

Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue
Four

Sept 2016

Aimee Nicole • Allen Forrest • Ashley Carlon • Aubrey Bjork • CB Droege • Carina Jiang •
Chaeyeon Kim • Daniel Galef • Fredone Fone • Gabrielle Horvath • Jacqueline Jules •
Monika John • Nicholas Froumis • Nyaila Newbold • Rebecca Linam • Scott Merrow •
Susan Gundlach • Z. G. Tomaszewski

“Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on.”

– *Louis L’Amour (1908-1988)*

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BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ) is an independent biannual 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

Submissions are welcome year round. Writers are strongly advised to read and follow the guidelines stated on the above website. Enquiries and submissions should be sent to:

editorblj@yahoo.com

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* Cover & back cover art adapted from this collection





Words from Editor-in-Chief

This is the first issue of BALLOONS Lit. Journal after this magazine received funding from the *Hong Kong Teachers Dream Fund*. For this, I must start by thanking Dr Choi Yuk-lin and her brilliant team for establishing the foundation to support the dreams of Hong Kong educators.

About dreams, I did not have a strong vision when I was small as to what I would be when I grew up. But now, being a front-line teacher and subject leader, my dreams become much clearer. I wish for youngsters, especially those in my hometown, to have a quality English literary journal displaying skilful and emotional work of different cultures – I have been making this dream come true!

Particularly through this fourth issue, I would like young people to know that attractive art forms could be very varied like from Fone's modern abstract work of sleekness to Forest's spectacular colouration against the striking outlines, and to Carlon's stunning capture of boyhood and innocence at worry-free moments; I would like poetry to touch youngster's heart just as how Newbold's verse poignantly delivers the message of final thankfulness, and Horvath's verse portrays the eternity of ephemerality; I would love grown-ups to be reminded of a child's perspective that they will rediscover in John's "Carnival" and Jules's "Waiting", knowing that I have been a never-growing child myself!

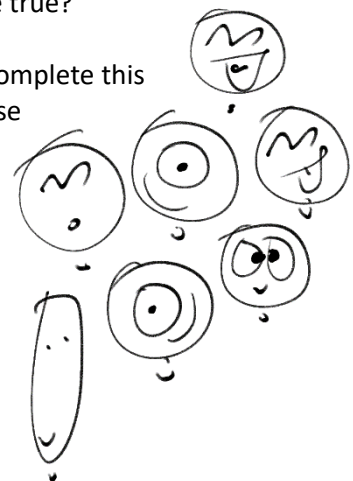
As for short stories, this issue does live up to the expectation of cleverly twisty plots you will find in most if not all of the seven stories selected here, ranging from space/earthly accidents and futuristic stories, to imaginary contexts and a love-for-pets theme. Kim's expressive prose "Watermelon Seeds" even explores the narrator's inner transition as she experiences cultural confusion and an identity crisis.

I can talk for weeks to my students with these excellent demonstrations of creative and rhetorical minds showcased in this humble issue. With these passionate art-creators all over the world enriching *BALLOONS Lit. Journal*, I am proud to say, what literary dream of mine would not come true?

I sincerely thank all the contributors, my advisors, and previewers to help complete this issue. And surely, I welcome you to read this issue of BLJ and hope that these entries will speak to you, comfort you, amaze you, amuse you, guide you, inspire you, move you etc, and most importantly, invite you to look forward to reading more and more.

Happy adventuring!

Ho Cheung LEE, EdD





Foreword

The stunning image on the cover sums up perfectly how many people see literary texts and art. They are luxurious puzzles that make us pause, look and think. We don't always need an answer or a meaning when we see these pieces; instead we revel in the silent interaction between us and the text or image. Stories, poems, songs, photos and art pique our interest, talk to us, carry us back to distant people and places, take us on journeys, make us laugh, release pain and allow us to reflect on who we are and what we are doing. And with that let me welcome you to the 4th issue of *BALLOONS Lit. Journal*! It is another collection of beautiful images and texts that are bound to trigger a personal response as you pore over each piece. As the poem "In the Library" tells us, words in books and texts repeat themselves over and over again "to reach every heart, and then to start all over again." Let these pieces reach your heart.

The short stories selected for this issue will touch you, delight you, surprise you and make you laugh – they are all perfect for the classroom and I would urge all teachers reading this magazine to integrate the short stories into their classes. Encourage students to read some of these texts aloud to really bring out added meaning – how much fun, for example, would it be to hear students reading a poem called "Please do not read this poem"? The black and white photos bring childhood to life and are all "question marks" in their own right – what a great way to stimulate personal response, discussion and sharing on what students see in them.

As I read through this latest issue, I was also struck by three recurring themes: time, childhood and heart. These are universal themes that engage all of us and stimulate more personal reaction. Some of the pieces will take us back to our childhood fears. Others will remind us of how we wished our lives away by eagerly looking forward to birthdays, holidays and parties. The child's "waiting itch" awoke memories of my own son's rush through childhood and into his teenage years and how I could do absolutely nothing to slow time. The final poem "All in a Day's Work" showed me why – the same scene can change completely, even in the course of 24 hours simply because time moves on.

We may not be able to slow time, but we can make the most of it. Start by reading every piece in this latest issue and allow them to provoke a personal response in each of you. My sincerest thanks go to Dr Lee for his time and heart in compiling this journal for students and teachers. It is an amazing gift.

Dr Gary Harfitt
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
The University of Hong Kong

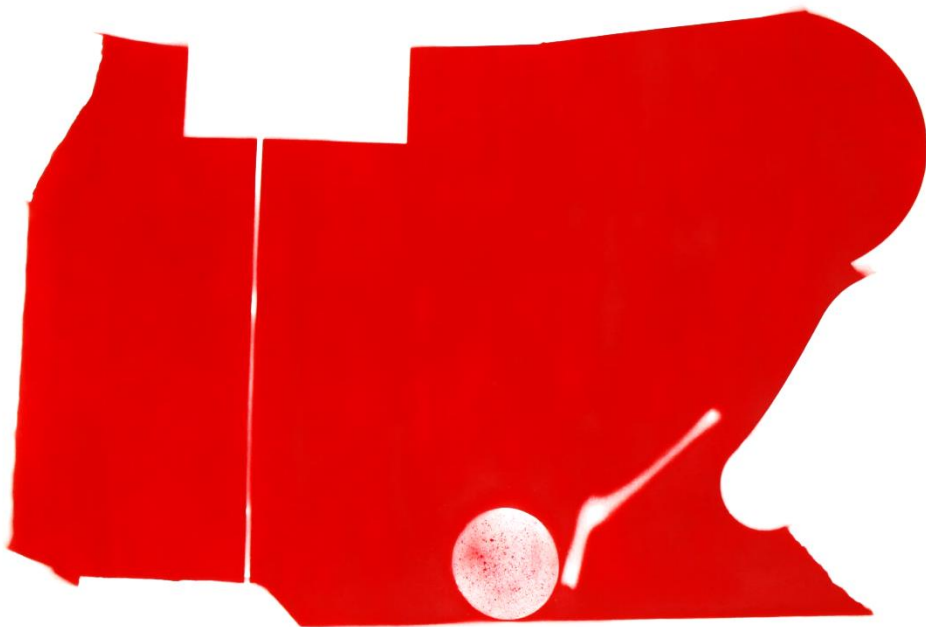




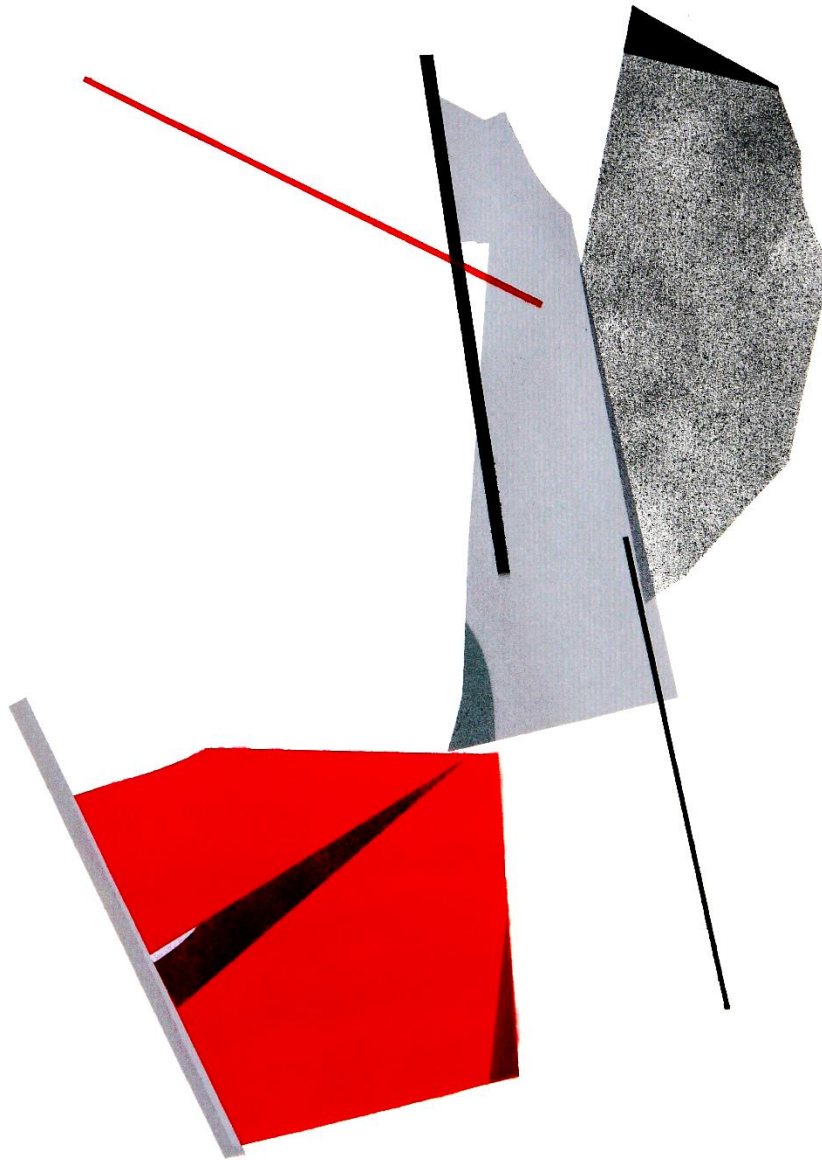
Artist

Fredone Fone





Fredone Fone was born and raised in one of Brazil's many suburbs. He is a self-taught artist who started an early career as a builder assisting his father, for ten years. This experience served as inspiration for his artistic work that is based on simple geometric shapes and abstract compositions. His abstract compositions are intuitively influenced by his experiences when he worked as a mason helper with his father. Fone's observation from the public space, especially the architecture made in an improvised way and with few financial resources apparent in the slums and suburbs of Brazil, shows him different ways of looking at cities and their inhabitants, who also built those cities.





This poem is top-secret. It could land me in the clink,
And nobody can see it — I don't even dare to blink.
I don't know who I'll think to trust, or who I'll trust to think —
That's why I wrote this poem down in disappearing ink.

Daniel Galef loves writing funny poetry almost as much as he loves reading it! He has been writing poems for twenty years. He has previously published funny poetry in *Light Quarterly*, *Lighten Up*, *Snakeskin Poetry*, *Child of Words*, and *Word Ways*, among others.

Poet

Daniel Galef

Carnival

Ice cream cones
have fallen into dust
mixed with the salt of a small boy's tears.

Mesmerized by ferry wheels
his eyes turn bright
above vanilla-chocolate lips.

Time stands still
in childhood dreams
of elephants and cotton candy.

Poet

Monika John

Monika John is a writer, lawyer and world traveler living in the Pacific Northwest, USA. Her poetry, essays and stories have appeared in numerous US, UK and Kenyan Journals and anthologies. Most recently her poems were published in *Kikvetu*, Kenya, *Dream Insights-e-zine*, US, *Kindred Spirit*, UK. One of her collections was selected for final consideration (*Mystical Poetry Prize*, Foundation Fernando Rielo); additional poems are forthcoming in 2016.



My heart beats.

It slams against the barricade of my chest when I'm nervous
and slows down when the sun disappears.

It pulses and pulses and pulses,
dancing to the rhythm of my body.

I know that one day, it will stop beating,
and I will stop dancing, and singing, and smiling.
I will take my last breath,
and rather than look up to the sky,
I will look inside and say thanks.

Nyaila Newbold *Poet*

Nyaila Newbold is a 9th grade student at Miami Arts Charter School. She has been published by *Young American Poetry Digest*, and won an honorable mention in the *Scholastic Awards*. She has three brothers, a dog she's in love with, and a phone she can't resist using.





The Treehouse Monster

Aubrey Bjork
Author



Aubrey Bjork loves experiencing the world through the perspective of her beautiful children, Addie and Andy. When she's not teaching, she's either writing or devouring fresh-oven pizza. Life is better with mozzarella.



The monster thumped the back wall of the treehouse. His long arms and sharp teeth were as real to me as the weathered toy box rattling in the corner. Could I hide inside that box, if worse came to worse? He wouldn't think to look there.

Boom. Boom. Whump.

The monster swung to the corner, the one furthest from the door. He snarled and gurgled words I didn't recognize, but completely understood. *I'm coming for you, kid*, he said. *I can smell you in there*. His deep belly laugh *ha ha ha* beat against the walls and seeped through the open window. Good thing the monster was still outside. For now.

I ducked down and pulled my knees up to my chest. Maybe if I stayed quiet long enough, the monster would go away, drawn to noisier prey. Where was my brother when I needed him? He would make great bait.

Thump. Whap. Smack.

The shadow of a monstrous hand sprouting five terrifying fingers fell on the wall opposite me. He was reaching through the window! The game was up. I knew he'd get me and haul me off to a secret cave somewhere. My legs shook as his raspy breath blasted the top of my head. I closed my eyes, ready for the end.

I waited. And waited.

Silence.

I cracked open one eye. No shadow on the wall. Was he waiting for me to move? I tilted my head closer to the window. No breath

blasted my face. A new hope kindled in me, sweet like a glass of Grandma's lemonade. Was he gone? Was I going to make it out alive? I crept cautiously to the door and poked my head around the jamb.

Grandpa was talking with Dad, one hand on the tree house. His long five fingers splayed out on the old wood near the window. He must have chased the monster away. I crawled out on my hands and knees and scooted close to Grandpa until my eyes were level with his.

"Is the monster gone?" I whispered. I risked a glance around the corner. All clear.

Grandpa shrugged. "Do you see him or hear him?"

I shook my head.

"Well, I guess he's gone. Let's get some dinner."

He helped me down and we walked together across the grass, to the picnic tables festooned with red and white squares and ketchup and mustard prawns. Grandma offered us tall glasses of sweet lemonade. Grandpa settled into his seat and piled his hamburger high with pickles. Uncle Sam told a joke and Grandpa belly-laughed. *Ha ha ha*.

I sighed and picked the lettuce off of my bun. I'd wait until after lunch to tell Grandpa more about the monster. I didn't want to scare him off his hamburger.



Second Thoughts (ink, watercolor, 2016)

Random Actors Chinatown Series

Artist **Allen Forrest**





Senior Strollers (ink, watercolor, 2016)

Allen Forrest, Graphic artist and painter, was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications and books. He is the winner of the *Leslie Jacoby Honor* for Art at San Jose State University's *Reed Magazine* and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

Scott Merrow

Author

Scott Merrow began writing short stories after retiring from a 30-year career in the Air Force. He has recently had a story ("The Good Mother") published online at *Short Fiction Break*. He and his wife Paula also co-write short screenplays, and have had ten of them produced. The films have done quite well on the film festival circuit. They live in Colorado with their two crazy dogs.

Time in a Box

Twelve-year-old Mortimer Smedley III was in his bedroom, hard at work. The word "bedroom," though, might be a bit off the mark, as the room seemed more like a science laboratory than anything else. It was crammed full of the tools of the trade for a young scientist and inventor. There was electronic gear, disassembled components, and other odd pieces and parts strewn everywhere.

The walls were covered with hand-drawn charts and graphs, plus one large poster of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out. A large bookcase was crammed full of well-worn books, mostly of the mathematics and science variety, and on the very top shelf was a row of six shiny gold trophies,

each one reading: *Mortimer Smedley III, Winner, Science Fair, First Grade, Second Grade, Third Grade...all the way up through Sixth.*

At the moment, Mortimer ("Morty" to his friends) was tinkering with his latest project, a very large and obviously homemade contraption, which occupied the middle of the bedroom floor. It was a huge cardboard box covered with wires, gauges, dials, computer parts, lights, and other peculiar gizmos. He was carefully fine-tuning things to meet his exact specifications.

Morty was a smallish boy and sort of nerdy-looking, with an unruly shock of blonde hair, clothes a little too big and always somewhat disheveled, and thick glasses that constantly slid

down the bridge of his nose. Currently, he was wearing a pair of safety goggles over his eyeglasses, making him look a bit “owlish” as he tested the various components on his machine. He wasn’t alone in the room. His best friend and colleague, Anna Maria Hernandez (whom everyone called “Annie”) sat on the bed while Morty tinkered with the cardboard-box machine. Annie was also twelve. She was a pretty girl and just as bright as Morty, but at the moment she was mostly bored. She spied a TV remote control on the nightstand beside the bed, and she picked it up and fiddled with it absentmindedly. It wasn’t your everyday remote, though – there was a BIG RED BUTTON, right in the middle.

Of course, she pushed it.

Instantly, a whirring sound arose in the corner of the room. Both kids flashed a look in that direction.

A small robot (another homemade Morty masterpiece) was sitting in the corner, and it came to life. It stood up and raised both arms. In one hand, there was a large magnifying glass. In the other hand, a laser pointer.

“Oh geez,” Morty yelled. “Duck!”

He leapt across the bed and pushed Annie’s head down.

The robot fired the laser through the magnifying glass. The thin red beam just missed Annie’s head. It hit the wall behind her, and a thin wisp of smoke arose from the wallpaper.

The robot lowered its arms, sat down, and went back to sleep.

“Yikes!” Annie exclaimed. “You have a killer robot?” She sat up on the bed, licked a fingertip, and snuffed out the smoldering spot on the wallpaper.

“Look, Annie,” Morty said, a little irritated by the interruption, “if you’re gonna fool around with my stuff, don’t go pushing any more red buttons, okay?”

“Okay, okay,” she replied, a little sheepishly.

Morty grabbed a laptop computer from his desk and connected it to a series of wires on the cardboard-box device. He typed in a command, and suddenly wheels began spinning, lights flashed, and the machine began to vibrate gently.

He typed in another command, and everything shut off.

Annie watched in awe. “Explain this to me again, Morty?” she said. “Time travel? In a cardboard box?”

“The box doesn’t matter, Annie,” he explained. “It’s all about quantum physics. We’re gonna warp the space-time continuum...” He stopped. “Look, I don’t have time to explain it again. We have...” he checked his watch, “...two minutes to get going. Otherwise I’ll have to recalculate the whole thing.”

He pointed to an electric guitar leaning against the wall. “You just grab your guitar,” he said. “That’s all you have to worry about.”

She got up, grabbed the guitar, and followed Morty to the cardboard machine.

Laptop in hand, Morty opened a flap on the side of the box, and climbed inside. Annie followed with her guitar.

It was dimly lit inside the box, dark really, just a few blinking green lights, and it was so crammed full of equipment that it was difficult for Morty and Annie to shoehorn themselves in, not to mention Annie’s guitar. But they managed.

Once they were settled, Morty reached over and plugged in Annie’s guitar, then he began turning dials and flipping switches.

The outside of the box came to life. Lights began flashing, wheels started spinning, and everything began to vibrate.

Inside, Morty did one last check. Then he turned to Annie. “You ready?”

“I guess so,” she said.

Morty typed on the laptop. "Okay, then," he said. "Next stop...the future!"

He pushed a BIG RED BUTTON on the panel in front of him, then he pointed to Annie's guitar. "Quick! Play an A chord."

With a twang, Annie played a loud A chord. The box started shaking wildly.

Outside the box, the sound of the guitar chord continued ringing, louder and louder, as the box shook and rattled and began thrashing around the room. Sparks were flying everywhere, and thick smoke began streaming out of the box.

Then there was a loud *POP*, a flash of light...

And the box disappeared.

For Morty and Annie inside the cardboard time machine, only a moment passed, but in that moment they had folded space and time and crossed a vast amount of both.

Then, in some other time and some other place, there was a flash of light and a shower of sparks, and a loud *POP*, and the box appeared out of thin air.

In the middle of a dirt road.

After a moment, the flap opened, and smoke billowed out. Annie crawled out first, coughing and sputtering, followed closely by Morty.

They both looked around.

"Where the heck are we?" Annie asked.

"This is the future?"

"Uh, I may have miscalculated the..."

Morty began.

He was interrupted by a thundering sound. The ground began to tremble.

At that moment, they noticed that this wasn't exactly a typical dirt road they had landed on. It was dirt, yes, but there were rails on both sides of the road, and the road itself was decidedly curved.

And the thundering sound – it was two

huge thoroughbred horses racing toward them, a jockey in colorful clothing atop each one.

It was a race track!

The horses continued straight toward them, but at the last moment the jockey riding the horse in the lead yanked the reins and barely avoided trampling them.

Stunned, Morty and Annie watched the horses finish the race. Unfortunately, the horse that had pulled up and saved their lives lost the race. By a whisker.

As they watched, six uniformed security guards leapt the rail, dashed across the track, and grabbed them. Morty raised his right hand in a Star Trek Vulcan hand salute...

"We come in peace," he said.

* * *

A few minutes later they found themselves sitting on wooden folding chairs in an office marked: *Pimlico Race Course Security*. They sat very still as the Chief of Security paced angrily around the room shouting at them.

The cardboard time machine, looking a little worse for wear, sat smoldering in a corner. Next to it, Annie's guitar, sporting some fresh burn marks, leaned against the wall.

"Time travel?" the Chief asked incredulously. "Look, a race track is no place for pranks. You almost got yourselves killed out there."

He slammed his fist on the desk.

"Not to mention you made Seabiscuit lose to War Admiral," he screamed. "Do you have any idea how many people – *across the country* – bet on the Biscuit?"

Morty and Annie cringed.

They were saved by a ringing telephone. The Chief picked it up. "Yeah?" he said into the phone. "Yeah, I got 'em here. I dunno, some cockamamie story. They say they're from...never mind. I'll be right there."

He hung up and started out the door. He stopped, turned, and pointed at them.

"You-do-not-budge-an-inch!" he ordered. "Hear me?"

They nodded.

He stormed out and slammed the door behind him.

A nanosecond after he was gone, Annie leapt to her feet and started pacing. Now *she* was angry. "Okay, Morty," she scolded, "now you've *really* done it. I thought we were going to the future. How'd we end up in 1938?"

Morty reached in his pocket and fished out a charred metal gizmo. He held it up. "I think the flux capacitor melted."

"Great, just great!" she said. "Well, here's a better question...how are we gonna get back home?"

"Uh, well," Morty stammered.

But before he could finish his thought, the door creaked open. A jockey in red silks entered.

"Greetings, Morty and Annie," he said.

"Who're you?" Morty asked. "And how do you know our names?"

"No time for that right now," he said. "I have something for you, Morty."

He pulled a purple stone from his pocket and held it up. It was iridescent.

He handed it to Morty.

"What is it?"

"Synthetic obsidian," the jockey explained. "To replace your flux capacitor. It'll make your trip home... smoother."

Morty was perplexed. "How did you know we needed a fl..."

"Don't worry about that," the jockey interrupted. "Just trust me. We've been watching you for a long time, Morty. For a very long time." He glanced over at Annie. "You too, Annie."

He took the purple stone from Morty and secured it to the top of the cardboard box. As he

worked he said, "And we'll be seeing each other again...in two hundred years or so."

"What?" Morty asked. "What are you talking ab..."

"Hurry," the jockey interrupted. "You have to get out of here before that security guy gets back."

He ushered them into the box and passed Annie's guitar into her. As she took it, he told her, "And Annie, this time try an A Minor."

"Why?" she asked.

"Better frequency," he explained. "It'll get you back home before you ever left. We need to create a time loop to reset a few things and re-run the horse race – it's supposed to have a different outcome." He winked.

Annie looked puzzled, but she shrugged and ducked under the flap and into the box.

With some sparks and sputtering, the box sprang to life. It started vibrating. More. And more. Then, a loud guitar chord sounded – A Minor.

The box shuddered violently.

POP!

Then it disappeared.

The jockey grinned. He removed his cap, revealing a pair of sharply pointed ears.

He opened the door and left the room, and as he did so he unfurled his long tail, which pulled the door closed behind him.



In the Library

In the library
you can hear the hum
of hundreds of books
silently telling their stories,
all at the same time,
to no one and everyone,
over and over and over —
their pages shivering with delight
as their unending tales unfold —

they won't ever, ever stop,
those loquacious books,
talking as they will forever,
spreading wisdom and silliness,
happiness and tragedy,
revealing facts and mysteries,
questions and truths —

those rows and rows of books
cheerfully, in noisy silence,
will keep at their job
of repeating and repeating their words
in an everlasting quest
to reach every heart,
and then
to start all over again.

Poet

Susan Gundlach

Susan Gundlach's poems have appeared in such journals as *Dark Matter*, *Vine Leaves*, *The Middle Gray*, *Lingerpost*, *Referential Magazine*, *After Hours*, and in the walkway of the Evanston Public Library — etched in stone, or cement, actually. Some of her poems for children can be seen in *Cricket* magazine, and local stores will be giving away her poems during April, National Poetry Month. Currently, she is also working on collaborations with artist and musician colleagues. She lives in Evanston, Illinois, with her family, human and canine.



Waiting

It burns me like a pesky itch
making me wiggle, making me twitch.

But if I dare let loose and scratch,
I'll end up with a big red patch.

It's so hard to wait, wait, wait
for parties on a certain date

or grown-ups to say "yes" or "no,"
"you're old enough" or "you must grow."

I'm stuck inside a kid-sized jail,
rattling bars and growing pale,

counting things I'd like to switch
so I don't have this waiting itch.



Poet

Jacqueline Jules

Jacqueline Jules is the author of 30 books for young readers including the *Zapato Power* series, the *Sofia Martinez* series, *Feathers for Peacock*, and *Never Say a Mean Word Again*. Her poetry has appeared in *The Poetry Friday Anthologies*, *Cricket*, *Cicada*, and over a hundred other publications. If she is not out talking about books and poetry at schools, she is home writing and exercising. Visit her online at www.jacquelinejules.com



The puppy

Joshua clicked the right button of his mouse, and finally, his house was completed.

Finally. Something I can actually do.

Even if it was only in Minecraft.

"Joshua dear! I'm back!"

The nine-year-old boy groaned. *Of course you are*, he growled bitterly. *You're never more than ten minutes away.*

Joshua's mother bustled into his room, a big smile on her face and a strange box in her hands. He hoped it was something actually useful, not stupid, like the therapy book she had given him a few weeks ago.

Joshua had buried it in the backyard after ripping it.

His mother's hazel eyes glimmered with excitement as she set it down in front of her. "Oh, I'm sure you'll love him! The shelter said he was free because of his legs, but he's adorable and wonderful!"

Him? What's inside of that box?

The brown-haired boy cautiously touched it, then quickly recoiled when it shuddered.

"What's in here?" he demanded.

His mother ignored the outburst. "Go on!" she urged. "Open it!"

The boy inhaled, and after several agonizing moments, told himself, *Let's get this over with*. Using one hand to keep the box steady, he unsealed the top.

Within moments, a small, golden-brown head popped up, a floppy, pink tongue hanging

out of its mouth. He stared at it in disbelief. They had never been able to afford a dog, so why now?

"I thought you would like him!" his mother said cheerfully, and she reached in to lift the puppy out. "They called him Hooper, but you can give him another name."

As soon as she set Hooper down on the floor, he started barking happily. Catching sight of Joshua, he scrambled over to meet him but stumbled and tumbled over onto his back, tail still wagging. That was when Joshua noticed his legs.

Hooper had only three. The back left leg was a stump.

"What is this?!" he screamed. Joshua almost kicked Hooper, but he couldn't. "Are you mocking me?!!"

His mother connected the pieces. Her face turned white. "No no no," she protested, "no, I'm not —"

"Get out!" he screeched, and stood up. Joshua would've managed it, but he had forgotten about his leg, or lack thereof.

He collapsed, landing on his knee and elbows. His mother came forward, but Joshua swatted at her. "Go away!" he yelled, burning from embarrassment.

There was a moment of silence, and then he heard the soft *thump* of his bedroom door closing.

Awkwardly, he got back into his wheelchair using his three limbs, and sat himself down, still fuming. Joshua glared at Hooper, who watched

Carina Jiang is an 8th grader at Rice Middle School. She has loved to draw ever since she was in kindergarten, and she started writing when she was in third grade. She has been intrigued by the fictional worlds of Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, and Warriors since fourth grade, and wishes to be able to create fantasies with her own words. She has an interest in animation and is part of her school's top orchestra, playing the violin. She hopes that her writing will take her far in life.



Carina Jiang

Author

with curious, stupid eyes with his stupid tongue hanging out.

It was just stupid.

"You get out too," he mumbled gruffly.

Hooper wagged his tail.

"You know what?" Joshua turned back to his computer desk and rummaged through the papers. "Since you're a dog, you'll like playing catch. So..." He turned back around, holding a rubber ball he got from behind the computer's wires, probably twenty million years old. "Fetch!"

He threw the ball, and as the puppy scrambled past him, muttered, "And get lost." He turned back to the computer, starting up a new Minecraft game.

Nearly three minutes later, a scratching sound caught his attention, and Joshua twisted his head to see Hooper scratching at his seat hopefully, ears perked and tail wagging, the ball in his mouth.

"Wow, you made it?" The boy was genuinely impressed, what with the dog having only three legs, but he quickly cast it aside. "Whaddya know." He snatched the ball, and a feeling of anger overtook him.

"It's easy for you, isn't it?" he growled, and his grip on the ball tightened. "You're a stupid dog. Everyone likes dogs, but not disabled kids."

Out of nowhere, tears started bubbling up in Joshua's eyes, and he wiped them away furiously. "Stupid dog!" he yelled. "Just get lost! You're missing a leg! Why don't *you* care?!"

He started hiccupping as Hooper scampered for the ball squeaking excitedly, (evidently) oblivious to Joshua's tone. The child sat in his seat, glaring angrily at his new puppy, the tears still streaming down his face.

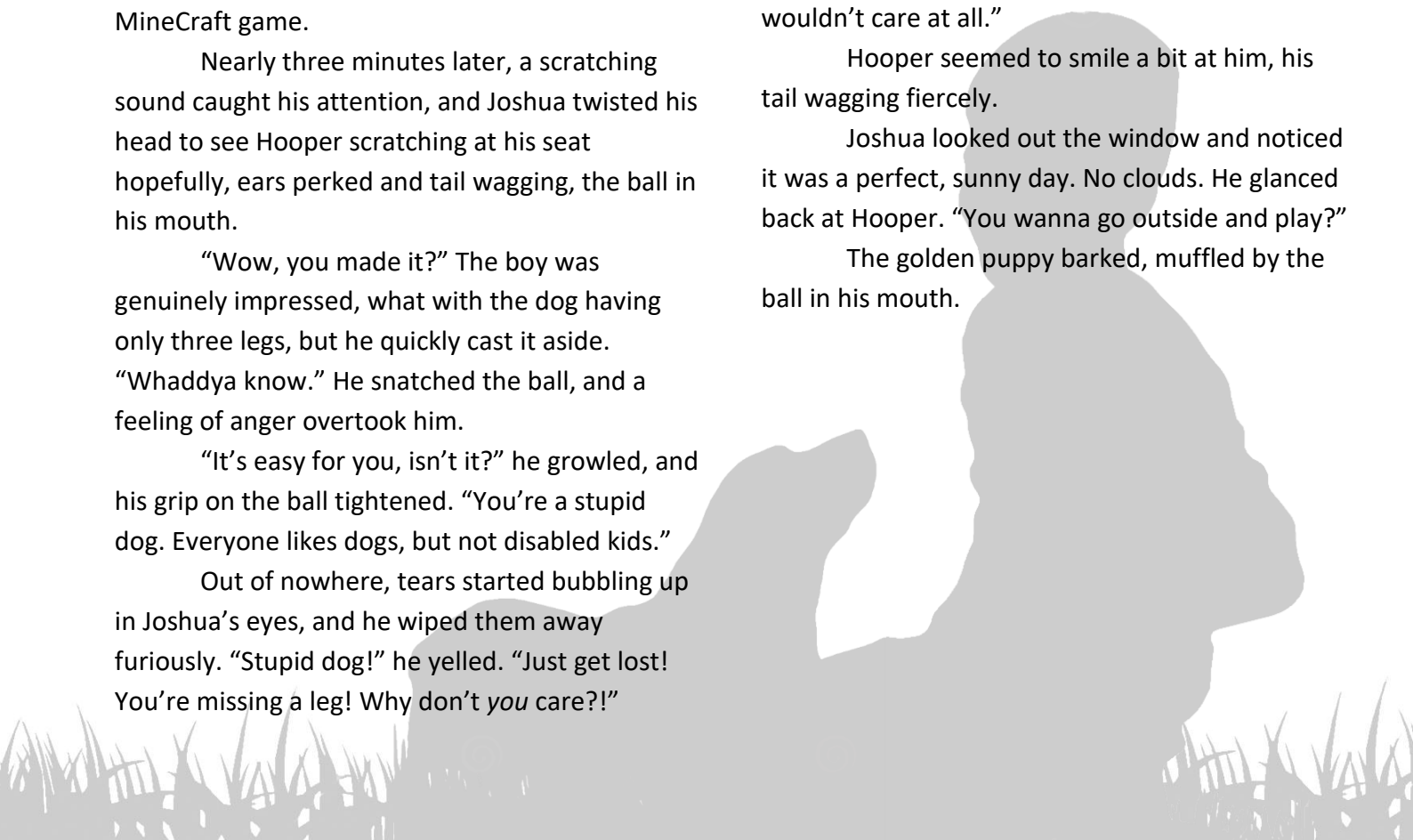
The ball bounced against the wall and right into Hooper, who squeaked and tripped, falling onto his side. Within moments though, he was back up on his three legs, hopping right after the rolling ball, his tongue flopping out.

Joshua smiled a little, and rubbed at his eyes, but less fiercely. "It doesn't matter to you, does it?" he asked as Hooper brought the ball back to him. "You could have *no* legs, but you wouldn't care at all."

Hooper seemed to smile a bit at him, his tail wagging fiercely.

Joshua looked out the window and noticed it was a perfect, sunny day. No clouds. He glanced back at Hooper. "You wanna go outside and play?"

The golden puppy barked, muffled by the ball in his mouth.



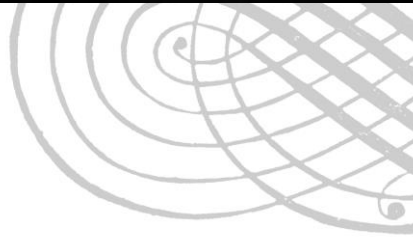
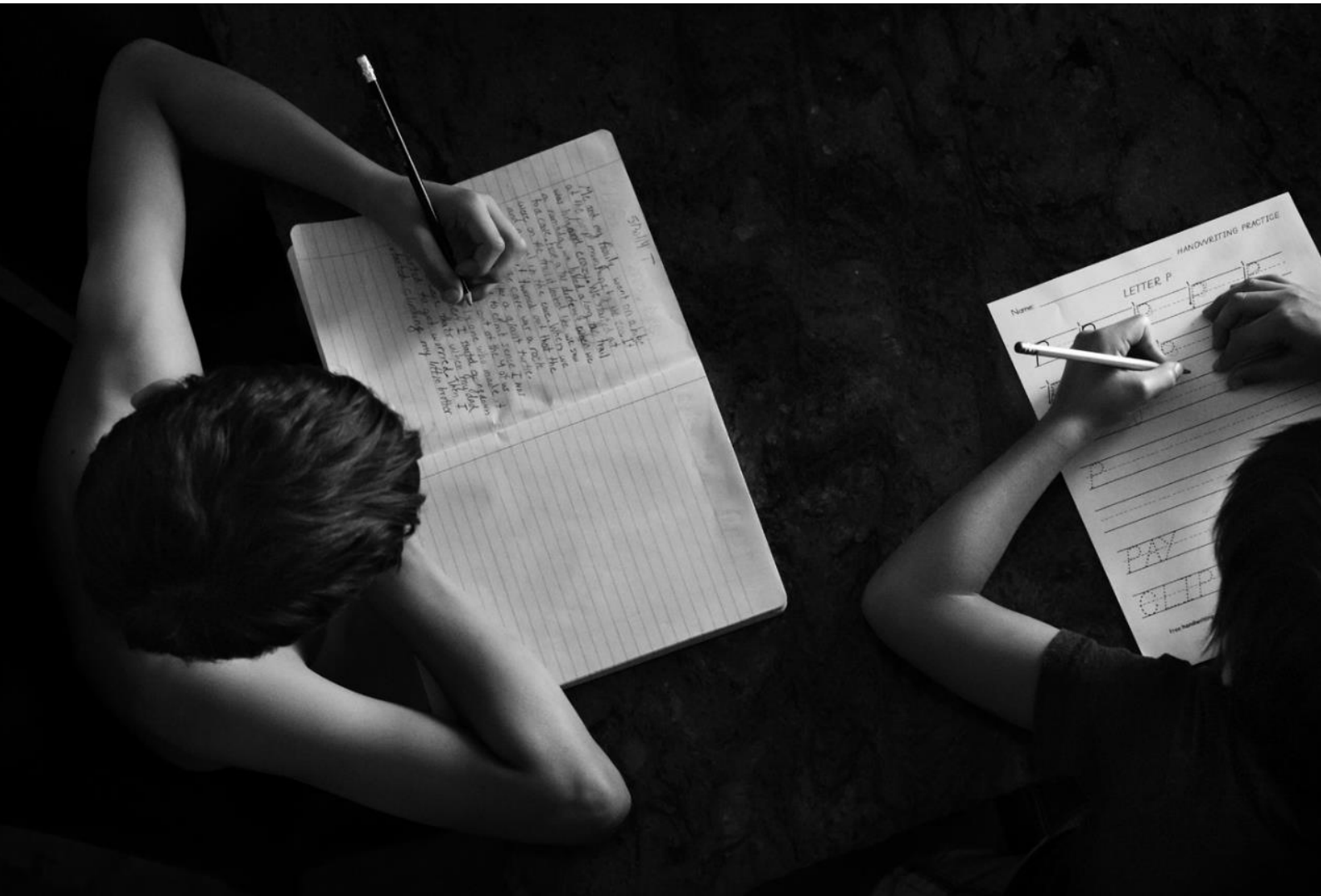


Ashley Carlon



Photographer









Ashley Carlon is a fine art photographer based in Tempe, Arizona. Although her formal profession is a Registered Nurse, her true passion is found in photography. She specializes in black and white child photography, and she is particularly inspired by documenting the lives of her own children. She is drawn to the power of light and shadow in black and white photography and the emotion a monochromatic image can evoke. She loves to discover the beauty that can be found even in common daily activities. Her work has been featured in *Click magazine*, and she has had multiple images chosen as finalists in *The Annual International Photo Competition* in Black and White Child Photography and multiple category winners in *The Voice Collection*. The images in this collection feature two brothers in daily activities. More of her work can be seen at www.ashleycarlon.com and www.facebook.com/AshleyCarlonPhotography.







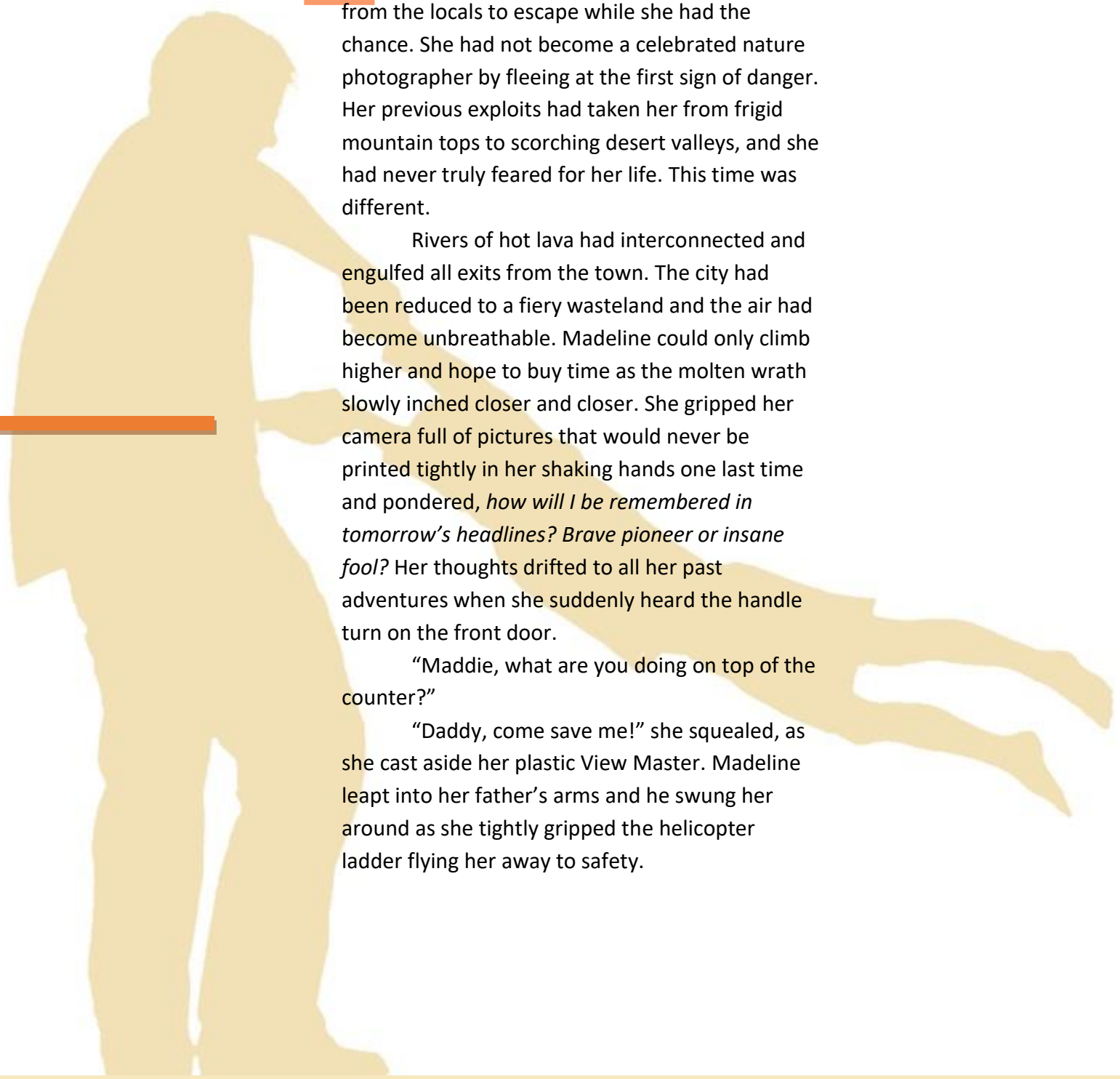
Hot Lava

Nicholas Froumis

Author

Nicholas Froumis practices optometry in the Bay Area. His writing has recently appeared in *Right Hand Pointing*, *Dime Show Review*, *TWJ Magazine*, *The Society of Classical Poets Journal*, *Calvary Cross*, and *Touch: The Journal of Healing*. He lives in San Jose, CA with his wife, novelist Stacy Froumis, and their daughter.



A large, light yellow silhouette of a person is positioned on the left side of the page, extending from the bottom to the middle. The person is shown in profile, facing right, and appears to be climbing a ladder or a structure that is not fully visible. The silhouette is simple and lacks facial features or clothing details.

The air was filled with ash and doom. An ominous grey cloud billowed from the top of the volcano and cast a blanket of darkness over the abandoned town. Madeline had ignored the pleas from the locals to escape while she had the chance. She had not become a celebrated nature photographer by fleeing at the first sign of danger. Her previous exploits had taken her from frigid mountain tops to scorching desert valleys, and she had never truly feared for her life. This time was different.

Rivers of hot lava had interconnected and engulfed all exits from the town. The city had been reduced to a fiery wasteland and the air had become unbreathable. Madeline could only climb higher and hope to buy time as the molten wrath slowly inched closer and closer. She gripped her camera full of pictures that would never be printed tightly in her shaking hands one last time and pondered, *how will I be remembered in tomorrow's headlines? Brave pioneer or insane fool?* Her thoughts drifted to all her past adventures when she suddenly heard the handle turn on the front door.

"Maddie, what are you doing on top of the counter?"

"Daddy, come save me!" she squealed, as she cast aside her plastic View Master. Madeline leapt into her father's arms and he swung her around as she tightly gripped the helicopter ladder flying her away to safety.

Chaeyeon (Annika) Kim is a high school junior from New Jersey. Originally from South Korea, Chaeyeon explores the concept of identity in her writing. She also enjoys binge-watching “Orange Is the New Black”, eating breakfast for dinner and playing with her cat, Butterfly.

Chaeyeon Kim

Author

Watermelon Seeds



I stared incredulously at the dripping hunk of watermelon in front of me.

"Eat it," urged the old lady, her face wrinkled into a broad smile as she wiped her wet hand against the cloth of her baggy drawstring pants. "It's ripe." She seemed to drown in her loose clothes as she sat with her legs spread apart on a mat behind the counter, while a small radio crackled faintly in the background.

I couldn't be rude. Smiling politely, I took the slice, cringing as its juice started running down my fingers. My eyes darted side to side, searching for a napkin to wipe my hands on, but there was only a wet washcloth heaped on the side of the counter that had been once white, but had since faded into a light grey color. The old lady plucked up the washcloth and wiped off the kitchen knife with one swift motion, then stuck the knife back into the watermelon. *Was that really sanitary?* I nervously eyed the black flies buzzing around the watermelon, imagining the hundreds of thousands of germs that were surely crawling over my slice. *Why is she insisting that I eat this? Is there something wrong with her?* The small supermarket was swelteringly hot, and the only means of cooling down was a small electric fan that swiveled its head around the room. I glanced up at the woman who waited patiently for me to take a bite.

"Thank you, but I think I'll save it for when I get home," I explained, flashing the most polite smile I could manage. I pivoted on my heel and turned to face the exit.

"I remember when you were a little girl!" The old lady beamed, the corners of her eyes wrinkling into deep creases. "It's so nice to see you in Korea again."

I left Korea 8 years ago. I have no idea who she is. I slowly turned my head and nodded politely. This is really uncomfortable. I want to leave.

As if she had heard my thoughts, the woman pushed the tray of watermelon back and swatted the flies away. "Go now, I'm sure you have to get back to your grandmother's house."

"Thank you ma'am, and have a nice day!" I stepped out of the store as quickly as I could and exhaled deeply. I wrapped the handles of the heavily laden plastic bag around my wrist, flipped back the hair from my sweaty neck and set off back down the road. I glanced at the slice of watermelon in my other hand. The juice dribbled down onto my hand, and my fingers felt uncomfortably sticky. I really wish I had a clean napkin. I slowly walked back to my grandmother's house.

The sun beat down on the pavement, casting a harsh dusty-yellow light on the street, and the whining chorus of cicadas fell and rose like the heat waves pricking at my skin. I trudged down the middle of the road, dragging the ratty soles of my flip flops in the steaming asphalt and swinging the shopping bag from one hand. There wasn't a car in sight. I forgot how small of a town this was. Dongnae-gu had a population that consisted only of either very young or very old people; all the adults had moved into the bigger cities in search of work. I swung the bag in an arc over my head, and wiped the sweat from my brow with my forearm. How could she recognize me after 8 years? I thought hard, struggling to bring back the hazy memories of when I used to live in the town but I still could not remember her face.

I've really forgotten.

I glanced at the watermelon once more, then cautiously took a bite. It was slightly warm, but it was ripe and sweet, and the juice quenched my thirst. I thought back to my initial suspicion when the old woman offered me the fruit. Since when did I start misinterpreting the kindness shown by strangers? I thought about my town back in the US, where I felt comfortable in knowing that my family would forever be isolated from my neighbors, and that we would have the privacy to lead our separate lives. The floor of my apartment complex was inhabited by six other families, yet the interaction I had with them was minimal; once as I was leaving my apartment, I spotted a girl my age and her mother exiting the apartment across the hall. Clutching a plastic lunch box and a small canvas backpack, she quickly glanced sideways at me, then inched closer to her mother's side as they quickly shut the door and walked away. In school my teacher would lecture my class about the danger of talking to strangers, waving newspaper clippings about horrific murders and kidnappings over our heads as she strode around the room, cautioning us of strange smiling men driving white vans and shadowy stalkers following us at night. We were warned that a next door neighbor could be a serial killer, a friendly man at the coffee shop could be a rapist, and interacting with anyone outside of your family would guarantee imminent danger.

Here, there was no isolation; everyone either knew each other or knew of them, and it both surprised and bothered me that I belonged to that same tight knit community whether or not I was fully aware

of it. I walked past a large tree on the corner of the block; its sweeping branches were lush with glossy dark green leaves, and it cast a great shadow on the dirt ground. I remembered the countless lazy afternoons spent lounging under the shade of that tree, fanning the sweat from my forehead with a piece of stiff cardboard and swatting at the pesky mosquitos buzzing near my ear. Most of the kids from the town would gather under the same tree in the morning, before the sun became too hot to bear, and trade marbles or play tag under the tree. My friends would always wait for me there, though I no longer remembered their names or faces, and we would lean against the trunk of the oak and braid each others' hair. Now, during the hottest time of day, there was no one under the tree except for a raggy stray dog panting with its tongue hanging out. I walked past the tree and farther down the road; I thought of my grandmother back home, and of the way she would always save the ripest fruit for me, deftly cutting out the bruised or dried out portions with a knife and saving them for herself. When she smiled, her eyes would crinkle in the same way as the woman in the shop. *Maybe she wasn't a complete stranger.* Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted someone walking down the street up ahead.

"Student!" A middle-aged woman with a visor-like sun hat pushed down over her short curled hair called out from the side of the street. "Student! Why don't you walk in the shade? You'd sooner get hit by a car before arriving home, loitering around like that in the middle of the street. She squinted, straining her neck to study my face. "Say, aren't you Mal-sook's

granddaughter? The one who went to the United States?"

I tilted my head to the side in confusion. "Yes ma'am, how did you know?"

"Well, you're certainly not from around here. I see your grandmother at church every Sunday; I have a daughter your age back at home, so come with Mal-sook for dinner sometime!"

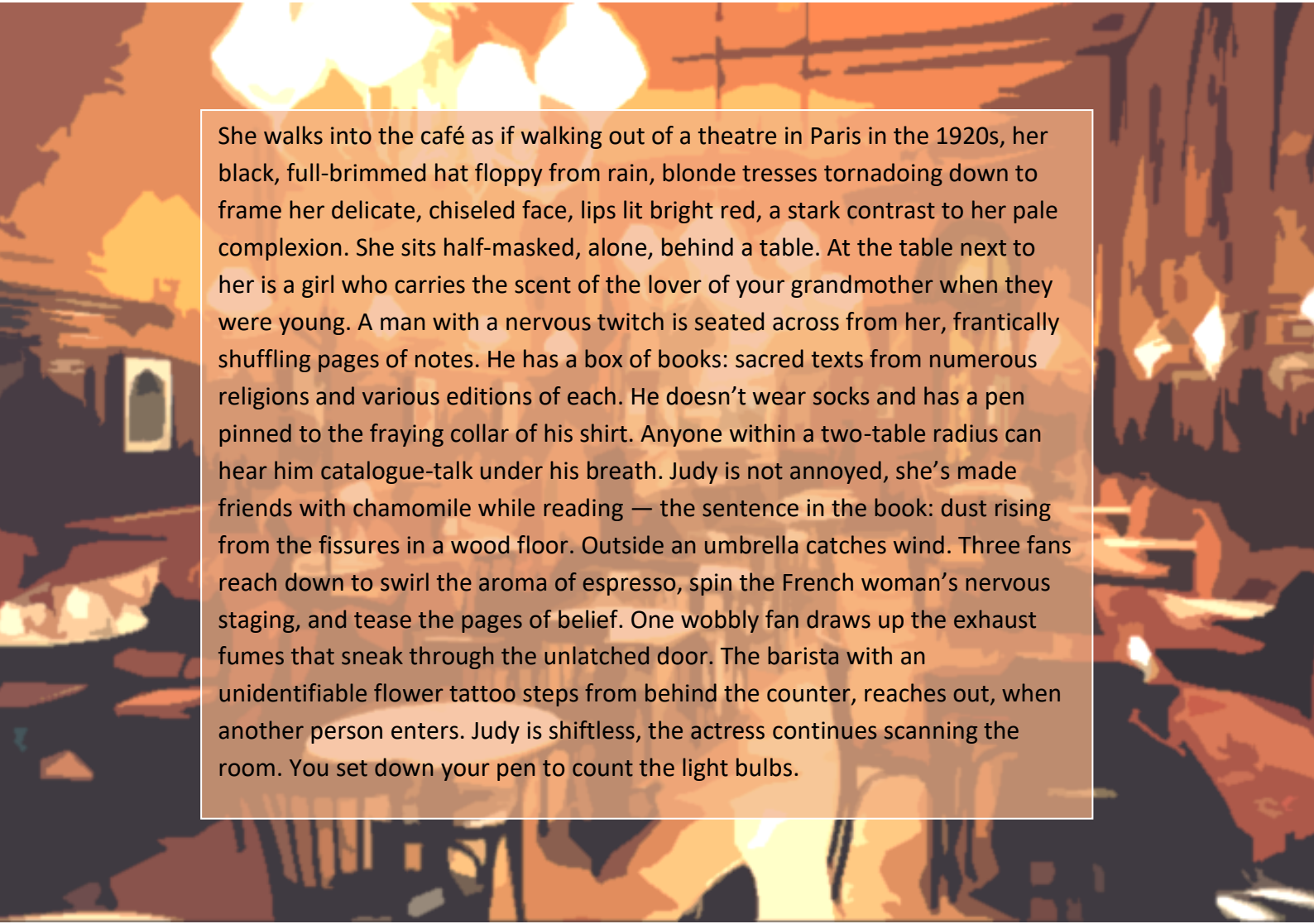
"Thank you ma'am, I'll tell grandmother I met you on my way home."

"No need for that, I live three floors down, I'll come up later tonight to see her!" The woman started walking back, and I gave a polite nod. From the distance, she called out again, "the roads in America must be very wide, for you to be able to walk down the middle of them without getting hit!" I grinned, stepping sideways to walk down the side of the street under the shade of the trees. *She was actually nice. She reminds me of my aunt.* I felt more at ease now, and the run-down buildings baking in the sun didn't seem so foreign anymore.

I reached the crumbling apartment where my grandmother lived and started walking up the dusty concrete stairs. *That lady lives on the second floor. I wonder what her daughter's like?* I climbed up to the third floor, heaving up the heavy grocery bag. *Who else lives in this apartment? I'm sure I'll meet them sooner or later.* I looked down over the side of the stairwell and glanced at the village spread out below. The clustered low-rise buildings and clay tiled roofs seemed familiar, comfortable and oddly intimate. I stretched out my arms, sore from carrying such a heavy load, and picked up the groceries once again. I hauled the bag up the rest of the stairs, and knocked on my grandmother's apartment door. I was home.

Z. G. Tomaszewski, born in 1989, lives in Grand Rapids where he aspires to fish the river every morning and play bossa nova in a lounge by night. For now, Tomaszewski works maintenance at an old Masonic Temple and is a founding member and events coordinator of Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters and co-director of Lamp Light Music Festival. His debut book *All Things Dusk* was the winner of the *International Poetry Prize* of 2014, chosen by Li-Young Lee, and published by *Hong Kong University Press*. His chapbook, *Mineral Whisper*, composed while living in Ireland, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press (December 2016).

Scene



She walks into the café as if walking out of a theatre in Paris in the 1920s, her black, full-brimmed hat floppy from rain, blonde tresses tornadoing down to frame her delicate, chiseled face, lips lit bright red, a stark contrast to her pale complexion. She sits half-masked, alone, behind a table. At the table next to her is a girl who carries the scent of the lover of your grandmother when they were young. A man with a nervous twitch is seated across from her, frantically shuffling pages of notes. He has a box of books: sacred texts from numerous religions and various editions of each. He doesn't wear socks and has a pen pinned to the fraying collar of his shirt. Anyone within a two-table radius can hear him catalogue-talk under his breath. Judy is not annoyed, she's made friends with chamomile while reading — the sentence in the book: dust rising from the fissures in a wood floor. Outside an umbrella catches wind. Three fans reach down to swirl the aroma of espresso, spin the French woman's nervous staging, and tease the pages of belief. One wobbly fan draws up the exhaust fumes that sneak through the unlatched door. The barista with an unidentifiable flower tattoo steps from behind the counter, reaches out, when another person enters. Judy is shiftless, the actress continues scanning the room. You set down your pen to count the light bulbs.

Poet

Z. G. Tomaszewski

Haunted — for Garret

When I met you at
the haunted hayride,
I woke up for the first time
in 27 years. Surrounded
by faux friends, sickly sweet
candy apples, and the brutal
sounds of saws begging to
tear into tree, flesh —
you took my cold hand in yours.

The trail full of monsters,
traps, tricks, and scares
twisted into a portal to
lurch us into who
we were meant to become.
A ghost circled your lungs,
haunting your breaths.
I took her hand as well and knew
that in time she would grow tired
and fade into the background.

But on the haunted hayride,
ghosts only grow wiser and can
follow you into the most perfect
hidey-hole. Dogs become rabid,
maps turn to obstacles, and your hand
quickly morphed to a dagger.
Friends, like vampires leeching
the very life from you. Draining your
color until the relationship is blanched,
like a fresh blanket of snow.

Aimee Nicole

Poet



The Fate of the White Wolf

CB Droege

Author

CB Droege is a fantasy author and poet living in Munich. Recently his fiction was collected in *RapUnsEl and Other Stories*, and a selection of his poetry appeared in the *Drawn to Marvel* anthology. His first novel, *Zeta Disconnect* was released in 2013. He recently edited *Dangerous to Go Alone! An anthology of Gamer Poetry*.

Klaxons sounded. Crewmen dashed about in an organized panic. The White Wolf, the flagship of the Confederacy's fleet was under attack by United Protectorate forces. An Ambush. Three dark-ships had appeared, seemingly from nowhere, and had begun launching attack boats without even a warning hail. Crewman Rose had been knocked from his feet at his station during the first volley, and was watching dazed as his comrades bustled around him. Specialist Harris grabbed Rose by one arm and hauled him to his feet.

"You okay, Sweets?" Specialist Harris's face was very close, and Rose could see blood spattered across his left cheek and eye. It didn't look like it was his own.

"I-I think I'm alright," Rose managed while still getting his wind back. Harris nodded hurriedly, and moved away, disappearing immediately into the mad rush.

Crewman Rose tried to concentrate. The Klaxon pattern was indicating "general quarters", but he had already been at his action post at the starboard communications array. He turned back toward his monitoring station. It was fried; the portholes were blackened and the equipment was smoking. He didn't have a secondary action post, so what next? He tried to think, his thoughts felt like he was stuck in deep mud, and if he pulled much harder, he would only lose a boot. He was likely concussed. There was nothing for it but to try to find a medic, or his CO. Luckily the med bay and his CO's quarters were in the same direction. He took off down the passage becoming one more among the frantically moving crew.

The ship shuddered. The wall of the passage peeled back to reveal open space beyond. The bulkheads fore and aft sealed instantly. Rose felt his emergency helmet activate, and surround his face with a rush of oxygen, as he grasped for something, anything to hold on to...

* * *

The timer buzzed softly, and broke Rose out of his reverie. He was in the kitchen of the White Wolf, staring down at a brown-green nutrient patty blackening on the hotplate. It was burned again. He frowned, and pulled at his greying beard. The timer buzzed again and he slapped it to shut it off. He scraped the blackened patty off the hotplate into his bowl and stared at it. The rations didn't need to be cooked of course, but it introduced a bit of variety into his life to have a warm one occasionally. The spices had run out in only five years, leaving him with an endless supply of nearly flavorless rations, all identical. He day-dreamed of spiced food often, whenever he wasn't reliving the day of the attack.

The timer buzzed again, and Rose slapped it off without thinking and walked over to the nutrient recycler with his bowl, dumping the mess. He looked up at the wall where he marked time. Forty-six years, as well as he could reckon, since the White Wolf was ambushed and destroyed, leaving him the only survivor; trapped inside the sealed and shielded galley compartment, tumbling aimlessly through space. The galley had food to support a forty-man crew for three years, a water purifier, a waste recycler, small plants to keep him in Oxygen, and solar panels to keep it all running.

The timer buzzed again, somehow more insistently than before, and he glanced at it, annoyed. Except...It wasn't the timer. The timer had been broken for over a year. It sat inert in the console next to the hot plate. Rose's eyes widened, as he looked around. If it wasn't the timer...

He rushed over to a panel on the wall next to the Aft bulkhead, where the kitchen radio was suddenly all blinking lights, in time with the buzzer. Without hesitation he switched the speaker on.

"-lie Farmer of the C.F.S. Wildflower calling

the occupant of the unidentified wreckage. Please come in. Is anyone there?"

Excitedly, Rose pressed the transmit button. His voice cracked and stuttered as he spoke, "W-Wildflower, this is Crew-wman Dexter Rose of the C.F.S. White Wolf. I'm h-here. I'm here!"

"Sweet name!" said the voice. She sounded young, and pleasantly disposed. He'd heard the joke before, of course, but never had it sounded so good, "Nice to hear you made it, Crewman Rose. I'm not familiar with the White Wolf. How long have you been out here?" Rose glanced at his tracking wall again, "forty-six years, one-hundred and thirty-nine days...I think."

"Hold the Launch!" She exclaimed, "that's amazing! I've never heard of anyone surviving inside a wreck for more than a few days. You've been in there since right before the end of the rebellion."

Rose was heartened to hear that the war had not lasted much longer, "I was lucky," he said, "I b-brought the kitchen with me."

"I want to hear all about it," Farmer said, "but let's get you out of there first. You have an evac suit in there with you?"

Rose glanced around, as if he did not already know every square centimeter of the inside of this kitchen. "No, just my pop helmet," he said, taking it off the hook on the wall and fitting it around his neck. It would activate the instant it detected vacuum.

"Space me! You guys already had pop helmets way back in The Rebellion?" she sounded even younger then, but Rose realized that she was likely older than he had been when the White Wolf was ambushed. "Okay, let me just send for operational clearance." Silence for a few moments then. "My CO wants to know The White Wolf's regnums. She can't find them in the database."

"Erm alright, charlie - foxtrot - sierra -

tango - whiskey - two - seven - one - ate - dash - tree," he recited.

"And your Crewman I.D.?" she asked.

"fower - two - eight - fife - seven - tree - zero - ate - ate - bravo," he didn't even have to think about that one.

"Okay, I'll send that info up." Another moment of silence. Rose waited, surprised at his impatience after over four decades of waiting to be rescued. "It'll be a mo' for that to get sent up the chain, Sweets, sorry."

"It's alright." He said, but he didn't feel alright. Something about what she said just then, or the way she said it bothered him. He felt nauseous and his head was swimming.

"So," Farmer said in the tones of someone trying to make conversation, "What happened to the White Wolf forty-six years, one-hundred and thirty-nine days ago?"

Rose forced himself to focus. "We were ambushed by Protectorate forces; unknown objective. They came out of nowhere."

"How did they get through the shielding of a Tower-class flagship?"

"I don't know," Rose said, feeling a bit clearer, "I was just a comm tech. I didn't even see what happened before... before..." What had happened after he left his post? He couldn't remember. How had he even gotten to the kitchen?

"Where was the White Wolf headed?" Farmer asked.

"Covert mission," Rose said, "We'd discovered the location of the Protectorate shipyards in the atmosphere of Jupiter. We were on our way to take it out. We were decelerating toward Vesta Station for a refueling when we were attacked."

Silence dragged for a few moments, then "Okay, Crewman Rose, We've got clearance to get you out of there."

"What should I do?"

"Just grab anything you want to take with you, shut down the seals, and leap from the bulkhead. I'll catch you." There was a smile in her voice at the last sentence.

Rose looked around the room that he'd been trapped in for two-thirds of his life. Was there anything in here that was important to him after all this time? There wasn't and it surprised him. Why didn't he keep a journal, sculpt or paint something? Why didn't he create anything or decorate the walls? "I wasted so much time here." He said.

"Let's not waste another minute then, Sweets." She said, and the headache and nausea returned. He felt like he was floating down through the floor, and it was all he could do not to vomit. Sweets? How did she-

"Crewman Rose?"

"I'm here," he said, "but I can't shut the seals down. The shielding controls are behind this wall, and I can't get to them while the seals are up."

"Hmm..." she said. "Hang a tick."

There was a minute of silence, during which Rose managed to regain control of himself again. He remembered that something had concerned him greatly just a few moments ago, but now he couldn't remember what it was. Something about Farmer...

"Okay," She said. "I've tapped into the Shield controls for that section from my boat's computer. I'll take them down from here. I just need the ship's remote shield control code. You were comms, you should know it, right?"

"Yeah," Rose said, but hesitated. The shield command code was top, top secret. It was treason to share them even with other crew members.

"C'mon, Crewman." Farmer said. She sounded just a bit impatient, "I can't get you out of there without that code."

Rose closed his eyes, and recalled the code, "six - seven - niner - foxtrot - victor - fife - one - six - niner - papa - fower - six - foxtrot"

"Thank you, Crewman Rose." She said, but her voice sounded different, closer.

He tried to open his eyes but could not. Everything was darkness, and his head was feeling light again. He was frantic, frightened, but pain kept his words slow, "What's going on? Did you get the seals down?"

"I will have soon," Farmer said, her voice close now, right beside him and clear as a bell. "Thanks to you."

"Wait!" he shouted. He struggled to move, but found his arms and legs restrained. He was suddenly aware that his body was reclined. He still could not open his eyes.

"Stay calm, Sweets," she said, "Our surgeon tells me you have a fresh concussion."

The Accident



Author

Rebecca Linam

Rebecca Linam teaches German at the University of North Alabama. Her hobbies include reading, playing the piano, learning foreign languages, figure skating, participating in the Alabama Renaissance Faire, playing the harpsichord, and playing video games. Her short stories have been published in *Lights and Shadows*, *Skipping Stones*, *The Write Place at the Write Time*, *Funny in Five Hundred*, *Spaceports and Spidersilk*, *Spadina Literary Review*, *Stinkwaves*, *Fictive Dream*, *The Caterpillar*, and *The Times Daily*.

Cecily had had a hard time remembering things since the accident last week.

She remembered that her sister Erin had gotten a car for her sixteenth birthday.

She remembered Erin driving her to Benjamin Franklin High School that morning.

She also remembered joking with Erin about being scared to death to ride with a teenager who had just gotten her drivers' license, but it was just that — a joke. "You're going to get me killed before I can even get my license!" Cecily had teased. Cecily was fourteen and couldn't wait to get her own license and car.

Erin had rolled her eyes. "I wish everyone would stop saying that. I'm a great driver."

"Yeah, right. You almost rear-ended that 18-wheeler at the red light."

Erin sighed and glanced down at her phone. "I *knew* they'd make me drive you to school if they got me a car."

"I'd rather ride with Mom," Cecily said, trying to annoy Erin. She and her sister fought over silly stuff just like most siblings, but when it came right down to it, Erin had always been there for Cecily.

Then, somewhere on the way to school, the accident had happened.

Cecily's memory was fuzzy. How had it happened? One minute they were driving along, and the next, her mind went blank. She felt like she had just woken up and was still half groggy whenever she tried to remember. They had talked about head trauma in science class at school, but Cecily had never thought it would be this confusing.

Maybe Erin would be able to tell her what had happened.

"Erin?" Cecily followed along behind Erin, who now had to walk to school since her brand new car was in the scrapyard.

Erin marched along on the sidewalk that

led to Benjamin Franklin High School with her arm in a sling and her backpack slung over her other shoulder. She had come home from the hospital three days ago.

Cecily broke into a jog to catch up with her. "Hey, Erin. I know this is going to sound crazy, but I don't remember what happened. Did somebody run into us?"

Erin didn't answer. Her face was like stone, her jaw clenched tight.

"Erin? Come on! I'm not joking this time. I really don't remember."

Cecily ran out in front of her sister to block her path, but Erin kept up her poker face and stared blankly at Cecily as she kept walking. Cecily had to dodge out of the way before they had a head-on collision right there on the sidewalk. She watched Erin walk further and further away until she was just a speck disappearing into the cedar trees that framed Benjamin Franklin High School.

"She's really mad at me this time," Cecily sighed. She hadn't really meant that crack about crazy teenage drivers, but maybe Erin had taken it to heart. After all, they had ended up in a car wreck shortly thereafter.

Cecily sighed again and made her way down the sidewalk to school. She'd just have to find some way to make it up to Erin. Maybe she'd get the chance after school.

However, Erin left right after the bell rang, and Cecily didn't see her again until she got home that afternoon.

Actually, Cecily didn't see Erin at all. By the time Cecily got home, Erin had holed up in her room with the door locked and the radio blasted up so loud that the neighbors could hear Nicky Minaj well into next Tuesday.

"Erin!"

No answer.

"Erin! Please talk to me! I didn't mean it!"



I was just kidding!”

Still no answer.

“Erin, I swear if you don’t open this door, I’m going to call Mom!”

Tears stinging her eyes, Cecily stomped over to the nearest phone but then hesitated. What was Mom’s work number? She was on day shift now at the hospital, but... Suddenly that fuzzy feeling clouded Cecily’s brain again. The more she tried to remember, the more confused she felt. Those quadratic formula equations in algebra had seemed easier than trying to remember Mom’s phone number.

Then it came to her; she should have Mom’s number already programmed into her cell phone. She reached into the back pocket of her jeans but came back empty-handed.

“That’s right,” she remembered. “My cell phone got thrown out of the car in the accident.” She hadn’t gotten a replacement yet. “And Erin’s phone...”

Cecily’s forehead wrinkled in concentration. What about Erin’s phone? Had it also been damaged, or had their mom taken it away as punishment? Cecily couldn’t remember for the life of her.

Suddenly Erin’s bedroom door flew open, and Erin ran out down the hall past Cecily and out the front door.

“Erin!” Cecily followed behind her. “Erin, we’ve got to talk!”

Erin ran like crazy — down the sidewalk, left at the intersection, across the crosswalk, and into Burgers and Shakes, the local teenage hangout. Cecily and Erin ate there sometimes when their mother had to work the night shift.

Cecily found her at the booth in the corner with her best friend Shanti.

“Come on, Erin. You can’t keep this up,” Shanti was saying.

Erin looked at her with that blank look in

her eyes, the exact same way she had stared at Cecily this morning on the way to school.

“I can’t take it anymore, Shanti,” Erin said. “I just can’t.”

Cecily edged over to them and eased down onto the booth next to Shanti.

“It’s all my fault!” Erin burst out and broke down into tears for the first time since the accident.

Shanti reached across the table to pat Erin’s arm.

So the accident was Erin’s fault. Cecily couldn’t remember, but even so, she wasn’t mad at her sister.

“I threw my phone into the river yesterday,” Erin said, her face stained with tears. “I never should’ve answered that text message.”

That’s right; Cecily remembered now. Erin had gotten a text message and was typing back a reply when she had run the red light.

“And now I’ll never see Cecily again. I couldn’t even go to her funeral.”

Cecily’s mouth fell open. “I...died?” she whispered, but, of course, no one answered because they couldn’t hear or see her.

“I wish I could see her just one more time. I’d tell her I’m sorry.”

Shanti patted Erin’s arm again. “Tell her now, Erin,” Shanti said softly. “Talk to her right now.”

The minute Erin began, Cecily knew it was time to go.

“It’s okay, Erin. I understand,” she said, looking at her big sister for the last time.

And then, suddenly, she was gone.





All in a Day's Work

On a golden walkway
Under a dismal gray sky,
An ebullient worm squiggled
As the downpour surged.

Later that day, I passed the same spot.
Under luminous rays
On a dusty, broken path,
A blue sky dazzled overhead
And a black worm lay shriveled and flat.

Poet

Gabrielle Horvath

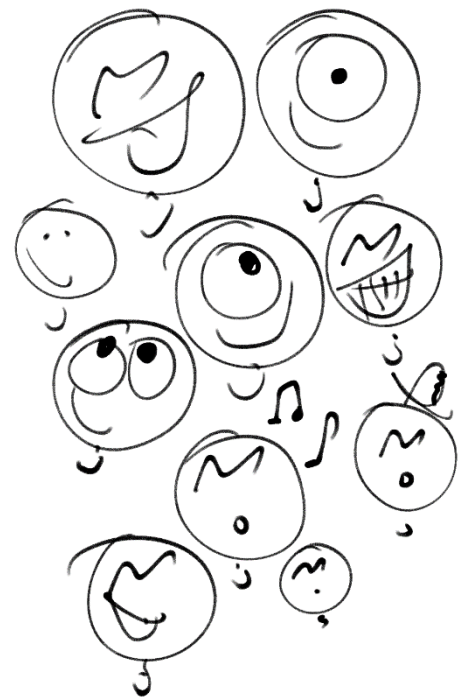
Gabrielle Horvath is a sixteen-year-old student at North Royalton High School in Ohio. She has been previously published in her school's literary magazine, *Inkwell*. Besides writing, she likes to play golf and row on the Cuyahoga River.





Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal



BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ) is dedicated to literature and art lovers of all ages around the world. Here again, we would love to thank all our readers and contributors for their trust and devotion. In particular, a big thank you must go to members of the BLJ Advisory Board for their time and support, especially Dr Gary Harfitt, who has kindly written such an inspiring, sentimental and comprehensive foreword for us this time. Thanks must also be given to Mr Simon THAM, Mr Richard WOODS, and Mr Tom KWOK for giving me inspirational and constructive comments on the earlier drafts of this 4th issue.

Once again, BLJ wishes all our readers very good health and a very good time reading every piece chosen for you here.

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