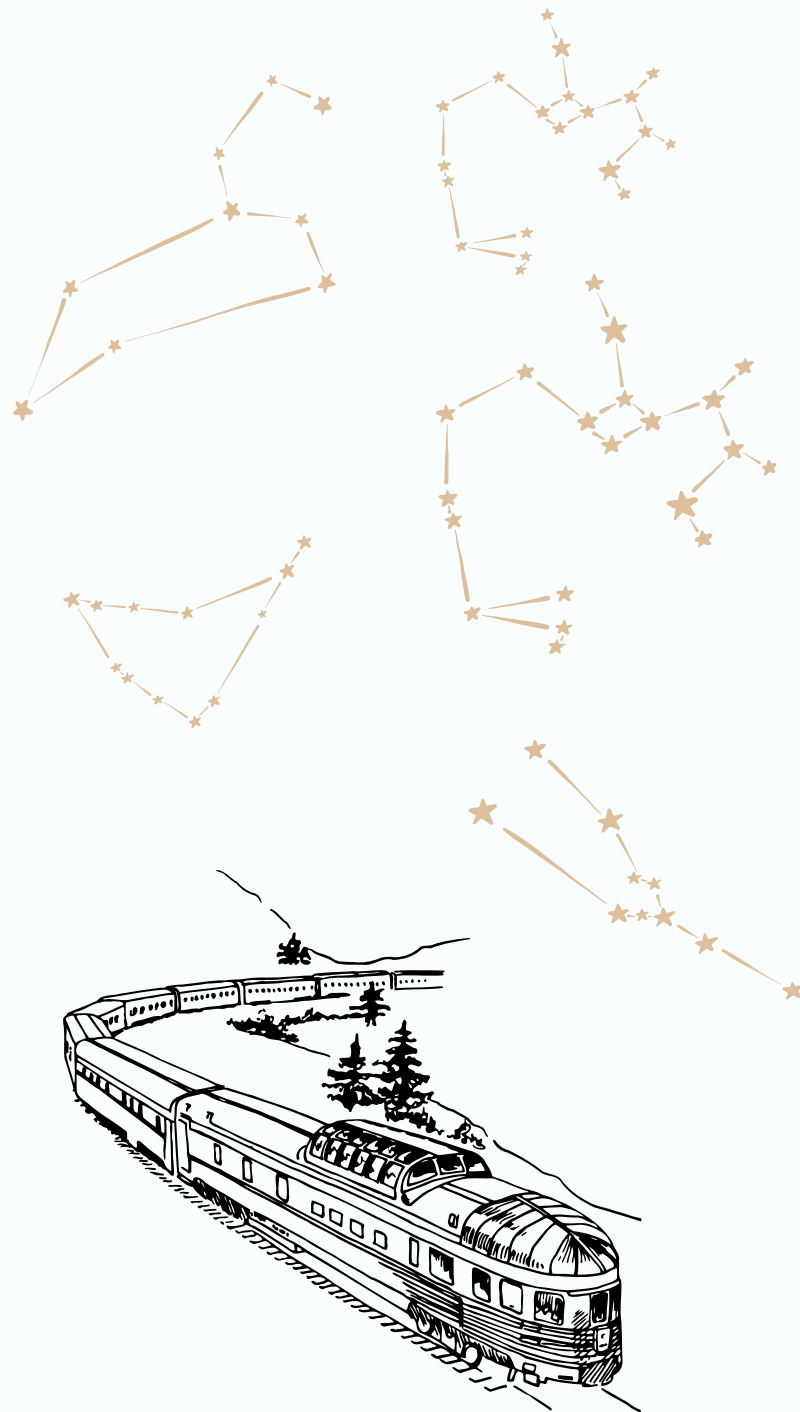
On Tracks - Poem
By Cassidy Bull

An inter-dimensional space
with cable lines snaking across the sky
going from one to another place.

A sense of purgatory hits my insides
and burns through the whole way,
like a heated numbness, it petrifies.

Passing places going about the day,
just a superficial glimpse
into some mystery where I'll never stay.

This backwards rocking is an ellipse
for the space between my split self,
a life here, a life there— neither eclipsed.



Cassidy Bull is a twenty-year-old writer and poet from Tampa, Florida. In 2021, she graduated from Johns Hopkins University with degrees in Earth and Planetary Sciences and Political Science. She has a short story appearing in Hobart.

laundry kingdom - Poem

By Leah Boxley

I overlook
my mountain range of laundry
my seafloor formations of folded towels
mounds of socks and tiny kid tshirts
my kingdom, a towering atlantis
spanning the whole living room rug
it is no tiny feat I maintain the city
I rule its valleys and wandering underpants
I've folded the last linen napkin
"I've done it." I breathe to myself, to the Kate Winslet movie
lulling over my sleepy province.
The townsfolk do not seem to celebrate with me I celebrate
myself, ignored by Kate Winslet as is customary

you know there is no one on this green earth
who can tell you if you're doing it right
no one in the big black sky, either
this is what we all look for, I understand.
We want our therapists to be palm readers
our professors to tell us we're going the right way
We want a server that says,
"I know you'll love the salmon."
We love our sure things
But there are so few sure things
that's a lot of time just waiting
for signs, right answers, yessirs

I value the knowledge that I am small
have worked hard for it
and in the grand scheme, I am not a sure thing
or a resounding answer, a symmetrical equation I am a little thing
doing little things
and this is how I prefer it.
I like to celebrate the finishing of my folding

raising my arms to the ceiling
alone at midnight, in front of my sea of
tidy stacks
it is my celebration to have
and it is better conceding to the quiet
than stalling for the big things that may or may not ever come I
make my own big deals.
Sometimes feel guilty that I do
but I do not let it toss me away (as Katigiri Roshi says) I
go on folding my laundry
cooking mediocre pasta dishes
having slightly awkward dinner parties
I celebrate my tiny kingdom
it is what I have

Leah Boxley (she/they) is a 26 year old poet from southern New Mexico. She is the co-founder of Blackwick Writers Guild based in Longmont, Colorado, which protects and fosters writing of LGBTQ+ writers of all genres and skill levels. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her daughter who is the coolest thing she's ever made.

this tapestry - Poem

By Parker Ussery

and as we stumbled through the
walls caving in, artwork
turned to ash, i turned to notice you
and wondered why i ever thought
healing was meant to happen alone

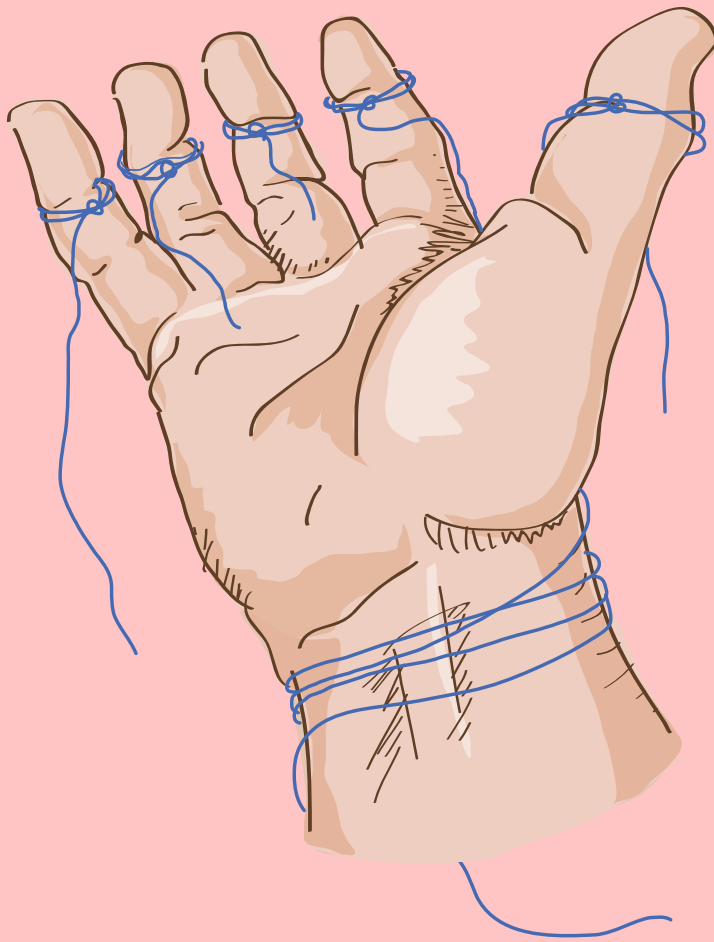
so from that day on i never
left your side, we rebuilt from
the rubble and quite honestly
it was better than before the past
became the present became nothing

because it was no longer
an outpouring of what we
thought was ours, our names
scribbled in black pen to claim
credit we felt we deserved

no, it was our hands intertwined as
we spun new realities, it was
the very fibers of our everything
woven anew into a tapestry
that no one could take credit for

and perhaps this was how
it was always meant to be,
us together in everything
manifesting new hope that
could never be found in solitude.

****Inspiration for this poem was found from The Council by Adelita Husni-Bey.**



Parker Ussery is a sophomore in high school in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. She writes poetry with themes such as identity, liberation, and coming of age. Parker has loved to read ever since she won a reading contest in first grade (having read over one hundred books during that school year), and her adoration of literary works has led to her creating works of her own. In addition to writing poetry, Parker delights in sprinting kinda-fast on her local track, learning Spanish, cooking intriguing new recipes, and snuggling with her baby sister.

eternal mortality - Poem

By Angelina Yeung

i want you to see me: eyes open,
 skies ablaze in smoking trees doused in the gasoline of

your music. our ears: dissatisfied of temple bells ring shame in the distance,
 as if we care to abide by the code that family history has set before us

which for all i care can drown itself
 in the vain of its existence.

is it too much to ask to be seen—as not devil, but a sapien lost
 in a sea of identity crisis.

i want to see you, hear you, to say that i love you, but
 to say that would be to sentence myself to death by

execution, to be chained to stone while firing
 squad's footsteps slowly grow louder, closer, real

and it will flash in an instant, but the beauty is—
 to be executed is to expect death, to live a life before it

the world ends not when the gunshot sears the soul
 the world ends when the gunshot kills it

before it is even alive

to know nothing is bliss
 to know everything is freedom

because freedom they tell me is to be alive.

Angelina Yeung (they/she) is a 15-year-old from Canada. Aside from procrastinating on writing, you can find them debating, watching ungodly amounts of Twitch streams, or surfing through Twitter. You can find them @ang_yeungg on Twitter.

jump - Poem
By Adritanaya Tiwari

Dreaming these days
of movement and faith.
It's been a while since I felt, either. I find,

my feet stuck to the ground,
but at least, you're not drowning in quicksand,
peppered periwinkle
vines wrapped around my feet
on good days
I can move my toes to touch them. My mind,

tells me
to dream -
open leg cuffs and soft sighs,
empty roads and pastel skies.
I put a hand on my chest,
I'm still breathing. Yesterday,

I begged the birds migrating west
to take me with them,
pick me up by my hair &
claw the vines off my feet,
set me free. This morning,

I woke up
to my feet
red, swollen, digging into sand
and water as far as I could see,
still too dark to tell, but it all feels blue.

Where do I go from here?
Does faith give swimming lessons?



Decisions, decisions.

Do I get more time? *Or was the past enough?*

What do I have to lose anyway?

But at least, you're free.

Dawn has arrived

and so

I *jump*.



Adritanaya Tiwari is a 24-year-old dental intern from India. Her work has been in Small Leaf Press, Mark Lit Review, Wrongdoing Magazine, Royal Rose magazine, Serotonin, The Daily Drunk Magazine, Versification Zine, and others.

The Properties of Honey - Flash Fiction

By Natalie Hampton

My mother taught me lessons in honey.

Imagine age five: she smeared it across my bare back and told me to lay on my chest in the middle of a flowering field. Diasporas of burrs dug into my skin, the grass itched, and I wanted to go back to my room and nap and play with Barbie dolls, but she made me lay there until cutting canyons of ants crawled up my back, attracted to the saccharine sweetness, and they left their crimson bites behind.

If you attract men to you, my mother said, all they'll cause is harm.

Imagine age twelve: the cusp of teenager years, and it doesn't yet feel like a movie, but you have a couple more months to learn the script of the main character. Instead of honey sweetening your foods now, its artificial sugar: the low-calorie white powder that never tasted ripe enough, but she threw away the bee's greatest creation, said my clothes were too tight and I needed to maintain my figure.

Your body is a weapon, my mother said, learn how to wield it.

Imagine age eighteen: a legal adult by name only, neither comfort nor ability, and I had never stayed away from home for more than a night, but I needed an escape, moving across the country. She came in my room as I zipped the final bags, flickering match lighting up her grave expression, and pressed the flame into the center of my palm, holding it there as I cried out, a burning eschar to form. She handed me a bottle of honey to pack and said it would soothe the burn better than any medicine.

Hurt yourself enough times, my mother said, and no one else can cause you real damage.

Natalie Hampton is a rising junior at the Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in the Creative Writing Department. She has been recognized at the National level of the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition and by the Harris County Department of Education, the Young Poets Network, the Pulitzer Center, and Ringling College of Art and Design. She serves as an editor at Polyphony Lit and Cathartic Literary Magazine. She has taken online workshops and classes with Iowa, Brown, Sewanee, and Ellipsis Writing.

Cardamom chai - Creative Nonfiction

By Vrinda Gandhi

My mother loves cooking, and her best product is cardamom chai. She sits on the balcony where only the sky and roofs are visible, as the scent of cardamom chai engulfs us, giving us a warm hug. I would like to learn this recipe someday. The other things that give her joy are music and memories. She adores talking about experiences, brought up in casual conversations. Her childhood remembrances fall off her tongue with the hint of chai, and she speaks with bright, wide eyes. I was 7, or in my other very young years, when I visited my mother's parents. Dewas is a small city, close to where they then lived. My mother's face regained her gone years just by hearing her birth city's name. I was curious; I had never seen a village as loose as Dewas. I was surrounded by my mother's recollections of her past self. A young daughter reflects another young soul. It was just as my mother had told me- colonies, kind people and cheap snacks. Dewas smelled like closeness, desserts dipped in sugar syrups and crushed leaves. You could feel the texture of leaves while walking through its streets, as the slow wind blew in the sunny afternoon. "The houses were built together, but that was not the reason why the neighbours were like a family," she says now as we recall our time in Dewas, cupping the teacup, "it was because they were kind to each other and honest to themselves."

I imagine her younger version picking up sand. The grains slipping away and leaving debris stuck to her small palms. This reminds me of when she soothes my hair, untangling strands with a soft touch. Maybe her touch is so comfortable that the strands come back to me, while some fall out of pure bliss. Do you love everyone that effortlessly, Mumma?

Back in Dewas, I saw things I wish I did now too. Stray animals, who know all about the people there. I bet you could ask them for directions and they will lead you to your destinations. Wandering around, we encountered a Gola seller and asked him to make one for each of us. We were four cousins, wanting to taste the traditional flavour and savour our necks. Gola is like an ice lollipop- a big cup of crushed ice drowned in thick, sweet syrups. I asked him if he could make a rainbow with the colours. He did not understand, but I was too young to surmise illiteracy, which comes from the roots of poverty. And in India, it follows generations of family like a tradition. He replied, "like their shirt?" pointing to my top. He got it, and he formally referred to me with respect. My green, sleeveless top had many colours on it, and sparkly dots too. It was my favourite, and I promptly wish I could get the courage back to wear open-back tops. Now, I only add them to my shopping cart because the uncovered bare skin scares me. I was carefree about it when my mother used to comb my hair. The children watched him in excitement and being the tallest, I did not have to stand on my tip-toes to observe him. The ice was crushed and made a rushing sound as if it were

late. The blade hit the ice perfectly, and the vendor used an old cloth to help him hold the piece of ice. I was worried if there was enough ice, but then my sister pointed towards the ice-box. It was okay, and we could enjoy our snack without considering the quantities or quality. The vendor handed a big Gola to each of us for ₹5. We enjoyed, cherished that price and piece of ice that probably wasn't healthy. My cousins do remember that moment. It is just an inside joke now, but at that time, it was much more. It was those secret stares and hushing sounds that were made by me as the oldest and the followed gestures by the little ones. I now think if we would see that vendor again, selling small packets of childishness, colours and cloud nine.

I ask my mother what she misses the most, and she said everything. Houses were not better than now in the 1980s, but they were more comfortable. They felt like home, is what my mother said. "I miss those uneven roads the most, or maybe my late-night study sessions. Perhaps, we can only go for a holiday there at this time. I think they broke down the houses and reconstructed them into better ones." I wanted to ask what better means, and what is suitable for the people there. But deep down, I know that the buildings age faster than people, and their walls carry stories of decades. They collect silent eye movements, calm breathing and quiet footsteps during late nights. I do not belong there, in Dewas. My home is where my memories are, and despite loving my brief time Dewas, I have no other recollection of that small city. My mother's home is where her family is, or at least that is what she has told me.

I ask my mother if she would go back to live again, and she nods firmly, but there was a sense of hesitance in her answer. Beside her, her husband is reading the newspaper and my brother is slurping cold coffee. She takes a biscuit from the chair-made table and dips it in the chai. The glucose biscuit is our favourite, and it has a sweet taste with a rough texture. She smiles at me, I share the smile back and we agree on something in our minds. When she takes the biscuit out, half of it is already dissolved in the cardamom chai.

Vrinda is an eighteen year old literature enthusiast from India. She has work forthcoming/in Overachiever magazine, Hooligan magazine and currently is a personal essay writer for the Outlander Zine. She loves street food, vanilla candles and wishes to travel and write stories about obscure experiences of people.

Night Shift - Flash Fiction

By Jihyun Kim

We ran out of small talk. The private yawned, making me yawn as well. I wanted to rub my eyes, but I didn't want to freeze my fingers off by taking off my glove. Even with the gloves I couldn't feel the tips of my fingers. Ten layers of clothing on me and I was still shivering. I just wanted to be done with this two hour shift so I could go back to sleep. These were the nights I envied the Air Force, though I didn't envy their longer service term.

The private on the other hand was chipper. He was now humming the Torch of Anti-Communism, one of the more ridiculous military anthems. Its lyrics were about how we risk our lives to protect the homeland and the people. Was the other side of the border not our homeland? Were the "communists" we were meant to eradicate not our people? "How much time do we have left?" I asked.

The private stopped humming and checked his watch. "About an hour, sir."

"Damn, we still have an hour left."

"We only have an hour left, sir." He chuckled. Always the glass half full guy.

To me it still felt like I've been out here forever.

Normally, by the time you were a sergeant you wouldn't be on the night guard duty. But recently there was an order to stop senior soldiers from putting all the harder work on newbies. It was a good thing; I just wished they had implemented the policy back when I was a private.

I turned my head to look at our base. In the dark I could barely make out the barracks in which my comrades were asleep. The civilians in town were free to do what they wanted when they wanted, but there wasn't much of a night life in this rural nowhere. They would be asleep by now, too. It was my duty to guard them for another hour. Not that there was much I could do if an actual emergency arose.

I blankly stared at the scenery visible through the metal bars, the beautiful nature untouched for almost seventy years. Once a whole nation, now divided by tall fences, topped with barbed wires and all. Once a family, now holding each other at gunpoint. So close yet so far. I've been to Argentina, an actual antipode to where I stood, farthest from here I could ever have been. It was so far that there were no direct flights, but all I had to do was get a transfer at Los Angeles. I've still never been to my grandparents' home town, an hour drive from here if there were roads.

We heard a shuffle. The private immediately positioned his rifle. I tried to make out the source of the sound. We were ordered to shoot all animals on sight to prevent diseases spreading to livestock. If it was a defector, we would have to report it to the superiors. If it was an enemy...

"Who is it!" The private shouted.

"The colonel." The voice muttered. Soon he approached us enough that he was visible. It was indeed the colonel.

“Glass?” the private said with some uncertainty in his voice.

“I don’t know the countersign.” The colonel replied, his hands now in the air. “I’m sorry, sir. I can’t let you pass if you don’t know the code.” He was still pointing the rifle at him.

The official policy dictated that no one passes without the correct code. The unspoken rule around the base was that if we recognized the person we let it slide. I looked down. If he upset the colonel, I would be in trouble, too.

“Water bottle.” The colonel laughed. “I was just testing you to see if you followed the field manual.”

The private lowered the gun and laughed with him. For once, his by-the-books personality worked in my favor. If he had failed the test, the entire unit would have been punished.

“How are you holding up? I know night shift’s the worst, especially in winter.”

“Proud to serve, sir.” The private was smiling ear to ear. He seemed to be pleased with himself.

The colonel grinned and tapped him on the shoulder. “You guys keep up the good work.” “Good night, sir.”

The colonel disappeared into the dark.

“Man, that scared me,” I said when I was certain the colonel was out of earshot.

“How much time left?”

“Thirty minutes, sir.”

The guys covering the next shift would be up by now, putting on ten layers of clothes so they don’t freeze to death.

“Sergeant, may I ask you something?”

“Go ahead.”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“My girl dumped me when I was a corporal.”

“Oh, sorry I asked.”

“I’m over it. What about you?”

“There’s this girl I really liked, but I couldn’t tell her because I knew I would enlist soon...”

Despite our surroundings, the night was serene. We might as well tell love stories.

Jihyun Kim is a 26-year-old writer from Seoul, Korea. She writes in many genres with overarching themes of Korean identity, womanhood, mental health and the volatile nature of youth. She studies physics and computer science at Konkuk University. When she is not writing or running physics computer simulations, she spends a lot of time on the internet.

The day we took our masks off - Flash Fiction

By Dana Serea

Like winter that held on too long, the plague receded slowly, sputtering false springs and flash snow until one day we looked out the window and saw the sun shining again.

We each resurfaced in our own time, some so starved for contact they were out as soon as the medical cordons came down. Others waited to check the math of the economists ushering us back to work. A few held on for weeks, like shelter animals wary of the cage's open door.

The day we took our masks off wasn't a day, exactly. Whenever it happened, there was a moment we all shared: when the mask dropped and we saw our smiles again, hardened by time and stress but gleaming like a vein of precious ore that only forms under pressure.

There was still work to do, yes. There were dead to mourn, sick to tend to, and losses too raw to speak of. But for a moment, we felt the weight of our long isolation melting away like snow in sunlight. We thought back to ourselves at the beginning of this calamity, before we lost count of the anxious nights and lonely days. And we whispered into reality what we had been too afraid to say back then.

That all winters end. All masks come off. And we will see each other again before too long.

Dana Serea is a rising senior at Rutherford High School in Rutherford, NJ. She loves competitive swimming, photography, and writing. Her work has been published in Canvas Literary Journal, Lunch Ticket, Bluefire, and in the Poetry Society of Virginia anthology. She is the winner of a Scholastic Art & Writing National Gold Medal, as well as a Gold Key winner for the state of New Jersey two years in a row. She won the 1st place in the 2020 Renee Duke Youth Award Poetry Contest for Human Rights for poetry, the 1st place in the 2020 Ringling College for Art and Design "Storytellers of Tomorrow" Writing Contest for a short story, as well as several third places and honorable mentions in national contests for her poetry and prose.

Solomon - Fiction

By Paul Bianco

Solomon was an octopus, and he had a sandwich waiting for him at home. Turkey and mayo on whole wheat bread, the perfect lunch to destress him during the day. Solomon considered his lunches a time to relax in the middle of the day, and he lived close enough to his office that he was able to go home. At home, nobody would interrupt his lunchtime to talk about work, and nobody would judge him or ask him about his responsibilities. At home he was just Solomon, an octopus with a sandwich.

When the current first ripped Solomon away from the sea floor, he didn't notice. He was caught up in a daydream about deli meats and artisan breads. One moment he was considering how people consistently overrated rye (in his opinion, a solid contender for bottom ten breads), the next he was hurtling towards the surface. Towards land. Solomon didn't like the land very much; that was where the air was, and octopi don't mix well with air.

Before he could fully consider what was happening, he was beached. A healthy octopus can survive for almost thirty minutes on land, and Solomon considered himself pretty athletic. He was far from shore, certainly farther than he'd ever been before, but he still felt relatively safe. The real issue was lunch. Solomon was going to miss his sweet, sweet lunch break, and even if he made it home quickly, he would have to rush through his routine in order to get back to work on time. The indignity of it all filled Solomon with rage.

The rage wasn't just at the universe for stealing his beloved lunch today. Some was directed at his demanding coworkers, but it was mostly at himself for being such a pushover. He wouldn't have to worry about finishing his lunch on time, wouldn't need that break in the day, if he just learned how to say no and not take on every responsibility available. There was no use in feeling sorry for himself right now, though, as too long of a delay could make this situation actually dangerous. Solomon was upset his lunch (and, by extension, his day) was ruined, but that didn't mean he wanted to die on some random beach.

The journey to the beach was probably only 50 feet or so, but octopi are small and built for water travel. Just because it was dangerous doesn't mean Solomon would abandon his propriety and use all eight tentacles to move. Modern courtesy dictates that an octopus should use two limbs when walking and four when in a rush. Solomon used three, as he certainly wasn't going to be leisurely about getting home, but he also didn't want any

onlookers to think he was some desperate vagabond. He had an image to uphold, after all. Good old trustworthy, reliable, cool-headed Solomon.

It turns out that it is extremely difficult to walk on land with only three limbs, but Solomon was made of strong stuff and wouldn't give up so easily. That being said, even the strongest run out of energy eventually. For Solomon, this happened with what seemed like twenty feet left before the ocean. A short break was in order, and Solomon still wasn't worried. He was over halfway there in what felt like about fifteen minutes. He was making good time, but he couldn't slow down too much or he would be in hot water. Or rather, out of it.

As Solomon sat there to recharge, his mind began to wander. Not to the work he was going to most likely miss, or the family he hadn't seen in years, or even the path of half-assery that led to his current station in life. Solomon thought about his lunch. He thought about the new loaf of bread he had used, about the day old cold cuts in his fridge, and about the nearly empty mayo jar he had forgotten to replenish yesterday at the store. He would be kicking himself over that one all week. That got him thinking about his weekly trip to the grocer. Mayo was first on the list, obviously. No matter what anyone said, he loved the stuff, and would gladly sacrifice any other condiment for it.

Before his mind could wander further, the quieting lap of the tide brought him back to reality. If it was quieting, that could only mean one thing. The tide was going out, and Solomon had to hurry. Sure, it didn't go out particularly fast, and he could at most sit here for another ten or so minutes, but every inch counted now. Solomon recognized his situation was beginning to look a little sticky, and he had to start moving again.

He still didn't feel particularly unsafe. Sure, he recognized potential doom as a future that could pass if he acted improperly, but Solomon was known as cool headed for a good reason. He kept up well under pressure, and this was a tense situation indeed. What Solomon didn't know, however, is that he is only calm and collected with a crowd. Without the hanging sword of disappointment, Solomon could barely motivate himself, even in such a dire situation. He still moved, but he was only using two limbs now.

Solomon made it another 10 feet or so, nearly within reach of the water, when his energy gave out again. There was a sense of finality to his collapse; the last of his reserves were spent. He had been out of the water for so long now, and he had forced so much work on so few of his limbs. The gentle sound of the waves mocked him: so close, yet perpetually out of reach. Even the tide line, probably a vestige from high tide a few hours ago, was too far away.

Maybe, in its own way, this was an impressive way to go. It wasn't dignified by

any stretch, but he had shown just how much he was capable of. He could find peace in that, in knowing that he tried his best. If he couldn't make it, certainly very few could. At least like this, nobody could call him a quitter.

Although, nobody would know. He was all alone out here. People might just think the pressure got to him and he ran away. People always assumed the worst of you, especially when you're someone with a lot of responsibility, someone they lean on. Any excuse they could make to belittle you and raise their self esteem was valid. The actual reasons were irrelevant. He was already going to be late for his shift at this point, so perhaps this was for the best. If he came in late, he would be met with disapproving glares, hateful whispers, and a private conversation with the boss that would somehow become public knowledge before it was even over. Ironically, the smaller transgression had a larger penalty.

There was some irony, too, in Solomon dying with an empty stomach. He who loved to eat, who found peace in his meals, would die hungry. Even now, he thought more of his lunch than his own family. Maybe that was selfish, but Solomon didn't really care. It felt right: his parents would keep being people after today, but the sandwich would quickly spoil. They never show that part on television: someone dies and the family has to go in and clear out their fridge. It's probably pretty far down the priority list, so the food is already spoiled by the time they get around to it. Maybe it's better that way. It's a metaphor or something.

Solomon realized he had never looked behind him. It didn't matter anymore, but then again, nothing did, so he might as well look. It was a strange and backwards place. A land without water, with strange buildings of many bright colors (so unlike the dull plastics that made up his home), animals moving through the sky like a school of fish, and humans, real flesh and blood humans, walking on the beach. A crowd of humans was gathering at a distance, observing him but not helping. He could tell they were speaking to each other, but couldn't understand their words.

Solomon was suddenly very self conscious. Dying alone he could manage, but now he had an audience. He had to keep up appearances; he couldn't appear weak. Even in death he had to be stoic, responsible, and fight until the bitter end. Even if he didn't want to.

A fine sentiment, but Solomon was still completely out of energy. He was spent completely; there was no secret reserve hidden inside him, no last moment, adrenaline fueled, superhuman feat of crawling to be had. Solomon was still going to die, but he was no longer at peace. If octopi had tears, Solomon would surely be crying right now. Not even that small gift would be afforded to him, though; there was no final cathartic release to be

to be had.

Solomon closed his eyes for the final time, not accepting the end yet welcoming it. His horribly dry skin cracked and bled as his eyes shut, but he ignored the stinging of the blood in his eyes as he took his final exhale.

In that moment, Solomon heard footsteps behind him and a high pitched voice screaming. He couldn't understand the words, not even if they were in a language of his species, but when he felt a pair of small hands lift him off the ground, he understood their meaning. This human, much smaller than the others, wanted to save him. The human carried him towards the water as two more humans, clearly the parents, began to run towards it, shouting something in a seemingly commanding tone. The child ignored their pleas.

When it sounded like the child had reached the water's edge, Solomon opened his eyes to get a look at his savior. He was right, they were a small child. Solomon tried to croak out a thank you, but he couldn't summon any sound. It seemed like the child understood, though, and they smiled briefly before flinging Solomon back into the sea.

Solomon plummeted towards the sea floor, the salt water burning his cracked skin worse than the dry air had moments ago. He was still far too weak, and he couldn't control his descent. The water slowed him somewhat, but he was still moving much too fast. Octopi were designed to move fast in water, after all. In what were truly his final moments, Solomon thought only of the poor child who tried to save him. Solomon appreciated the meaning behind its actions, but, as always, nobody had acted until it was too late. Solomon should have never expected someone else to actually help. All they could do was get his hopes up, and then make things hurt even more. Solomon closed his eyes.

In an empty home far away, a single turkey sandwich sat on the countertop, uneaten.

Paul Bianco is an eighteen year old from New York. He enjoys reading and writing as hobbies, but he dedicates most of his free time to computer science and baking. This is his first submission to a magazine.

Fireflies - Flash Fiction

By Kiara Azuma

An older woman sat near the pond, watching the frogs hop over lily pads. She had a smile creased with wrinkles. Her weak hands reached over to the pond, dipping her fingers into the cold water. Light trickled from her fingers, catching the attention of the creatures surrounding the pond.

Wind blew past her which made her look behind. A younger woman floated towards her, as she controlled the winds.

“Do you need to be inside, Ciana?” The young woman asked.

“No, I want to enjoy these last moments,” Ciana said softly. The young woman’s face turned grim, understanding what was occurring.

“Should I call for people?” she asked. Ciana shook her head.

“You can stay with me, Eteri.”

Eteri took a seat next to Ciana, controlling the winds to remain a cool breeze. Eteri looked back at the village, lights shining from the tents. She could hear the bright chatters of her family and friends, who were unaware of what was happening to Ciana.

The sky turned darker every minute as the sun settled down. Soon, the only lights would be from Ciana’s fingers and the torches in the village. But, Ciana’s lights would not last long.

“I wish you could stay longer,” Eteri whispered. She looked down, not wanting to meet the gaze of Ciana.

“I won’t be gone. I’ll be here by the pond. If you see something light up, it’ll be me.” Ciana held Eteri’s hand, squeezing it with comfort.

Tears stung Eteri’s eyes, but she smiled, not wanting Ciana to see her cry.

Ciana lit up her hand and flicked her wrist so they turned into dusts of light. They settled around the pond, making the water sparkle.

“It’s so beautiful. The way it lights up the pond at night, it should always be this way,” Eteri said.

“I don’t have much time left,” Ciana said weakly. The magic alone had drained more of her life.

Eteri shifted towards her, wrapping her arms around Ciana. Ciana had always been like her grandmother, taking care of her since she was a child. She had always given Eteri a private light show and the perfect gifts on special days. She could not bear to never see her light again.

Ciana slumped in Eteri's arms as her eyes came to a close.

"Thank you for being my light," Eteri whispered as tears fell.

Ciana's body glowed one last time and evaporated into light. Eteri watched as the light swirled around her and the light trickled into bright dust.

Eteri pushed out her hands, letting the winds move with the dust and go towards the pond. It was where Ciana loved the most, it felt right for her to be with the pond at the end.

The dust of lights grew larger as they neared the pond. Eteri stood up, running towards the pond, wanting to see what was occurring. The dust was turning into tiny insects with light.

Eteri blew more of her wind towards them as the tiny insects grew wings from her wind. Eteri's eyes widened, as she realized what Ciana and her had created.

She stepped into the pond, not caring about the ends of her dress becoming drenched.

The little insects surrounded her, twinkling with light. They lit up the pond, just as Ciana had with her magic.

It should always be this way. Ciana had made Eteri's dream come true.

Eteri was at peace, knowing Ciana would be with her even after passing. She would always be here to light up the pond.

People came from the village after seeing Eteri surrounded by insects of light. They watched in awe, as the pond sparkled with beautiful light. The dark pond now glowed as more creatures joined to see the light.

Eteri had her eyes closed, taking in the environment. She flicked her wrist and let the insects fly with the breeze as they fluttered back and forth. They became dancing lights, almost like floating lights of fire in the night sky.

Her eyes opened and looked at her family and friends that had gathered around.

One word fell from her lips, naming the beautiful insects: "Fireflies."

Kiara Azuma is a high school student from California. She has been writing from a young age, participating in numerous writing contests and submissions, to expand her writing skills. Kiara is currently working on a novel with hopes to become traditionally published. Outside of reading and writing, she enjoys watching shows on Netflix and spending time with her family.

La Mer - Flash Fiction

By Yawen Xue

- yesterday the fisherman told me he doesn't fish here anymore -- the sharks are here and they like the smell of blood in the water.
- i think it's you -- the secret you that wants to dive to the deepest edge of the ocean and climb to the highest edge of the sky.
- it's always you.
-
- in the beginning you had radium for eyes. they got intoxicated with sunlight and then, when the starless nights came, they glowed. blue, murky blue, like the ocean you loved so much.
- they used to burn up the whole world.
- the stars above and the inferno below were envious of your radium eyes. they wanted to pull you apart with teeth and glittering claws. they wanted to sprinkle pieces of you in the deep green sea.
- they wanted you to be nothing but nekton and jellyfish.
- you hid.
- so you lived in the sediments of the abyssal plain. lied there, where the only lights came from the bioluminescent anglerfish.
- when did your radium glow begin to fade? when'd they become half-blind from all these thousands of years asleep at the bottom of the sea?
- all is not sacrosanct at the bottom of the deep deep sea, did you know? out there are fishes who pick bones clean.
-
- they say radium has a half life of 1600 years.
- isolation
- radioactive decay
- isolation
- isolation
- isolation like a heartbeat, a rhythm that doesn't stop -- goddammit, when will it ever stop?
-
- it's not like you'd never tried. you opened your mouth but nothing more than bubbles came out and the ocean stole your words.
- once a phantom whisper escaped your lips, a word so distorted it sounded like a laugh.

- help.
- the fish and the tubeworms did not reply.
-
- the brittle stars down here aren't worth a damn compared to the almost-everlasting ones up in the sky.
- you offered to live forever hidden in the deep waters. to live hidden forever down, half-buried among the creatures. some of them looked like lovecraft's fish gods.
- perhaps you knew how it would end. end in shame and blindness and everything. everything falls to pieces here.
- did you?
-
- you can't sing from the bottom of the ocean. you might as well try singing on the moon.
- the whales can.
- there are whale carcasses every few miles here.
- every starved living thing swarms to the fallen whales. the fish bared their teeth at you, all sharp and shiny.
- you grinned back.
- in the boneyards left by the dead whales, the detritivores are thriving.
-
- follow anything that swims up. except you didn't know what was up anymore.
- somehow, someday, you escape.
- 1600 years.
- your radium glow dies out.
-
- disintegrate.
- there are little pieces of you all throughout the sea.

Yawen Xue is a 17-year-old writer. Born in Nanjing and currently based in the Bay Area, they love learning languages and exploring the in-between spaces of the world. They are the Editor-in-Chief of Phoenix Art and Literary Magazine, and their work has been published in Interstellar Lit. As a writer, they are inspired by post-punk lyrics and Ray Bradbury. You can find them birdwatching, overanalyzing the Cure's songs, and having existential crises at 2 AM.]

Digging around for pistachios - Flash Fiction

By Rita Chernikova

My fingers plunge into a bowl of broken shells, searching around for two of them—just two—still locked together, a yellow-green gem of a pistachio between them. I lick the salt off my lips. What cruel trickery.

Pistachios are like people. Only when they break apart, do you get to peer inside the shell. Savour the flavour of their emotions. And sometimes, the only thing there is air.

So you reach for the next one.

I have no pistachios left. I wander into the kitchen, roll open the bin, and empty the bowl. Will the next packet ever come? Or is this all I'll have now—the fading taste of salt on my tongue, the coarseness of my fingers, the chip of pistachio between my molars?

I dig my hand into my pocket and wrap it around something small and round.

“Hey,” I mutter.

I don't want to crack this pistachio open just yet. But I will. When I'm ready to come out of my shell, I will. For now washing away the salt of the past is enough.



Rita Chernikova is a writer from Wicklow, Ireland. She writes in two languages, English and Russian, but hopes that French will become her third linguistic funnel for thoughts in the future. When she isn't fanatically hitting the keys of her laptop she likes to record music, dance or do whacky art with bird feathers.

Divinity - Fiction

By Sam Podnar

You are born a goddess, emerging healthy and glowing from your mother's womb and made soft by her ambrosia. A darling little girl, your parents fawn, dressing you up in soft fabrics and tiny blouses boasting the label of princess. Relatives rush to your side just to glimpse your silky hair and whisper praise into your delicate ears, to worship a piece of heaven brought to Earth. Aurora at her christening in technicolor, Aphrodite emerging from the sea. Those days are cloaked in a golden haze, hardship bouncing off your supple skin. Your divinity untouched.

You run down neighborhood sidewalks, hands outstretched towards the marble-blue sky. It tumbles away, and scraped knees are the day's souvenir—a hibiscus-pink bandage patches up the wounds. You ask for a bow and arrow so you can be like Artemis, goddess of the hunt, and you make your own out of popsicle sticks and yarn when your parents inevitably deny the request. Your first book report is on Joan of Arc, your next on Malala Yousafzai. When adults ask you what you want to be when you grow up, you proudly declare that you want to be a princess—making Ariel proud, of course. You are adored and adoring, a little girl bathed in the warmth of a doting kingdom and protected by the shadow of your mother. The world bends around you. It never occurs to you that it would be any other way.

The kid with the curly blonde hair grabs your arm and pushes you down at recess. "It's only because he likes you," says your teacher. You begin taking his jabs with a smile, even if they do hurt, and sometimes you hide in the coat closet instead of going out to the playground, the Frida Kahlo poster next to the times tables training her eyes on you. Your classmates catch on, and they taunt you with K-I-S-S-I-N-G, and you're still not sure why he pulls your hair or pushes your notebooks off your desk because no one else you love does that. The bruises don't feel the same as the ones you got chasing the sun.

In middle school, it's a different culprit: the boy who never looks. You become one face in a sea of others, jockeying for his attention, and a glance he shoots your way becomes a recurring character in journal entries and daydreams. His smile is a constellation, his attention your lifeblood. When he says your name, you remember what it's like to feel untouchable.

You beg your mom to let you shop for clothing where all the other girls do, diligently take care of your braces in the hopes that you can get them off sooner. You pick at the imperfections on your skin until it bleeds, skip meals until tracing your fingers along your ribcage becomes addicting, read about juice cleanses on your first phone with the Sailor Moon case. Runs are now in pursuit of lost weight, not the sun on the horizon. You use makeup in

in an attempt to replicate the glow of your early childhood, but it's not the same—will it ever be the same? The “take her swimming on the first date” jokes are personal now, and getting old. The first boy you tried to impress does not remember you, and you wonder when you stopped being the most beautiful girl in the world.

Then you've entered high school, and the boys and girls come and go faster than ever. Everyone around you is so pretty, and you're so not, and you spend all of your time trying to get them to see you. Your best friend starts going out with a 22 year old, her sentences ending with satisfied smiles and her weekends spent out late at concerts and gas stations and empty parking lots. You hear girls crying in the bathroom, and the fluorescent lights make your skin look dull as you do your makeup beside a stall strangled with weeping. Your English teacher asks you why you don't write anymore. You wonder if all of your female friends hate you and if all of your male friends are bad people.

You turn your eyes on the other girls—your former playmates, your current competitors. And an audience. *Her dress is so short*, you scoff internally, then aloud—your non-sisters chime in. *I can't believe he would go out with that slut*. The insults get passed around like sandpaper, each girl taking her turn scraping the aura of womanhood—of sisterhood—off her skin. It's a competition now—who can sink the lowest, the fastest? You shed petals of divinity—indeed, you scratch them off, tearing at your flesh because you've seen what others will give a girl who doesn't respect herself.

Your own original sin. Eve rolls in her grave while Adam lays still beside her. It will take a long time to come to terms with this. You imagine yourself sinking back into the Earth, willows bowing and creeks pausing their rush as you return to your Mother. Soft clay and a breeze stirred by falling leaves will soothe your aching skin. Only when you are at rest will you realize the exhaustion—how hard it was to breathe when so many of the breaths were not for yourself. Protected in a gentle cocoon of loam, you will think back to the mistakes of years past, to the time lost to others, and you will grieve—silently, internally, with the energy of your Mother coursing through you. Your divinity as if it was untouched.

Until then, you will navigate a world that constantly tries to remind you of the place in the hierarchy it has created for you. You will be shocked at the apathy of some and the entitlement they feel to your attention, your body, your love. You will wonder why every compliment comes paired with an insult, why everyone loves you and hates you simultaneously. You will contain your emotions in fear of ridicule and hold your keys between your fingers to give yourself the illusion of power. People will disappoint you, and you will rush to lower yourself for them anyway—womanhood nothing more than something to exploit. You will lose sisters who thought the same. Other people will tell you that you are

not a goddess, young Helen of Troy, so much so that you will believe them. But sometimes you will lay down in the grass, chest pressed against the ground, and you will feel the Earth's heartbeat align itself with your own. And in those moments, you will reclaim small pieces of the divinity of which the world so aggressively tries to strip you. You will heal.

Sam Podnar is seventeen and attends high school in Pittsburgh, PA. When she's not writing, she enjoys baking and worrying about things out of her control. After graduation, she plans to major in international relations and pursue creative writing on the side.

Peaches - Personal Essay

By Catherine Xie

As a child, I have had many, many, tantrums at the Shanghai Pudong International Airport.

I would pound my grubby little fists on the floor, blubbering through my snot that I didn't want to leave. And why would I? In Shanghai, I ate three meals a day, each with three porcelain bowls brimming with rice, soup, and meat. And while I gobbled that up, I would anticipate what came after: a single moon peach, straight out of a Taoist fairytale. It eclipsed my face and melted in my mouth as if plucked straight from Queen Mother's orchard.

Life was good.

But my dreamlike summers always ended as my parents dragged me back to the parched peanut fields of Southern Illinois. Meals there consisted of the free hardtack from Panera Bread's charity program, the sunfish jerky we cured on our apartment roof, and - if we were lucky - the occasional fried chicken after Sunday Mass.

There were peaches, but they were small, hard, and meant to be eaten with the skin. They made my nose itch.

My parents had left their comfortable, familiar life in China when my father decided to pursue journalism, a profession that he believed he could only pursue honestly in the States. Mama and I resented this honesty as we wallowed in the South with no friends, no family, and no good food.

One of the few highlights was when my grandparents came to visit, usually spurring a bout of sight-seeing. Yeye, in particular, adored American historical sights. So once every year,

Mama would pack a day's worth of lukewarm ham sandwiches into the trunk of our second - hand Nissan Sentra, and we would putter our way down to Mount Vernon. Perhaps it was the hot Virginia sun, how I knew all of Washington's cream-colored rooms by heart, or even just the uphill trek to the vineyard. Sometime during the fourth trip, I decided that I didn't need to see Yeye moon over the founding father's portrait again. "What's so great about all this anyway?" I asked him, arms crossed.

Yeye peeled his eyes from Washington's proud visage to gaze down at me. My father looked away.

There was a jumbled answer about Communists and Mao's. "It never was the right time for us," he kept repeating.

My yeye had grown up in Shanghai in the early '60s, his childhood spent melting the

his childhood spent melting the family silverware for Mao Zedong's disastrous Great Leap Forward campaign. The communists of his time had only been ruling for forty years after their victory over the Nationalists, a party committed to gradual democratic reform. The Nationalists had followed the Qing Dynasty, the Qing after the Yuan, the Yuan after the Song, the Tang, the Sui, and eight more before reaching the very beginning. There was a nursery rhyme for it, back in preschool.

The Nationalist's dream for a republic had ended China's 2000 year dynastic cycle, but their inevitable failure made them much like any previous hiccups in the imperial chain. Attempts at a stable democracy never succeeded due to the consistent poverty and desperation of the peasant class.

I, of course, did not understand any of this when Yeye explained it to me. I only understood he looked sad, and that Mama had started shooting me her "I can't yell at you in public" glares. I nodded and told Yeye that we should return to the estate next year.

After publishing his dissertation, my father secured a job in teaching investigative journalism at some posh Connecticut college. Mama packed up our life into the trunk of the Sentra, and we hauled our way up north. Through the next decade, my parents toiled tirelessly to inch our way up the tax brackets, until I found myself starting high school in a town where the cafeteria served sushi. And "Asian Nation Chicken", or chicken nuggets dipped in some unholy matrimony of barbecue sauce and soy sauce.

At the end of my freshman year, we decided enough was enough. Chinatown was only an hour away now, but it did not make up for the fact that my mother, consumed by her work, had not seen her family in seven years. We flew to Shanghai.

When we arrived, I was shocked. I had heard of the massive urban development in my absence, but I had not anticipated their extent. Convenience, it seemed, was the name of the game. The world had gone mobile. Paper money was nonexistent. The online food delivery service had evolved to the point of making UberEats look like the Pony Express.

A hypothetical situation: say that I am on my couch, on the twenty-first floor of my apartment building, and I am overcome with the urge to eat hotpot. Hotpot, however, being that it is a meal where you actively cook raw ingredients in a boiling pot of soup as you eat, requires a tedious prep and clean-up process. I sit back down on my couch, dissuaded from the effort.

But then, I notice my phone on the counter. I get back up from the couch to grab it. I find the website of my favorite local hotpot restaurant, and I place an order. Within thirty minutes, an out of breath delivery man shows up at my door. In his arms is an iron pot full of soup, a gas burner, and the fifteen side dishes I ordered.

I eat the hotpot. I call the delivery man, and ten minutes later, he shows up - still out of breath - at my door. He packs up the pot and the garbage, and then he leaves. I kick back on the couch and savor my peach. Life is good.

After the summer, I headed back to America with a heavy heart, but less of the customary screaming. I settled back into the school year, with its outrageously priced “Nutrients Enriched Vegan Buddha Bowls”.

But then over quarantine, social media discovered the Uighur crisis. Although Beijing has already smothered this ethnic group for decades in its anti-terror initiative, the issue only recently became notorious after the sensationalization of the concentration camps. Wedged between the black squares on my Instagram feed were “callout” posts for the inhumane treatment. Girls on TikTok discussed the atrocities while primping their lashes.

My gut reaction was to recoil.

“Americans,” I remembered the aunties saying, “always stick their nose where they don’t belong. They’re so simple, with their freedom and happiness and hoopla.” I nodded along with the memory and stopped checking my friends’ Snapchat stories.

This all came to a head one night as I called my friend about our combustion lab results. As two of the few POC in our mainly white town, we had formed an inevitable camaraderie through our mutual exasperation for our eccentric chemistry teacher.

Discussing reaction times quickly turned into wistful reminiscing for our grandmothers’ food. I gushed about hotpot and peaches. He waxed poetry about lox bagels and his bubby's matzo ball soup.

“You should definitely visit China sometime,” I said, trying to be slick. “It’s a beautiful country.”

“Oh.” Some shuffling. “I’m never going to a country with concentration camps.” A beat of silence, and then - to my continued horror - I blurted, “It’s - I mean - China’s not like *that*.”

He ended the call, and I was left devastated by the realization that China was like *that*. If democracy had not previously taken hold largely due to poverty, now the opposite is true. Every aspect of living, at least for the middle and upper class, is designed to be comfortable. In the fastest - growing economy in the world, luxury only comes at the small price of your freedom.

In this “Second Cold War,” as dubbed by overzealous publications, the enemy is no longer a desperate people, forced toil for the war effort with the threat of death. It is no longer the physical boundary of the Iron Wall, but rather the technical boundary of the Firewall. Understanding that the “carrot” is more effective than the “stick”, the Communist Party has

managed to subjugate a nation with complacency.

No one will cry for freedom. No one will plead for the Uighurs. And why would they? At home, the children are fed and the streets are safe. There's hotpot and peaches. Life is good.

Catherine Xie is a Chinese-American writer living in Weston, CT. All of her pieces mention food to some degree, but she's not sure if it's because she likes the imagery or if she's just always hungry. Her writing is published or forthcoming at The Jellyfish Review, The Incandescent Review, Wrongdoing Magazine, among others. She was born in 2004.

Porcelain Saucer - Flash Fiction

By Natalie Hampton

My parents taught me that love is fleeting and tawdry. They taught me to never settle down, to stay forever light on my feet, and the second the shackles of emotions dawned, they taught me to flee just like my mother had (though she took fleeing a step too far).

I listened, until I met him.

He was a delicate boy with a name that slips off your tongue like butter, though now I've forgotten the exact mixture of syllables. His skin was soft, untarnished liquor, except for a thin scar spanning from the corner of his left eyebrow to his hairline where golden ringlets began.

He was the exact type of boy I liked to crack like nothing more than a porcelain saucer, but he was the first boy who ever made me consider building a permanent life.

I don't know what drew me to him. His personality was dull, and he was attractive, sure, but I'd traced the four corners of the world and drank from enough glasses in them that I no longer found looks striking.

But then he would sing, and it was like he slowed time and could see the individual notes saturating the air, pluck them out and mold them into perfection, and I could listen to his performances for hours.

He sang lyrics of life and love infused with raw emotions, and he made me wonder if those were rites of passage.

So, I let myself live with him, let myself love. But I saw myself become my mother: making him breakfast, kissing him on the cheek as he left for work. And I remembered the hollow look in her eyes the day she didn't bother to press the brakes on her accelerating car, so I shattered another porcelain saucer and fled.

Natalie Hampton is a rising junior at the Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in the Creative Writing Department. She has been recognized at the National level of the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition and by the Harris County Department of Education, the Young Poets Network, the Pulitzer Center, and Ringling College of Art and Design. She serves as an editor at Polyphony Lit and Cathartic Literary Magazine. She has taken online workshops and classes with Iowa, Brown, Sewanee, and Ellipsis Writing.