



ISSUE 01

PERSIMMON REVIEW

March 2023
Cover Art by Caleb Kim



EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Persimmon Review*, an online literary magazine that aims to showcase the voices of young writers and artists. This issue presents the creativity and passion for various topics by writers and artists, regardless of age or experience, in hopes of bringing people together through literature and art.

Persimmon Review began as a blank canvas, absent of stories told through art or prose. Thank you to the contributors who submitted their work and helped make this first issue possible. Also, thank you to the readers, social media followers, and those who happened to stumble upon this. All the support has been encouraging and meaningful.

It's an honor to share the creative pieces of talented writers and artists. I hope this issue inspires everyone to pick up a pencil or type away. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Emily Kim

Founder, Editor-in-Chief



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Untitled

by Irina Tall (Novikova)



Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

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Apple & Slice
by Caleb Kim



Caleb Kim is a young and aspiring artist who enjoys drawing, digital art, and animation.

Off Duty by Eve Dalton

The Hero touched down on the island, and was handed a glass of champagne on arrival. He'd greatly enjoyed flying business class – far more comfortable than what he was used to. The resort looked exactly as it did in the brochure.

His muscles rippled under a hideous collared shirt, the flowery kind that sunburnt tourists wear on vacation. It was the most visible he had ever been, and nobody looked twice at him. Why had he bothered with a disguise all these years?

He checked into his villa, and a grinning man gave him the tour: on this side of the island, sand; on the other side, more sand; at the bottom of the sand, ocean; in between all that, paradise. The Hero drank it in. Nothing was on fire, or collapsing, or in peril.

He ordered a pineapple juice at the poolside bar, and was enchanted by the tiny umbrella that garnished the glass. He pocketed it, and ordered another. He would have a collection of fourteen umbrellas by the end of his stay.

The grinning man had raved about the island's sunsets, so the Hero reclined in a hammock on the beach after lunch and stared directly at the sun, unblinking, until it dipped below the horizon in a blaze of colour. He had never experienced such a silence before: he could only hear waves lapping playfully at the shore and distant screams from cities being destroyed, oceans and aeons away.

Each day, he danced on the ocean floor with stingrays and explored underwater caves with just one breath. He wore the waves like a blanket and allowed himself to be gently rocked by the tide, eyes closed. He could dive to depths undiscovered by man, and run along the water's surface to race pods of leaping dolphins. Hundreds of miles away, whales would serenade him, drowning out the muffled cries for help from burning buildings and sinking ships and plummeting planes. He would resurface at dusk and the grinning man would have a pineapple juice waiting for him at the bar.

He got to know the families and honeymooning couples around the resort. The children nagged him for piggyback rides; the parents gave him film recommendations. He was never without an invitation to join a group for dinner, or a boat ride, or a game of soccer. They asked for his company, and nothing else.

Free time was so foreign to him. He used it to acquire new skills. It took him seventeen minutes to learn how to knit, but several hours to master crocheting. At the end of the evening, he had made teddy bears for each of the children at the resort.

He watched *Toy Story* for the first time, then *Toy Story 2*, *3* and *4*. He laughed and wept freely in each, then watched them again. The faint screams of faraway places were drowned out by Buzz and Woody's banter.

One night, the screams were louder. The Hero drank his tenth pineapple juice at the bar and ignored them as ever. The grinning man cocked his head.

'Can you hear that?'

It was from the other side of the island. A crowd gathered at the water's edge to watch an enormous shark circle two lovers who had swum out to the reef for some late-night skinny dipping. The Hero watched them flounder, vaguely interested, then moved aside as the resort workers frantically launched a lifeboat. He strolled back to his villa as the screams became more desperate.

On his fifth night, he felt a tremble from an ocean away. He sighed, and packed his belongings in a heartbeat. It was a full moon, and a beach party was in full swing. The partygoers cheered when they saw

the Hero coming down the beach, and he walked among them, handing out his coveted cocktail umbrellas. Then he held his hand up in farewell. The people who had embraced him as their friend watched the Hero launch himself into the silver sky and fly away.

By light of the moon, he watched the ocean, miles below him, churn and heave and surge violently towards the island. The wave would bite down hard on the delicate aisle of paradise and reduce it to a memory in minutes. He could already hear the screams of the honeymooners, the families, the grinning man, as they watched their doom approach. *Save us. Save us.*

He flew on, towards a change of scenery. He would sit atop a mountain, and melt snow with his eyes, and be far away from the cries of people in need of rescue.

He would continue his holiday.

Eve is a screenwriting student from Melbourne, Australia, who teaches creative writing to school students for work. She has recently launched Writing Hand Magazine, filled with writing prompts for every kind of writer, in an effort to relieve her laptop's hard drive of the thousand prompts she's written for her students.

Bin Night

by Lotte Becket

The ceiling felt squashed, sinking down towards the armchair in the brown room. It was the centre of gravitational pull in the house, each seashell and bookmark inching towards it. With an out breath, she too moved slightly towards it, a g&t in one hand and the Four Pillars bottle in the other, precariously balanced. She was compressed, but for her it was the floor, her yoga mat, the dirt. She willed them to meet her. Instead they ate her up and licked their lips afterwards.

Each time she looked down the opening chords of a symphony began, and ended as she jerked her head to horizon level. Vertigo, she suspected, but wasn't bothered to confirm or deny it. The doctors had said that being 'grounded' would bring her back to herself. But she was suffocated. Would her yoga class fee cover a therapy session too?

Her organs felt messy. The vessel of her torso sailing through hard-edged waters. The diaphragm clearly not performing as it should. It was too empty, allowing blood to filter in from all sides and consume organs. The seashells rocked gently on the mantelpiece, mimicking her water breaking. There was a scraping inside her chambers, as though by a scalpel. Surely her breathing was coming from somewhere else then — the gin perhaps, compensating for an empty womb.

No longer an out breath but a sigh of almost ecstasy as she reached the brown chair and let the weight of the ceiling sink her down. Some forces good, others scary and dense. This one was needy and moaning on her, and she liked it. A few sips later.

She waved a goodbye to the picture frame on the mantelpiece. God she hated when people she loathed looked good in photos. Her arms sticky, moulding through a heavy air that felt like honey to the touch. A humidity rang out in the house like sirens, and she embodied an ant on the side of a jam jar. Precarious, knowing that the plunge below was sweet — too sweet to deserve. She was already too sweaty. She took another sip. Her arm slammed back down beside her.

She had a particular relationship to Tuesdays. This Tuesday was bad. The issue, she'd decided, was that it was bin night. The bathroom bins couldn't possibly be emptied. It wasn't so much the neighbours she worried about, but how the stench would hit her nose. Would it bring back too much, too little, nothing at all. Trousers with bloodstains could be taken straight to the tip instead, if she drove? Shoved in the boot of her pick-up truck, out of sight, out of smell. She grinned. Good idea, you.

She'd been told she couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't drive, and that if she did, something bad would happen.

Something bad has happened, she would reply, receiving sympathetic furrowed brows in response. Furrowed brows were performative. She wondered if scrubs were just costumes stolen from a high school theatre wardrobe.

Last week she'd been sent home with four of his friends to accompany her. Apparently she needed that many people to make it in the front door and into her own bedroom.

She likes the shells placed in height order, he'd said to the troops helping her upstairs. Are you all listening to what I'm saying? Like this. As they reached the bottom of the stairs, they all looked back as he transferred sea shells from a carry bag to the mantelpiece with the care of a new father. Got it, they replied in varying tones of unison, and headed upstairs with her in tow.

Husband's Little Helpers left the house. It was just him and her left, not a standoff, but a shift that made the house slanted. They were actors, on the upstage and downstage, but never on the same plane. Separated with urgency.

"Why did you ask me to leave?" he said.

"You smelt like hand sanitiser, and I wanted my room to smell like roses," she replied.

"I drove you home through peak hour traffic—"

"I know. I was there."

Her hand rose to slap him. Damn it, too collapsible. Some famous author probably wrote that words were stronger than actions. Yeah, let's go with that.

"I felt like a fucking child," she said.

Swearing equals passion, right? A yummy fricative.

"I could get up the stairs without help, and instead you recruited your mates to do it. It was pathetic," she said.

“They wouldn’t let me sign you out unless—”

“Sometimes I wish everything could have happened here, not in a hospital bed,” she said.

“I feel like I’ve watched years worth of home renovation programs. And I hate renovation shows,” she continued.

“You didn’t bring me anything I asked for. I wrote fucking poems about the revolting chocolate sludge they gave me to stop my brain from shutting off,” she said.

This was prodding. Like a dirty stick to a campfire. A physical reaction would be appreciated please. A step forward, a scratching of the arm, a raised eyebrow would be enough to get her breathing back. She spoke to his bones, praying for movement.

And, nothing. When does intimacy one day become forgotten the next?

“It’s good to see you standing again,” he replied.

With a smack of the face he left the house, wrapping his arms around his torso before he got in his car and fucked off for good. She’d been left in the centre of the brown room, swaying from foot to foot, ears fixated on the sound of his diesel engine.

Now it was her brain that felt sticky. Still like honey, but textured, with some pearls thrown in that ricocheted from one side of her head to the other. She should not have asked him to leave with a yell and a scream reminiscent of hysteria. Ricochet.

She shouldn’t have called him pathologically submissive, paralysed by confrontation. Ricochet. She should have begged him to stay, stay, take care of her and the height-ordered seashells. Ricochet. Her hand trembled against the glass as she thought about how much cereal they’d gone through together. How many bowls of cornflake-granola fusion they’d accidentally dribbled into when the laughter got too much. In any case, she’d forgotten what aisle of the supermarket the granola was in, and had switched to multigrain bread.

She returned to the issue of the bins. How long would it take to empty all of them (well, not all) into the big bin and return to the g&t? Too long, she muttered. Too long, too long, too long, she could see her vowels stretched out before her like chewing gum. She'd always been a consonant girl, but she liked this performance. It needed an audience: the picture of him on the mantelpiece. That'll do. She could see every crinkle of his wicked smile. She let it land in her gut like a raisin hitting teeth, a chewing motion, a melding of love and disgust. She found words with lots of oo sounds — too, you, threw, argue — and shot him with them. She wanted him to see it all: the jut of her hip bone, the air riding to and fro her stomach, and she wanted it all to be fast and hot. With everything in the room watching.

Not good. Her hair brittle like tangled wire, caught on the screws of the wooden house. She sat back, felt the muscles of the chair contract into her. Safer? Not really. Must've reached the end of the gin bottle, she thought, feeling the last dregs of the glass claw down her throat and into her belly. She liked shots of gin more than vodka. It seemed more civilised, less high-schoolers-at-a-night-club. She wondered what that much alcohol could do to stomach lining, to a life force. Maybe she already knew. Was that a knock?

Time machines sounded dumb until you remembered what they could do. God how she wished it was 1606. England, maybe. Somewhere where her vocabulary would be more Shakespearean and less vulgar. How exciting to be in the Gunpowder Plot and not the tragedy in her stomach. Taking wicker sleds to execution felt more courageous than sitting in an armchair and drinking. The plotters were hanged, eviscerated, then beheaded. Not great, but at least all of London was watching from their windows. Thick velvet curtains lay across her house's windows like skin. If she were beheaded, no-one would be able to peek in and stare in delight. Or disgust. She didn't mind which.

What she knew for sure: there was cheese in the fridge, the gin was empty, somebody wanted to get in, she hadn't signed the papers. What she didn't know: where any pens were.

If she could characterise the knock at the front door in literary terms: insistent, angry, petulant, aggressive. Trying them on for size like a wedding ring, she liked petulant the best. But there were too many obstacles between her and the door. The bins mostly. She mimicked the rhythm of the knock on her glass — her clinking and his banging sounded like something out of new-wave.

She wondered whether her trauma could incite a new-found musical ability. Stop knocking. Maybe she could become one of those depressed-but-brilliant piano players who played in underground bars in Berlin. Nah, plane flight was too long anyway, and what made her think she could ever play the fucking piano?

She sent herself into vertigo again, head to the floor, then up again, then down. Surely company would be a nice thing again? Stop it. The centre of gravity had changed, he was pulling the house towards him. The door was shoved, it opened, she looked up. The photo on the mantelpiece was now 3D. The gin glass fell into her lap like a carcass, and he reached out to grab it.

Lotte Beckett is a writer and playwright based in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. She is a graduate of the University of Melbourne (Creative Writing, English and Theatre Studies), and has previously been published in Above Water Anthology 17 and the Student Artist Spotlight (UniMelb). Her playwriting has been performed at Griffin Theatre Company, Australian Theatre for Youth People and La Mama.

Morning

by Irina Tall (Novikova)

Longing penetrates white into my heart, into my thought, where joy breaks into thousands of fragments, into meriads of stars in the sky, trees in a dark spot ...

Morning

When I think about who I was, my words are filled with sadness, they become bitter like dew, like what is called sour, and bitterness remains on the tips of my cold fingers ... Maybe someday I will be able to believe in myself, remember who I was and didn't want to be.

My inner voice: "- Why did you leave then?"

- "I don't remember ... It's just that something pushed me or probably took me away, like a boat sailing away in a stormy sea ... "

- "And now? Why don't you want to give something here now?"

- "Probably it's time for me to go, get into a yellow big taxi filled with the thoughts of lost people ..."

The voice falls silent, it goes somewhere to speed me up again in the evening in something that I don't remember ...

Day

The man smiles into his scarf, the green thin jacket is blown in the wind,

The girl flashes her glasses, a thin wire runs from her pocket to her ears, she holds her head high, like a drinking bird. Dark blue clothes in the shade are black, she holds on to the yellow wire with her hand. A light-colored braided patterned hat and black boots, she has a small, elegant foot. At the bus stop as gray as life, in the area where there is no hope, there are two, a man and a woman. The girl went out, followed by a gray-haired man with big blue eyes, half-blind they look with the eyes of a big owl at the white shroud of the world. A woman in red boots entered, she went deep into the cabin, sat down near the door, she blew a little and put on bright knitted gloves.

And there are five stalls, like doves, frozen on the pavement, and the holiday is trying to enter their doors, colored lights of garlands are hung on the roof. And soon Christmas will come in a red sheepskin coat, a little frisky grandfather and put a gift in his hands. Do you need him? And why are you waiting for it? I will walk along sharp rocks, leave traces of eternity, and many flowers of yellow longing will sprout behind me. The bus stops and passengers get off...

Evening

The lamp catches its counterpart in the glasses of subtle reality by its reflection.

In the evening, longing approaches me again, sits next to me on the carpet, strokes my legs. Probably, she once dreamed about something, and then she forgot like me ... I put down my black pen, a couple of drops flow past the paper from the gel rod, maybe it will be absorbed into another white sheet or carpet covered with bright colors. .. I go into a dark room and look at a light lamp in the corner, it shines brightly, illuminating the light putty of the walls, sometimes it seems to me that they don't need to be painted or wallpapered, Sirins fly in the weaves of irregularities, unicorns jump, water dragons swim and catch fish

with human heads. The world that does not exist inside me, it moves like a lake to the surface and wants to break out.

And melancholy sits on the carpet and looks at the weave of the ribbon in my stupid drawings...

I quietly pick up the phone and turn on the audiobook, Cheslov Milosz, a Polish poet and writer, I listen to him and it seems to me that forced immigration, the one that brought him overseas, allowed him to live in a distant and miserly America is just a fiction, like myself ... Life is one red thread that three blind old women weave and then tear... And none of them will ever understand whose life was cut short, because the eye sockets are dark and empty, there is no light, the stars illuminate from the hand, white and thin, like a girl's, but you see the deception, their fingers tremble with every touch, move and freeze from the unbearable lightness that they forgot about ...

In my hands I have a green cup with dark tea, like small fish floating tea leaves, light and naughty and get stuck in my mouth, they roll down my throat and I feel like swallowing them, the sperm whale probably feels the same and I kind of become him. ..

Night

She covered me with a blanket, suddenly came up like a cat, jumped up on the windowsill, saw the stars with her eyes, blinked her golden eyes and disappeared into the thousands of windows on the blue ...

What can't be called a dream

- "Finally, you have come!" - the raven scratched his nose on the crossbars of the iron ceiling.

-"Why so long!?" muttered another.

- "There are many floors, go far!"

- "Really? It seemed to me that you can do everything! And now .. you know that everything has flowed away for spring longing !?" - the first one scratched his feathers, thought ..

The second waved its wing and flew around the circle and crouched on the other side of the building.

"Now it's over..."

-"I know..."

He carefully looked into her eyes and gradually, he began to blur, melt in this darkness.

- "We have to go! Otherwise, the darkness will surround us!"

He took off into the air, the second followed him, and they turned into only memories for her.

She touched the railings, still warm, quite...

The wind blew on her.

- "And you're here!"

The wind growled.

- "And as always silent ... I think that sometimes you need to find a voice!"

The wind falcon hesitated on the neighboring building, its eye flashed blue and the darkness swallowed it...

The wind blew harder on her shoulder.

- "I don't feel like it. It's better that way!"

Darkness approached her, the falcon on the building gnashed and fell down, dispelling the darkness.

The wind blew more and more worried, began to disperse the dark clouds, the moon and stars appeared.

- "Why are you helping me? You don't have to..."

The girl looked down at the falcon's broken wings and a torso that looked like a slug.

The wind blew on her again, but gently and pleadingly. Darkness covered the sky, the wind blew harder on the dark clouds and they parted.

"Stop!" the girl screamed.

She lowered her hands, looked at her fingers.

- "Why? Why are you doing this? I want to die! Die!"

She sat down on the floor, began to wait for the darkness to come, but the wind blew and blew all night until dawn came, and in the morning he flew away exhausted and satisfied with his work, the next night he would also arrive.

The girl on the floor was fast asleep and had a wonderful dream.

Snowflakes covered the ground, covered the thin branches of trees, the roofs of houses and clouded the glass with a coating.

If not for the fire, the cold would have frozen us all.

Only that which cannot be lost turns to ashes for the stranger, so as not to be his prey.

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Fieldwork.

by Joy Jin

A faint blade of moonlight darted warily out from behind a cloud, attempting to banish at least a little portion of darkness. Soon, the cloud passed, and now the slice of visible moon shone in its full glory, glittering moonlight shining down like a veil from the heavens in a war against the gloom.

Alas, the clouds moved faster, obscuring the moon from sight again.

Tonight, the shadows would prevail.

But only tonight.

A light misty drizzle floated lazily through the city streets, basking in the darkness. Many luxuries could be found in the shadows, as long as one knows where to look.

Then, a light breeze chased away the drizzling clouds, leaving the city damp and dark. The perfect condition for mold and germs and who knows what else.

A dark figure, hidden by the night, could be seen momentarily leaping onto a rooftop. The twilight would be their ally today, and no more than that.

Keeping close to the side of the tall building, they caught onto one of the many rungs of a fire escape. Swinging on them like a skilled trapeze artist, they made it to the ground.

Their hood had fallen off during their descent, revealing short brown hair and light brown eyes. Their sharp gaze noted everything around them in less than a second, taking in everything of importance and combing through the area for threats. This was a person who favored action over words. More doing, less talking.

They continued, darting through the streets and alleys. The tall skyscrapers and large glassy buildings started trickling away, succumbing to grassy parks and quaint suburban neighborhoods.

Finally, they reached the edge of a fancy, iron-wrought fence, enclosing one of the privileged “rich people” communities in the metropolis. Beyond the barrier were tall, manor-like houses and swimming pools, rolling hills and golf clubs. Fancy indeed, to say the least.

They fished out a small, gun-like object from inside their cloak. After aiming and pressing the trigger, a length of wire with a fishhook hanging off the end shot out and hooked onto the top of the gate. The wire retracted, pulling the person along with it. With a light maneuver, they swung over the fence and landed in the grass on the other side.

A gloved hand lifted and pressed a button attached to a small, barely noticeable earpiece in their left ear.

The person spoke. “Ghost, I’ve reached the area. Location of target?” Their earpiece buzzed lightly. A voice, presumably Ghost, replied.

“It’s the house up on that hill. His car should be in the driveway. You’d know what it looks like, correct?”

“Yes.” They pulled their hood over their head again.

“They’re finishing up some drinks. He’ll be out in around ten. Driver is already waiting in the car. You know what to do.”

“Alright. Lemme know when they’re on the move.”

“Will do.” Ghost paused for a second, contemplating. “Oh, and Pixel?”

“Yes?”

“Be careful.”

“I know.”

We now have a name to add to the face. Pixel. And whatever they were doing, it would involve the subject of life and death.

They opened their cloak again, revealing a wide array of weapons. Switchblades, Swiss Army knives, you name it. Heck, there was even a pistol. They seemed to be organized with care and precision in mind, some lined up neatly along their belt, others tucked into pockets or hidden into unobtrusive little nooks.

However, Pixel ignored these deadly little toys and took their entire cloak off, revealing an intricate crossbow strapped to their back. Upon removing the straps, they carefully inspected the weapon, making sure it was loaded and everything was working right.

Putting the cloak on and pulling the hood over their face again, Pixel made her way over to “the house up on that hill”. A large manor house, which, compared to the others surrounding it, made the other houses look like small ants. It sat with mocking arrogance on the hill, cold white light shining from behind the giant windows.

Pixel waited a ways away from the house at the side of the road, hiding in a tree. They crouched there like a cat waiting for its prey, eyes gleaming and muscles tensed, crossbow in hand.

Ghost’s voice crackled through their earpiece. “He’s coming. You ready?”

“What do you think?”

Slowly, a car came down the road, its occupants not yet aware of the fate designated upon them.

Pixel aimed the deadly weapon at the car, lightly fingering the trigger.

With an almost silent *click*, they fired.

And then the world exploded.

Bloody Affairs

(*Inspired by Akutagawa's "In the Grove"*)
by Jessica King

"The Maid"

“Yes, I have been their maid for ten years now. Yes, I’m the one that found the body... No, I don’t know who did it... I go to their house every Monday morning because the daughter likes to have house-parties with her girlfriends on Sundays, and she’s terrible at cleaning. Lizbeth is a sweet girl though. She just got a whole collection of the Brothers Grimm, the stories I would read to her at night—” *She pauses, choking on another sob.* “Sorry, I didn’t mean to go off-topic. Anyway, I went to their house ten o’clock sharp because Mr. Walker would give me an extra tip for arriving on time. Sometimes he’ll ask me to clean on Thursdays or Fridays because they’re going to have friends over. My son is in the hospital right now, but not the one Mr. Walker works at. I work two jobs for his medical bills... My husband passed away five years ago.” *She pauses again to recollect herself, blowing her nose with a provided tissue.*

“Anyway, I got to their house ten minutes early, I think, so I went inside the house to start right away. I went through the front door. I knew something was very wrong when I smelled that *odor*. That’s when... That’s when I saw the handprints on the walls. And all the smears... I didn’t know whether to run out the house screaming for help or clean it up before it stained the carpet. Mrs. Walker loves her spotless carpet. I couldn’t think of whose blood it could’ve been, the whole family leaves before I arrive because—well, the wife isn’t the friendliest towards people like me, if you know what I mean...

No! No, I didn’t touch the blood at all, but I moved around it to enter the living room. I think it came from the kitchen because it went around the island. I saw that the window was shattered, maybe someone broke in? I heard rushing water when I followed the trail into the far bathroom. I know their house like the back of my hand, and I recognized the sound coming off the tile walls. They’re painted a pastel pink, which is my favorite... Sorry, sorry. Um, that’s where I... that’s where I found Mr. Walker... in a bathtub full of red water...” *She begins sobbing inconsolably. The interrogation ceases for an hour before she returns to continue her testimony.*

“My relationship with the family? Well, I used to be close with Lizbeth before she started high school. She has to get up in the wee hours of the day for school, poor thing. I used to read bedtime stories to her, she loved Brothers Grimm because ‘they were realistic,’ silly girl. Lizzy and I got along well, but she has to take the bus at seven o’clock, so I don’t see her much anymore.” *She smiles sadly, a bittersweet expression on her face.* “Mrs. Walker isn’t a terrible woman, but Mr. Walker could have found better, if you asked me. She’s smart though, I’ll give her that. She has a degree in something and works as a secretary in some high-end corporation. She’s a perfectionist and starts yelling whenever something’s not to her liking... Mr. Walker? Oh, he’s such a gentleman. Very friendly and considerate. I’m grateful to have him as my boss... Something more? Oh, no! I could never. His family may not be perfect with that wife of his, but his family makes—*made* him so happy, I could never do that to him. Besides, I have my son to take care of! He’s my first priority always.

“Who do I think did it? Oh, I don’t know... Lizbeth, poor thing, she might know since she must have just left for school... He had no enemies as far as I know, he’s so nice to everyone. His wife was the only other one there, so she must have done it! Poor Beth, I hope she’s okay...”

"The Wife"

"I really hope that whoever did this atrocious crime will pay to clean out the stains in the carpet. We paid a lot of money to make it look nice... Of course I care, there's just nothing I can do about James's death. The carpet, however, I'll get it replaced if I need to." *She sighs in aggravation.* "This is exactly why I told Elizabeth we can't have pets..."

She doesn't seem to be mournful; if anything, she looks annoyed. "If you *have* to know where I was, I wasn't home. I was with Jared, my boss. I'm his secretary and, well, if your boss works overtime, you work overtime too... Okay, *fine*, I'm sleeping with him, but can you blame me? James has such boring conversations about paperwork and surgeries, and he's definitely stopped trying to look good since he started working full-time. Sure, James has money *now*, but it's been months since we've gone out on a romantic date together and I'm tired of being the sole parent for our daughter. Jared has money as the CEO *and* he's putting in the effort to woo me. He makes me feel beautiful and desirable. He works out at the gym and dresses so well, how could I not fall for him... How long? Oh, ten months. We planned a 'business trip' to the Bahamas for our anniversary in April. He let me pick the hotel!"

"I only married James because he's from a rich family and has a hefty salary, but I truly love Jared so much. He'll be a good father to Elizabeth, especially since we'll be able to afford a better therapist for her... Yes, she's been showing symptoms of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia... Yes, she's been aggressive lately, but she hasn't hurt anyone! She's never hurt me, and I'm the one always taking care of her! She's a sweet girl. I assure you that her therapist has praised her improvements... Yes, we get benefits for her mental health issues, though it isn't a lot because James makes a lot of money. They really should've taken into consideration that we're trying to live in a nice house and eat organic food, you know? Eating healthy is expensive now, and we're not going to feed Elizabeth any of that junk food crap. A good lifestyle isn't cheaper, and neither is new carpet! Oh, I'm sure his life insurance will cover it... Yes, James's life insurance is \$500k, as far as I know. I insisted that he leaves half with Elizabeth and the other half with me."

"I've been planning to divorce James for about a year now. I thought I could wait it out until my daughter Elizabeth moves out for college. I'm hopeful that she'll get those voices in her head under control since she wants to dorm. But I really can't stand to be around him anymore. I know he's screwing our housemaid. It's not like we sleep together anymore, and we all know how men are. Why else would he keep her this long? She's terrible at her job! When I come home, I have to reorganize everything how I like it." *Her eyes light up in realization, her face flushing. There's a hint of a smile.* "What if *she* killed James? Maybe he told her that he won't leave me and Elizabeth, or maybe he finally threatened to fire her. I've seen the cameras, she comes way too early for work. She's not supposed to be at my house until ten o'clock, as the three of us had agreed to for ten years now. I have to get Elizabeth to school by seven o'clock, so we leave before my husband does. I'm the only one that takes care of my daughter, so it's not like he ever worried about her. I bet she's trying to seduce him before he leaves for work. That sly little brown whore!"

"The Boss"

"Yeah, Amanda was with me that night. She's my secretary, but we've been going out for a while now. She used to come in early everyday. I started getting into her the more I talked to her, then I asked her out for a casual date. Now, every once in a while, she comes two hours late. Technically, she's supposed to be there already by the time I arrive... but I let her work after hours, if you know what I mean... All right, all right. That night, we went downtown for a movie and dinner. She loves that tacky crap, but whatever makes her happy. We stayed at a hotel with an ocean view, a bubble bath, and a couple bottles. She likes wine... Yep, we're going on a trip in a couple of months since she insisted. I don't really care.

"I've heard the name Mrs. Marquez a few times. She's been around for a while. Amanda hates the woman. I've had to ask her repeatedly to stop mentioning her cause she'll make racist comments about the woman. My mother is from Mexico, so I'm not too friendly with supremacists like Amanda. She's a hot bod though, so I'm tolerating it to a certain point.

"She sometimes complains about her daughter. I guess she cut some of her classmates with scissors and ran out of class screaming that her teacher was hurting her and trying to control her mind. Now they have to pay for her medical treatments, and Amanda can't afford some shoes she really wanted... I don't know, I wasn't really paying attention.

"She's talked about some life insurance her husband had a few times. I don't remember how much it was, but it's worth about as much as I make in a month... Nah, I don't think she would do something like that. Besides, she was with me, at least until I passed out. She usually leaves before I do because she has to get her kid ready for the bus... Five o'clock, I think? I don't check the clock until my alarm goes off... Marriage? Nah, I don't really commit longer than a year. Is that what she really thinks we're doing?

"I'll be honest. I have to be since I'm talking to cops, right? My business is starting to lose clients. We're losing a bit of money, so I've had to let some of my good employees go. Some of them had worked with me for more than five years, that's what I call unappreciated commitment. I know Amanda's husband is a doctor from a rich family, that's why I started hooking up with her. If I buy her nice things and treat her like a proper lady, she can lend me some 'loose change.' Once I get what I need and my business rises back to what it once was, she and I will part ways peacefully. I've never met the guy, but he's not a great husband if his wife is screwing her boss, you know? So I don't feel too bad reaching into his pockets. Who knows, maybe she'll give me some of his life insurance and I'll be able to cancel our trip before I have to empty out my own pockets." *He nervously starts laughing a little. He has nothing else to say.*

"The Daughter"

Her expression is twisted between agitation and grief. Her voice is defensive and hostile. "I don't get why I'm here, I didn't do it! And I don't know anything that happened. The police won't even let me go inside my house! Like, I'm tired of all the stares from our neighbors and I don't want to stay in school because it's worse there. I just want to hide in my room, okay? I just want them to leave me alone... Fine, I'll answer your questions, but I want my room back! Deal, mister?"

She shrugs, kicking the floor. "No, I wasn't home last night. My parents were fighting again, and I didn't want to hear it. I snuck out through my window with Rebecca and walked around the neighborhood. It was a nice summer night, so we stayed there all night... What were my parents fighting about? I dunno, some guy named Jared. Maybe one of Dad's drinking buddies? You're better off asking my mom about him. Whenever they start arguing, I fib about going to a study group and go to a girlfriend's house to hang out... No! No, Mom wouldn't cheat on Dad! Yeah, they fought a lot, but they've made it work for twenty years now. I mean, they raised me and I came out okay! You can see all the pictures in our house, they're clearly happy together!" *She's seething, her fists balled up, but she calms down with a change in topic.* "What? Oh, you asked how often they get into a fight about Jared. Maybe last week? A month ago? I don't keep track of what day it is. Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, they're not really time, right? It's just a stupid construct to control our minds and what we think— Right, right, right. Sorry."

"Mrs. Marquez? Yeah, I know her. She's our housemaid, she's been around for... I dunno, since I was six. I'm sixteen, so I guess that's ten years? I'm bad at math. I used to pay her to do my math homework cause I can't do more than a multiplication table. She's really smart. I wouldn't have made it through middle school without her. It's nice to control someone else when the world is trying to control you, right? Rebecca says not to trust people that aren't Mom or Dad or Mrs. Marquez. Anyway, she taught me how to love reading, too. We like *Cinderella* because she got to marry the prince— Right, sorry... 'Rebecca'? She's my friend. We grew up together and hang out all the time before and after school... Sometimes. I have to tell her to leave me alone during class *all the time* because she *always* wants to talk to me. Sometimes she'll tell me to do really stupid stuff like poke Caitlyn's arm with scissors or kick myself during class to make sure I'm controlling my own brain. It is getting annoying... Where does she live? I dunno, we only hang out at home and school... Usually Dad takes me to school, but sometimes Mom takes me to school, but I like the bus. It makes my headache go away."

"Like I already said, I don't know who would've done it. I didn't see anything when I left for school— Oh yeah. I was at Angelica's house. I didn't go home. I went to school with Angelica. It shouldn't have happened because Dad wouldn't have done anything to hurt anyone... Mom? No! How *dare* you make that accusation! He was a doctor, he wanted to *save* lives! Dad wouldn't have hurt anyone! He wouldn't have hurt me and Mom!" *She starts sobbing uncontrollably, forcing the interrogation to conclude.*

(Was she crying or laughing?)

“My name isn’t Angelica, it’s Amber.” *Her smile is polite and confused.* “Elizabeth Walker? No, I don’t hang out with her. No one really hangs out with her. She’s weird... House parties? Every week? Since when did she host parties? I don’t think anyone’s ever gotten an invite from her, or I would’ve heard about it.

“Sometimes she starts giggling or talking to herself during class. I have math with her, so it’s hard to concentrate... I sit in the front left corner, and she sits a few rows behind me... Closest to the door, I think? I think it’s because she used to bolt out during class screaming, so they don’t want her to hurt anyone else... Sometimes I think she’s arguing with someone that isn’t there, like a ghost or something. Or maybe she has split personalities... Nope, never heard of a Rebecca. Is she new?

“Umm, I don’t know. She was nice in middle school. A lot quieter, didn’t talk so much. I didn’t really talk to her... Yeah, I heard she stabbed someone with a pencil while laughing, I think she’s psycho. I mean, *laughing* while hurting someone? That’s what you’d see in a bad horror movie.

“No, I’ve never met her parents. Or the maid. I don’t think anyone has. I’m surprised they didn’t move away after she attacked someone. I mean, that’s what you do as rich parents, right? We go to a private school so it’s not like her family doesn’t have the money to transfer somewhere else. I honestly don’t feel really safe around her... Umm. I mean, I don’t know. She’s bat-shit crazy enough to do it, but I’d like to think that I’m not sitting next to someone that commits patricide.” *She pauses for a moment.* “Is she going to kill me too?”

Jessica King (she/her) is a self-taught writer of ten years whose publications can be found in Heart Balm Literary, Raven Review, Meditating Cat Zine, and others. She's currently enrolled in a dual-bachelor program in creative writing and comparative world literature at Long Beach State University. When she has time, she occasionally posts on Instagram (@thewhitedovepoet) and develops a future literary journal for new writers.

Monday

by Christ Keivom

And so you are returning, pink blush of early dawn.
The dark retreats into the background, the smell of
Air is indescribable like a face I hardly knew but
Am desperate to recall. The street awaits the surge
Of people; rhythmic in their coming and going.
Dews falls, weaving its web over everything.
The fog lifts itself up and breathes upon the windowpane.
In the bushes, a small creature hides. In the trees,
The songbirds cry. The horizon's a fixed clothesline
And the clouds are hung on it like drying shirts.
Suddenly— a bevy of birds spread like buckshot
Into the view and into my mind passes a thought
of you—*I date and time and write it down.*
A breeze touches my cheek. The city begins to rattle
And buzz as a machine plugged in and pressed to *start.*
Entering the beginning or the middle or the end
of a life, someone rises up from bed. The day has begun
and I think about how I will be thinking about
you all day. In the distance— the old man is opening
up shop, the milkman bikes past him and the
sanitation worker appears with a broom.
Listen: you can hear him sweeping the street.

Christ Keivom (he/him), is currently pursuing his master's in English Literature from Delhi University. His work has previously appeared in Novus Literary Arts Journal, Mulberry Literary, Monograph Mag, Write now lit, The Chakkar, Farside Review, Spotlong Review, Agapanthus Collective, Native Skin to name a few.

Chamomile

by Sarah Freia

Inflammatory insurrections

seize my senses;

but you cup my hands

and murmur chamomile cherishes

which appease all anxious

aspersions from brewing further.

Sarah Freia (she/her) is a multilingual author and actor, who has lived and studied in Paris, London, and Toronto. She recently graduated with an International B.A. in French and Hispanic literature and a French B.Ed (Sorbonne Université / Glendon Campus). She continues to hone her craft at Gotham Writers Workshop and The Second City Conservatory. Recent print and online publications include Wild Greens Magazine, Soft Star Magazine, Ampersand Press, The Uncoiled, The Belle Ringer, Curio Cabinet Magazine, and Spiritus Mundi Review. Sarah is rarely seen without a coffee, or her miniature dachshund, Alphonse.

Engaging Ennui

by Sarah Freia

I always await
engaging ennui
to dissolve lovely lethargy;

amused musings
amalgamate
during midday monotony

amassing answers
to ponderings
I hadn't realized I'd posed.

Sarah Freia (she/her) is a multilingual author and actor, who has lived and studied in Paris, London, and Toronto. She recently graduated with an International B.A. in French and Hispanic literature and a French B.Ed (Sorbonne Université / Glendon Campus). She continues to hone her craft at Gotham Writers Workshop and The Second City Conservatory. Recent print and online publications include Wild Greens Magazine, Soft Star Magazine, Ampersand Press, The Uncoiled, The Belle Ringer, Curio Cabinet Magazine, and Spiritus Mundi Review. Sarah is rarely seen without a coffee, or her miniature dachshund, Alphonse.

Sugar-Coated Caresses

by Sarah Freia

I've only been treated to
sugar-coated caresses;

pitiful un-pitted dates
of dehydrated desires,

unable to stimulate
temptation's throbs, and

over-saturated, I exclusively crave
unsatisfying syrupy sentiments.

One day -

my halted heart heard
sincere sweetness reach out,

But -

my insulin's response was
silent.

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Writing a Poem

by Saptarshi Bhowmick

For me, writing a poem
with collective thoughts is difficult.
As I see myself in a chimeric room,
of numerous colourful kites,
each attached to a string of peculiar hue:

once I get hold of one,
others glisten like crystal
alluring me into their tribe.
But when I fall deep in those sensations,
I lose my grip –
That string is now nowhere to be found.
Same is when I close my eyes
to tighten my grip, once more
the Kite itself starts to loom further
and the idea flies over my head.

So, there I find myself in a black sea
where dark waves only pursue
Cresting and troughing over my head
- A cessation of Kites.

Curating the solid imageries taken from real-life experiences, **Saptarshi Bhowmick** makes his sanctuary of sublime poems. Each of them toils to tell you a different story. Came from the outskirts of a town named Berhampore, Saptarshi strives to write even when everyone in his locality claims writing as lethargic. Aside from being famous for his bilingual poems, Saptarshi got published in many International Magazines, including The Rainbow Poems, Tofu Ink Art Press, The Antonym, Wingless Dreamers, Sparked Literary Magazine, MOIDA, The Compass Magazine, SeaGlass Lit, Aster Lit, Firefly_Archives, The Graveyard Zine, The Dried Review, Meadow Mouse, Overtly Lit, Meditatingcatzine, The Hyacinth Review.

Each letter deserves a destination by Saptarshi Bhowmick

Where do these letters reach?

is it to the heart or to the brain;

for the reason of understanding or for a feel?

I write each and every sentiment, I bled.

A word for a tear of a wailing mother,

two lines, lyrical for those cupid lovebirds

and a patient paragraph of a wife for her husband

who is on eternal leave from home.

The waning moon follows the postman

as he carries their emotions with him;

without knowing the proper weight,

each land it crosses, each bloom it makes;

to the barren lap of a liable receiver

the fruit of happiness it springs_

They wait for an answer with great anticipation

as if the sender tasted the honeydew of motion

in reaching the pinnacle of plentiful emotions!

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You Will Find Me by Shamik Banerjee

Beneath the shades of a bud and sprig;
or on the crown of a hummock big;
around the fold of a rainbow sheen,
with black admirals 'mid an orchard's green;
you will find me in the dreams I share--
with them, on the lap of nature's care.

In the wind of the voice, a cantor sings;
or aside the bells of pigeonwings;
whereupon the town-streets singly run,
or in the fame of a maiden's bun;
in busy groups of chatter and blare--
with the sudden swoop of unseen air.

Where wide continents' lands are woven;
whose prospects come as views in sweven;
with fast bogies on a railroad's track,
or still as the mild grass, reclined back;
in their finespun hearts with depth as sea,
in a remote backwater's secrecy.

Often by a pond with its breast of blue;
or a foothill with its greeny hue;
in the trims of an old vignette or dome,
or in the vicinage of my home;
in emotions of a purling heart,
and within the deep layers of art.

You will find me in earth and above,
in the sonhood of my warmth and love;

in the conjunct fate of smiles and woes,
with stillborn men and they who rose;
in the courtliness of life and scar,
and then, if you think, I voyage far,
of me, you will find, yet, none of me,
but in my wordings of poesy.

Shamik Banerjee is a poet and poetry reviewer from the North-Eastern belt of India. He loves taking long strolls and spending time with his family. His deep affection with solitude and Poetry provides him happiness. He has recently founded a poetry journal and aims to contribute immensely towards its future.

Autumn Morns

by Shamik Banerjee

The Autumn morns are very shy:
meek sunshine waits from pot to pot,
when plants have risen to the sky,
to see the pretty dews;
who once again to them have brought
their blitheful interviews.

The fish look merry in their school,
when on them falls the dust and mote
through light of early crepuscule
and does the manure heat;
for lawn-wickets to shine and gloat-
in pride, with birds abeat.

The brace of sun is gentle more,
when dins and gaggles do not blow;
and I have sat in corridor,
calmly 'neath its cover;
the warmth is meet- not high, nor low--
like palms of a lover.

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The Person I Used to Like

by Erin Mullens

The wind whistles violence, colder

Than a dragon from the north.

Its grating teeth bite straight into

The exposed skin of my shoulder.

An amateur's attempt at seduction.

Look, I say turning to that guy

The one sitting right next to me

With curly hair and brown eyes.

Look up at the stars. Look.

The stars are currently obscured

By gigawatts of light pollution

But he's dumb and takes the bait.

While his head is turned upwards

I grab his chin and kiss him. Hard.

I kiss him with enough strength

To suck all the sadness out of me.

When he pulls away, he smiles

But I look down at my wrist

And finger the threads of my bracelet.

He appears in my mind. Not that guy

Who is just merely enough in every way

But *him*. The person I used to like.

His face is shadowy, ghost like

Framed by the mischievous sun

Of an afternoon in early August.

I bite my lip and wonder

What it would've felt like to kiss him.

I was too scared to find out.

In the eerie reflection of the Han River.
I can see everything, all over again.
His eyes my shaking knee the crying kid
The ads in the window my cold coffee melting
My high pitched laughter rough brick tile
Our voices like flowers blooming
As the moon stood sentry over the horizon.

My regrets mix into the sordid air of night
Falling in little star shaped tears. I sigh.
That guy has his arm around but I am still cold.
The Han River stares incriminatingly at me.
Why? The water asks, waves scooping
Through the tension that balances in the air.
I turn away. I don't have an answer.
All I have is the slight shiver of my heart
When I think of the person I used to like.

Cracks

by Erin Mullens

Each thought I have is like another step
Out onto the frozen ice. It is cracking
But I keep walking- I can't help myself-
Until the cracking is a disharmonious crescendo
That drowns out every other sound.
I plunge into the cold. I keep my eyes open
But there is nothing for me to see.

When I talk to my friends, I feel so fake.
I am cotton candy, looking so colorful
But really it's just spun air and some sugar.
I am a rainbow, looking so magical
But when you try to touch me, I disappear.
I am a tropical island, I appear like paradise
But underneath is a volcano about to erupt.
The lava pools with each heartbeat
And the anger surges like a tsunami.

Sometimes, when I lie face down on the floor
Slowly reciting a list of the thoughts that ail me
I feel like Atlas. If I try to put down the world
I know I will have to shut down to avoid destruction.
I will have to funnel all the feelings out of my body
So I become a collection of strong winds
With nothing solid left to clutch on to.
If I try to run away, I know I will go in circles.
The places I go to always look like the places
From which I was running. And it all
Begins to blur together, like one long nightmare
Because the problem isn't anything outside,

It's inside of me. The problem is me.

Because the truth is I am not really a person.

I am a brilliant vase, shattered on the ground

And now my well constructed patterns

Are just bits of shining glass on the floor

If you touch them they will make you bleed.

I am a crumbling set of ornate stairs

It used to lead to somewhere, but somewhere

Was destroyed a long time ago by invaders

Now it leads only to a precipitous fall.

I close my eyes and look at my heart

The darkness is swimming softly in me

My hands shake. I don't know what to do.

I never know what to do.

Erin Mullens is an American writer who currently lives in Seoul, South Korea. Her hobbies include reading, going to art museums, and hiking in the woods. She has previously been published in Cathartic Youth Literary magazine. You can follow her on Instagram at @moonchildisuhgood.

This is a bad poem.

by Shining Chen

This is a bad poem,
It consists of fourteen lines.
Why are you wasting your time,
Reading this.
You could be doing so many other things,
That are more productive,
A much better use of your time.

Grammarly is picking at my “are” in line 6,
So annoying.
Speaking of annoying,
I’m talking about you.
Read something else,
Something that you enjoy,
Whatever.

scraps by Anatalia Vallez

writing is flipping a bubbling pancake to a crisp golden brown
writing is singing to the onion that keeps growing on the counter
writing is cleaning the sink, scrubbing the bathroom
texting the group chat
sitting in front of a tv only to sneak a few words in a notebook
to placate the need to make sense of this rock we live on

writing is learning a new Gwen Verdon dance
and doing a full-body shake in the mirror
writing is looking up the nine greek goddesses
and dedicating a day to honor each of them
writing is reciting Bianca's poem in 10 Things I Hate About You
and rolling your eyes when you cry on the same line

writing is putting the veggie scraps in a container
in hopes you'll remember
what was so special
about the routine
so ordinary
it made space for words

messy
fleshy
sweet
full of juicy vitamins
don't throw them away
not yet
they've only just begun to tell their story

Anatalia Vallez is a writer, actor, and creative alchemist, currently pursuing her MFA in Television, Film and Theatre at Cal State LA. She is the author of the poetry collection: *The Most Spectacular Mistake* (FlowerSong Press, 2020) and has been featured in the LA Times, LibroMobile and KPFK Radio's *Nuestra Voz*.

you're magnetic by Anatalia Vallez

there's something so special about a heart breaking open
the light coming in to show you what is you
because that which is meant for you will show up
listen closely
because that which is meant for you
will trickle in
like the sound of a leaking faucet
you can choose to turn it off
but there is also the possibility
of turning it on
tuning yourself into the frequency
flow
rivers ravaging
everything in your way
and all of a sudden you're both lost and found
no longer at the leaking faucet
but in a safety vest
cascading
somewhere you've dreamt of before
enjoying the thrill with whomever is on the same boat
the heart's electrical field is about 60 times greater than the electrical activity generated by the
brain
so yeah
basically
you're magnetic

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