



ISSUE 02

PERSIMMON REVIEW

Summer 2023

Cover Art by Cyrus Carlson



Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Issue 02 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 written and visual work, regardless of age or experience, in hopes of bringing people together through their craft.

Issue 02 features an optional theme surrounding topics associated with summer. Summer has various interpretations due to different emotions and events that one can experience during this time. These pieces enable readers to explore this season from many perspectives.

Thank you to the contributors who submitted their work to make this publication possible. Additionally, thank you to the readers and social media followers. The growing support for Persimmon Review has been truly meaningful.

It is an honor to share the creative pieces of talented writers and artists. I hope this issue inspires everyone to create. Happy summer reading!

Sincerely,

Emily Kim

Founder, Editor-in-Chief

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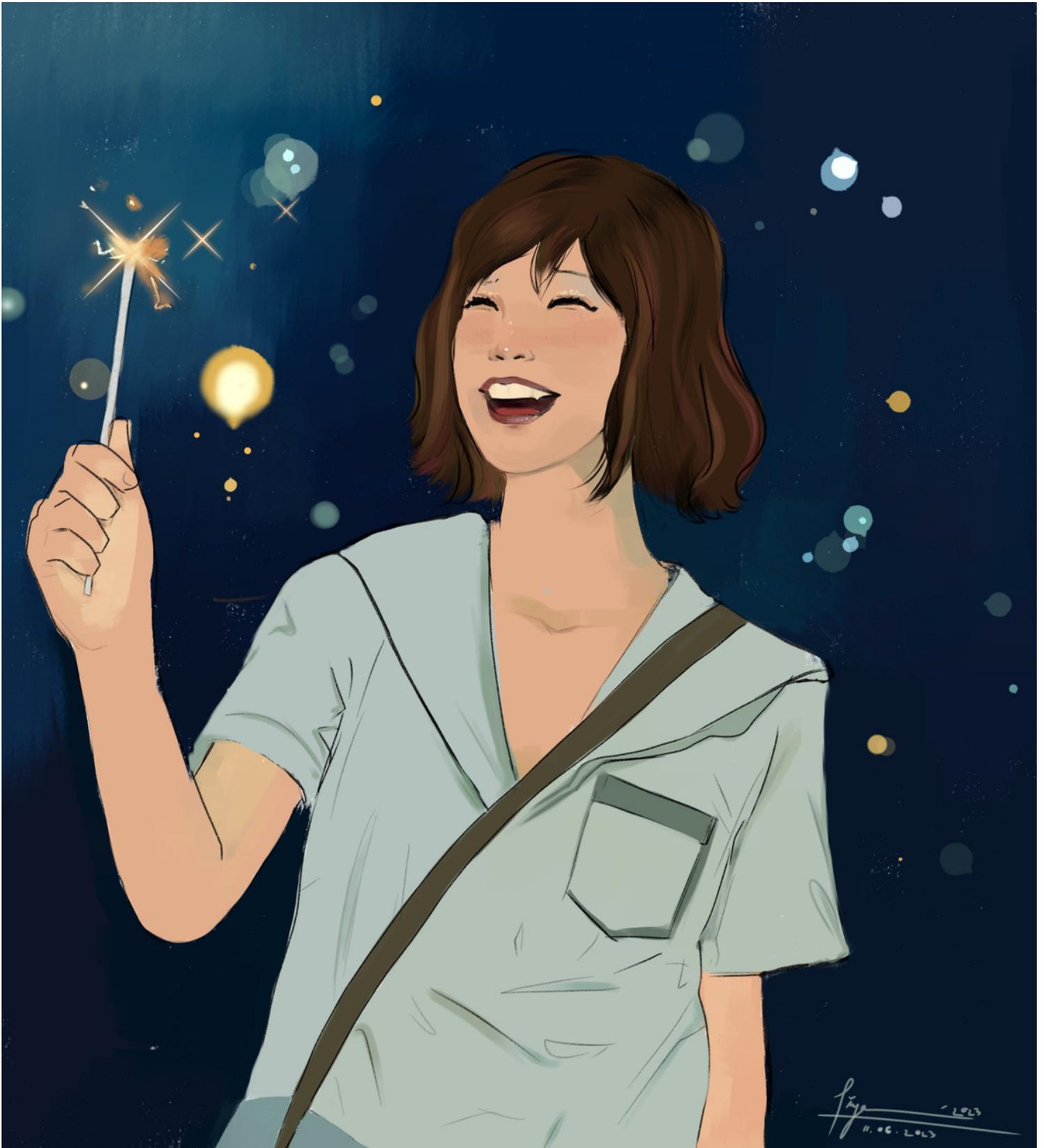
Bleeding Hearts

by Rachel Coyne



Untitled

by Zaina Alam (Piya)



Angel

by Irina Tall (Novikova)



Angel, Materials: collage, paper, Size::30x40 cm, Year:2021-2022

Landscape

by Irina Tall (Novikova)



I painted this landscape at night, when the leaves were posting from the trees, it was very cold... An impetuous fan tore my small album out of my hands and the crayons scattered over the wooden bench on which I was sitting.

Swim Mask

by Shannon Maltbie-Davis



Enjoying summertime, with my youngest son, at the swimming pool.

Swim Mask 2



Swimmer

by Shannon Maltbie-Davis



Back Float

by Shannon Maltbie-Davis



Enjoying summertime, with my youngest son, at the swimming pool.

Summer nights and fleeting connections

by Stellarvirn



Selectivity

by Taya Boyles

I almost miss it; it's almost
in the rearview mirror, where memories
go to die. I almost let go of why
I began searching in the first place.
As we glower between a day's end
and its equilibrium, I was content
to wait because there it was: u n d e n i a b l e
me, the golden hour, and your hand brushing
the tops of mine. You weren't letting go,
telling me your favorite flower is a weed
that wind and spores kept everything moving
I ask, "Where to and why in such a hurry?"
and you only smile, and I forget why I asked.
You didn't seem to blame them
so who was I to question
the unknown instead of grounding
myself in the now of you and me?

A Faraway Memory

by Rachel Lui

One Saturday morning my mum and I
got off the ferry at Lamma Island and
There were some tidy rocks cut into
cubes and rectangular prisms breaking
the waves and a white lighthouse at the edge
of a cliff and some expensive seaside
houses occupied by wealthy expats who
came up with handmade wooden signs in an
effort to stop people from littering near their
Property and clumps of trees and grass with little
crabs scuttling through sands littered with
household waste. Then at sunset the blue sky faded
into orange and grey clouds
Lastly I got a silver bracelet with a feather trinket
hanging off of it at this little souvenir shop
just before the last ferry was due to leave the pier

Looking back it wasn't really all that special
There was never going to be enough for me
To appreciate every nook and cranny
In between the rocks which got eroded away
Every day bit by bit
Whenever the sea crashes against the shore

And adds salt to its many wounds
Or the greenness of every single leaf
And the pink and purple petals
Of the flowers that grew among them
For there was no way I could have remembered
Every single detail

I stopped short of the picture
of the cool, sweet glass of piña colada
With the little white frangipani
And sex-on-the-beach
and Bluegirl beer
At this swanky little beachside luau
Overlooking the golden sands and gentle seas
Which I had no idea I was going to say goodbye to
In my phone's photo gallery
The clinking of glasses and the sloshing of
waves and the smell of vanilla and salt
Mixed together with tingling pineapple
Washed over me while I held out
in this dreary little English town miles away
from the sea with few and far between
the transport nodes and tidy neighbourhoods of
red brick buildings and vicious winds that
kept you from opening your eyes and

chilled you to the bone. At that point I was
just waiting for the day I could go home
and experience all this again with a pair of fresh eyes
After all, when given a second chance
it is always better to look forward to the
future than to reminisce and lose sleep over the past...
Isn't it?

Goldfish Market

by Rachel Lui

Viciously and relentlessly
the summer sun sent its simmering rays
hurtling towards the red-brick-covered path
while the salty sweat droplets running straight
down my baked back soaked through my favourite
blue polo shirt and the nauseating stench
of stinky tofu attacked my nostrils
And the narrow streets were crowded with people
With sunhats and sunglasses and carrying umbrellas
Like I was hurrying towards their destinations
But armed with a walletful of ten
and twenty-dollar bills I was a girl on a mission
because it was going to rain the very next day
and my pet geckos were starving for crickets
So I trudged on in search of those little critters
In one of them upstairs pet stores
Passing by glass tanks of turtles in murky
waters and plastic boxes with black
hairy tarantulas lying in wait I grabbed a bag
Full of hopping chirping crickets
Brought it to the counter and had the bag stapled shut
then paid twenty dollars

I thanked the man and went back downstairs
and walked by a small stuffy store that reeked
Of cigarette smoke with its display windows
filled with rare sulcata hatchlings
crawling around munching on fresh green lettuce
under some white lights that I knew were
likely to die in half a year if purchased by
any unsuspecting customer with no experience
In another store across the street they also
Sold blue and red and purple betta fish in
little plastic cups and little rainbow guppies
and mollies and freshwater weeds and orange
goldfish in small inflated plastic bags while the
more expensive ranchus and orandas and whatnot
Occupied the larger glass tanks with filters and beads
I walked on by, because I didn't have any fish to care for
I swear if I ever see another child
And their parents carrying a bite-sized plastic tank
With a little coin-sized turtle hatchling in it again
Talking about how it'll take ages for it to outgrow
its home I'm going to lose it completely

It was getting way too hot outside
And there was a striped tabby cat
Taking a nap in the shade of the

Small aquarium supply store

So I went back within the air-conditioned

Refuge of the mall with my crickets

And onwards home

Upon First Glancing at Bohnen's Detail of Summer Night

by Shamik Banerjee

Summer, You, the emperor Of Brightness;
Your son, the Day, does bill of work invite,
which ends with the sedate wind of lightness,
'neath the fair sky of your daughter- the Night.
So seems, in this wellborn convocation:
luminant moonwake on its ground does shine;
aurous spherules from their tall location,
suspend from spindly trees of trig design
which illustrate the greensward and the pool
and 'pon two madames, pour the sheenest light.
Glow's workman using his best refined tool,
makes them the arch attraction for one's sight!



What thought is behind each smile and laughter?
What mood engenders such vivacity?
A lady's in privity; thereafter
views the pond. What chimera does she see
that makes her eyes delectation express?
The centreward madames what charm have pent
which all the other females does impress
that they're gloaring at them with full attent?
O' Night, how do you bring with willfulness,

unacquainted people, 'neath one archway
and fill ebullience with skilfulness
in their hearts where unified joyiness sway?

Like discourses the man in his swart coat
with the woman who's in her bustled wear.
Men's crews and women's be vies are remote
while love-pairs are diverged here and there.

O' Night, in your painting, the air rools not
but gallivants throughout this happy spot!

How do you construct such animation?

And which knowledge of finesse do you dern,
which tugs me to this meeting's formation
and spurs me to this artwork itself turn?

I know, it is your saintliness that blooms
for every daughter has a mother's soul,
who loves each child equally in heart's rooms,
like you, O' Night, who vivify them whole.

The Huckster

by Shamik Banerjee

There, in the Sun of loamy eastern soil,
peddles she, from one door to the other;
a mickle bag, clenched in her hands that moil
with her reasty feet, tarnished together.

I saw her today, in sudoral state
in the humid noon. She galumphed all through
and higgled for the dairy in her crate
under the muggy heat to earn for two.

Then saw her halt on fenny ground with trees,
and clean the face and breathe the air to fill;
to toil some more until the day would cease;
so calmingly, could feed herself the meal;
then rest at night when all her wear is gone
and nuzzle with her merry little son.

The Lemon Tree

by Ruchi Acharya

In my garden of dreams,
Butterflies flit and flutter,
Avoiding the insatiable lemon tree,
Its fruit changeless and yellow.

The slope of my confidence,
Descended over time's ticking clock,
Lost chances in mock opulence,
Like the aromatic golden citrus, I could not unlock.

The lemon tree, my spiritual guide,
Rises above the taste it provides,
Freshening and refreshing,
Captivating the buzzing bee,
In the sultry breeze of Somerset.

As I squeeze the half-cut lemon,
Its starry divisions perfume the earth,
Watering and whirling,
Into the transparent glass,
My thoughts ponder in the heat of July.

This Morning

by Hayden Park

This morning, my mind

rose earlier than me

As the shadows

hurried away from the dawn, she

grew weary of my silence and

left me with my dreams

Dawn,

she asked,

what shall I wear today?

As dawn kept peace with silence, she

sang melodies with no cadences and

danced improv across

unswept floors with

the dust

She flung open the boarded windows and

bathed in autumn's first breeze

Beaming, the sun rose to greet her,

escorted by blushing

cotton clouds

What shall I wear today? she asked the

armoire carved from maple and mirth

She carelessly tossed

delicate lace and luxurious silk

And as I awoke I saw her in white

carnations. I wanted to yell stop but she

put a finger to her lips and I said

nothing

I danced alongside her,

and the rain fell through my soul

This beautiful October morning.

Spring Cleaning

by Hayden Park

The last thing was the turntable.

A record, too,

lay where she had left it.

Its layers of dust were like tree rings, one

for each year. She erased

some of those painful seasons

with only her index finger

and a trail through the dust.

The needle grazed the

black vinyl, and the song

began soon after.

She let herself remember. She

listened to the voices

she had locked away

after he left. It was an old tune,

but it sang with only the

faintest quaver of age. Then

she went downstairs and

rolled her sleeves up. Ran

her cracked hands

under stinging water.

And when the record

stopped turning, she
continued. Because
the dishes were still
unwashed, and the children
still had to be put to bed.

and you said Look at Me

by Julia Glazebnik

Every year when the salt splashes in I remember I exist.

How the cool night air rushed through your open window

And I didn't know where to put my hands—

Where to touch first.

How you looked next to me when dawn broke,

Shapeless under the orange light,

And how you, my lover boy with the blue-green eyes,

Cried your sweet, soft cry and

Blew my raw heart out into the water.

I was sure that one day this sadness would fossilize—

That I would not feel fear or anger or hurt

But only the sun,

Bright and golden along my back as I ran home, happy;

But I feel everything.

I remember how long your lips stayed pressed together,

Determined and trembling, like you were scared of what you might say. (I wasn't)

How sorry I was, I was;

I knew it couldn't help.

And I remember how righteous you were

When you looked to heaven for guidance and

Prayed, and prayed, and prayed.

How sweet your smile came when

You said you loved me and

I almost believed you. I crossed my fingers under my thigh then but

I don't think I'll ever live that way again—

The surf lapping up your calves and the rust on our hinges.

But I remember, and, oh,

How soft your skin was under my fingertips.

The Fairy Song

by Ava Palmer

Between the moon and its frozen reflection,
Blue eyes, ringed with white,
A flowing dress, white, blue, lilac,
I cannot tell,
Enchanted, drunk on your laugh,
Long-limbed people play the harp,
Captured in song, in the hot blood of youth,
The world falls away, we are not on earth,
Prayers play on our tongues,
In a language with no name,
The Bear above did wink at me,
In slumber, I rise and dance to a sickening tune,
The Earth no longer spins,
Caught in a stupor, wound in a trance,
Let the dance begin.

thoughts of a summer evening

by Maggie Jordan

my ice cream is melting

in my hands,

mosquitos humming all around me.

the darkness seems inviting,

warm.

(perhaps that's the humidity.)

a bunny hopped by,

I think; it's hard to tell under the diffused green porch light.

ice cream, mosquitos, humidity, bad lighting.

somehow these make everything seem okay

on summer nights.

Therapy

by Chris Mardiroussian

She's trying on a new baseball cap
this time, and we both knew it.

"When you're ready," she said.

"Let's begin."

"Don't undress my soul,"

I said. "You might find a tumor."

"And what about this tumor?" she asked.

The therapist is a store window
trapping me like a mannequin; a doctor
prepping to dice me open for a surgery;
a God for turning that miracle of water
into cheap wine.

"Don't remove the tumor,
you might find my soul."

"Surely, there must be a way
we have not yet thought of," she said.

“I doubt it,” I said. “There is an emptiness in this world so great that you follow it in the magnetic movement of a compass.”

“What you see is the struggle in the struggle.”

“The real struggle is sitting in a small room, on a crooked velvet couch, drinking a tall glass of water instead of sipping a glass of whiskey and rolling a blunt as I scratch myself, listening to a shrink who is a stranger with legs like toothpicks, feels like coming back from a thousand wars alive.”

The therapist worked all up and down like the earth spinning around the sun, pulled up my pants, and stumbled into the other room, inside the darkness, thinking: *maybe this is it.*

The summer I fell in love

by Johanna Gibson

your body broke the beaming sun
caustic on the water's surface and you
emerged, beach beading on your afro,

beside you there were rays sifting sand,
a crab bent itself over your twice-broken toe,
the incoming wave bullied your back

but you, unmoved, called out for me to join
and I, cautioned, aware of coastal deceit
crammed near the shoreline considering

you a god I had lassoed. your mouth formed
a sea foam smile before you mounted your
chest against the seafloor, a school of fish

appeared around you. that was the summer
I discovered the sea could surrender to a
man, heard the ocean belly your blessings

and I behaved as if a batholith had ruptured
beneath me, certain I would go forth willingly
into whatever water you whirl-pooled.

citrus on ceramic

by Jules Duve

the knife slices through peel and flesh until wood.

then, a plate of fruit

—cut neatly, arranged meticulously—

handed to the other, careful not to touch.

the sweet juice sticks to skin

as do the bitter words that berate the brain.

minimum eye contact, a slight nod,

and a silence followed by absence—the tautness of the saran wrap lessens.

metal clatters in the sink below,

signaling exchange complete:

apology automatically accepted.

Old Friends

by Victor Doan

Our merry band roams during ghoulish hours

Accompanied by the dark of the park

The same-old conversation never sours

Broken up by the rare turtle or lark

We run to find a dark spot for relief

Disregarding the gross, long-locked bathrooms

Planning dinners and substitutes for beef

Laughs smash apart the silence with our booms

Wandering vacantly through the sprinklers

Cringing as the mud seeps into our shoes

We chuck insults when one of us shivers

Pondering shared take-out meals as our muse

Walking around the bone-dry reservoir

Until we tire and flee back to the car

Greetings

by Cesar Toscano

I would love to hear your story again, but I am so tired of crying
like a Kangaroo who's found her joey
in the middle of the night
after losing him the morning before

I can spot it,

the little pinnacles of circles
hanging around your cheeks
How they are but little dimples of
pink and velvet

You see,

I was once the joey
all lost and cold in the
blankets of my bed
In my apartment on Van Buren

Where,

the window blinds blinded me
of color and sounds that would
have never occurred to me
if I hadn't left

The pigeons on Michigan street and
the honking of a bus driver, all these things
would be just dying moments before, but now
I see them as extensions of little time we are here

Yes,

Remember, every thing

little or large

How the colors rearrange into blobs and cubes
of green, blue, red, yellow, orange and purple—

Of Joy

A Lovely Night

by Blanka Pillár

(A dark street scene, lit only by the faint flickering lights in the distance. Man on the left, woman on the right. Only their pale shadows are visible.)

(silence)

It would be so much easier if we could be two other people. If I hadn't come here, and you hadn't been here, it wouldn't have happened like this. If we weren't standing here right now, I wouldn't have to break this awful, oppressive silence because I wouldn't have to do it. If you hadn't been staring at yourself, I hadn't have been freezing from this bone-chilling cold. If you'd looked me in the eye because you couldn't look away, if you'd spent the whole night seeking how you could make me laugh. If you hadn't left me alone and knew how much loneliness torments me. If you'd touched me, not the way you touched others, but in a way, you didn't know you could touch. If my stomach hadn't been clenching with agonising nervousness, I hadn't have had to stare at the floor the whole time. If you'd finally seen me the way I wanted you to see me. If you hadn't said what you said and what you're going to say if you hadn't asked me what you asked me. If we'd even taken a breath together if you'd drunk in my words, if you couldn't tear yourself away from me. If you'd seen or heard me if I hadn't been deafening and invisible to you.

Or, if I hadn't been like this instead if I hadn't acted like me, if I hadn't been so loud and if I could decide why I was saying anything to you. If I hadn't tried to figure out what you thought, if I hadn't responded with half-words and panick and if I hadn't run away when I felt I wasn't needed again. If I hadn't asked questions and dreaded the answers, if I had been able to decide what I wanted from myself, from you and them. If I hadn't bitten my nails and wrung my hands, if I had been brave and special and wonderful if I had been able to break free of everything I never needed to be stuck

in. If I hadn't gotten caught up in the tension and the trepidation if I hadn't misunderstood everything and hadn't gotten myself into this. If I hadn't ruined any chance of my own happiness, if I had been lovable, if I had deserved something in this life, if I had even the last shred of dignity. If I could have stopped talking and not told you all this. Then everything would have been easier.

(silence)

(He looks down at her. He stares at her sideways for a few seconds, then looks back ahead. He says nothing.)

Endless Summer

by Gemma Fable

Since his passing, Jack had existed in a blissful, endless summer.

He knew there were other seasons - though his memory of them was admittedly distant as if they were just something he had heard about from a friend of a friend. Other seasons didn't sound remotely plausible to him: flowers growing in the trees, turning orange and crimson as if they had burned, or the ground covered in cold, tasteless ice cream.

Not that he could taste ice cream in his spectral state. He could stand beside the van that was always parked at the end of the pier and inhale the scent. Sometimes he would follow sticky-handed children that held the cones, his face close to the ice cream and that was almost like eating. Not that he could remember eating. That was something as unattainable as autumn.

His afterlife was everything he hadn't been able to do in life - endless turns on the merry-go-round, slipping into the final seat of all the rides without question, slotting every coin he found into the arcade games, running along with the other children laughing and joking as if they could see him.

It was lucky they couldn't see him. Jack, in the afterlife, had become something not quite human. His skin was seaweed, taut across sinewy bones that were yellowed with age where they poked through. In some places, his old skin could be seen - gritty with sand and saltwater, shells and stones freckled across him. At some point, he had lost a leg. A twisted driftwood pole had taken its place, the seaweed tethering it to the rest of his body.

Jack remained on the pier throughout the endless summer. He knew every ride and stall and where to watch the sunrise and the best view of the ocean.

Not that he looked at the ocean if he could help it. The swell of it made him shudder, on rough days he would hide in the arcade or retreat to the part of the pier closest to land and shut his eyes against the storm. He didn't like to think of it swirling underneath the planks of the pier.

He never went to the very end of the pier. There wasn't anything interesting there. No fairground rides or sweet-smelling food stalls. Just empty planks and endless ocean. Not until the three of them came.

Two men and a woman, dressed in sombre black. Next to the Hawaiian shirts and bright t-shirts of the holidaymakers they looked like a trio of crows in a pandemonium of parrots. Jack thought he recognised them - not as they were now, but as they had been in the time before summer: three children, running along the pier and playing about on the beach.

As he watched them, he thought he saw the young faces shudder across their aged ones.

He followed them. Past the merriment of the fairground to the place he never thought he would go.

He walked beside them with the light dancing steps of the beginning of summer.

He thought that the trio had become shorter as they got close to the edge, their black clothes becoming bright and summery, the woman's bouquet of roses becoming a package of fish and chips.

One of the men - no, they were boys now - reached into the packet and threw a chip into the air. They watched a seagull snatch it from the sky. He laughed, grabbing for another.

“Stop it!” the girl shouted, holding the greasy package out of his way, “This is all we’ve got for lunch.”

Impulsively, Jack grabbed one and sent it soaring into the sky.

“Jack!” she span on him, and he was seen for the first time since life, “I don’t want them swooping down.”

She glanced to the sky, ducking at the flap of wings far above.

But she was laughing, really. They all were.

They sat down, the package of lunch spread between them. One of the boys took a handful and ate it as he balanced along the edge.

“Be careful!” the girl said, “You’ll fall in.”

Jack felt his heart thumping hard, his breath heavy. Two things that hadn’t happened in a long time.

The boy only rolled his eyes, “It’s really calm. Don’t worry.”

“It only looks calm.”

He scoffed, “Sure. I could jump in and be -”

“Don’t you dare!”

Jack felt himself moving towards the edge, “It does look calm.” he said, though he knew it wasn’t. That ghostly part of him was screaming, “Don’t!”

Just as the girl was.

“I dare you to jump in.”

“Don’t!”

Jack looked to the water and found the ghostly part of him was gone; a grin came to his face, “How much do you bet?”

“Don’t!”

There was the click of coins, and quick bartering as the bet was placed.

Then, Jack dived. He dived as he had seen Olympians do, and landed on the grey ocean with a hard smack. He kicked, feebly. The waves tossed him up and down, each shout taking in another mouthful of saltwater.

He was aware of a panic above, though not very. His kicks became weaker, his vision faded until he became aware of a bright white light.

The waves tossed the roses away from the pier.

The three old crows stood close to the edge and watched until the last petal disappeared beneath the foam.

Working Late in Bacolod

by Kim Detore

Sunlight was a deep red-orange, shifting slowly to let the shadows take over. Jeepneys passing were turning on their headlights, one after the other, to see more of the busy streets. Carts selling fried chicken, barbecued pork, and other mystery meats were pushed and gathered near the southbound double-tire buses were parked, hoping for additional customers before the day ended. People were skirting the edge of the road to get to their destinations, navigating through a maze of food stalls, parked cars, and little hills of garbage on the side of the street. The smokey, savoury meats being grilled by the merchants in their tiny stalls camouflaged the burnt gasoline from automobile exhausts and the rotting stench of decaying vegetables from the surrounding marketplace.

Joel, who was standing in front of SaveMore, was one of these folks. Marie, his wife, was calling. She asked where he was and bombarded him with several household issues that irritated him. As a result, he gave her short answers. He was tired of the questions. He sighed deeply and said, "let's talk about this when I get home, alright?" With that, their conversation was over.

After a few minutes of standing and waiting for the next double-tire, he felt his hunger set in. He bought a water bottle from a passing vendor in a white shirt with a "Re-Elect" print for some politician he did not care about. He preferred not to buy from the carts, as any sane person would, in fear of getting hepatitis from those mystery meats. No matter how appetizing the savoury smell was, only God knows what vendors put in them to cut costs. He reasoned that a little bag of salted peanuts would be safer to eat and satisfy his hunger until he arrived home. He had a poor day at work, and his prospects of having a better day when it came time to go were dropping by the second. He tapped the young peanut vendor in the green shirt from whom he had purchased the peanuts.

"Hey, you gave me the wrong change," he grumbled. "It's short ten pesos. Straighten this out!"

"Sorry, sir. How much did you buy?"

"Only twenty."

"Here you go, sir. Sorry again," the young vendor said, his back hunched in a bow as he handed Joel the ten-peso coin.

"Get it right next time, will you?" Joel's voice was loud other people turned their heads to look at the vendor. The vendor was a few inches taller than Joel but appeared small. His dispirited expression made him look older.

Seeing the vendor shrink in his presence satisfied Joel. He thought that the embarrassment the vendor felt is a small inconvenience compared to what his other customers must have experienced (or will be experiencing). It should be corrected right away. The vendor apologized again, to which Joel gave him only a curt nod. The vendor left in a hurry.

Joel inhaled deeply, poured a handful of peanuts on his palm, and threw them into his mouth. As he was chewing, his mind rewound the events in the office earlier in the day.

Their office had a meeting wherein the managers and team leaders reported what they did for the past month and their level of productivity. Joel never did like most of his colleagues. He had his reasons. One of them was Dave. He talked rapidly during his presentation. He managed a ranch the province owns somewhere in Murcia. Everyone else in the room gave spectacular, colourful PowerPoint presentations, and Dave had put more work into the graphics than the actual data he provided. How does Joel know this? He 'helped' Dave in making his data seem reasonable. And 'help' meant organizing and calculating the data himself from unintelligible raw data made up by Dave out of thin air (as most government employees do sometimes, unfortunately). Joel was annoyed by Dave's insistence that he help him, reasoning that he was just a junior. A new youngster. Yet he had to do it to finish the job, if only for this month. Dave would then be out of his mind. Joel agreed that Dave would have to produce his reports after that.

Joel watched, concentrating on the presentation, trying to listen to the presenter's words. It distracted him from the boiling annoyance that might ruin his report. He was to present his data last. On paper, Joel was not the manager of the province's farm ranch but was given the job regardless. It was almost midday when he got to the number of cow deliveries throughout the farm ranch completed.

"And that concludes my livestock report."

Small claps can be heard around the table. Joel smiled at this and mouthed a 'thank you' to his colleagues. He walked back to his seat, still smiling, and he received a soft pat on the back from a friend of his when he finally got there. However, the floating feeling he experienced dissipated when his boss opened his mouth. Joel did not appreciate his boss taking the piss at him for loaning at the cooperative so often.

"Well done, I do not regret raising your salary. *Te*, go ahead and empty it with all those loans you keep on getting," his boss said as he laughed. His coworkers let out small chuckles as his boss smiled smugly. Joel's mind raced, flashing through a multitude of different scenarios in his mind, most of them involving picking a fight with the man who ran their office. He didn't know which ones to do. He feigned a chuckle and bit back the reply he was about to utter. He genuinely wanted to say anything to defend himself or retaliate against his employer, but he decided against it. This was not worth getting heat from his boss or HR. He was tense for the rest of the day. He snapped at his coworkers if they did anything he thought was stupid or annoying while thinking of what he could have said, but didn't.

Now, here he was, at the end of his work week, and the double-tire bus had arrived. He took a step aboard and scanned the interior. There were no seats left near the window, so he sat beside a girl he thought to be the same age as his eldest daughter, who was now in Dumaguete for college. Joel remembered that his daughter was coming home the day after. He was looking forward to the weekend since it was the only time he could relax at home with his wife, children, and his pet dog, Moki. He felt nearly comfortable with the concept. He couldn't get his boss's words out of his head. He had to put up with the mockery and suffering, he reasoned. He toils at a job with people he despises not for recognition, but for the sake of his family's survival.

Joel slept off a few minutes into the bus journey. He awoke to a discussion between the girl beside him and a boy who had moved to his right. He had no recollection of his being there, so Joel reasoned that the youngster must have come aboard the bus while he was sleeping.

He was not judging people based on looks, but he does listen to what comes out of their mouths, and all he could hear from the boy was boasting.

"I just got out of basketball practice, as you know, I'm a varsity player."

"Yeah, I know a lot of people. I could hook you up with someone I know who sells tickets for that party."

"Dad has a Ranger Raptor, so I could maybe drive for you and some of our classmates during the field trip."

All Joel could hear from the boy was 'I, I, I' and 'me, me, me,' which was infuriating. He saw today's youth as entitled, all talk but with little to show. He had part-time jobs on top of part-time jobs in college and didn't brag about the money he didn't have.

The car this boy was boasting about was not even his but his dad's. He gritted his teeth and offered to switch seats with the boy, no longer eavesdrop on other people's conversations, and sleep during the ride peacefully. Unfortunately, he could not go back to sleep that easily.

So, Joel observed the two college students beside him instead. He overheard that the girl's name was Katrina, and the boy's name was Josh. They were in second-year college, just a year under his eldest. It appeared to Joel that Josh was flexing how great he was. Joel was willing to bet that the boy was interested in Katrina, and his guess was proven right when the boy finally asked the question.

"If you're single now, that means I have a chance with you, right?"

If it was his child this boy was flirting with, he would reveal him to be the pretentious bum that he truly is like he did the last time someone just a cent short of a peso was courting his daughter.

"Sorry, Josh. I am not interested in having a boyfriend at the moment. I want to focus on my studies. Maybe when I graduate, that's when I'll think about having a relationship."

All Josh could say was, "Oh, okay," and the two young persons went silent. Joel thought that he was not the only one having misfortunes today, that he felt like telling a joke.

"What, that's it? All that talk was just until here, *junior*? We haven't even left *Bago City* yet!"

Joel told the boy and snickered.

Josh's face and ears became red. He stiffened and glared at a grinning Joel, his lips pressed together, forming a thin line. The boy breathed in slowly, seemingly letting the joke go. He ignored Joel for the rest of the trip.

Joel fell asleep during the ride again for a few minutes until they arrived in Pulu Pandan. Outside of the bus was dark now, with a few specks of white light streaming in from the buildings and houses they'd pass by along the highway. The orange lights inside the bus shined warmly around Joel, which did little to help him shake the drowsy, foggy feeling in his mind. The time on his watch was 6:15 p.m. He attempted to shrug it off to embrace alertness.

"Excuse me," the boy, Josh said to him. The bus had come to its usual unloading zone in Pulu Pandan. This must be where Josh was getting off, Joel thought. Joel gave space for the boy to walk past. Katrina waved goodbye to her classmate.

Joel felt the back of his head being grabbed. All he could hear was a ringing in his ears. The only thing he could see was the fuzzy shapes of his fellow passengers. All he could feel was aching and swelling on his top lip. It felt like forever when he came to his senses. He felt faster than time. His heart sank to his stomach, but his body felt light. Everything was clear at that moment. Feeling the world was more vivid now than he could remember, he did not need to touch and check if his lip was bleeding. He could taste his blood dripping. His mind thought of nothing but one thing. That boy, Josh, did this. He jumped up from his seat to go after Josh. Joel reached out and smacked the side of the boy's head on the open bus door. The act elicited gasps of horror from the onlookers. Knuckles turning white, Joel clenched his fists, deciding whether to punch the boy or not. The moment almost went into a full-blown fight, if not for the bus conductor, who stopped it from escalating further.

Of course, Joel wanted to report this incident to the authorities, and they were both escorted to the nearest police station to file a blotter report. When they arrived, they were at each other's throats again. The boy was very agitated and was only held by an officer. Joel only sat down next to the officer that is recording the report, holding an ice pack to his bleeding and swelling lip.

"Stupid old man, *gago!*" Josh screamed. "If you didn't start, this never would have happened."

"What I said was a joke, if you're easily offended by it, you're an onion-skinned show-off. Ironically, you weren't embarrassed while bragging to that girl back in the bus, but ashamed because of a joke," Joel replied, however calm he appeared, the anger he felt was clear in his tone.

"You're like this because you must hate your life, that you want other people to suffer with you, you want everyone to be as miserable as you! You are a pitiful old man that I almost feel sorry for you, you judgemental old man."

Surely, he did not feel or think like that...right? However, why else would he jump into a conversation he was not a part of? Joel went silent and contemplated what was said while the boy was being told to be silent. The boy was the first one to be sent home at eight in the evening.

Luckily, Joel met Gabe, an officer friend of his, who was stationed at the town's police station. Joel thought he rarely saw Gabe nowadays, and they met at such an unfortunate time. He escorted Joel, thirty minutes after Josh was sent home, for fear that the boy would come back and bring more trouble for them. Gabe said that he was driving back anyway, so he might as well make sure Joel was home safely. Although, Gabe wondered why Joel, chatty and witty Joel, was silent during the twenty-minute drive.

When they were finally outside Joel's gate, he wished his friend the best and gave Joel's shoulder a soft squeeze. Joel thanked him for the ride home.

Marie was waiting for him to come home, worried that her husband came home late. She opened the gate for him and asked what happened. His youngest child was already asleep, and will only hear about what happened in the morning.

"Some college student pushed my head on the headrest on the way home."

"Is it bad? Do we need to go to the hospital?"

"No, no need."

"Are you sure?"

He squeezed her in a tight hug. "Yes, I'm sure."

Joel paused, and squeezed Marie in a tight hug. "I'm sorry," Joel whispered as he held her.

"For coming home late?"

"For being horrible when mad...and that too."

"You better be sorry, I was very worried!"

Joel woke up later than usual at seven thirty in the morning. It was forgivable since it was the weekend. Immediately after waking up, he goes to the bathroom. He catches a glimpse of his reflection in the bathroom mirror. His upper lip was not as swollen as it was last night, and the wound was already forming a scab. Looks like it was going to leave a scar. However, he did not mind. He was relaxed. He felt like today was going to be better. He did not need to be mad at his boss, at young people, his wife, or anyone. Everything was going to be okay.

A Friend for Two Nights

by Isabella Zhu

We lie across your bed, resting our short legs up against the wall so that we are sideways, facing the open window. In drifts the early morning breeze, all saltwater tinged, brushing against our matching red cheeks. The Italian air hugs me like rocks against your coastline; it hugs me like this is my home. I've only stayed here for three days, but I could almost believe it. We stick our heads outside, and Vernazza's colors come to life before my eyes. The bickering merchants wave at us as they make their way down the cobblestone with carts of fruit; we wave back and signal for them to ring their bells. You laugh when they do, all giggles and snorts, like usual, but they fall short instead of fading. I am not laughing with you. I am losing against the thought that this is the last time we'll ever be able to do this. The gleaming ships of dawn depart from the age-old docks into the stretch of blue-green sea, and I wonder if you are thinking the same thing as me: In three hours, I'll be the one leaving.

I push away the image of my parents retrieving me on one of those boats—back from their cruise tour around Italy—and stare back at you. Your golden curls frame your pinkish skin like a crown, though your eyes wear the sadness of a wounded bird. You are right here, nestled in this gingham blanket we've shared since Aunt Betty agreed to drop me off two days ago, but I already miss you. You should be a stranger to me, but now you're my best friend, and I already miss you. I miss you, I miss you, I miss you. Trembling, I hold out my pinky finger, and you do the same.

"Let's promise to never forget each other," you say, grinning with two uneven dimples.

"I promise," we whisper in unison, our two distinct accents—mine choppy and brash, yours slurred and gentle—blending into one. Between the lulled tongue of the sky and swollen gums of the shore, the sun bursts out from under the sea with the pop of a tangerine. Bathed in soft rays of pink and gold, we intertwine our fingers and swear wholeheartedly to remember each other for the rest of our lives—because we are children, or at least we are girls, and we have found in each other something as special as a four leaf clover in the middle of winter.

We have not known each other for more than seventy two hours, but the scent of your family's laundry soap—lemon, mixed with some strange spice, not abundantly sweet, yet pleasant—has melted into the blues of my denim jacket and even the bronze of my skin. You had not looked at me strangely (like others would) when I remarked that I could almost taste the tangy yellows of it in the air of your room. You just laughed and told me about how your father was obsessed with it, how every Sunday morning he dumps cups of the liquid into the washer so that your whole house would smell like lemons. It is a tradition, and your family has loads of them—like how every week, ever since you learned to walk, you'd go with him to the rustic, red-roofed marketplace. I picture the hours you two have spent perching at leafy greens, and you as a toddler, sitting on his shoulders and pointing at tomatoes. I find it fascinating, the way your life has been grounded in this village of sunshine, grounded in cliffside beach walks and decade old dinner tables.

Your parents, they do not mind my presence one bit, though I can't imagine why. I know my shuffling, awkward limbs and choppy patterns of speech are far from charming. But ever since that day you found me alone on the sandless beach and dragged me home, all I have felt was acceptance and care, as if I was four years old and spoon fed warm soup. I'd begged and begged and begged my Aunt Betty and you'd pleaded and pleaded with your parents for me to stay with you, just for two nights. Now on my third and last day here, life with you is already routine. We lunch on Caprese sandwiches, and for dinner, it's hand-stretched spaghetti with various sauces—my favorite being marketplace pesto, yours butternut squash. Between bites, your mother coos at the texture of my waist-length black hair, the familiarity of my gaze, and your father asks me about all the places my family has lived and moved away from: India, Hong Kong, Australia, Texas. I talk about the future, clouded by uncertainty of where my father's job will take us next. I never miss the way your eyes gleam with curiosity and hunger to follow where adventure leads. I wish you could come with me.

Having wandered back to the beach for the last time, I tear my eyes away from the advancing shoreline, ultramarine. The sun has bounced from the horizon, and its chariot seems to race across the sky faster than the thumping of my heart. We turn our heads to watch the sparse crowds drift through the stacks of richly colored houses lined up our coastal town. My parents will be here soon, whisking me off on one of those large white boats that make their way to the airport. We watch our scuffed soles trace the reddish rocks that we sit on and their fossilized stripes. I catch your lashes in my periphery, almost invisible against the blinding sun rays. You've been dreaming of leaving with me and I've been dreaming of staying with you. It hurts knowing that neither of us will get what we want. I'm tempted to count the sparse minutes on my fingers, but I don't, hiding them under my legs to rid myself of this strange panic that is filling my lungs. Instead I look at you, now dressed in your favorite green striped shirt. I knock my sneakers against your wooden sandals.

"I need to tell you something," I say, trying not to swallow my words. I've done it all my life, collecting secrets and confessions at the bottom ridge of my heart as if they were dust.

"What is it?"

"I know we've only been friends for like, three days, but you remind me of home."

You smile at me, your freckled face a little sunburnt like strawberries, my favorite fruit. They're not the most sugary of the bunch, but I like the way the taste surprises me each time, a serendipitous mix of sweet and sour and something else. You know that home is something rare to me, something I'm forced to find on the road, something that I doubt, yet choose to seek.

"You remind me of home too."

I'm familiar with packing boxes, of seeing rooms filled with memories stripped bare until they are just empty spaces. But that doesn't mean tears don't spill out of my eyes everytime I catch the last glimpse of a place I used to fall asleep at.

By the shoreline, your bouncing frame is a tunnel, and I am speeding away from you and your exuberant goodbyes. The sky opens, larger than ever, and foamy waves crash into my eyes, staining my face with salt. Through stinging vision, I see you wave at me, growing smaller by the second as my

boat picks up speed. I can barely notice your beaming parents and my perpetually mad looking Aunt Betty. All I see are the green stripes of your shirt like a flag, shrinking and shrinking against the rainbow colored island. My parents are next to me drinking sparkling water from the bottle and filling me in about all of the historical monuments and fascinating architecture that they saw—there were even remnants of our ancestry! I tune it out, the words that surround me. The air hangs flat, devoid of wind, as you become nothing but a dark green dot pinned in a map of the all encompassing ocean. My nose grows sniffy. *Don't cry*, I tell myself, *it was only three days, two nights*.

It was only three days yet I had never had a friend quite like you. I'd never had anyone to juggle Pink Lady apples with on the balcony, anyone to race against the breaking dawn, barefoot and bleeding yet ever so gleeful. In truth, I see a mirror held in the faces of people I meet, and I oftentimes the reflection is something distorted and despicable. Something that attracts laughter too difficult to pinpoint. But your green eyes reflect in me a grinning girl with glowing skin and beautiful hair, someone who is loved for all her idiosyncrasy and knows it. A girl who is able to be understood. I hold that feeling with me as if it's a sip of hot chocolate on a winter day, warm and comforting. I can barely see your silhouette now, and my arm hangs limp and exhausted after all the waving. I can feel warm tears caressing my cheeks and I let them fall.

Perhaps this boat will sink and the news will reach you tomorrow morning (tears would stream down your cheeks and you'd yell incomprehensibly at your parents, crying into your dad's chest as he strokes your shoulder). But I'd much rather live, and have you hold onto the hope that I'm out there somewhere, that I am a kite mingled amongst the clouds but you are still holding onto my heartstrings. As for me, I think that for the rest of my life, I'll look at the sea and know that you are out there.

Contributor Biographies

Ruchi Acharya

Ruchi Acharya is a multi-talented author hailing from India who has a passion for writing poems on nature, war, and love. Despite having a strong background in Electrical and Electronics engineering, English Literature, and Business Analytics, Ruchi pursued her creative side and found her love for writing. Currently studying Shakespearean Literature, Ruchi has always had a deep appreciation for the literary arts.

Shamik Banerjee

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.

Taya Boyles

Taya Boyles is a writer based in Richmond, Virginia. She is currently a senior pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at Virginia Commonwealth University. Taya's publishing journey started at just eight years old and has come a long way from misspelling glue. Since then, her poetry and flash fiction has appeared in Crest Letters, Split Lip Magazine, Vermillion, Pwatem, The Rye Whiskey Review, Synthesis Publication, Breadfruit Magazine, Radical Zine, and more.

Cyrus Carlson

Cyrus Carlson is an abstract painter from the Midwest

Rachel Coyne

Rachel Coyne is a writer and painter from Lindstrom Mn

Kim Detore

Kim is a female writer who cannot afford to be ignorant in the Philippines. Fascinated by stories from all walks of life, she believes we become immortal through storytelling. She hopes her works bring love and light to those who read them. A cosy, warm bed is her natural habitat, where she can be found wrapped in blankets while consuming modern fairy tales and coffee.

Victor Doan

Victor Doan is a student in English Literature at the California State University of Long Beach who has never been published before. He writes poetry to immortalize the experiences he fears would escape his mind.

Jules Duve

Jules Duve is a Filipino American high school student. They enjoy literature through many mediums: reading, writing, and even the study of language itself. They plan to pursue archaeological linguistics and a life full with writing, from typing unseen poetry in their notes app to analyzing the occasional classic.

Contributor Biographies

Gemma Fable

Gemma Fable is a writer from the UK who has previously been published in Myth & Lore Zine and Tabula Rasa Review.

Johanna Gibson

Johanna Gibson is a writer from the Virgin Islands (U.K.). She received her Bachelor's in English from the University of Southampton. She has previously been published in Moko Magazine and Pree Lit. She was shortlisted for the Bocas Emerging Writer's Fellowship 2022 and attended the Obsidian Foundation Retreat 2023.

Julia Glazebnik

Julia Glazebnik is a sixteen year old poet from New York, who has previously had her work recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing awards.

Maggie Jordan

Maggie Jordan is a third-year English major at Florida Southern College. In between running the campus Writing Club, volunteering, and her homework, Maggie enjoys practicing nature photography and grabbing coffee with her friends at the local library. She most delights in writing creative nonfiction and poetry pieces—especially those where she can sharing her experiences to help others.

Rachel Lui

Rachel was born and raised in Hong Kong, China but is currently studying for an English Literature degree in the UK. Since early childhood, she has had a turbulent love-hate relationship with writing--while it is her main means of self-expression, she also finds herself constantly reliant on external inspiration, which means she often runs into writer's block at the least convenient of times.

Shannon Maltbie-Davis

Shannon Maltbie-Davis is a visual artist based in Basehor, Kansas. She received a BFA in Graphic Design and an MFA in Visual Communications from Kansas State University. In the past, she has worked as a graphic designer and marketing assistant at The Coleman Company, an Assistant Professor in graphic design at Friends University, and the Communications Program Director at Friends University. After leaving the workforce to raise her two sons, she returned to her love of art by pursuing a BFA in photography at the University of Kansas. As a mother, student, and photographer, her body of work alternates between documenting her children, producing assigned schoolwork, and creating an on-going series of self-portraits.

Chris Mardiroussian

Chris Mardiroussian is a Lecturer in the Department of English at California State University, Long Beach. His most recent book is a full-length collection of poetry entitled BLUNDER DOWN UNDER, which Chasing Shadows Magazine called, "A stark

and raw style of writing that clearly constitutes the life of a typical miscreant." In 2019, he won First Prize in the Cinema Italian Style Film Festival (sponsored by the prestigious American Cinematheque in Los Angeles) for his short film entitled *IL BREAKUP*, which he co-wrote and produced. In 2017, he co-wrote a collection of poetry entitled *HONESTY. LOVES. CRUELTY*. His work has appeared in *Bloom Magazine*, *BOMBFIRE*, *Ice Lolly Review*, *Maythorn Magazine*, *Perfumed Pages*, *Pomona Valley Review*, *Soul Talk Magazine*, and elsewhere. He lives in Los Angeles, CA.

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".

Ava Palmer

Ava is a biochemistry student who finds herself constantly scribbling in notebooks. She has been published in *Motley* magazine, and came runner up in the Edna O'Brien Writer's Bursary.

Hayden Park

Hayden Park is a high school student currently attending Orange County School of the Arts (OCSA) in the Instrumental Music Strings conservatory. Hayden has been studying violin and piano since she was four. Her musical accomplishments include winning first place in the American Protégé International Music Talent Competition and the ASTA Solo Competition. She has always been passionate about expressing herself creatively, not only through music, but also through poetry, short stories, visual art, and photography.

Blanka Pillár

Blanka Pillár is a sixteen-year-old writer from Budapest, Hungary. She has a never-ending love for creating and an ever-lasting passion for learning. She has won several national competitions and has been a columnist for her high school's prestigious newspaper, *Eötvös Diák*. Today, she is not throwing away her shot.

Contributor Biographies

Zaina Alam (Piya)

Zaina Alam (Piya) is a High School Junior from Dhaka, Bangladesh. She enjoys creating traditional art as well as digital art.

Stellarvirn

Stellarvirn is a 9th grader from the Philippines who loves to draw art that tells a story and meaning behind it. Other than drawing, they also enjoy scrapbooking, writing and playing video games in their free time. You can also find them on instagram at @stellarvirn

Cesar Toscano

Cesar Toscano is a Chicago-based writer; he is currently a senior majoring in creative writing at Columbia College Chicago where he worked as an assistant poetry editor for Allium, A Journal of Poetry & Prose. He also read for the multi-genre magazine, Uncharted. He now runs his magazine, Mystical Owl Magazine, a magazine for strange Fiction and Poetry. His work delves into mental health and identity through a speculative and horror lens. When he is not writing, he enjoys watching movies and playing video games

Isabella Zhu

Isabella is a multilingual writer from Massachusetts who is curious about connecting the world through experimentation with language. She is the Editor-in-Chief of The Empty Inkwell Review and an alumna of the Iowa Young Writers' Studio. Her work features themes of nature, friendship, art, and change, having been recognized by the Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards. You can find her editing for on-campus publications at her high school in Cambridge or reading an Anne Carson collection.



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