

ISSUE 03

PERSIMMON REVIEW

AUTUMN | 2023



GOLDEN DREAMS BY FIONA ANG

LETTER

FROM THE

EDITOR



Dear Reader,

Welcome to Issue 03 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 03 features pieces that contain elements associated with autumn. The collection of work sheds light on various perspectives and emotions of the season, as autumn can be interpreted differently according to one's experiences, location, and more.

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.

Issue 03 is the last publication of 2023! It has been a wonderful opportunity to be able to publish three issues during *Persimmon Review*'s first year of launching. The staff and I are excited to embark on new journeys to not only grow the literary magazine but to also find new ways to inspire and connect people through literature and art.

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

EMILY KIM

Founder, Editor-in-Chief

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A QUIET AUTUMN MORNING

Angela Patera



UNTITLED

Irina Tall



SNOW WHITE

Ani Cooper

The rotted apple of a festering story,

They said she was beauty,

“Ink black hair and blood red lips”, they said.

They remembered the fatal bite

But,

Her gums bled and flesh ached

Her blood boiled and lungs filled with incurable infection

Moths made a desperate home in her sleeping heart.

Pulses exiled to a new death.

They remembered the next part,

but not quite right.

Because although a sudden life tore through her skin,

Pulled her from her salvation

Giving life to the sleeping girl.

They forgot to,

let her rest,

They should have,

let her rest.

For she was dead

Her blood spilt and tears shed,

She had no life to give

For she was snow white

And she should be dead.

BREAKING EVERYTHING

Elisabeth D.

I see ghosts in hallways,
and it must be because it's Halloween
and my vision has a tendency to
get blurry,
but I'm pretty sure I saw you last night,
haunting dark corners,
and I'm also sure
that your gaze met mine.

I have a tendency to
break everything
every time.

Even if I remain silent I know,
when your laugh echoes through the hall,
that I've broken you too.

I still have that vinyl you bought me,
and I keep listening to it daily,
but I broke it yesterday and I'm
not even sad.

Maybe it's for the best,
because I'm the heartbreaker
but you are and will remain
my night-haunter
if I don't cut you off.

A LETTER TO LILY

Bella Giammalvo

I am four weeks away from only knowing you as a memory and we are sitting in your bedroom. Your eyes are the same color as a heavy cloud. We sit on your bed, I with my knees pulled into my chest, half under the covers, weighed down by the sky. And you sit with my head on your lap, stroking my hair. We are talking. The air conditioner in your room hums softly. Your teddy bear sits desolate in the corner. The plants by your window shyly wave. We are not talking. You are still here but i already miss you. I stroke my thumb back and forth on your jeaned leg. You look down and say “Hey gorgeous how are you feeling” Bad, I am feeling very bad. I am the child’s shoe I saw stranded on Alameda. I am the rabbit my father decapitated with a shovel excavating the den. I am the toy elephant the waitresses keep at the counter after its owner waddled away. Lost. Alone. Out of place. I miss you so very much. I miss you like I miss my mother, with that same primal ache and fear of your return. I sit by your house, a loyal dog who might just not understand that you can’t come back. That you are lost too, strung between court sessions and foster homes and all the promises we made. That you hugged me for the last time and I was too distracted to sink into you like I wanted. To kiss your tear-stained cheeks as the orange streetlamp flickered overhead. To tell you I loved you as we were ripped apart by a god who takes my mother’s side. And I say none of this. I only look up at you and say “I’m tired” which became our favorite substitute for all the things too difficult to say. “I feel depressed all the time and I don’t know what to do” simply became “I’m tired” and “I know how that feels and i wish I could help you” became “Take care of yourself, I’m always here for you”. And even though you left, I know you meant it.

VILLANELLE OF SUCKLED CURLS

Zac Hudson

The boy with sickled curls haunts my night

I meet him head on, face all his shades of blue

Never will I let him dim my light

Voided eyes and words born from a blight

He stalks me from the last row of my minds pews

The boy with sickled curls haunts my night

From recesses in my mind he aims his cutting slight

Like poison that rots into different sickening hues

Never will I let him dim my light

Long tenant in my mind, an enduring snake-bite fight

Trading blow for blow, adapting to each others cues

The boy with sickled curls haunts my night

Cutting hymns that blind an angels sight

In the brief dark he spits venom drenched truths

Never will I let him dim my light

This phantom hides, my own mental plight

After each attack I tend to open wounds

The boy with sickled curls haunts my night

Never will I let him steal my light

A LIFE UNLIVED

N.A. Kimber

The sun is going down,
the autumn winds have come,
my life draws nears its end
and what have I to show?
My branches never flowered,
the leaves never produced brilliancy,
just faded to the brown of the Earth
and withered unremarkably.
I offered no beauty,
I provided no shade,
I could not even offer a place to rest,
my roots too twisted and mangled,
a disgrace – I must confess.
Now as the frost settles in,
so does the fear in my heart.
What will become of me
when we reach the winter and the dark?

GHOST TOWN

MAOIs

Welcome to the ghost town,
Where the action is gone,
The streets are all empty,
And the crickets sing on.

Once a thriving community,
Now a desolate wasteland,
Where the only things moving,
Are the tumbleweeds in the wind.

The saloon is now silent,
With no crooning from the bard,
The amusement park's rides,
Are now just rusted shards.

The graveyard's now crowded,
If only with ghosts,
No one left to give flowers,
Or mourn with toast.

It's a jolly old time,
In this lifeless place,
Where the only thing left,
Is a miserable embrace.

So come take a stroll,
Through this ghost town of mine,
Just watch out for shadows,
And whispers so fine.

It's a party for the dead,
A celebration of demise,
So grab a drink and toast,
To the emptiness in our eyes.

ETERNALLY

Aaliyah Mendez-Garcia

i long to live eternally.

to forever adore, to forever indulge

in the moments of life.

where i can't help but wonder,

what could be better than living?

where i can't help but wonder,

what would my soul consist of

if i were to perish?

would it be the music i love,

or the writing that keeps me sane?

i want to pause and think

about what's worthwhile

in the middle of a grocery store.

BIRDWATCHING AT NIGHT

Raphaela Pavlakos

spring is the season of robin's beaks and ripe worms
all forgotten in golden autumn light, stark sunlight
birds call melodies back and forth
catch and release
sharp screams from black beaks
their voices surround me like skin

crows sit on telephone lines
buzzing, waiting
when will we rebuild all we've lost, what we've killed?

autumn leaves, dead, cluttered in the gutters
before being sucked away by street-sweepers
when morning is grey as dusk

birch bark peels, hanging and sagging like skin
even gravity is not kind on its own creatures
seed pods drip from bare branches
like unfinished thoughts, nearly forgotten before they leave the lips

my memory is a fragile, flightless thing
I cannot trust my thoughts
when the last rain of October
stands in the drain
collecting pollen that floats like sailboats

FORGOTTEN

Nila Phillips

The rain is going through me

The breeze no longer chilly

Their eyes no longer watching me

Fading into the background like nothings happening

Almost like they're forgetting

A ghost haunting the streets

Lonely

Almost like they're forgetting

A ghost haunting the streets

MOCKINGBIRD

Dia Quattrochi

Lines to a Mockingbird

mockingbird silly mockingbird
singing up so high
could the images destroyed
by the heart
ever please the mind
that betrays me day by day?
mockingbird silly mockingbird
singing to that neverlistening sky
where in the leaves
did you see that once-sweet
unblinking eye
did you see me
did you hear me
could shadows release
the tears
preferred by the heart
or will the heart
empty itself
far below you?
mockingbird mockingbird?

TO SAFE HARBOUR

Emma Smith

To Safe Harbour

Brown leaves stick and congeal together
We trudging down abandoned lanes,
Striving not to slip on the sludge,
While insisting neither of us is lost.

"It's just down here and left," you say,
And I hide my scepticism as the sky turns grey.
Pulling my scarf tighter, I keep my head down,
Watching you create footprints in the rain.

From ash to anthracite before our eyes,
Our breath fogs our minds,
And as doubt drizzles in,
You mutter, "Not much further."

Perhaps if I lie down here now,
Surrender to the turning season,
I'd be taken into the hardening ground,
resting until May, budding back, homebound.

But then-- we see it,
A golden port sits at a junction.
The door swings open; heat hits our cheeks.
Our safe harbour for the next twelve weeks.

FADING INTO AUTUMN

Soumik Srabony

O thou Autumnal soul

Drying yet calming.

Is it nay befitting,

Thine imagery,

To summon back thee?

Beneath thou yellowy veins, there dreams do wallow.

The leaves of crimson, thy grace ne'er departs hollow.

NEXT SEMESTER

B. Viv

Pristine walls here in this campus really ought to be wider.

Sunset leaves soaked up your jumper, what a quaint college leaflet

your distant sight is. And hungover coffee soaked your smell,

all is hushed, your gaze immersed in lines like a bullet

I once bled from. The bricks absorbed me, actually,

I'm heavy with past and obsolete. Your glance,

it finds me, I wish a shelf'd devour me.

Yours is the coming of age romance,

I will blend into set designs,

clutching just your cursives

steeped in slim margin lines

I keep noticing

trying to hide

everything.

A SPOOKY DREAM

Kaciann Weller

Shadows dance,
Leaves whisper,
Spiders crawl,
Moonlight shimmers.

Jack-o'-lanterns grin,
Bats take flight,
Ghosts appear,
Haunting the night.

Trick or treat,
Children's delight,
Costumes galore,
Under the moon's light.

Witches brew,
Spells are cast,
Magic fills the air,
As the night goes fast.

Autumn's embrace,
Chills in the air,
Halloween's charm,
We all gladly share.

Spirits awaken,
On this eerie night,
Halloween's magic,
Fills us with delight.

FROST

Hallee Wells

Beautiful, laced up corset - the earth is covered.

White - blue, green and orange, it's frosted outside and it's beautiful. I woke up today feeling far from peaceful, I feel achy and as though I've been running for eighty.

It's cold and this weather brings bliss, my hands ache and my knuckles are split.

My lips bleed, they're dry and chapped - I love the autumn come winter, it doesn't make me feel so trapped.

I'll walk to st. Mary's, walk by the river and feel the cold, my nose and cheeks go pink and my breath a translucent curl.

My skin is dry and cold, you'll never see me quite as old.

I'll tumble in the pumpkin fields next week, frost littered on their stems in the morning, I'll make the most! It won't be bleak!



IN LOVING MEMORY

Ani Cooper

I died three months ago. Or maybe it was three years. I don't know, it's hard to tell, I loose count down here. There's no light, I'm not convinced my eyes are open- a small blessing. The dirt holds me close, holds me tight. The roots of flowers unknown drag through my bones and tug on my veins in a harsh tangle. They hold me to the earth, no severed edges, just bones tried to the light- even in death. I don't know if my flesh remains, but I can't feel it anymore, my organs don't sit comfortably, and my bones feel like a separate entity. I don't know if I did this right, if I'm supposed to be somewhere else. If despite it all, I failed death. I don't know if I'll ever know, know where I should be, who with. If I should feel whole, as if I ever have, and know things the living doesn't. I don't know why I died, of where my casket went. I couldn't tell you my name or my date of death. But I can tell you, that I've been laying here a while, and even as it scratches and tugs, the dirt is my home now. My old friend. The earth is my solace, because at least I can feel it.

THE HAUNTED NEIGHBORHOOD

Jude Deluca

“I got an XL Chocoblaster bar!”

“I got a Sour Starfruit Mega Sucker!”

“I got a rock.”

“That’s a jawbreaker!” I laughed and playfully punched Marty’s shoulder.

“Easy!” Marty protested. “You’ll make my bandages come loose. And how often do I get to say that?”

“Quit gabbin’ and come on!” Jenna complained while adjusting her green rubber witch mask and the stethoscope around her neck. “There’s more houses to hit, and don’t forget the party!” The reminder of the party was met with cheers, and our little group headed for the next home to collect more teeth-rotting treats. Lowering my bloody hockey mask over my face and picking my cardboard machete up off the ground, I was eager to follow everyone when something tugged my sleeve.

“Olivia?”

I looked at Max. His white face paint was totally eerie, with blood dripping from his mouth and the gash on his forehead onto his black and red vest. It was disgusting. He made an awesome vampire.

“What’s up?” I asked. “We gotta hurry before we lose everyone.”

“Olivia...” Max held onto me.

“What?” I seriously asked. “Is something wrong?”

“Who are those kids?”

“What are you talking about?” I laughed. “Can’t you tell from their costumes? The witch doctor is Jenna. The mummy in the pearls and dress is Marty. Adam’s going as Johnny *Pumpkinseed*, and the two-headed Frankenstein’s Charise. Carla’s the werewolf, though with her bike helmet she insists she’s a *wheel*-wolf. Isn’t that awful?”

“But-”

“What are you doing?!” Jenna yelled. “You’re missing the good candy!”

“Come ON, Max!” I pushed him forward. There was lots to do tonight and while I love Max - he’s my best friend – sometimes he’s a slowpoke. You can’t be slow on a night like this.

All around us were kids in costumes running up to houses and under streetlights. Each of their outfits were unique. A pumpkin-headed ballerina on a skateboard zoomed past me. Crossing the street was a zombie in a cardboard race car. On the corner was a trio of girls wearing candy wrappers around their chests, each decorated with skulls and warnings about poison, inspecting their treat bags.

We shared a common goal beneath the waxing crescent moon, kicking up dead leaves in the cold October air: to collect as much candy possible and have the living daylight scared out of us. After that, we'd party 'til we drop.

Halloween, you gotta love it.

What made Halloween better was sharing it with Max. We'd been best friends forever, and Halloween was our night to shine. We'd trick-or-treat as soon as school ended and wouldn't come home until our sacks bulged with enough sweets to last until New Year's Day.

Which is why I didn't understand Max's problem. He lacked his usual eagerness and seemed uncertain. Scared, even. Not normal "Halloween scared." We reached Jenna and the others at a ranch level house in the middle of the block. The front lawn featured a scarecrow family on display, having a gruesome dinner of body parts on bloody dishes. There were over a dozen kids ahead of us, giving me time to talk to Max.

"Wanna tell me what's up?" I inquired. "You're acting strange."

"I am?"

"It's not like you, Max," I confessed. "I usually follow, but tonight you've been out of it." Max didn't reply, looking more uncomfortable as his eyes darted around. That's when it hit me. "I get it."

"You do?" Max hopefully asked.

"I'm sorry Max," I thumped my forehead with my palm. "You know I'm a blockhead."

"Hey!" Marty called out. "I make the Charlie Brown references tonight, 'Liv!"

"Ignore him," I advised Max. "And ignore everyone else. It's about your costume, isn't it."

"My costume? What's wrong with it?"

I gestured around us. "You're an awesome vampire, Max. Especially with the blood and forehead thing. Compared to everyone else out it's... kinda ordinary." Max opened and shut his mouth several times, as if he were trying to comprehend what language I was speaking. Great. I regretted saying anything. I made him feel worse. Nice job, Olivia.

I shook my head, wondering why I couldn't be more sensitive. At least I hadn't compared his costume with mine. I was proud of my "Red Slasher Ranger" costume. Made it myself. All it needed were some personal touches to resemble *Friday the 13th's* Jason. I wondered why no one had this idea already. I could've made a fortune on it.

"Oh wow!" Jenna shouted ahead of us. "They've got homemade pumpkin cookies!"

"You hear that?" I asked Max. "You love pumpkin cookies! Those'll perk you right up."

"Liv, we can't eat those."

"Why not?"

"We can't take anything not prewrapped!" Max complained. "It's dangerous! You know that! Our parents always warn us about stuff like homemade candy, it might be poison!"

"Next you'll be telling me to watch out for razorblades in apples." Rolling my eyes, I told Max "I don't think we need to worry about getting poisoned. Wait. Was *that* all that's bothering you?"

Max looked at me like I'd said the dumbest thing in the world when he grabbed my wrist.

"Hey!" I cried out. "Max what are you doing?!"

Ignoring my question, Max's nails dug into my skin as he pulled me away from the house with the scarecrow family. We maneuvered around more outlandish costumes; a chainsaw wielding purple dinosaur, werewolf cheerleaders, a pirate dentist, and a half Batman/half Joker mash-up split. Max dragged me past houses alit with grinning pumpkins in every window and skull lights wrapped around every gutter. I caught glimpses of kids receiving candy apples, popcorn balls, even miniature pumpkin pies. My mouth watered and my heart ached. Max held on, his unease replaced with grim determination at the worst possible time.

"Max, STOP!" I yanked Max's fingers off with my free hand. We'd reached the edge of woods, standing under a flickering lamp post by a vacant lot far away from the other houses. The lights, the noise, the costumes. The candy. I placed both hands on my hips in an authoritarian stance, demanded answers. "What is **WRONG** with you?! Are you trying to ruin our Halloween?!"

I immediately regretted yelling when I saw Max was on the verge of tears.

"Max," I gasped. "I-I didn't-"

"Who are those kids, Olivia?" Max said, his voice strained. "Please, tell me who they are."

“Max, I don’t understand,” I shook my head. “You’re scaring me.”

“I’m scaring you,” Max bitterly laughed as tears ran down his cheeks. “I’m pretty scared too, ‘Liv.”

In the flickering light, Max seemed positively pitiful. He made no move to wipe his eyes as his make-up started to run, looking more like a trapped animal than a bloodsucking fiend of the night.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of, Max,” I assured him. “It’s just Halloween. Y’know, *Halloween*. Like we do every year. Don’t you know that?”

“I don’t!” Max shouted. “I don’t know that! I don’t know who those kids are! Jenna and Marty and the others, I’ve never met them before tonight! I don’t know what this is, because *I don’t even know how I got here or what we’re doing in this neighborhood, Olivia!*”

Max’s fists trembled, his face tight with fear and desperation. He waited for me to reveal answers he longed for more than any sort of candy we might’ve gotten tonight. Gingerly, I reached my hand out towards his face. I touched the gash on his forehead. When Max winced, I pulled back. My glove’s fingertips were wet. I thought it might’ve been sweat until I recognized that metallic scent.

“Oh, Max,” I gasped.

“W-what?” Max immediately placed his hands on his forehead, crying out in pain as he ran his fingers over his injury. “Is this,” he pulled his hand away, eyes widening as he saw the red on his palm.

“Don’t touch it!” I advised him. “You must’ve cut yourself on something! I’m sorry, I didn’t know! I thought-”

“I-” Max’s breathing intensified as he turned around and walked towards the forest. “I didn’t even feel it. I think I was-”

“Come on,” I placed my hand on his shoulders and steered him from the woods. “You need help. Let’s go to the party.”

“No, Olivia,” he said, sounding a bit clearer. “I think what happened, I was running and-”

“We’ll talk about it at the party,” I told him. “But we have to go!”

“I was running, and I fell,” Max rambled. “I didn’t look where I was going-”

“Max *please!*”

“I was in the woods, because-”

SNAP.

Turning around, keeping my hands firmly on Max and holding him back, I saw something in the mouth of the woods. A tall, lean figure, standing just out of the circle of light. Hidden, but still leaving me able to make out certain shapes.

The outline of his clothes.

The thing he held in his hands.

“Max,” I whispered. “Did your costume have a cape?”

The figure took a step forward.

He smiled.

“*Found you.*”

I *knew* that smile.

“RUN!”

I pushed Max ahead, holding refusing to let go of his hand as we ran. Whenever Max tried to look behind him, I screamed “DON’T!” and urged him to keep running. Each time I glanced behind us, *he* was keeping pace. Max’s discarded cape held tightly in one massive, clenched fist at his side as he followed us. My throat tightened just looking at it.

“What happened?” Max shouted as we ran down the empty streets. “Where did everyone go?!”

“It’s late!” I told him. “They’re at the party!”

“But the houses! HELP!” Max screamed. “SOMEBODY HELP US!”

“Don’t! I told you they’re at the party!”

“But-!”

“THERE!”

We reached the end of the neighborhood, running up the steps of a three-story brick house. Ivy ran down all sides. A lone pumpkin with a jagged grin rested on the front step, the only light around.

“Inside! Hurry!” I grabbed the rusted knob. Looking over Max, I saw our pursuer at the other end of the street.

Max scanned the house’s darkened windows, saying “There’s no one inside!”

The second the door was open, I pushed Max in. Into the blaring music and dim firelight and whirlpool of voices. I slammed the door shut behind us and turned the lock.

Max stood on the precipice of the living room. The party was in full swing. All the kids finished trick-or-treating and were partying like no tomorrow. There was dancing, music

blasting, movies playing on a huge TV. Some kids played party games like bobbing for apples, others stuffed their faces with cupcakes, donuts, and popcorn. In another room kids told ghost stories around a lit jack-o'-lantern. Some roamed the house on a scavenger hunt.

“THERE you are!” Jenna swam through the crowd to reach me, ignoring Max. “Why did you run off like that? You know the party starts promptly at midnight! It doesn’t wait for anyone!”

“Jenna, listen to me,” I motioned to the door. “He’s out there.”

“Someone else was late?” Jenna groaned as she headed to the window by the door. “You’re lucky you got in, after all we...”

Jenna’s lecture ended prematurely once she looked outside. I glanced at Max, trying to comprehend what he was seeing. My heart ached for him.

I asked, “You see him?” Jenna nodded. “What’s he doing?”

“He’s confused,” she relayed. “Must’ve caught a glimpse us.” She yanked off her mask to reveal the sympathetic horror on her face. “Is that really *him*? The one who-”

“You think I wouldn’t know?”

“How,” Jenna shook her head. “How did he...?”

“Olivia.”

Jenna and I looked at Max.

“Max,” I softly replied. “I’m sorry.”

Appalled, Jenna asked me “You let him in here?!”

“He *found* me!”

“This is *our* night! *Our* party!”

“What should I have done?!” I screamed. “He’s my best friend!”

“There’s someone out there,” Max said, pointing at the door. “He’s after me. I was running in the woods when I fell.” He ran his hand over his forehead. “I fell and then I found you, ‘Liv. Am I dead?”

“No,” I shook my head. “You’re not, Max.”

“But... *you* are, right?”

“...Yeah.”

“Oh.” Max blinked. “I thought this’d be more shocking. I was so happy to see you, I didn’t think about it.”

“I was happy to see *you*,” I confessed. “I didn’t want you to be dead, but I missed Halloween with you.”

“I missed Halloween with you too.”

I led him into the living room. The party mood had officially – pardon the poor choice of words – died. Everyone stared at us as I brought Max to the refreshment table.

“Here,” I picked up a glass of cold cider and put it in his hands. “It’ll help you feel better, I promise.”

“You know who’s outside,” Max acknowledged.

“I do,” I gritted my teeth. I could never forget that smile. Or when he wrapped his hands around my neck and left me in that ditch. Two years later and I haven’t forgotten. Never.

“I’m sorry,” Max said. “I led him here.”

“*I’m* sorry he hurt you.”

“What are you going to do?” Max asked. “Who *is* he?”

“I told you don’t worry about it. Please,” I implored. “Drink.”

Max looked around at all the kids in the room. All the sad, angry, lonesome, envious faces of children who had departed from the mortal coil, just like me. This was supposed to be our night. Our chance to return and experience the fun we used to have in our old lives. To dress up and pretend we were still alive.

Giving me one last longing gaze, Max brought the cider to his lips and drank.

I grabbed him before he hit the floor.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized again. “I promise this’ll just be a bad dream.” Looking at Jenna, I said “We need to hide him.”

“Marty, Carla!” Jenna called out. “Downstairs! Everyone, watch the windows! Don’t let him inside!”

We carried Max into the dark basement. Up against the far wall was a moldy couch, left by the former owners years ago. Thankfully, the rusty-looking sink by the couch still worked. I tore off a piece of my costume, soaked it in cold water, and dabbed at Max’s forehead.

Carla asked, “Is it serious?”

“It’s not deep,” I observed.

“The shock probably rattled him more than the injury,” Jenna hypothesized. “He’ll wake by morning figuring he wandered in here in a daze.”

Charise called from the stairs. “He’s trying to get in! What should we do?”

“What *should* we do?” Carla asked.

“We’re gonna be in so much trouble,” Marty fretted.

I thought of him smiling as he tried to kill my best friend.

I looked at Jenna, Marty, and Carla.

“I’ll stay down here,” I told them. “I’m not leaving Max again.”

“You’re gonna have to come morning,” Jenna reminded me. As if I didn’t know that.

“I won’t let anyone else hurt him.”

“Marty, Carla, follow me,” Jenna ordered. She smiled as she said “This is a Halloween party, right? Let’s show our uninvited guest how to have *fun*.”

AUTUMN REGRETS

Deborah George

“Happy birthday, Ava!”

Mom smiles at me as I walk into the kitchen. “Feeling eighteen yet?”

“No,” I reply honestly, sliding into a chair. “I only woke up thirty minutes ago.” Then I remember. “Wait! What time is it? Don’t I have school today?”

Mom laughs. “We decided no school on your birthday, remember?”

“Oh, yeah.” I relax into the chair as my concerns are quelled. Mom hands me breakfast, and then sits across from me as I eat. She sips a cup of coffee. Everyone else in the family is at work or school, so it’s just Mom and me.

After a minute, I notice her gaze is fixated on me. “What, Mom?”

She doesn’t say anything for a moment. “You know...your birthday is in spring, and so are you.”

“What?”

“You’re in the spring of your life.”

“Oh.” I’m not very interested in a discussion of this sort, so I change the subject. “Did you know I became swim team captain this week?”

“That’s lovely, Emma, but I want to talk to you about something more important than the swim team.”

I sigh and let her take the reins of the conversation. When Mom wants to discuss something, there’s no stopping her.

“You’re in the spring of your life. Every life has seasons, doesn’t it? There’s spring, summer, autumn, and winter.” She pauses. “I’m in the autumn of my life. When you’re in autumn, you sometimes look back at your life. I sure am. I’m remembering *my* spring and *my* summer. And I remember my regrets.”

She takes a sip of coffee, then looks at me over her cup. “I don’t want you to have regrets.”

“Everyone has regrets in life,” I answer.

“Yes,” Mom says, “but the regrets of some are more intense than the regrets of others. The regrets of some are...*serious* and moral. Other regrets are just...a bit stupid.”

I laugh at the word “stupid” coming up in what seems to be such a serious conversation. “What do you mean?”

Mom sighs. “When I was your age, my mom was in autumn too. She said that she regretted not giving me enough attention in childhood. I thought—and still think—that she was crazy. She spent a ton of time with me—in fact, I think she spent a little *too* much time with me. I wasn’t sure what to do without her. I think Grandma’s regret is an example of a foolish regret.”

“What are your regrets?” I ask quietly.

Mom sighs again. “Oh...yelling at my parents about everything. Lying on a job application to get my first job. Having too much self-pity throughout my entire life.”

“Don’t all teens yell at their parents about everything?” I counter her first regret. “At least when they’re teens.”

“Just because everyone does it doesn’t mean it’s fine,” Mom replies. “I yelled at my parents about *everything*. Absolutely everything. Now that I’m a mother myself, I see what she had to go through. Mom worked so hard every day, and so did Dad, trying to make enough money to pay the bills and create a comfortable living. And they were good parents.” She pauses for a moment, and her next sentences are a bit wobbly. “The other day, I visited your grandparents’ home and saw Grandma lying in bed. You know what she looks like, don’t you? Long white hair, lots of wrinkles...”

“It’s not very polite to say that she has wrinkles.”

“Grandma wouldn’t care if she heard me,” Mom replies. “She never cared about how she looked. *Anyways*. I saw Grandma lying there, so weak and frail, and I thought about all the times I had yelled at her. I screamed at her over the most miniscule things. When she gave me orange juice instead of coffee. When she stopped buying my favorite brand of nail polish. When she refused to let me go out past nine.” She cringes. “It was bad. We had a terrible relationship during those years. It was sad, since we were so close throughout my early childhood.”

“And did you really lie on your first job application?” I ask, moving onto the next regret.

“Oh, yes. I did. I had lied about my age, experience, pretty much everything. The internet wasn’t around back then, and the boss didn’t really care to verify what I said. But one day, my mom came to pick me up from work, and she got to talking with the boss.” She cringed. “I was fired a few days later.”

“That must have sucked.”

“It did. I needed experience and I needed finances. After being fired, I lost both. I couldn’t put the job on my resume, because in the future, someone could look at it and call up my old boss.” She shook her head. “Don’t do that, Emma. Don’t ever do anything like that.”

“What about the self-pity?”

Mom frowns. “Well, I’ve gone through a lot in my life. You know that. And I always thought that I couldn’t do anything, because life had made me abused and wounded. I looked at other people and their accomplishments, and I envied them. A few years ago, that all changed.”

She takes another sip of coffee and continues. “I had a friend named Rose. Remember her? She was wealthy—she lived in a beautiful, four-story house. She ran her own small business, and her husband was a lawyer. She had little children that were always well-behaved. She herself was amazing—so sweet and compassionate.”

She takes a deep breath and continues. “One time, on a visit to Rose’s house, I told her what I’ve just told you. I told Rose how amazing her life seemed, and how amazing of a person she was. And then I said, ‘I could never do everything you’ve done. I could never become as successful as you have. I’ve—I’ve gone through so much in life. I’ve been abused.’”

“Wow,” I say in reply, unsure of what else to say.

Mom pauses, and then begins to speak again. “And her abusive experiences—she told me about them. Emma, what she endured was much greater than anything I’ve gone through. So much greater.” She draws in a sharp breath. “Rose had a horrible childhood.”

“That’s terrible,” I say softly.

“But you know what?” Mom continues. “She rose above her circumstances. She didn’t say, ‘I’ve gone through too much to be successful. I’m too weak to become strong.’ No. She built a business, raised amazing children, worked hard and did amazing things. And she never complained about *anything*. She had amazing character.”

Mom pauses again. “I will never forget that conversation.” She looks at me. “I don’t want you to forget it, either. By the time Rose and I had that conversation, I was in autumn. I couldn’t go back and change my summer and spring.”

“But I’m in spring,” I say softly.

“You are.” Mom smiles at me. “That’s a good thing! Just think of the good you can do in your life. You’re a beautiful girl with beautiful potential. Don’t let your mind tell you the same things it told me, Emma. Please.”

“I won’t,” I reply. Silence fills the room for a few moments as we both reflect on the conversation.

“So, what flavor do you want your birthday cake to be?” Mom suddenly asks. And with that, I remember what day it is again. It’s my eighteenth birthday. I’m in spring.

I want to make my spring beautiful. My summer, too. So that by the time I'm in autumn, I won't have anything to regret.

NADDAHA

S. S. Helwa

a story about the vintage egyptian siren

She carries his unborn daughter and works hard domestic days under the searing Egyptian sun, while he sneaks off to all the young women's houses to commit his vile acts of adultery. Of course with the way he catches the eye of all the village people, the calling mistress that lives by the Nile seeks his specific interest. Infamously, her beauty speaks for itself, so do not recognize her by her appearance.

In his first night with her, he familiarly escapes his wife's embrace. Away at the Nile, he meets the calling mysterious woman. The deep mesmerizing ale color of her eyes has drunken him, almost non-verbally inviting him to fondle every aspect of her. Lust overtakes the parallel aura, and in her arms he speaks his bleak rhymes in his calming sleep. It was known that he repeats from an original variation of vows, meant for another. Things had always been especially silent.

The next night, he returned to her calling, just after previously leaving his bride. The feminal musk is not unfamiliar to the calling woman, yet recognized that he had sought two scents. The depths of the Nile were attractive, and the tips of their toes were embellished by the sweet, boiling, body of water. Has love ever smelled so indifferent to him?

That night was the night his unborn daughter was introduced to the world. He forbids to miss his appointment, and he returns the morning of the third day to his affair to notify her that he must discontinue. The woman by the Nile wasn't infuriated. She asked him for one last entanglement, closure.



His daughter was now a week old. His wife was a widow. The abyss of the Nile river swallowed a naked cadaver.



The egalitarianism of dalliance is illusory. Had he known that having done wrong by his missus would end him, perhaps he should have considered the calling of the Naddaha as a calling for the assurance of infidelity. The man answers to his own crime. He is not the only one.

Here lies the harmony of dead deceitful men.



MY MIDNIGHT MAN

Liberty

3rd October

The sound of his feet rustling in the bushes by my front door is what keeps me up every night. He's not very stealthy and he's not very silent, and if it's his intention to sneak around, I'm afraid he is truly terrible at it.

I want to catch a glimpse of him. I want to see this mysterious man and I want to study the features of his face. Does his skin glow under the moonlight? Are his eyes a entrapping colour of green? Does he smile or does he wear a scowl like a mask?

I crave to know more about him.

5th October

I heard him in my bushes twice more. He is consistent and he is regular, but he is careless. Anyone could have seen him and mistaken him for an intruder. Someone could have called the police or dealt with him themselves. I live in a dark village, with drunks and criminals and ex-military men. I do not want the Midnight Man to get hurt.

I wonder if he is hungry. Does he have a place to stay? I could feed him. Is he a vegetarian? I'll give water and some of my left-over curry.

I hope he likes spice.

6th October

My plate was licked clean when I came back from college this afternoon. I'm glad he liked my food. No one ever eats my food.

I live alone. I don't get along well with others, but I don't mind. I love to be in the company of my own thoughts. I am the most intelligent person I know.

But, if I were to be honest, a little company wouldn't hurt.

9th October

I have a plan.

I am going to capture my Midnight Man.

I made lasagna for tonight; it is steaming and ready to be served. When he goes to eat it, a net will fall and capture him like a mouse. I have placed pills in the food, so he won't make a sound. They are left over from my own collection. I have terrible insomnia now, because all of his rustling in the bushes. Perhaps after tonight, I will finally be able to sleep.

Maybe after tonight, he will be my evening company.

10th October

Never have I seen a man as beautiful as him.

I skipped college today to see how my plan went. I am a master of my craft, for there he was, more enchanting than I had thought.

His skin was pale, like he had not eaten for months. Over his damp cheeks were scorching

burns, blistered and red. They looked sore, and they have spread to his whole face. His neck was angled irregularly and the grass he lay on was crimson-stained. Still, I could see the wrinkles in his lips and the darkness of his eyelashes. He had a long nose, decorated with copper-coloured freckles.

He was heavy, and limp. It took me two hours to bring him into my house. For a moment, I thought he was dead, until he let out a suffocated gasp. I thought I was strangling him, but it just seemed like he wasn't used to breathing the air around us. That's when I saw the red on his Adam's apple, a rash that trailed his throat.

I sat him on my sofa, I thought he'd be comfortable there. I made him a cup of tea and gave him some chocolate Digestives, but he remained gasping, and had to cup his neck with his hands.

His hands. They were translucent, like glass on a window. I thought he had spilled ink all over them until I realised his veins were black, as dark as the sky he used to prowl in. I wanted to hold them, let them soak in the gold of my skin. I wanted to kiss them; revive them so that they come to life again. And I wanted to feel them on my face. I wondered, were they cold? Could they steady the blood that was rushing to my cheeks?

I asked him if he needed anything. I had plenty. Water? A blanket? Socks to cover his bruised feet? I wanted him to open his eyes. I wondered if he liked eye-contact. I thought if he looked at me, I would melt. But he didn't. He was still, struggling to find the breath he had lost some time ago.

14th October

My midnight man is still on my sofa.

Four days have passed, and he remains stiff as a pencil. Did I do something wrong? Did I give him a bad impression? I have offered him everything. I have sung and danced for him, massaged his shoulders so he could relax. Am I not welcoming enough?

I have dreams about him. They're always so lovely. I have dreams where he is mobile, and we are dancing in the living room and singing along to The Beatles. In my dreams, my Midnight Man knows every word. He kisses me with freezing lips and caresses my back with black fingertips. In my dreams, his hair is soft and I play with it when I am anxious.

But I wake up and he is lifeless and staining my ivory couch.

He is not the man I fantasize about.

Who is he?

17th October

Today I pried his eyes open with pliers. His eyelids flaked off and are buried in my living room carpet.

They are black. The colour of obsidian and they are not inviting. What happened to the forest green eyes he was supposed to have? What happened to their warmth and their inviting embrace? His eyes do not twinkle in the light. They are dull, and they are sad.

I parted his lips with my fingers. I traced them like art. I kissed them gently, but my stomach did not erupt in butterflies. My cheeks fuzzed up and I felt something crawling up my throat like a rat in a pipe.

18th October

Is this what it means to be in love? I am disgusted by my Midnight Man, he makes me feel sick and I hate his charred face, yet I want to devour him whole. I want to kiss him until I throw up, and dance with his limp body until we both fall to the floor.

Yes, I think this is love.

28th October

There is a man on my sofa and he is rotting from the inside out.

He is beautiful and disgusting.

His fingers have dropped like flies and his once black veins are colourless. There is red in his eyes and his lips are the colour of snow. I can see things crawling in his skull and neck but I kiss him anyway. I breathe in his odour and sleep on his hollow chest.

I lay with him all day and I lay with him all night.

And together we listen to the absence of the rustling in the bushes.

THE WOMAN IN THE CHECKERED COAT

Asheley Nova Navarro

I had just come out from the grocery store, holding recyclable bags in one hand and an umbrella in the other, with my hair feeling itself across the blank canvas of my face. It had been a cold day, and the streets were dimmed with only the white fullness of the moon as luminance, hanging low, almost descending upon the little town on Elm Street, when, walking myself back home, I spotted two women walking oddly way across the pavements, and turn into a little corner, which I found odd.

I paused when a man, who had been cycling behind me all the five miles I had walked and who I knew to be a neighbor, ran right into me, knocking my grocery bags and the umbrella over and sending my rounded eatables rolling off the pavement and right out into the street. I apologized to the neighbor, who I knew as Peter, and sent him on his way.

I looked over to the little corner, where a yellow light shimmered in its black metal body. The women emerged, looked back and to the left and right, and continued on their way. I followed them. I noticed a couple of things on their persons - one was wearing a green, lined coat, the other an orange checkered one - the women certainly seemed as if they were from around here, with their colorful dress, their green and pink felt hats. One had a blue handbag in their hand, the other a green one, and an object in her left hand concealed by the length of her seemingly colossal coat, which seemed to swallow her body whole.

The woman in the green coat parted and went her own way. I had a moment of uncertainty - my mind began to race, my heart seemed to be detaching itself from its center and forcing itself out from my mouth - this unpleasantness was a feeling that could pass as some nervousness, and for a moment, even in this uncertainty, I held myself together, and continued following the woman in the checkered coat. I glanced at my watch and saw I had traveled ten additional miles from the store to this unfamiliar place I felt I had never been to. I was unsure if I was still on Elm Street, or if I had passed my apartment building, and why I was still left to follow this woman.

The clouds in the night sky hung low, showing their tender bodies, and the moon seemed to be lulled by the blue of it - everything on this side of town seemed to me a novelty, an extraordinary sight, yet the sight of so exquisite a view discomforted me. I glanced at my watch again, laying on my wrist with its gold swatches, and saw that I had traveled twenty miles, which, according to the little rational thought I had left in my head, indicated that I had walked roughly five hours, which seemed impossible. Perhaps my watch had broken when I ran into Peter.

Suddenly, the woman in the checkered coat and pink hat came to a halt. It may have been in my head, but I could have sworn that I saw the woman look back at me. But perhaps not, as the woman cocked back her felt hat and continued on her way. A few more miles in, not long after her last stop, the woman again stopped. I, too, stopped. The woman turned into a field of overgrown pasture, and I thought that maybe she lived on the outskirts of the little town, perhaps on a farm or some other community unfamiliar to me. I followed her through the fields and, a little way in, saw the woman's face. She had turned, seeming to look straight through me without truly seeing me. This occurrence sent me into a sort of shock and, with a bobby pin, sharpened the edges, making a small incision on my palm. I had to check, after that second turn from the woman and after her seeing seemingly right through me, whether I was indeed alive. Red blood coursed through my palm, seeming like red wine, and then turned to air. I thought that perhaps I had lost my mind - I continued walking. And, anyway, I had seen the woman as she turned around that second time. In that dark foliage of greenery, the woman seemed almost like a portrait, perfectly placed in that vast field, the moon still shining, her face with a pink hue, her hair black, although I could not particularly see what sort of hairstyle. She continued on, and I went on after her.

The night seemed to be growing hungrier for cold, and the cold conceded and brought its ferocious wrath onto the town, birthing a sort of ice age. The foliage began to form white crystals, almost like fists of precious pearls, in their long, flimsy structures. I wished for a scarf but did not have one, instead wrapping my long, black hair around my neck to imitate one. I continued. We

had traveled along the fields for a while when we finally came to what seemed from afar like a street with a bloody red lamp post and a yellow light. I realized that we were again on Elm Street. Suddenly, the woman stopped in her tracks.

I could see a dog, small and frail, cold even, I could see, come out of a dimly lit corner. It seemed to be the same corner from which the women had emerged miles off, but that seemed impossible. I looked at my watch, the one I had earlier perceived as being broken, and to my surprise, saw that it had become reset. I was ten miles from when I had left the store, had walked five miles, and decided to follow the women. Sure enough, there was Mrs. Fagama's store, and not soon later, Peter, the neighbor, was cycling by. I saw that my recyclable bags were in my hands, and as I scurried off to the side so as not to run into Peter, I, too, saw that my round eatables were still inside. The moon was still shining, lulled by the blue ocean sky, and the temperature had increased, the time set to 9:50 PM. I glanced over and saw the dog again, and the woman looked back once, this time right at me, smiled, her dark, black hair slicked back, and drove an edged knife right through the dog's skull. The dog fell, motionless, and to my relief, without any feel for the cruelty brought upon him.

The woman, now with her hair undone from that one violent sway, looked back at me once more, almost arrogantly, with such a calmness that I could feel a silent ocean, there all along, rise and drown me from the inside. Then, I could see the woman become serious, perhaps with rage.

The woman, in her orange checkered coat and pink felt hat, grabbed from her green handbag, now bloody, her metal Apartment keys and opened the door to apartment Number 241. I walked over and across the street, and I could still hear Teresa's guitar filling the streets with an aroma of Spanish Concierto.

I knocked on the woman's door.

A STORMY NIGHT

Yvanka Maria Guia Rebelo

As soon as Harriet entered the building, she headed to the seventh floor. When she had approached the elevator in the Hotel Royale's lobby, she had pressed the button only to see the lighted panel go off with a tired splutter, leaving her to labour up hundreds of stairs. Everyone knew that the Hotel Royale, a fixture of the town for over fifty years, was closed for some badly needed repairs, yet someone had left the front doors ever so slightly ajar and had turned on the electricity. As she hurried up the stairs she could hear the culprits, tucked away at the top of the hotel, probably having a party, if one was to judge by the racket they were making.

When she reached the third floor she paused, mesmerized for a second by the lovely chandelier that adorned the banquet hall. Colored little flames that danced in the air seemed to burst forth from its crystal droplets. Completely entranced by its beauty, Harriet drew closer to the crystal wonder, forgetting her mission for a moment. Outside, the storm that had been brewing all afternoon finally exploded and a crash of thunder shook the building to its very foundation. The chandelier flickered wildly before going out.

With a weary sigh, she continued her nocturnal adventure with grim determination. "They mustn't be here," she muttered under her breath, "they simply cannot be here tonight." The peeling paint and exposed wires on the winding staircase cast shadows in the flickering light.

Thunder echoed once more and Harriet shuddered. She hated storms, she had always been terrified of them, even as a child. Shutting out all thoughts of the storm, she raced up the stairs. As she drew nearer to the riotous laughter echoing above her, she rehearsed the speech that she had planned to give them, "Now look here," she muttered under her breath, "you must pack up right away, right away, do you hear me? You cannot be here, not tonight." As the feebleness of her words hit her, she shook her head sadly. "You sound like an idiot," she thought to herself, "there's no way they would ever listen to you."

As she continued her ascent, a single thought pounded in her brain, "Not tonight, they cannot be here tonight." On the landing of the seventh floor, she paused for a moment in front of an ornate mirror. "I do wish I looked more presentable," she whispered to her pale reflection. "Well," she continued in a determined voice, as she smoothed the creases out of her black dress, "it will just have to do." Shaking her dark curls free, she marched straight up to the room from where the laughter emanated.

A blast of cold air rushed into the room as she flung open the doors and the group of revellers within immediately fell silent. “Please,” she began as she moved towards them, “you must leave” ... she broke off as the lights in the room flickered and with a sudden scramble of arms and legs the youngsters pushed past her and rushed into the hallway. Harriet stood alone in the darkened room for a moment and listened as their screams faded into the distance. Then she walked slowly to the large windows and watched the lightning as it danced across the sky.

The next morning, the newspapers carried the strange story of a group of college students who had escaped from the Hotel Royale mere minutes before a lightning storm reduced the building to ashes. Stranger still was the fact that they credited their escape to an apparition - the ghost of a young woman, horribly burned, who had appeared in the room as they partied, unnerving them enough to cause them to flee. Local gossip, aided by the town’s records, soon identified her as Harriet O’Brien who had died in a fire over 200 years ago when lightning hit her homestead, located on what was now the grounds of the hotel.

SEOUL, ALONE, AFTER THE WEDDING

DC Restaino

The day after the wedding is soft in the way the days after events tend to be. They pull close and wrinkle like the waning amber of the autumn heat. It was not my wedding – I’m at the age where I have to clarify that. It was the wedding of a friend I hadn’t seen in person for over five years. Somehow, I’m at the age where that is possible as well. I send pictures of the night before to my flatmate back in London as I lie in bed, but with the time difference, I’m not expecting a response.

I walk the city on my last morning, get under its skin like the beak of a mosquito – when travelling, I prefer people not to notice me till I’m gone.

I take the train to Itaewon, catalogue how wide it is compared to the Tube, enjoy the melodic chime of the announcements as we approach each station. It’s the middle of the day, but only myself and the elderly occupy my car. I sit next to them and feel my years. I worry I used to be better at this, convincing myself I belong wherever I travel. But the more I move, the more space I fear I take up. Like a river bloating beyond its banks and swallowing the land.

I burn away the afternoon in a café. It is stained by the early October light, and I try to forget the work I left piled up when I boarded my flight here a week ago and the list of projects that await my return. I watch a group of university students study as I pretend to read a book I brought but haven’t started. It’s strange to remember being that age, even if it wasn’t too long ago in the scheme of my life. It feels intimate but distant, like a friend you only send gifts to over Instagram. I don’t move until the café fills up, and I see someone searching for a seat. I clear my table and stumble at the many recycling bins, unsure which is plastic and paper. I tuck my trash in my bag and bring it with me.

I grab kimbap and a bottle of soju later in the evening from the convenience store near my hotel in Myeondong. The shop is below ground level; I watch feet rush outside the slice of window near the ceiling as I’m rung up – heels and trainers and dress shoes. I’m wearing the boots I always travel in. They splinter my shins if I walk too long, but they force me to slow down. I

I exit with my goods and follow a flood of people to Cheonggyecheon – a waterway slicing through the northern part of the city. Back in the Joseon period, it was named Gaecheon. The current name was imposed during the Japanese occupation of the 20th century. It has lived as a natural stream, part of a drainage system, a multi-lane elevated highway, and now a stream again. It has been turned back, in a way, to something resembling what it once was yet nothing like its past. A mere shadow of water – a play of light.

When I first arrived three days ago, I waded through the crowd of schoolchildren at the National Museum of Seoul and wandered the halls of pottery that reached back to the Three Kingdoms era. Shaped from the clay harvested from the banks of rivers that carve across the face of Korea, the pots morphed gently from room to room like a tongue of water licking smooth a rock. The necks got shorter, the bodies rounder. The progression and difference in shape told the story of the country's history, and for this reason, the pottery is said to hold the flow of time in its shifting form. The museum's upper level detailed how contemporary potters employ traditional techniques to shape the ceramics for modern use. They are still vessels holding time in the swell of their bodies.

This seems to hold for the whole city – retrofitting traditional hanoks into stunning cafés, the gnarled branches of Korean pines scratching between skyscrapers, rivers unearthed to become a reprieve from the sharp curve of the swollen cityscape. I wonder how many times we can turn back and refurbish before even what is restored is no longer original. I wonder how long we can continue to be pulled by the tide in so many directions.

My twin recently explained it takes four years for skin cells to fully replace themselves. Every four years, we are born anew, like a snake sloughing its skin. But we lose something in the shedding, surely. We leave something behind.

I stand on a bridge overlooking Cheonggyecheon. The water is clear. I can see the carp filtering the current. A child runs from their father and hops across the stepping stones to where their mother waits. She hugs them. The child wiggles away and hops back to the other side. They continue to wash from one bank to the other as the family moves downstream.

Last night, I sat on the grounds of an old hanok – named for the union of three nearby streams – that now functions as a wedding venue and watched my friend get married. Tomorrow, I will return to the airport, board a fourteen-hour flight home, and cross nine time zones before landing in London six hours after I depart. Now, I watch the remainder of my last day in Seoul turn gold and curl into night. I hold all this time as long as I can.

CONTRIBUTORS

FIONA ANG

GOLDEN DREAMS

Fiona Ang is a high school student who has been drawing digitally for more than 2 years. Her passion for art has driven her to continually improve her skills and explore new techniques and styles. From a young age, Fiona would spend hours at a time drawing and creating, and by the time she was in high school she had developed interest in digital art and photography.

ANI COOPER

SNOW WHITE, IN LOVING MEMORY

Ani (she/they) is a new writer who majorly works with poetry, flash fiction and articles however they enjoy experimenting with form in my writing and art. They draw their inspiration from the likes of Dakota Warren, Kae Tempest and Ocean Vuong when she writes her poetry. That being said, the majority of their work is highly personal to them, drawing in from themes such as grief.

ELISABETH D.

BREAKING EVERYTHING

Elisabeth D. is a writer and poet who grew up writing stories and daydreaming about adventures she'd want to have, but never could. She hopes someone will one day find love, sadness or peace in her work.

JUDE DELUCA

THE HAUNTED NEIGHBORHOOD

Jude Deluca is a nonbinary aegosexual Capricorn. Their areas of interest include magical girls, slasher fiction, young adult horror, superhero dads, and big beautiful men. They enjoy writing about the ways we influence media and media influences us. They try to focus as much on world building as they do character development and interactions. As they put it, what's the point of building a house if no one can live in it?

DEBORAH GEORGE

AUTUMN REGRETS

Deborah is a creative writer who serves on the board of SeaGlass Literary. Her work has been published in Real Voices Write Now and the Blue Marble Review. Deborah loves appreciating the little joys in life, like beautiful sunsets, cozy sweaters, and dark chocolate.

BELLA GIAMMALVO

A LETTER TO LILY

Bella Giammalvo is a Los Angeles-based student writer. She's fond of pretty trinkets, the ocean at night, and lots of Lana Del Rey. Her writing illuminates the clash where future meets present, in an attempt to understand the struggle between support and intervention, self and other, and love and loss. Bella is a member of The 309 Collective, a group of young California poets, writers, musicians, and artists, as well as the host of Next Line Open Mic, a teens-only open mic celebrating young artists. Her work can be found on Cultural Daily and The309Collective.

S. S. HELWA

NADDAHA

S. S. Helwa (also referred to as Salma Sherif Helwa) is a 16 year old Egyptian American teenager who values the art of literature. As a child, S. struggled with language and English and was considered an English Second Language student (ESL) but over the years grew up to have her strongest academic suit lay in the liberal arts. They find communication and declaration through written art especially enticing because the underlying message can create a unique significance to both the author as well as the audience. S. hopes her writing will reach an audience that sees the beauty of language arts.

ZAC HUDSON

VILLANELLE OF SUCKLED CURLS

Zac Hudson is a university student studying in the Australian Capital Territory. He aspires to be a teacher one day as well as a writer. He believes words are what change worlds.

N.A. KIMBER

A LIFE UNLIVED

N.A. Kimber (she/her) is a writer from Caledon, Ontario. She has been writing since she was twelve years old and has always been moved by the power of storytelling across all mediums. She is the co-founder of the online publication Forget-Me-Not Press which she runs with her twin sister and artist, Kristen Donoghue-Stanford. She can usually be found with a cup of tea in hand and either knitting, reading, or (obviously) writing. Find her on Instagram @nahydekimber or at her website nakimber.org

LIBERTY

MY MIDNIGHT MAN

Liberty is an avid reader and obsessive writer from London. She is inspired by the works of Donna Tartt and has a desire to live her life through morbid words and gothic media. She has a blog called Lilithbl00d, where she writes about her deepest thoughts, her creative muses and messy reviews.

MAOIS

GHOST TOWN

MAOIs (Mahnissa), an artist at heart, has worked as a writer for over 15 years. Throughout her career, she has poured her emotions onto paper, firmly believing that words have the power to heal her. When asked why she became a writer, she readily explains, "I write because no one listens." Her talent has not gone unnoticed, as she has been honored with more than 10 national awards. Additionally, she has embraced her love for vibrant art forms by venturing into various creative avenues such as writing comics and curating art. Now, she takes another bold step towards self-expression by delving into the world of collages, seeking to become an artist. This audacious move signifies her determination to break free from the confines of the written word and explore new artistic territories.

AALIYAH MENDEZ-GARCIA

ETERNALLY

Aaliyah Mendez-Garcia is a young high school student wanting to improve her writing skills. In her free time, she can be found listening to music, specifically wave to earth, or visiting local record shops and bookstores.

ASHELEY NOVA NAVARRO

THE WOMAN IN THE CHECKERED COAT

Asheley Nova Navarro (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic) is a bilingual poet. Her debut bilingual poetry chapbook was published with Bottlecap Press, and her work is published in the Chilean Literary Journal, Copihue Poetry, Revista Digital el Coloso, and the Creative Zine.

ANGELA PATERA

A QUIET AUTUMN MORNING

Angela Patera is a published writer and artist. Her short stories have appeared in Livina Press, Myth & Lore Zine, and more. Her art has appeared in numerous publications, as well as on the cover of Selenite Press and Penumbra Online. When Angela isn't creating, she likes to spend time outside in nature. You can find her on both Twitter and Instagram @angela_art13

RAPHAELA PAVLAKOS

BIRDWATCHING AT NIGHT

Raphaela Pavlakos (she/her) is a 3rd year PhD student in McMaster University's English and Cultural Studies department and a poet. Her research looks at Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee poetry and landscape as alternative sites of memory, using research-creation to intersect her scholarly and creative production. Raphaela's poetry can be found in the Taj Mahal Review, Word Hoard, Sanctuary: A Cootes Paradise Anthology (forthcoming), and graduate journals like The Lamp. She co-authored a self-published poetry collection called Mythopoesis in 2022 with Georgia Perdikoulis, which is available through Kindle Direct Publishing.

NILA PHILLIPS

FORGOTTEN

Nila Phillips is an ambitious and passionate author, writing about the thoughts plaguing our mind in the dark. Even though only sixteen, she's struggled with mental health for several years, causing her to have such a love for writing about it. She has two published pieces, Poems for the Lost Souls, and Letters to the Moon; both poetry anthologies based around mental health.

DIA QUATTROCHI

MOCKINGBIRD

Dia Quattrochi is a second-year college student, nineteen years old, and excited about the future. Known as a ferociously creative writer from early childhood onward, she started self-publishing books in middle school. Today, she draws inspiration from her past and from elements of nature.

YVANKA MARIA GUIA REBELO

A STORMY NIGHT

Yvanka Rebelo is a young writer hailing from India. A bookworm and polyglot, she loves bringing worlds to life through writing and is truly convinced that words are magic. You can find more of her work on her instagram - @a.quiver.of.tales

DC RESTAINO

SEOUL, ALONE, AFTER THE WEDDING

DC Restaino is a writer and editor living in London. His work has appeared online and in print. When not writing, he is desperately trying to keep his one plant alive.

EMMA SMITH

TO SAFE HARBOUR

Emma Smith is an emerging writer and a graduate of the University of Manchester. Her work has been published by Heroica and performed on stage at Contact and the Royal Exchange Theatre. She writes both poetry and prose, mainly about love and relationships. You can find her on Instagram @missemmalsmith.

SOUMIK SRABONY

FADING INTO AUTUMN

"Soumik Srabony: Nature enthusiast, poetry lover, soul-rejoicer, just like Autumn's embrace."

IRINA TALL

UNTITLED

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".

Links to my social networks:

<https://instagram.com/irina369tall?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=> <https://instagram.com/irinanov4155?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

B. VIV

NEXT SEMESTER

B. Viv is an amateur poet and writer currently living in Hungary. Some of her works have already found their way in her native language's small publishing field but getting recognized in an international art community is a new challenge she would love to take up. In her poems, she often explores the topics of walls and connections, alienation and comradeship, despair and determination - hoping to make some sense of this day and age by the power of art and words.

KACIANN WELLER

A SPOOKY DREAM

Kaciann Weller Is A Writer And A Graphic Designer. She focus mostly on writing poems and she is from the Caribbean Country Jamaica . But relocated to georgia a few months ago. She has been writing for 2 years.

HALLEE WELLS

FROST

Hallee (she/her) is an aspiring writer/poet, she is greatly inspired by the late Virginia Woolf, bones on the side of the road, fawns taking their first steps, and the ethereal meanings she can find in the macabre.

She has other poems published with LilithsDiaries

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