

Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue
Thirteen

Oct 2021

Candice M. Ralph • Daniel Vinson • Dean Flowerfield •
Dharmavadana Penn • Diana Grove • Kimberly Dutta • John Grey •
Juliana Pratt • Kelsie Donaldson • Kris Spencer • Kwan Kew Lai •
Lisa Wee • Phil Huffy • Nathan Franson • Simon Tham



**“This is how you do it: you sit down at the keyboard,
and you put one word after another until it’s done. It’s
that easy, and that hard.”**

– Neil Gaiman

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BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ) is an independent online literary journal of poetry, fiction and art primarily for school-aged readers from upper elementary school years onwards. BLJ sees it an important mission to bring the art of literature, and the creation of it, to our younger generation. The journal is freely accessible to all electronically. BLJ welcomes submissions from people anywhere in the world and in all walks of life. We love something that is fresh, surprising, unforgettable, extraordinary, mind-blowing, humorous, bold, unique, layered, witty, educational, original...etc. In short, we want something exceptionally good. For the most updated information about the journal, please visit the website of BLJ:

www.balloons-lit-journal.com

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* Back-cover Art

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Words from Founding Editor

If this incomprehensibly fast changing world can teach me one thing, especially in this never-endingly chaotic period, it should be the value of time. Restricted are the time for gathering, time for school, time for travelling, time for enjoying life to the fullest etc. Yet, time never waits for us. It continues to go in its own pace, taking with it all that we cannot take back.

Fortunately, the spell of literature captures a lot of prestigious moments that stand against the tides of time. Here, we get into Ralph's aqua world of enchantment, learn from Penn to find the spirit through a child's eyes, appreciate from Flowerfield the cycles of life of a rain drop, accept Grey's physical challenge of climbing down, freeze the time as Huffy suggests, see the world positively from Donald's story, make reading your life-long friend as we read Pratt's work, understand from Vinson the fun sides of germs and sneezing, put yourself into Hamlet's shoes as you read Dutta's medical report, laugh at the fun wedding party as Tham portrays, join Franson to give life to the delicious farfalle, and certainly, climb the mountains and breathe in the fresh air with friends as Wee's artwork leads you to.

All of the above activate the child within you and you start to rethink about the world and re-understand the fun side of life a little bit more. Surely, we cannot lock time up in a cage, but we can make it as rich and as multicoloured as possible while we are having it. These artistic creators of BALLOONS Lit. Journal Issue 13 did just that to allow readers to relive precious moments and think in beautiful ways in response to the uncertainties and irrationalities of the present world.

This issue comes a bit late. In fact, I skipped one issue in 2021, which makes Issue 13 the sole issue of BLJ published this year. It is not that I begin to value this literary project less. It is completely the opposite; I value this project so much that I cannot afford producing an issue casually and carelessly. I need quality time, which is quite a luxury given that my full-time teaching job only gets heavier, in addition to my passion for speech and drama and the many writing tasks I bury myself into.

Despite the many hurdles, there is a lot for me to feel grateful for. I thank the adversities I experienced for I could taste the sweetness when they were over; I thank my students for giving me energy to work for literature; I thank all the contributors and submitters for this humble issue; I thank Vivaldi, who wrote the foreword on the next page, for showing me that teaching is the most rewarding job; and I thank you, who is now reading these words, for being an immensely important part of this project. Enjoy your time!

Dr LEE Ho-cheung
 Founding Editor
 BALLOONS Lit. Journal



Foreword for BLW Issue 13

Brimming with brilliance

Adorned with excellence

Luminous with vitality, this

Lyrical, aesthetic bliss

Of ambrosial sights, of exotic expeditions

Of rejuvenating creations

Never cease to excite

Savour in this cornucopia delight!

This little poem is a dedication to my respected teacher and mentor, Dr Lee, who, in the past when I was still a naïve and attention-seeking ruffian, ignited my passion for English. More importantly, my passion to explore the colourful world of reading and literature. Now, some fifteen years later, I am still in love with reading and sharing the joy of learning the language with those around me.

This issue of BALLOONS Lit. Journal, just as all its precedents, continues to be a collection of poetry, stories and artwork that never cease to dazzle and shine. Characterized by bright colours and a warm tone, we look to a world of “Enchantments”, to a world where wishes come true in “Leaf”, and to the world of that unsuspecting “Loo in the Car Park”. Magnifying the child within all of us, we rediscover our child-like innocence inside a “Swiss Bookstore” and laugh at the psychiatric file of one “Hamlet”, a reinvention of the Shakespearean classic. These gems create ripples of intricacy, intimacy and inspiration in our lives.

Ever since the global pandemic, we have been thrown into a state of chaos, a mentality of confusion, and perhaps, deep down, a burdened spirit of hopelessness. We feel lost in the unpredictability, in “The Way Down”, in the daunting hardships around us. Gradually, we have become so entrenched in the dark that we forgot what the sunrise looks like. Penn’s poetry encourages us to walk into the light, and Wee’s refreshing works of art remind us that no matter how high the mountains may seem, how insurmountable the challenges may seem, “The Climb” will renew and invigorate, breathing freshness into our somewhat parched lives. Taking this long journey with those around us, we are building, and more importantly, re-building relationships. We are spreading love and hope to those around us. We are mending our world, and a little bit of our fragmented selves in the meantime.

May the BALLOONS lift your spirits up, bring you joy in abundance, and renew you to hope and strive for a better future! Happy reading!

Vivaldi Chung

MPhil Candidate

Research in Second Language Education

University of Cambridge



Candice M. Ralph

Sea Dream

Led by the tide of night in bed
her head begins to sink
into oceans
of aqua waves
and caves of coral pink.

Asleep, her feet become one fin
a skin of glossy scales;
she meets inside
this sea of Nod
a pod of humpback whales.

Join us! They sing, and so she swims
their hymns sail through the sky;
she wonders if
their songs will reach
the beach she now lives by.

Under the moon she makes a wish
on starfish twinkling bright
to drift within
this dream again
when day gives way to night.





Enchantments



Enter once upon a time
Nights of legends, lore and rhyme
Curses broken by love's kiss
Happily-ever-after bliss
Adventures paved with pixie dust
Noble beasts princesses trust
Towers that fierce dragons guard
Mermaids whose songs leave ships marred
Elixirs sought from witchy sages
Neverlands where no one ages
Twilight wishes; three are granted
Spell this poem to be enchanted!

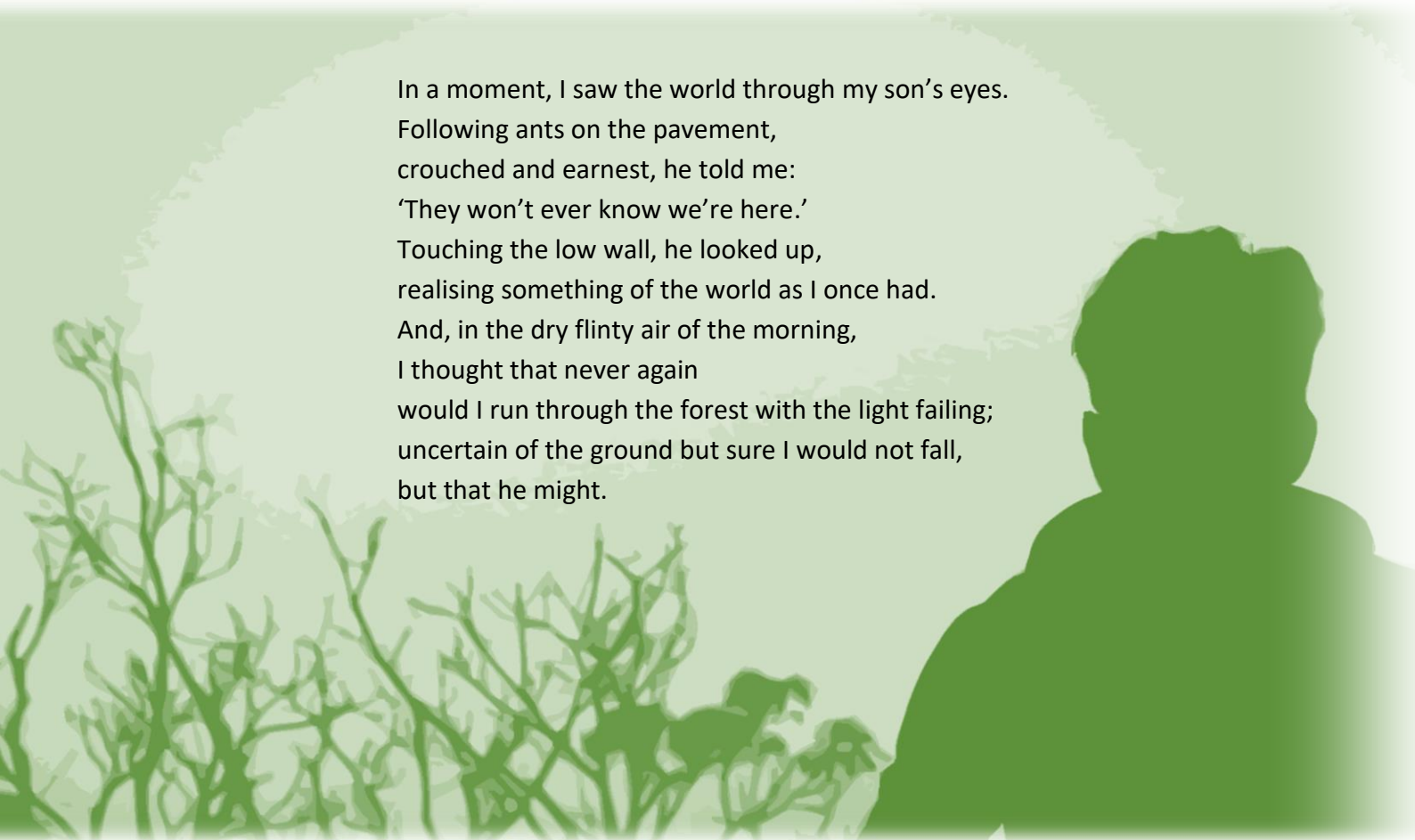


Candice Marilyn Ralph is a 31-year-old literary artist, travelling storyteller and literacy educator. She holds a BA in English Language and Literature from The University of Chicago and an MFA in Creative Writing for Children and Young Adults from The New School. Currently, she is undertaking an English Teaching Assistantship in Taiwan as a Fulbright ('21-'22) Grantee. She is also in the process of working with her literary agent on the publication of her first children's picture book.

Kris Spencer is a teacher and writer. Brought up in Bolton, he now lives in London where he is a Head Teacher. A Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a thread running through his written work is landscape; which he defines as how people feel when they look up and around. He was moved to write poetry when an ex-pupil came to talk to some of his pupils about her poetry during lockdown, via Zoom. He has written seven books and many magazine articles.

Poet

We Need to Find a Forest



In a moment, I saw the world through my son's eyes.
Following ants on the pavement,
crouched and earnest, he told me:
'They won't ever know we're here.'
Touching the low wall, he looked up,
realising something of the world as I once had.
And, in the dry flinty air of the morning,
I thought that never again
would I run through the forest with the light failing;
uncertain of the ground but sure I would not fall,
but that he might.

Kris Spencer

Diana Grove *Author*

Diana Grove is an Australian writer of speculative fiction. Her stories are about weird people doing weird things and some can be found in published short story collections. She has two cats who will always be frenemies and a ginormous needy weedy garden.

Leaf



Day after day, Gordon would eat lunch by himself, and then sit in the school library, hidden behind a book. His only friend was a kind-hearted librarian called Mrs. MacBean. Gordon longed to have a friend his own age — someone he could talk to and play games with. But the kids at school thought he was strange and called him names like Weirdo Gordo. The lonely boy didn't even have a brother or sister to play with at home.

While hunting in the library for new books to read, Gordon thought he found a forgotten bookmark inside a book of fairy tales. But when he pulled it out, he saw he held an old-fashioned coupon. It read:

The holder of this coupon is entitled to ONE WISH from The Great Orlando.

To redeem your wish:

Close your eyes and chant "Muzzabah Huzzapah" while spinning clockwise.

And the moment you stop, think of your wish.

**Do not be greedy and wish for more wishes. It will not work. Trust me.*

No one could see Gordon standing between two rows of bookshelves, so he followed the instructions, feeling silly. Once he had made his wish, he opened his eyes and gasped as the coupon disintegrated between his fingers. Little bright specks of it drifted into the air and then vanished altogether... Just like magic.

After school, Gordon raced home like

he was in a running race. He went straight to his bedroom and stood in front of his homework desk, puffing hard. When he looked inside the dirt-filled glass container (called a terrarium) that sat on top of the desk his face fell. Gordon picked up the Giant Burrowing Cockroach inside and placed it on the back of his other hand.

"I wished for you to be a boy, Leaf, so we could play together."

Leaf looked up and wagged his antennae.

"Stupid, huh?"

Carefully, Gordon put his pet cockroach back in the terrarium.

That night, while Gordon slept, something extraordinary happened to Leaf. The three-inch cockroach flipped onto his back, squirming and hissing. A pair of spindly legs retracted into the thorax (the bit above the abdomen) as the cockroach grew bigger. The four remaining legs thickened and lengthened, resembling the arms and legs of a doll. Leaf grew so big the terrarium shattered, and he fell onto the floor. Gordon stirred but didn't wake. That was a good thing; because Leaf kept growing until he was same size as Gordon. It was horror movie gross.

Gordon's pet cockroach now looked human apart from the curved shell on his back and long antennae poking out of his forehead. Stumbling about, he knocked over a stack of library books and kicked the trumpet case lying on the floor, waking up Gordon. When Gordon switched on his bedside lamp, the shell and antennae were gone, and an ordinary looking boy with

messy brown hair and nutmeg brown skin crouched in the middle of the room.

"I can't believe it! My wish came true," Gordon said, sitting up fast.

Leaf's wide brown eyes fixed on Gordon, who he recognised. Struggling to control his strange, new and fleshy limbs, he lurched towards Gordon with a look of panic on his face.

"Are you ok?" asked Gordon.

Leaf lunged, arms out wide, and fell on Gordon. Desperately he clutched at the front of Gordon's stripy pyjama shirt, and then his dirty hands travelled all over Gordon — messing up his blonde hair and smooshing his cheeks together.

"What are you doing? Stop!" Gordon said, pushing against Leaf's bare chest.

Leaf's round face drew close, and his nostrils flared. Suddenly he took off, zooming on his hands and knees through the half open doorway.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

Gordon's mum cooked a roast chicken for dinner, and the meaty smell still lingered in the air. It wasn't a smell that had ever enticed Leaf before. His favourite food had always been dry Eucalyptus leaves. Leaf twisted around on his knees but couldn't locate the source of the delicious smell. With great effort, he managed to pull himself upright and lean against the breakfast bar in the middle of the kitchen.

Gordon walked over to him slowly and said, "Are you hungry? Want me to make you a chicken and mayo sandwich?"

Leaf sniffed the air and hissed.

"Ok," Gordon said taking that for a yes.

He really wanted to find some clothes for Leaf, but first he needed to feed

him. Gordon had always been a responsible pet owner.

He went to the fridge and took out a jar of mayo and half a roast chicken on a plate. Leaf made a gurgling noise and swung out an arm. His mouth hung open and a little bit of drool trickled out.

"Just be patient Leaf," Gordon said turning around. "I'll make you a sandwich."

The moment Gordon stepped into the pantry to grab a loaf of bread Leaf chomped into the chicken left on the counter. He ate like a starving dog.

"No! Stop! Don't do that," said Gordon returning and reaching for the chicken.

Leaf scowled, his cola-coloured eyes disappearing in an impressive squint. Taking Gordon by surprise, he seized the chicken with one hand. But within two seconds it slid out of his grasp and rolled across the tiled floor.

"Oh, no! Lucky mum didn't see that." Gordon bent down and retrieved the greasy chicken. "Look, I know you're hungry Leaf, but you need to behave better if you're going to stay."

Leaf wasn't listening. He snatched the chicken from Gordon and darted under the dining table with it. Sighing, Gordon put the mayo back in the fridge and waited. Once Leaf had devoured his meal, he followed Gordon sedately back to the bedroom. The big house unsettled him. He liked Gordon's small bedroom; it was familiar.

After a bit of struggle, Gordon managed to get Leaf into an old pair of pyjama bottoms. Once he was back in bed, Gordon put out his hand the way he always did when he wanted Leaf to come to him. Taking the cue, Leaf crawled into bed next to

Gordon. Leaf liked the bed; it was dark and warm. He burrowed deep into it, and became a round lump under the wacky robot print doona.

"Goodnight Leaf," Gordon said, lifting up the doona, so he could see the top of Leaf's scruffy head.

When Gordon's alarm clock beeped in the morning, he looked around for Leaf but couldn't find him. Hanging down, Gordon peered under the bed... Nope. Leaf wasn't hiding there. Gordon quickly searched the house... No sign of him. He stopped outside his parents' closed bedroom door but didn't go in. There was no need to — Leaf didn't know how door handles worked.

Heading back to his bedroom, Gordon called out "Leaf" once more. He stared at his desk, all covered in dirt, leaves and broken glass. It hadn't been a dream. Somehow The Great Orlando, whoever he was, had granted his wish. But had Leaf been a boy only for a few hours? Was that the catch? Would he find Leaf hiding somewhere dark, a Giant Burrowing Cockroach once more?

Gordon flumped down backwards on his bed. A moment later, the door opened with a bang, and he looked up, startled. Leaf came tumbling into the room, knees wobbly and arms out like he was trying to walk in roller-skates.

"Chhhick-en?" he said hopefully, wiggling his eyebrows.

Gordon bounced upright and beamed at his new friend.

Simon Tham

The Loo in the Car Park

Oh, what a Ha! Oh, what a Hoo!
What a dreadful hullabaloo!
How the neighbours such a fuss threw,
To find parked in their midst a portable loo!

It wasn't a Rolls, it wasn't a Daimler;
Neither a Porsche, nor a sporty Alfa.
It wasn't a Benz or even a Jaguar;
But this obtrusive, unmentionable feature!

It was discovered early last week,
By genteel, sensitive, mild Madam Leak,
Who let out the most ear-splitting shriek,
"Come look!" she hollered to Hubby Leak.

"Someone's parked this unsightly, disgusting,
I can't mention, this, this dreadful thing!
How did it appear here? Who did this bring?
You better the Management, ev'n Police ring!"

Meek Mr. Leak meekly came out for a peek,
Not compren'ing why missus could so shriek.
"Who would so publicly take a leak!"
And his roar sent his BP to a new peak!

That singular shriek, that blood curdling roar,
Had the neighbours trooping out their door;
And such a sight it was they never saw;
One sensitive soul even hit the floor!



Simon Tham is currently an English language consultant. Before his retirement, he was an English Literature teacher at secondary school level, the Principal Inspector of English in the Advisory Inspectorate Division of the Education Department, as well as the Head of the NET Section of EMB, Hong Kong. Tham is an experienced speech and drama adjudicator and has written a booklet and produced a video on “The Teaching of Choral Speaking”, and “Good Practices in Speech Activities” which were distributed to all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Tham also frequently conducts talks and workshops on the subject for both primary and secondary English teachers.

Poet

How could anyone with taste so inferior?
How could anyone wreck our Shouson Arcadia?
How could anyone defile our exterior?
With such a monstrous low-taste perfidia!

The landlords, the tenants, and even a Vicar,
Some gents in gowns; some ladies in curlers;
Some in shoes, most in hotel slippers,
With a tit or a twitter and plenty of snickers.

They pointed accusing fingers at Management,
Who smartly suggested they'd check the tenant.
It turned out he's not our usual resident,
As if this helped solve the predicament.

The neighbour was suffering lockdown so long,
So he did what could be found in a love song;
The tying of nuptials of his beloved Fong-Fong
With his another beloved poo Hong-Hong.

To celebrate their Holy Ceremony,
What better way than to hold a party!
He invited not ten, not twenty, but forty!
To this mem'able, merry matrimony.

And parties that serve booze and light beer,
Become pee laced with booze and very strong beer!
Home loos are not ready for this deluge severe,
The host must venture into a new frontier.

To him, it was a brainwave of an idea,
To seek out a portable loo for hire.
He did not reckon with the neighbour's ire –
That genteel folk can also spit fire!



Germs Don't Have Brains

Germs don't have brains
Though some germs have names.
Some day you might name one yourself.

Some germs are good
But some we wish would
Just stay far away on a shelf.

The thing about germs
That we need you to learn
Is that you can control how they spread

By washing with soap
And with water we hope
That the germs off your hands will have fled.

Daniel Vinson

Did You Know

Did you know:

A sneeze travels 100 miles per hour?

Up from your lungs and out through your nose with unrelenting power!

Did you know:

A sneeze creates up to 40 thousand droplets?

Speeding through the air like 40 thousand rockets.



Did you know:

A sneeze can travel up to 30 feet?

Reaching the bus driver from the very backseat.

Did you know:

That you can't sneeze when you are fast asleep?

Apparently your sneezing nerves are also sleeping deep.



Did you know:

It's super hard to sneeze with your eyes open?

So rest assured that from your head your eyes will not be poppin'.

Did you know:

To catch a sneeze, just cover up your nose

And sneeze into a tissue or inside your elbows!?

Poet

Daniel Vinson is a physician, musician, husband, and proud father of two who has had his scientific research and original poetry published in multiple forums, including the internationally-distributed *Vinson Times*. He resides in the great state of Texas and loves a good colloquialism as much as the next guy.

Kwan Kew Lai— Shoes



Azibo had never owned a pair of shoes. In fact, as long as he remembered he walked barefoot all his ten years of life on this earth, his feet feeling the hard-packed red dirt paths in the village, the hot surface of the tarmac roads in the dry season, the sticky, muddy and flooded fields when the heavy rain came and the engorged river overflowed its banks. His name meant *the whole earth* which seemed to destine him to have his feet meeting the whole of the earth's surface in the most intimate way. But he surely wished that fate would not be so unkind to condemn him to walk barefoot for the rest of his life.

His mother and his seven-year-old sister, Mabufo wore no shoes either. The baby, six-month-old Dziko, had no use for shoes, she was still strapped to her mother's back for most of the day, it would be several months yet before she began to walk the earth or *the world* which was

the meaning of her name.

Azibo slept on a reed mat which he shared with Mabufo. All night long both fought hard to have a fair share of a thin worn blanket for it could be chilly here when darkness fell. Her name befitted her for she was all troubles during the night kicking him mercilessly when his body strayed to her part of the mat.

The cock crowed even though the first light had yet to appear. It would be another hour before a thin sliver of sunlight graced the eastern sky. In the dim and gloomy interior of the hut, he saw Mabufo crumple up her share of the blanket and threw it carelessly over him, and got up. He turned away from her. She had to fetch water from the water pump one kilometer from their home. He knew she resented the fact that he could sleep late and he had never once helped their mother to fetch water even if he used his fair

share from the tank she and their mother worked so hard to fill all day long.

Tradition did not require him to do this back-breaking job. He never once saw a man at the pump. Boys accompanied their mothers there but mostly they horsed around, spraying water at one another, something frowned upon by his mother if Mabufo joined in. Today was Friday, there was no school, it would mean more trips to the water pump for his sister. He was glad he was a boy and had an excuse to shirk off.

The first thing Azibo did when he woke up was to look for something to eat. The house was eerily quiet. A few chickens sauntered in pecking at some specks that resembled food on the dirt floor. His mother left some *nsima* in a pot next to a three-stoned stove. Some glowing hot coals remained, giving up a comforting warmth for the still chilly morning. But Azibo knew soon the searing heat from the hot sun would chase it away.

He ladled two scoopfuls of *nsima* into a wooden bowl and sat down on the floor eating without tasting his food. He was still drowsy from his sleep. The chickens clucked and cackled around him hoping to get a beak full of food from him. He wished he had some sugar to sweeten the porridge, but like a pair of shoes, that was a luxury he could only dream about. He was lucky to have something to fill his stomach. His mother worked hard in the field growing some maize and sweet potatoes to sell in the market.

No one knew the whereabouts of his father. He walked out on them one day and was never heard from again. Dziko was only three months old then. But the thing he remembered most about his father was, he

owned a pair of brown leather shoes, the only person in the house with shoes. When he took them off, he carefully dusted them, freed them from the ubiquitous red dirt, and then tenderly stashed them up on the rafters near the thatched roof, high up so no one could mess with them. When he disappeared from their lives, he took the shoes with him.

How Azibo coveted his shoes.

He wished to touch and hold them, run his fingers inside them and feel the softness of the interior. He could only look at them as they were placed too high up in the rafters for him to reach. Would he dare stand on a stool and bring them down to admire at close range? He imagined if he were caught in the act, he might get a thrashing of his life. He often wondered where his father got the money to buy this pair of shoes, shoes with laces to boot.

Chagani came to school one day with a pair of somewhat oversized, scuffed-up wrinkled old leather shoes with no laces. He strutted about in the schoolyard showing off his newly-acquired old shoes. With each step, his feet would ride up as they were a tag large for him, he clomped around until the school bell rang. Going barefoot was almost universal for all the children in the village.

"Ooh, Chagani, where did you get those shoes?" The children jostled one another to get a closer look.

It was hard for Azibo to concentrate that morning, he could practically smell the leather even if the shoes were ancient and worn. The only other person in class who had shoes was the teacher. He was convinced that he had to study hard to attain a status like him where ownership of shoes

was the rite of passage and the norm.

He walked home that sultry hot afternoon, listless and downcast, kicking up the dust and pebbles with his callous toes as he mindlessly scared the chickens crossing his path. A sow with her entourage of piglets snorted at the edge of the road, gave him a good stare, deemed that it was safe to cross, and then gave her command to her brood to charge. Even as the group scurried across, Azibo took no notice. His mind was far away, distracted by the thought and images of Chagani's shoes.

He rinsed his bowl using the water from the tank which Mabuufu worked hard to fill. Far away the faint muezzin's call for Friday prayer floated to him. His mother did not go to the mosque to worship but his father did. He had to leave his precious shoes outside the mosque, the shoes that he could not part with, the shoes that were placed on the pedestal to be worshiped. Did he ever worry that someone could steal them? That one day when he came out of the mosque, they were not there waiting for him?

Shoes...He headed towards the mosque at a trot, wishing to admire the myriad of shoes on display on the doorsteps to his heart's content. If his father was around, he would have brought him to the mosque but being that he was now more or less fatherless, there was no adult to guide him. No one cared if he attended Friday prayer.

The tall slender minaret painted sky-blue beckoned. The courtyard was quiet and seemed abandoned. Azibo crept closer. Hundreds and hundreds of pairs of shoes sat on the doorsteps spilling onto the sandy courtyard, waiting like spoils to be pillaged

and inviting him to try them on.

He picked a pair of pristine white running shoes that looked like they might fit his feet. He saw no one in the vicinity, spat into his palms and brushed the dirt and dust that clung tenaciously to his feet, and sat on his haunches to try them on. He could feel his heartbeat in his chest, his hands trembled as he tried to ease his right foot into the shoe, dirt sullied its vamp. It fitted like a glove. He slipped on the left side, this time a little easier, although he smeared the white surface of the shoe with his spit. Then he tied the shoelaces. He pushed himself off the ground and stood up. He had shoes on his feet for the first time in his life.

Like a baby taking his first faltering steps, the clunky footsteps carried his small body across the yard. He tried a few running steps, for a moment he felt a nostalgia for the intimacy of the hard earth on his feet but when he thought of the hot melty tarmac roads, he quickly changed his mind.

"Hey, take those shoes off!" An angry voice woke him from his reverie. It was Chagani.

Azibo ran into the bush and took the shoes off when he was sure Chagani was not hot on his trail; he had to put them back before the end of Friday prayer. Peeking through the long reedy leaves of the elephant grass, he saw a distraught Chagani squatting by the doorsteps, shoulders slumped, head down in his chest, wiping his eyes with the back of his hands. He was crying and did not notice Azibo.

He ran across the courtyard making a beeline for the doorsteps. Chagani raised his head, jumped up from his squatting position, charged, and butted his angry head into his chest, knocking the wind out

of him. The shoes flew from his hands into the air. As if in slow motion, both boys reached out with open arms into the sky trying to catch them before they fell onto the earth, smudging their unblemished surfaces. Chagani caught one and Azibo the other; both of them breathless from the effort.

Streams of worshipers with their white flowing gowns and caps emerged from the mosque, scrambling to put on their shoes. Chagani and Azibo with each shoe in hand looked on as though transfixed. The boy, the owner of the shoes, when he could not locate his, called out to Chagani who, together with Azibo walked sheepishly to him and with both hands offered him his shoes. The boy yanked them from their hands and deftly put them on his socked feet, giving them a parting look of contempt.

Azibo stared at the smartly dressed boy whose feet probably had not touched the packed red dirt paths or the steamy tarmac roads in his entire existence, as he sped away with his father on a motorbike, into the afternoon heat. The mosque caretaker handed Chagani a coin for watching over the shoes. It was a good thing he didn't see the scuffle when the shoes flew up into the sky. Azibo heard his stomach growling, it was lunchtime, time for him to head home for a meal.

Life went on for Azibo, still shoeless, his toes and soles felt the warmth and cold of the hard earth and sometimes an acacia thorn pierced and lodged deep into his hardened foot, he limped along until his wound healed.

One evening the same sow grunted and crossed his path again, her brood of

piglets had grown and they scrambled clumsily over the hardened red-earthed road on their cleft hooves. Even they had their own built-in shoes. Azibo looked on with envy and resentment.



Kwan Kew Lai is originally from Penang, Malaysia. She came to the United States on a full scholarship to attend Wellesley College. She is an infectious disease specialist in the Boston area, and in 2005 left her position as a full-time Professor of Medicine dedicating part of her time to humanitarian work; in HIV/AIDS and aiding in disaster relief in various parts of the world, including the Ebola outbreak, the Syrian, Rohingya refugee crises and the war in Yemen and most recently in the New York COVID-19 pandemic. She is the lead author of many professional publications and presentations in her field. Her book debut, *Lest We Forget: A Doctor's Experience with Life and Death During the Ebola Outbreak*, was published in 2018. Her second book, *Into Africa, Out of Academia: A Doctor's Memoir*, came out in October 2020.

If It Were Night Forever

If it were night forever

I'd know all night-time brings

I'd always hear the owls

I'd dream of a million things

If it were always night

I'd see the moon through all her phases

like a queen unveiling smiles

like an actor's costume changes

If night-time never ended

I'd be friends with badgers and bats

watch foxes play in the yard

be shown around town by cats

If night went on forever

I could follow the planets' paths

make a billion billion wishes

on ever-falling stars

If it were night forever

I could always be cosy in bed

safe from the lightning and thunder

raging above my head

But if the night-time never ended

the sun would never rise

I'd never see dawn through the curtains

or daylight in others' eyes

Dharmavadana Penn

There's a Ghost in Your Room, Amy Told Me

Look, there's its hair, sticking to the ceiling, clumps hanging

there there there
over its forehead

Can't you see its glasses
if I point them out?
With their silver rims?
It's not a trick of the light is it?

It's got
a big
long
nose
with
hairy nostrils

a long thick moustache
with dangly end bits
like drops of oil

and a massive wide horrible gaping
drooly mouth with long yellow
fangy teeth it's coming to bite
and eat you starting with
your little finger and a watery
tongue
hanging
out and
dripping
Can't
you
see
it?

Poet

Dharmavadana Penn has been a teacher, educational writer, charity gift shop worker and librarian. He now teaches meditation, in London, UK, where he lives. His poems have been published in *The Scumbler* and other magazines and two anthologies from the Emma Press – *Watcher of the Skies* (2016) and *The Head That Wears a Crown* (2018).



The Climb



Digital art, 8.5 x 8.5 inches

Lisa Wee

Victory Dance



Digital art, 8.5 x 8.5 inches

Artist



[illegible]

Digital art, 8.5 x 8.5 inches

Summary of Hiking Life



Digital art, 8.5 x 8.5 inches

Artist

Lisa Wee is a children illustrator with quint, quirky and lively illustrations. She focuses on diversity and inclusivity.



And Then He Was A Raindrop

He stood before the winding stream
and watched its dimpled face
and saw the raindrops join the stream
and heard them fall in place.

He puzzled for a moment,
this boy of six and three,
and asked himself the question,
What can a raindrop be?

What can its tiny life be like?
he asked and gave a sigh,
and dreamed that he was one of them,
these pebbles of the sky.

And then he was a raindrop
who hurries through the air
and seeks his destination,
a place he knows not where,

who passes through a passing cloud
without a moment's rest,
whose stomach falls from falling
and strains to catch his breath,



Dean Flowerfield —

Poet

who, licked by lightning's fiery tongue,
the dragon of the air,
is tossed on thunder's rumbling back
within a stormy lair,

who sparkles for an instant
within a rainbow's glow
and throws a ray of colored light
to humans far below,

who pauses for a moment
adrift on wings of wind
and smiles at the fearful sun
like one who's never sinned.

And onward in his downward dance
this falling angel whirls
and meets the roaring stream below
and splashes in its curls.

Then racing through the channel
toward dark infinity,
he ends his momentary life,
a fragment of the sea.

Dean Flowerfield (aka David Blumenfeld) is professor emeritus of philosophy. He has taught at the University of California, Santa Cruz; University of Illinois, Chicago; Southwestern University, where he held the McManis chair of Religion and Philosophy; and Georgia State University, where he was chair of philosophy and associate dean for humanities. In retirement, he has returned to an old interest, nonfiction and children's literature. His other 2021 publications appear in *Best New True Crime Stories: Well-Mannered Crooks, Rogues & Criminals; Mono; The Caterpillar; Beyond Words; the other side of hope, Sport Literate* and in *Carmina Magazine* (forthcoming 2022).





The Way Down

We retreated from the ridge
as long afternoon shadows
smothered all aspect,
followed the last of the glitter down.

Looking back to where we'd been,
it was all darkness,
many rocks now one
and pathless,
huge and towering,
no longer our equal,
we were nothing now
but the blades of grass
we found so weary with our feet.

Land sloped flatter,
more human.
We trudged by a marsh, a pond,
a loon, reeds,
buzzing insects with a love
for our skin.

All the way to the car,
we were taunted by cliff face.
The places we had climbed
could no longer remember us.

Poet

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Orbis*, *Dalhousie Review* and *the Round Table*. Latest books, "Leaves On Pages" and "Memory Outside The Head" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Lana Turner* and *Hollins Critic*.

Nathan Franson



Farfalle



I tear open the box of bowties
and start dumping
Plop! Pluck! Schwoom!
Golden splashes light the room
in frothy sounds and foaming flutters
and then, they fly
swirling and churning

out of steamy cirrus
my little lunch of butterflies

beat their
jagged wings.

More

and

more

swooping

looping

until the room

is blurred in

saltarello,

pepper,

and buttery glow

of noodles

and I drift

by a fountain

in a cobbled piazza

at my cloud

umbrellas wave

coast while

Mediterranean

Then I'm inhaling



Poet

Nathan T. Franson left his home in the backwoods of Virginia to study Nutrition Science and English at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. For years, he has dreamed of publishing one of his several fiction plotlines after he completes medical school. Nathan loves learning languages, bubble blowing, practising yoga, and playing the guitar. His writing pursuits led him to an ultimate life quest: to capture the feeling of nostalgia on paper.



Juliana Pratt

Swiss Bookstore



“F

“Fiktion oder Sachbücher?”, the chippy voice of a mountainous figure posed as its shadow dimmed the cover of my book from legibility.

I turned my head cautiously to face the man, my face framed with a nervous smile and wide eyes, as I shook my head slightly in hopes of sending the message that I only knew English. I would make note to my family when we left the bookstore that we should add “Sorry, I don’t

speak German” to our repertoire of German phrases. So far, we had, “Hallo” (hello), “Wo ist die Toilette” (where is the toilet), “Danke” (thank you), and “Es tut mir sehr leid für meinen Sohn” (I am very sorry about my son), the latter of which was learned at a courtesy to my little brother, who had deeply embarrassed our mom when he had taken a man’s zopf (delicious Swiss bread) right off his table, failingly assuming that the abandoned

appetizer was a sign of early dismissal when it in actuality was a sign of a bathroom trip.

"Fiction or nonfiction?" the man repeated smoothly, his accent drawing the ends of the words up in a way that adorned his tone with friendliness.

I blushed, feeling far inferiorly cultured and hoping that I hadn't painted myself as a picture of monolingual entitlement.

"I usually stick to fiction," I replied, glancing down at the book I had already picked up, "but I'm just gonna keep looking around if that's ok," I added with a polite head tilt. The man squinted his gray-blue eyes in a genuine smile and bowed his head in a nod before his arborescent legs carried him away to the next unsuspecting customer, who I hoped out of guilt spoke German.

The truth was I really didn't read books at all, but I had been to a bookstore on every trip I had ever been on, at a courtesy to my literarily obsessed mother, who thought a vacation destination was only as good as its best bookstore, which was an important aspect to the city's atmosphere and history. In fact, we were only staying in Zurich, Switzerland for three nights before moving on to Germany, but Orell Füssli, which looked like a regular chain bookstore with its walls of stories stacked together like bricks, towering wooden ceiling, and table displays decorating the brown tile floor, had been added as a must-see to the itinerary.

My eyes darted around the store until landing on the overflowing handful of books my mom had meticulously positioned to stability in her arms as she waited in the checkout line. Elijah, my brother, was pressing the crown of his head into her back,

staring at the tiles and shuffling his feet to stay in his leaned stance whenever she moved forward. I then turned my gaze back to the book in my hand, which was titled *Tschick*. I flipped over to the back cover to discover that what I had picked up was in German, and despairingly dropped it back on the stack from which it originated. My Birkenstocks dragged across the floor until they landed next to the pile of books and the woman holding them.

"Find anything?" my mom asked in her usual minimally hopeful voice.

My mouth gaped open, ready for the responsive words to fill its void, but I instead suddenly became all too aware of the sea of German words that was swimming around me, blowing with the occasional English conversation being spoken in a German or Swiss accent that indicated a second-learned language. I pivoted away from my mom to take in the room, and the fashionable cardigans, jeans, bags, and boots hanging from the bodies around made me feel naked in my sloppy open-toed shoes, Nike shorts, and school t-shirt.

The tall employee's pitiful voice as he switched to English echoed in my mind. My stare fell upon him, deep in fluent conversation with a girl in a red shirt whose hair fell just like a cocker spaniel's. A scarf was twisted and strung through the belt loops of her surely designer jeans. I felt my slouched shoulders with acute intensity as I admired her poised stance from just far enough that I could hear her sweet voice that sung its words.

Who was I, to think of myself as a cultured intellectual, to see myself as a member of the social scene? I hadn't picked up a book that wasn't for school since the

seventh grade when Dylan O'Brien had engulfed me into the Maze Runner series so much that I had to read the trilogy for myself while waiting for the last movie to come out. I only knew one language. And I was literally on vacation in Europe, and I was dressed like a hobo.

I dramatically slapped *Tschick* on top of the stack suspended in my mom's hold as all these thoughts came to a climax.

"Great!" my mom beamed and tried to gently place down the collection on the counter, which promptly fell chaotically off on both sides.

The Switzerland sun cast a spotlight on my mom that gave her black hair chocolate highlights, which swished in its own wind as she frantically picked up the books which had scattered along the floor. The green trees that waited outside the bookstore entrance smiled at me. As I walked toward them, I made sure to pick up my feet with each step and decided that my carelessness had been left in Orell Füssli when my Birkenstocks left the tile and greeted the sidewalk.



Juliana Pratt is a junior in high school from Houston, Texas. When she isn't writing, she is also a cheerleader, a sales associate at a clothing boutique, and a summer camp counsellor. Juliana loves travelling, cooking, reading, going for drives with her friends, and playing with her dog.

Kimberly Dutta

Hamlet — Of Sound Mind?



Royal Hospital for Neurological Disorders
Stratford-upon-Avon
Warwickshire, England
CV34

Phone: 1-800-HAMLET
Fax: 1-800-HAMLET

Patient: Hamlet Jr.

MRN: 123456789
DOB: 3/21/1603
Age: 30
Gender: M
Phone: 358-358-358

Provider(s): Kimberly Dutta, PhD

Commentary and Analysis:

Given my specialty in cognitive health, Queen Gertrude recently approached me in hopes of understanding her son Hamlet's condition. She noticed Hamlet's strange behavior for some while, but once she witnessed Hamlet hearing voices, it was clearly time to seek professional help. I was tasked with diagnosing Hamlet, and I shall now report my findings.

When I initially approached Hamlet, he rather proudly maintained that his behavior was perfectly normal. In denial, he refused to attend therapy sessions, so I was forced to resort to more unconventional methods. As I am the royal in-house doctor at Elsinore, I hear everything. I was not surprised when the Queen came to see me, as I had long agreed with Marcellus that there was something rotten in the state of Denmark! Shortly after Claudius, the newly crowned king of Denmark held court, I overheard Hamlet muttering to himself. I assumed Hamlet was grieving not only his father's untimely death, but also his mother's distant attitude. She downplayed her son's grief, and coldly lumped her own husband's sudden death into the passing of life that occurs daily, saying: "Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die" (1.2, 74). In my medical opinion, Hamlet continued to drown in his sorrow because his mother refused to grieve properly alongside him. She trivialized the late king's life by referring to him with the rest of the "common" deaths, not even personalizing him by name.





RHINO

After seeing Hamlet face such deep angst, I was sure he was dealing with chronic depression. However, I later overheard Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus discussing the ghost of the late Hamlet Sr., which had appeared in front of Hamlet. Being a person of logic and science, I believe the ghost must be a trick of the light as supernatural creatures do not exist. The ghost apparently wanted Hamlet to avenge his death and catch his murderer, Claudius. In order to succeed, Hamlet decided, "Here, as before, never, so help you mercy, How strange or odd some'er I bear myself (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet To put an antic disposition on)" (1.5, 189-192). Upon hearing his resolve, I became unsure if Hamlet was truly suffering from illness or simply pretending. In order to diagnose an individual as suffering from madness, I must determine that the person in question has lost control of his or her thoughts and actions. But Hamlet's plan to "put an antic disposition on" indicated that he was conscious of his strange actions he subsequently adopted. I was not to be so easily fooled...

Too invested in Hamlet's case, it was impossible to stop now. I kept on with my eavesdropping to sniff out the increasingly rotten smell in the state of Denmark. Hamlet later entertained the thought of suicide in a solitary setting. If I remember correctly, he said something to the effect of: "To be, or not to be: that is the question" (3.1, 64). Even Hamlet's act of madness had failed to earn his mother's love and attention he so deeply craves. He therefore felt a sense of defeat in this moment. Hamlet also behaved irrationally with Ophelia, repeatedly insulting her. Hamlet's mannerisms were paranoid, angry, and exhibited a lack of impulse control, a contrast with his calm, introspective demeanor when solitary earlier. It seemed he was exaggerating his actions in order to convince Ophelia that he was ill. When by himself, I am more confident that his words are authentic. In front of others, I cannot be as sure.

Finally came Hamlet's encounter with Queen Gertrude, which led her to seek my esteemed guidance. According to Queen Gertrude, she and Hamlet were conversing in her bedroom when he suddenly heard voices, surprised that Queen Gertrude could not hear them as well. She then decided Hamlet was mentally unwell, but Hamlet confessed his behavior has all been an act. Of course, Gertrude still believed he was hiding a true illness, and now the final decision has been placed onto me.

Diagnosis:

After much investigation into the past, I can conclude that Hamlet is suffering from only-child syndrome and mild depression. From the time that Hamlet first sees the ghost of his late father until his death, he believes that the ghost appeared to

RHND

convince him to catch his father's murderer. However, I think the "ghost" was a manifestation of his inner fears of abandonment by his mother. He was miserable that Queen Gertrude so quickly forgot him and his father and became solely focused on his uncle. The need for his mother's love and affection stems from the Oedipus Complex, which all boys carry in their subconscious mind. The Oedipus Complex is a repressed desire for sexual involvement and attention from the parent of the opposite sex. It also involves a sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex: in this case, Claudius. After Hamlet Sr.'s death, Hamlet finally had the opportunity to get close to his mother, but Claudius ruined his plans. Therefore, he was jealous that his mother's attention was moved elsewhere and acted out as a result. Although Hamlet believed he was acting mad in order to bring his father's death to justice, it was actually a ploy for Queen Gertrude's attention. Therefore, his delusions, obsessive fear, and anger issues were all an act; the true disorder is one of profound loneliness, which comes from being an only child. His thoughts surrounding taking his own life stemmed from feelings of solitude and his mother's lack of care. It is likely that he will face low spirits for some time, as the grieving process for his father will be difficult. However, with his mother's help and the following prescription, Hamlet should be on the path to recovery.

Prescription:

- Queen Gertrude must do the following
 - spend at least 2 hours a day with only Hamlet
 - buy a whole new wardrobe for Hamlet
 - take Hamlet on vacation for the two of them (2x per year)
 - read Hamlet bedtime stories
 - ask the chef to prepare Hamlet breakfast in bed on Sundays
- in chess matches, Queen Gertrude and Claudius both must let Hamlet win

*Hamlet must feel genuinely loved. I will check back with him in approximately four weeks.

Kimberly Dutta

Kimberly Dutta, PhD

Author

Kimberly Dutta is a current senior at Horace Mann School. She loves English, and writing, especially creative projects. She is also very involved in the singing community at school and is part of both of Horace Mann's advanced choir groups.



It's Magic

I am a magician
who can fool you and amaze you
and not reveal the secrets of my trade.
Up in my room I have
a box containing many tricks,
with a book explaining how each one is made.

I practice these illusions
and have learned important things
about the way to put on magic shows,
and tonight, right after dinner,
I will work on them again
and my dog will watch to see how well it goes.



I'll change a silken handkerchief
from red to blue and green
and quickly change it back to red once more,
then close into my waiting hand
a coin that disappears,
although sometimes it clatters to the floor.

I'll take a deck of playing cards,
a pack of fifty-two,
then tap the deck three times to cast a spell
that makes each card appear
to be the Royal Queen of Hearts.
Don't ask me how it's done, I'll never tell.



I'll also say some magic words,
the kind magicians use,
that sound quite odd to people who don't know
that magic words are really just
whatever they make up
and after all, are simply just for show.



And for the grand finale,
I will take a bunch of flowers
and place them in my tall magician hat,
then make those flowers disappear
right into empty space.
I have no other trick as good as that!



And one last thing I practice
is the taking of my bow,
saying, "Thank you folks!" and waving with a smile.
Then I'll pack my tricks away
and do my homework at my desk,
though I keep the magic hat on for a while.



Phil Huffy

No Time for That

Has the eagle ever said, "Hooray,
I see a lovely view today?"
and having zoomed around the lake
in search of a nice fish to take
thought, "My, this lake's a lovely blue."
and found the trees quite pleasant, too?

And has a moose on boggy shores,
while finishing her feeding chores
and dripping wet with swampy muck
considered it a stroke of luck
that way above her food supply
a splendid mountain towers high?

And does a fox out on patrol
in search of rabbit, duck or vole
but finding little as he prowls
and while his stomach, no doubt, growls
enjoy a songbird's happy tunes
or listen for the calls of loons?

The answer to these questions, though,
is very likely to be "no."
As forest creatures make their way
and seek to eat another day,
they have a lot of work to do
and leave the fun to me and you.

Poet

Phil Huffy is a busy poet who writes all kinds of poems. He often works at his kitchen table, but also enjoys outdoor activities such as hiking and camping. He has published three books of his work.



Kelsie Donaldson —

A Cold Comfort



In the darkness that is the corporate weekday, lunch hour was the only bright spot for David Wyatt. He had a tradition of eating on a park bench just down the road from the Tech World office, and lately, his co-worker, Charlotte Holmes, had taken to joining him. He enjoyed the company and conversation, and so he was always glad when she grabbed her brown bag lunch and waited for

him by the elevator.

This June Wednesday was no different. David grabbed his lunch, met Charlotte at the elevator, and rode down to the lobby. The park was within walking distance, so the two strolled casually down the sidewalk, chatting about nothing in particular.

When they reached the park bench, they

sat down side by side.

"Ham and cheese today?" asked David.

"It's Wednesday, isn't it?" responded Charlotte.

"Indeed it is," said David. And then like any pleasant co-worker, David remarked on the weather. "I can't believe how cold it is for June."

"Me neither. I saw the forecast on the news last night, and it doesn't show it getting warmer any time soon."

"What gives, Mother Nature?" asked David.

"It's not Mother Nature," came a voice. David and Charlotte looked over to see who had spoken. It was a man, maybe mid-70s, who was sitting on the bench next to theirs, drinking a coffee.

"What is it then?" asked David.

"My grandfather told my father and my father told me. The Earth is getting colder."

"Getting colder?" asked Charlotte.

"Correct," the old man said, offering no further explanation.

"Why?" Charlotte pressed.

The man paused for a moment and looked around as if to ensure nobody was listening in. Nobody was.

"Every time someone on Earth acts as if they are the center of the universe, the Earth moves a millimeter away from the sun."

David and Charlotte were quiet for a minute, trying to determine if the man was joking or senile. But he did not smile, and so the pair was forced to presume that he was serious.

"So, you're saying that every time someone does something selfish, planet

Earth physically moves in space?" asked Charlotte. David looked at her, a little surprised that she was even entertaining the idea.

"Yes. Earth shifts every time someone acts as though they are what they feel themselves to be."

"What do they feel themselves to be?" asked Charlotte.

"I told you. The exact center of the universe," said the man.

"How did your grandfather figure this out? And how did he convince you it's true?" asked David.

"He was well-versed in the cosmic ways of the world. He spent years studying psychology and astronomy, and the link between the two. And when he discovered this connection, he knew it in his bones to be true. Just like I do. Just like you do now."

And as wild as it sounded, David and Charlotte did feel it to be true. It was as if they always knew there was a link between Earth and those who inhabited it, and they only just put their finger on it.

The pair thought about it for a while before David finally asked, "So, there's no way to stop it? Are we all eventually going to freeze to death?" He had somehow already passed the disbelief and was now onto the fear, or more accurately, impending de-pression.

But the old man had already begun walking back home, leaving David and Charlotte to talk only to each other.

"We're going to freeze to death," said David, not as a question this time.

"It will take a long time," Charlotte said quietly.

"Can we stop it?" asked David.

"How would we?"



"We need to tell everyone! Let them know that every time they act selfishly, they are bringing us a millimeter closer to the end of the world!"

"And you think that will convince people to lead altruistic lives?" asked Charlotte.

"I mean, people would still slip up, but..." David trailed off as he realized Charlotte was right. They didn't have any kind of authority and many people would deny it anyway, even if their gut knew it was true.

Again, David and Charlotte sat in silence for a while, thinking about what the man had said before Charlotte came back to Earth.

"We've got to get back. Lunch hour is up, and we have that inventory meeting at 1:00."

"Charlotte, how can you even think about that right now?" David asked.

"Because I don't want to get fired. Come on." She dragged David back to the office.

Of course, the pair spent the entire inventory meeting and the rest of the day thinking about what the man had said. Charlotte even caught David shiver a few times throughout the day, but she wasn't sure if it was from the chilly temperatures or the thoughts running through his head. That selfishness would be the demise of humanity! Actually, Charlotte thought, that wasn't surprising at all.

As June came and went, the pair became increasingly despondent. Once and a while, they would throw ideas out to each other. "What if we told only scientists and asked them how we can protect against the cold?"

(They would be the least likely crowd to believe it.) "What if we got a group of people together and traveled the world to spread the message?" (We'd go broke after a month and still, it wouldn't be enough.)

And so, they kept doing what they'd always done. They went to the office, did their work (with a break in the afternoon for lunch in the park), and went home. David had lost interest in learning Spanish and playing the guitar. What was the point? Charlotte broke things off with the guy she was seeing after he let the elevator close on a scrambling woman. He claimed he didn't see her, but Charlotte knew he did.

On the third day of July, the pair was eating in the park as always.

"I did some calculations last night. At one millimeter per instance of selfishness, even assuming the very worst of mankind, we'll still probably die of natural causes before freezing," said David.

"That's good, I guess," Charlotte said.

"But it's still not reassuring. I mean, I know I'm going to die one day. But watching all these people act without any regard for anyone else is slowly driving me mad."

"Me too," Charlotte said.

"I just want to scream all the time, 'You're killing yourselves, people! You're killing your sons and daughters and their sons and daughters!'" David said.

"Me too."

They were silent for a minute, and then Charlotte said, "Do you wish we never found out?"

David thought for a moment. "Sometimes. But mostly, I just wish that everyone else knew. And believed it."

"Do you really think the entire world

would change their behavior to save future generations of people that they don't know?" asked Charlotte.

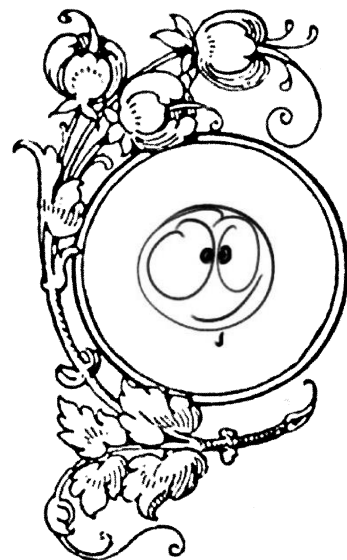
"You're right. We'd still freeze. Maybe just a little bit slower."

The pair sat in silence for a couple of minutes, Charlotte shivering slightly. It really was cold for July.

"You know what?" said David suddenly. "The world may be doomed to freeze over. But I have you and you have me and we're going to figure something out. At the very least, we'll do our part. We can think of others and be empathetic and it won't make a difference in the long run, but it will make a difference to us. And the world is terrible and selfish, but you are not terrible or selfish, and I'm glad to be stuck on this freezing planet with you."

Charlotte smiled widely at him and put her hand on his. David looked down and saw the goosebumps on her arm. He took off his jacket and wrapped it around her shoulders.

And as she huddled in the warmth of the jacket, the earth moved three millimeters closer to the sun, for the old man had only told the pair half of the truth. He had neglected to mention, or maybe he hadn't known, that good acts have even more power than the bad ones. That some months are unusually cold, and others unusually warm; a constant give-and-take, not a straight line down. David and Charlotte would eventually find this out, but for now, it was enough to believe in only the good of each other.



Kelsie Donaldson lives in South Lyon, MI with her parents and younger brother. She graduated from Michigan State University in 2019 with a degree in Professional Writing and now works in the communications industry. She has had articles published by Local 4 News in Detroit, as well as fiction published in *The 3288 Review*. When she's not reading or writing, she can often be found playing the ukulele or cuddling up with her yellow Lab, Keila.





Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal



NOT FOR SALE