



Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue
Five

Mar 2017

Alexandra Bowman • Ava Caudle • Daniel Galef • Danny P. Barbare •
Doraine Bennett • Emily Strauss • Gervase Vernon • Jay Lee • Maddy Barker •
Monika John • Nadine Cranenburgh • Paul Cookson • Sam McCready •
Savannah Tabor • Summer Edward • Yoon Soo Shin • Zoey Ruzic •

“Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

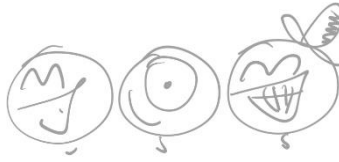
– Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

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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 primary 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 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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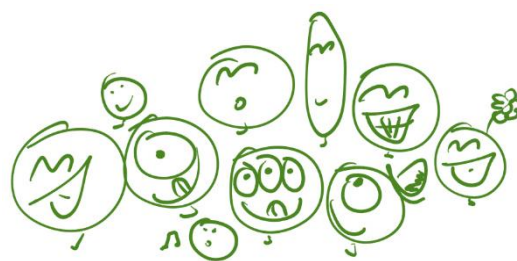
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* Cover & back cover art adapted from his collection



Words from Founding Editor

You always find the time to do things you like. That is how I often respond to people asking how I manage to produce *BALLOONS Lit. Journal* (BLJ) as a free e-zine for young people. It is true. It always gives me extra energy when good writings and/or artworks come to me; it always gives me a great sense of satisfaction bringing the world together as I select works from people from different corners of the world and display them through this platform. And most importantly, I find it tremendously joyful and meaningful doing all the work for children. BLJ is an artistic and literary adventure for explorative children of all ages.

Issue 5 is yet another magical journey. Galef's interactive verse "The Best Poem You'll Ever Read" starts this book with an inspiration. Readers will then visit Edward's kaleidoscopic work "In a Blue Hotel" and understand brand new perspectives to see ordinary things from Barbare's "Janitor" verses, Barker's poignant "The Sky's Flowers", Caudle's symbolic untitled verse, Bennett's thought-provoking "Cancelled Flight", as well as Ruzic's distinctive poem "Behind the Magic". Readers will be bewildered by the stunning scenic views offered by Strauss's misty poems, Bowman's painting "Magdalen College", and certainly, McCready's incredible artwork which wraps this issue in spring colours; for pet lovers, Cranenburgh's poem "The Gift" and Tabor's story "Fishbowl" will enlighten you; John's adept personification of a stone Buddha in a letter form will make you smile; Vernon's memoir will teach you an important life lesson; and last but not least, the powerful story-telling from Yoon Soo Shin's "The Girl in Yellow" and Lee's "Balloons" will let you know how tough a girl can get in challenging situations. All of these pieces and beyond are truly awesome at so many levels. I have no idea how fortunate I am to have attracted these artists to send their works my way!

I strongly encourage teachers to read the marvellous pieces in BLJ with students, and I encourage you all to keep reading and writing. I thank my serving school, Ying Wa Primary School, where this dream-like project was first inspired from and well-supported; I thank the *Hong Kong Teachers Dream Fund* for funding the print copies of this issue; and I thank you, who are now reading these words at this very moment – you are the reason this literary dream comes true!

Cookson's last stanza of his submitted masterpiece would offer a great closure to my humble introduction here:

Take the time to dream your dreams
Take the time to believe
Take the time to make them real
If you give you will receive

Ho Cheung LEE (Peter), Ed.D.

Founding Editor

BALLOONS Lit. Journal





Foreword

I was first introduced to *BALLOONS Lit. Journal* in 2015 when I saw a call for submissions for Issue 2. Investigating further, I was pleased to find a beautifully designed online magazine of writing and art. This rich resource is appropriate for a wide audience and features authors from all over the world, including student writers. As an educator myself, I am immediately drawn to how this magazine could be a boost to classroom instruction. The first selection, “The Best Poem You’ll Ever Read” is followed by a challenge to the reader to write his or her own poem.

So many pieces in this issue would make excellent classroom writing prompts. “Message from a Stone Buddha to Izzy and Benjamin” is a delightfully clever letter from a garden statue. Using this piece as a model, classroom teachers could ask students to write their own letter to a person from an inanimate object.

An inspirational short fiction, “From Chopin’s Memoirs” could spark meaningful discussions of how to get through hard times. The imagery in this story is profound — reminding us that we must use all the keys of a piano, both black and white, “to play a beautiful tune.”

“Untitled” by thirteen-year-old Ava Caudle lyrically compares a blank canvas to “a symphony yet to be played,” capturing the emotional sphere of every young person contemplating the future. The inclusion of student authors alongside adult writers makes *BALLOONS Lit. Journal* an especially unique publication. And if one did not read the by-lines carefully, the reader might not be able to identify work created by young people rather than adults. All the selections are thoughtful and finely tuned.

The dynamic artwork in this issue is not to be missed — particularly Alexandra Bowman’s oil on canvas “Pomegranate” and Sam McCready’s acrylic on paper, “Evening Trees.” I can see using these images as prompts in both writing and art classrooms.

Like previous issues of *BALLOONS Lit. Journal*, Issue 5 is a visual and textual cornucopia. Every reader will find something to love. Take the time to enjoy this magazine from cover to cover. You will be uplifted by the variety and depth of the material included. And like the last piece in this issue, Paul Cookson’s “Take the Time to Dream,” you will be tempted “to lose yourself in clouds and sky” where your own creativity will soar.

Jacqueline Jules

Author, poet, teacher, and school librarian

Author of the *Zapato Power* series, the *Sofia Martinez* series, *Never Say a Mean Word Again*, and other award-winning books for young readers.

Visit her author website at www.jacquelinejules.com and her teaching tips blog, Pencil Tips Writing Workshop at <http://penciltipswritingworkshop.blogspot.com>.



Poet

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.

The Best Poem You'll Ever Read

A sad poem,
a funny poem,
a worth-a-lot-of-money poem,
I hope it's not a bad poem,
but possibly a mad poem.

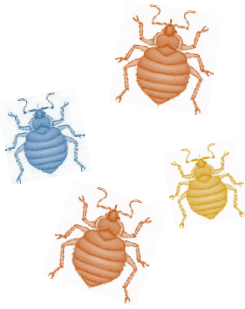
It could be a low poem, a high poem,
a girl poem, a guy poem,
a hello-and-goodbye poem,
a good old do-or-die poem,
I wouldn't mind a sly poem, a shy poem, a sky poem, a *spy* poem,
that could be your and my poem!

It has to be a new poem,
but not an any-hue poem:
I need a red poem (or a green poem),
A nice poem (or a mean poem).

An oughtn't poem,
a should poem
(and certainly a good poem)
that tickles the reader's ear.
Yes, that's exactly what I want!
Please write it here:



[illegible]



In a blue hotel,
in a big, blue room
where a lady snores
with a ripping boom,
there are four bedbugs
wearing eight ear plugs
sipping bedbug tea
from their bedbug mugs.

There's a moonstruck mouse
on the marble floor
and a lion troupe
by the lobby door.
In the Turkish bath,
there's a trombonist
playing Chinese whist
with a balloonist.



Outside, leaves
on the moonlit ground
rustle and bustle
and jostle around.



But in the blue hotel
where it's warm and still,
there's a carnivorous cat
on the windowsill.
There are acrobats
in the bright boutique
and a carpet clown
with a fine physique.

In a Blue



Poet

Summer Edward is the Foundress and Editor-in-Chief of *Anansesem* Caribbean Children's Literature ezine, a Highlights Foundation alumna and a former judge of Africa's Golden Baobab Prizes. She holds a Masters in Reading, Writing, Literacy from the University of Pennsylvania. Her children's writing and illustration appears in *Whaleheart: Journey into the Night* with Maya Christina Gonzalez and 23 Courageous ArtistAuthors, on the Children's Writer's Guild website, *Mirrors Windows Doors* and Storybird.com. Her writings on multicultural children's literature appear in *Horn Book Magazine*, *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*, *sx salon*, *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature: A Brief Guide* and more. Her personal website is www.summeredward.com.

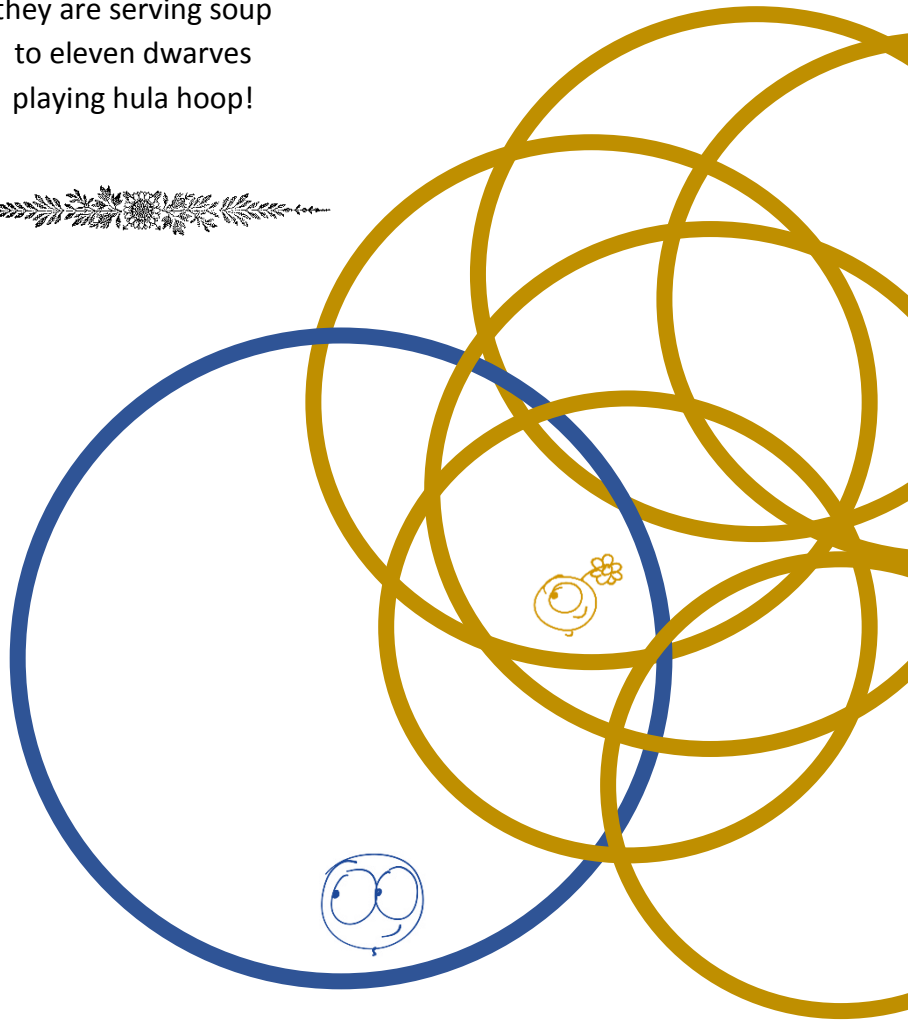
There's a kid-sized king
in the king-size bed
and a crooning chimp
on the bellboy's head.
There are mopey mimes
in the flower pots
making Soup of Bean
with Forget-me-nots.



By the swimming pool
they are serving soup
to eleven dwarves
playing hula hoop!



Hotel



Summer Edward



The Janitor Teacher

And
this is my day
says the
janitor as
the rag is friendly
and the bottle of spray...
oh how I must
shine
the tabletops are
looking up to
me.



Danny P. Barbare



The Janitor's Audition

The janitor says, how I
like to
fill a room with
shiny desks and a chalk
board that wants to be
written upon
as afterwards spiral
notebook paper lies on
the floor as if asking to settle
there like the remains of a
thousand ideas
the poet inspired and
shared — so much
happiness
claimed by
a dustpan and a broom.



Poet

Danny P. Barbare works as a janitor at a local college. His poetry has appeared worldwide. And he has been writing for 35 years.



Evening Trees, from my Study Window

Acrylic on paper, 10"x12"

Sam McCready



The Sea Between

Acrylic on paper, 8"x6"

Artist



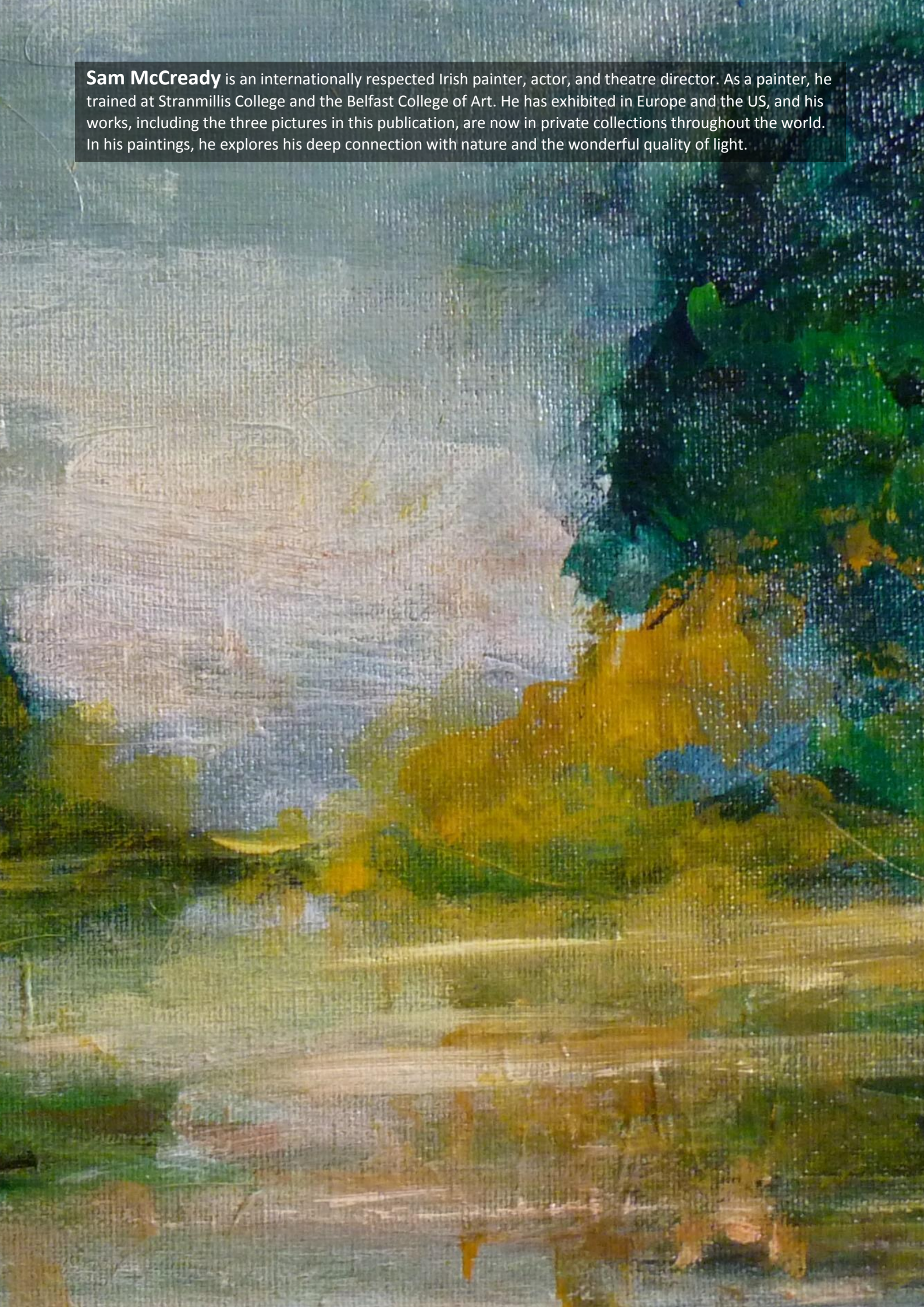
An abstract acrylic painting on canvas, featuring a rich palette of dark greens, blues, and earthy browns. The texture is highly visible, with thick brushstrokes and a sense of depth. The composition suggests a landscape, possibly a river or a body of water, with a hazy, atmospheric quality. The colors are layered and blended, creating a complex, moody scene. The overall effect is reminiscent of Impressionist or Post-Impressionist techniques, with a focus on light and color over precise detail.

River near Belfast (after Claude Monet)

Acrylic on canvas, 15"x10"



Sam McCready is an internationally respected Irish painter, actor, and theatre director. As a painter, he trained at Stranmillis College and the Belfast College of Art. He has exhibited in Europe and the US, and his works, including the three pictures in this publication, are now in private collections throughout the world. In his paintings, he explores his deep connection with nature and the wonderful quality of light.



Ava Caudle is a new and emerging voice as a thirteen-year-old writer living in the odd land of Florida, who has earned a win at the *2015 FCTE Writing Awards*. She has work which has been featured or is forthcoming in *Gulfstream 2015*, *Yellow Chair Review*, *Germ Magazine*, and *Girls Activism League*. Ava works as an editor for *Parallel Ink* and has a knack for puns, historical references, and literary jokes.

untitled



This piece is
Untitled
much like a
Blank page
Yet to be
Filled
With
Dreams and
Thoughts

Something abandoned
Never to be stamped with ink
An object
all alone
An idea
left untouched
Remaining a
white slate
lost in the
Flurry of the Page

The Future is Untitled
Unforeseen and Untold
a canvas not yet Painted on
still untouched
a symphony
yet to be Played
Unnamed
It is Abandoned and Unwritten
it is bare and
Raw
Awaiting the first

word



Poet

Ava Caudle



The Gift

It was delivered a day early –
wrapped in green, with trimmings
blue and silver grey

Left in the driveway,
without fanfare, or a spot
under the tree

Warm to the touch, as if it might
flap from our hands
and soar

But it lay still, while
feathers dropped
like snowflakes

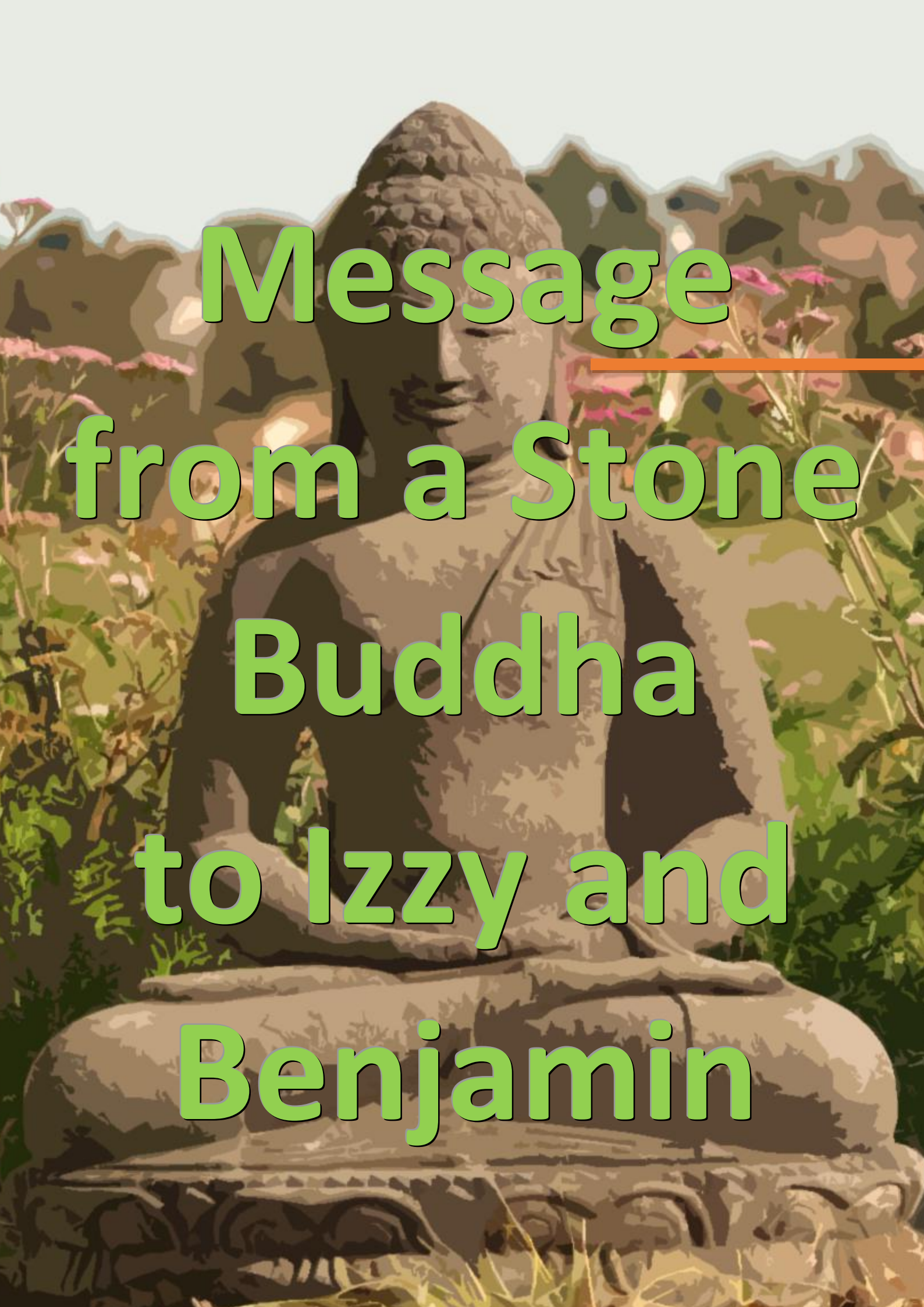
Giving is a two-way street,
so we bought puss
a bell



Poet

Nadine Cranenburgh





Message from a Stone Buddha to Izzy and Benjamin

Monika John is a writer, lawyer and world traveler living in the Pacific Northwest. Her writings have appeared in numerous magazines, anthologies, e-zines in the US, UK, China, Kenya, most recently in *Light of Consciousness* and *Depth Insight* US, *Kikvetu Journal* Kenya, *BALLOONS Lit. Journal* Hong Kong, *Brushtalks* (US-China collaboration). Forthcoming in *Poetry Pacific*, Canada.



Monika John

Author

...There I sat on a shelf among a few of my brethren. The scent of incense had become disturbing in the small store; doors were closed most of the time, particularly when an Arctic blast howled down the straits from Alaska. That's when I really yearned for the fresh air of a Pacific Northwest garden. And how I craved a little solitude!

That's when I spotted a friend of yours. I realized that she was looking for someone like me – a Buddha knows such things. I remained demur, allowed her to pick me up and check out my tranquil face. She saw the tiny flaw on my nose and asked the sales person if I had been in a fight! I became concerned for a moment: To tell the truth – I was really hoping to impress her. She was my ticket out of here. I also knew that she was looking for a gift for her neighbor's children – that would be the two of you – Izzy and Benjamin.

I communicated in no uncertain terms (cement to human brain) to take me to you – assuring her that your parents would not worry that she was trying to turn you into some type of monk. That took some doing, but as you see – I succeeded in the end.

I truly enjoy sitting among rocks and trees all by myself, but would be happy if you two visited often – ok, ok... also the occasional adult. And I know just the place – it is in your garden. Let's hope you agree and like me, I can be presumptuous at times.

I won't mind snow or rain or a few bird droppings. If a little moss grows behind my ears or a few snails crawl up my arm – I promise I won't budge.

So, dear Izzy and Benjamin, let's hang out together – I'll be your new friend.

"Your" Garden Buddha



Shared Morning

Rufus hummingbirds
awake into dawn's cool blue.
Fog blows in the red-leafed bush
by the open window.
Their tiny squeaking songs
rise insistent among the morning's
traffic.

They swoop up the air and down
among the small branches,
a hidden nest hangs from a thread
invisible but their chatter
in a minor buzzing tone
reveals the secret
of an infinitesimal young

fed drops of honeysuckle nectar.
The last mists drift in
from the harbor.
Here's a gentle Sunday
background waking the day,
the surf a distant pounding
none of us even notice
sharing an early morning.



Emily Strauss

The Fog and I

we walked the coast road,
the fog and I, our arms
over each other's shoulders
a cool white shawl we shared
I kept warm by red blood
he kept cool by the swirling wind

together we strolled silently
listened to the waves slapping
against the dinghies tied at a pier
young gulls flocking and begging,
we watched the silent pelicans
floating above, waiting their turn

to swallow a sardine whole,
throat erect, and slowly blue sky
appeared over the eastern peaks,
my new friend hugged me once more,
I nodded farewell and away
he floated over the far swells

leaving me his white shawl I pulled
closer around me, feeling his cool
windy fingers still on my neck
even as the heat touched the dusty
trees and the crows laughed at
someone who misses the fog.



Poet

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry, which she has written since college. Over 400 of her poems appear in a wide variety of online venues and in anthologies, in the U.S. and abroad. She is a Best of the Net and twice a Pushcart nominee. The natural world of the American West is generally her framework; she also considers the narratives of people and places around her. She is a retired teacher living in Oregon.



From Chopin's Memoirs



Gervase Vernon
Author

Dr. Gervase Vernon is a retired General Practitioner (family doctor). He was born in Paris and studied medicine in Cambridge and London. He is the author of "Belonging and Betrayal", a fictionalized biography of his grandmother, who was a Russian Jew and spied for the French in the First World War. He lives in Felsted, Essex, UK. Some of his short stories can be found at <http://www.jgvernon.co.uk>.

W

When I was seven my mother became very ill, too ill to play with me. My father found me in my room in tears.

"I have failed my exam at school, the Russians have chased us out of our house," I blurted out between my sobs, "and now mother is ill." My father showed me the beautiful acacia tree in bloom outside my window, but the sight brought me no comfort, its beauty only sharpening my pain.

He said nothing more, but instead that evening he asked me to help him drag our upright piano under the acacia tree. I asked no questions but simply obeyed.

Early next morning my mother woke me and brought me to the window. The white blossoms from the acacia tree had fallen on the piano during the night. "Look at the keyboard," she told me. The blossoms had fallen like snow on the keyboard.

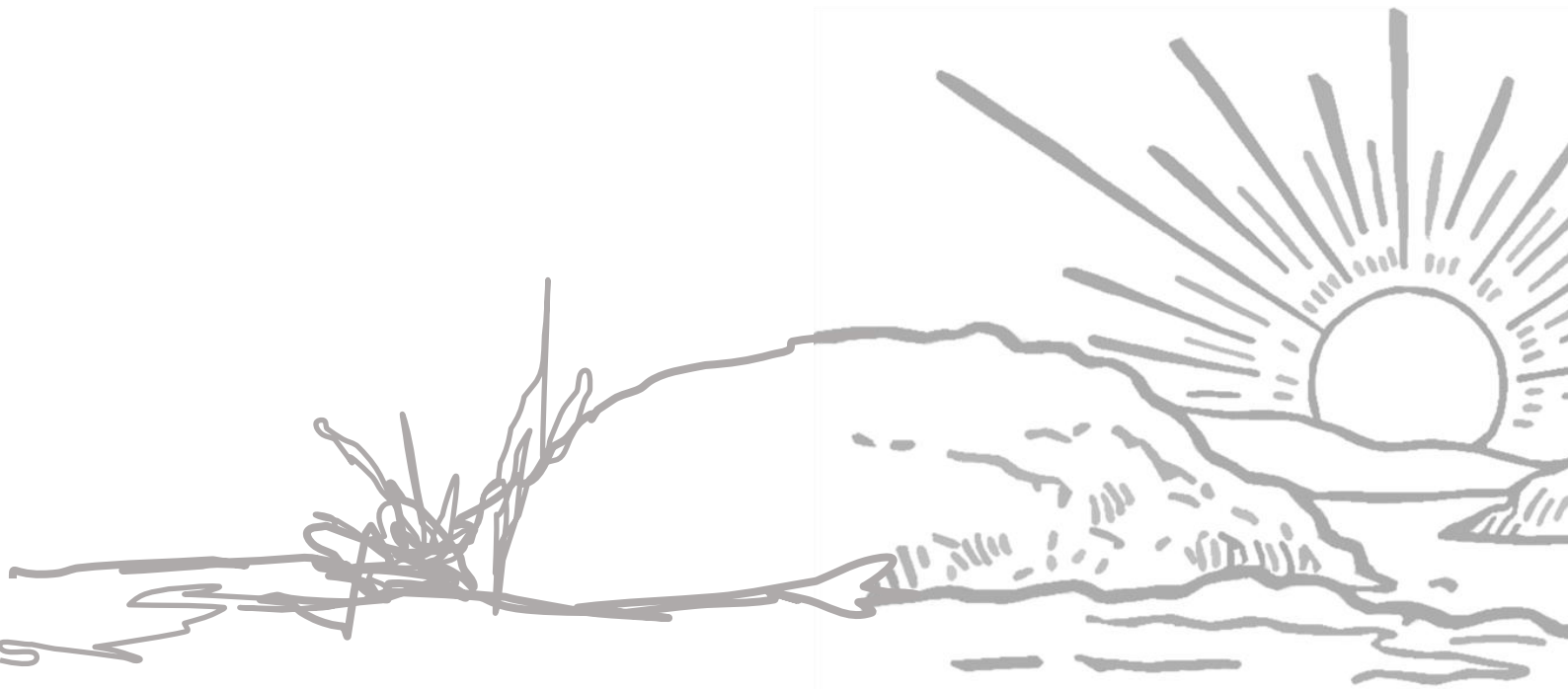
"From above," explained my mother, "you can see the white blossoms only where they have fallen on the black keys. Similarly, looking back at our lives, it can happen that we only see the black, the unhappy times. Yet, in truth, our lives contain both happiness and sorrow just as the blossoms fall on both the black and the white keys." As she smiled at me warmly, gently, hope crept back into my soul.

"In the same way, to play a beautiful tune," my father added, entering the room, "you must use all the keys on the piano, both the black and the white."

Doraine Bennett is the author of over 35 nonfiction children's books. She lives in Georgia in the United States where she teaches yoga, writes poetry, and entertains the heron who visits her backyard creek. Doraine blogs at www.dorireads.blogspot.com.

Nonet at Dawn

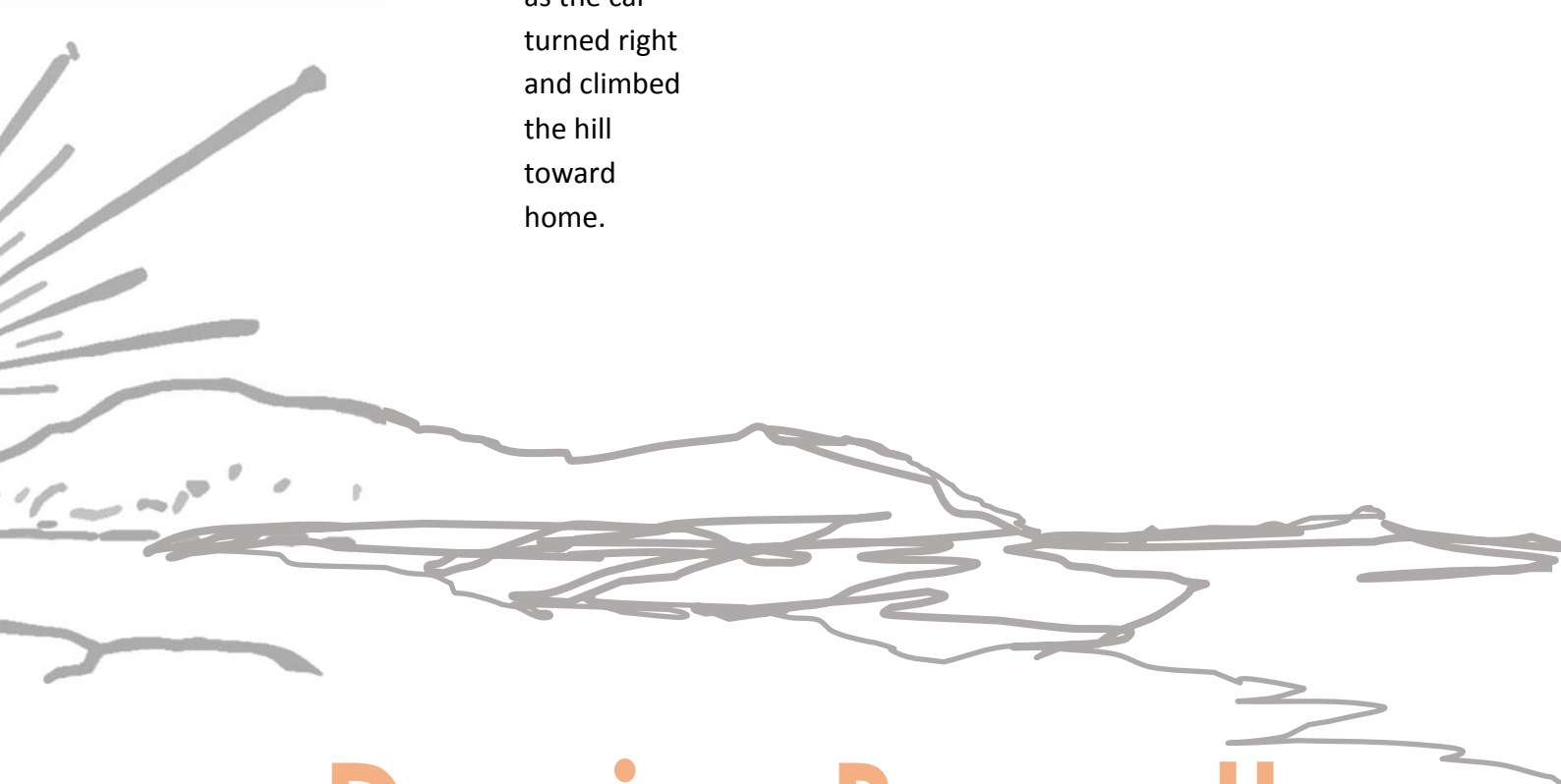
I awake to cloudy skies and wish
to stay swaddled in night-warm sheets
that coddle my lethargy,
keep me slip-sliding in
and out of waking
dreams that flee
the filtered
light of
day.



Poet

Cancelled Flight

An ocean of travelers
sprawl across islands of baggage
like scurvy-ridden sailors
adrift on a windless sea.
A disembodied voice
announces another numbered flight
that will not reach home.
I close my eyes
and wish I was nine,
lying in the back seat
of the blue Oldsmobile
where I watched
the slow strobe
of lights
flash by,
felt
the gentle
pressure on my side
as the car
turned right
and climbed
the hill
toward
home.



Doraine Bennett

Yoon Soo Shin

Author

The girl in yellow. She stood motionless on top of a hill. She pressed two phones so tightly over her ears that she could no longer hear the birds chirping above her.

She had climbed almost an hour through the woods to get there. The sun flooded through the trees, the birds adeptly maneuvered themselves between the branches, and wildflowers sprouted in every nook and cranny that wasn't taken up by other life. The forest was alive, awake, unlike her town where the people drowned under the dark, oppressive air no matter what season. She could hear the River rushing downstream, hurrying towards some unknown destination.

The view of the village was quite peaceful, as if the turmoil across the sea of

pine did not exist. The grass seemed greener and the sky seemed bluer today. Embracing the sun and the wind and the nature, the girl in yellow dialed two numbers. Both rang for what seemed like an eternity, but finally, a woman picked up one line and promptly a man picked up the other. In unison, both said, "Hello?"

"I'm going to do it today. I wanted to call to say goodbye," the girl responded.

"Don't forget what I told you," the man replied.

The girl whispered, "Mom? Dad? I know –"

The woman interrupted her, "Stay safe."

She couldn't tell if they could hear

each other, but the tone of their stern, tense voices told her that they could. She had heard this tone only once before. It was the day her father left to cross the River only a few months before. He was safe now. The sudden crunching of boots against the fallen branches in the near distance caught her attention. She quickly muttered "goodbye" into the phone in her right hand and hurled it into a pile of leaves where the trees and the clearing met. The remaining phone, filled with the deep heavy breathing that only a mother understands, remained close.

"Mother, when you arrive, I will make us food –" just as she began speaking, she spotted a military man emerge from the woods. The medallions on his crisp, seaweed green uniform reflected in the sun, and his shiny black combat boots glistened despite the permanent scratches from long ago. The girl fell silent, just as she had rehearsed with her mother. She had prepared herself to answer the man coming towards her. She hoped her mother understood her silence.

"What are you doing there, Miss?" His forehead crinkled and his eyes squinted from the sun despite the brim of his military patrol cap. It was the military man's job to watch them. This run-in was not uncommon. If they stepped beyond the surveillance spectrum, it was the military men's duty to follow them.

She paused for a moment, remembering her answer. "I'm speaking to my mother who is coming home today from an overnight trip to buy spices. I cannot transmit calls from where I live, so I must hike up here to call her."

"Why don't you use your landline

phone?"

"The landline phone we have only calls people in our town. This phone was lent to me by my neighbor to call my mother at my grandmother's house." Grabbing her by the arm, he stated forcefully, "You are breaking-" but she continued to innocently stare into his eyes, never losing eye contact to ensure her authenticity.

He squinted his eyes once more, seeing honesty more than deception, before releasing her arm with a heavy sigh. He spoke in a hush to warn her, "Curfew cannot be missed."

"Don't worry, I won't forget. It's still late morning. I will have ample time." She smiled to reassure him.

The man disappeared back into the woods with no other words. He did not ask for the phone. He did not ask anything more than what seemed apparent to him: a girl calling her worried mother who was away. He would never know that her "missing" father was on a phone hidden in the brush.

Once he was 100 feet into the forest, she murmured to her mother.

"Do not worry. Dad will get you out too." Her mother answered with silence. Closing the phone, she began to walk south, towards the River.

The sun broke through the layers of foliage as the girl cautiously trekked down the hill, looking over her shoulder every so often. In her arms she carried a handful of leaves, covering the traces of her footsteps as she went on. She could hear the River's rumbling nearby. He roared, like an unfed lion, waiting for his next meal.

Within an hour, she arrived at his feet. He greeted her with a rapid flow

that led to unknown places. In her yellow coat, she sorely stood out in the midst of the browns and juniper greens surrounding her. Slowly, she inched towards the mud where the River kissed the Earth. Once more, she swung her head back, squinted her eyes, and searched vigorously for any signs of the military man. But all she heard was the whistling of the wind.

Her eyes still lingering on the great height of the pines, the chilled water encompassed her. The icy springtime water crept up her legs as she marched into the River. As she moved deeper and deeper, the water stuck onto her body with the same strong force that she had used when she refused to let go of her father's hand before he had crossed the River. Waist deep, eyes closed, the adrenaline pulsed through her body as her heart leapt through her chest and her forehead wrinkled as the River grew stronger and angrier as it swirled around her. Her clothing became heavier, water filling her pockets as if the River was trying to drag her down into an endless pit of darkness. She grew tense, frightened that she may have to swim. It was a skill she knew she would need, but it was neglected in her childhood days when drills and marches consumed her adolescent afternoons.

By the time she was shoulder deep, she was only a third of the way across. Her tiptoes struggled to touch the ground and with her chin raised, she saw the blazing red and orange sky above her dissipate into pink. Panic flooded her mind as she realized she had no choice but to swim. His current constantly nudged her balance every few seconds. Lifting her feet, she began to kick and flail her arms. But they failed her. The

deeper she sank, the faster the air began to leave her chest. The River rushed up through her nostrils, slowly filling her throat and her burning lungs with water. He pulled her harder and harder as she tried to get away. The River did not wait for her. He had no mercy. He kept pulling at her feet, refusing to let go. Eventually, she had no choice but to give in.

He engulfed her, pulling her to the bottom. She felt the muddy floor against her shoes and she bent her knees, pushing herself off of the bottom. She returned to the surface for a moment. Several more times, she bent her legs and propelled towards the surface, her body tensing and burning each push upward. She had only moved a few feet from where she had been completely submerged, but she was already tired. Again, she kicked off the bottom and she began to kick. This time, she arched her back and kicked at a forward angle. She moved her hands apart and together, propelling her body forward.

Apart. Together. Apart. Together. He pushed her downstream with even more force, but she kept going. She could feel a pounding through her entire body as she kicked harder. Apart. Together. Apart. Together. She was almost there.

She could see the shore on the other side. Its singing birds and croaking frogs shattered her concentration and she lost control of her body. She was ready to sink again, but, to her surprise, her foot hit earth and she stood there. One last time, she looked back as the dusk quickly turned to night. One last time, she glanced at the forest, the village, the River that kept her hostage, even when she had done nothing wrong. She turned forward, staring straight

at the land that supposedly promised her freedom.

As she left him, she felt the weight of the River across her shivering shoulders. He hung heavy in her pockets. But she kept walking straight into the forest.

Night soon fell and without light, without warmth, it was only a matter of time before she would become food for a bear or freeze. She kept going, remembering what her father had said about a nearby town. She kept walking until she spotted a pile of branches in the distance. It was small, just long enough to fit her whole body and just wide enough to fit for her small stature. The branches strategically met at the top, making a triangle with the ground. Someone who had escaped must have created the shelter not long before her.

On all fours, she crawled inside and laid atop the soft leaves as she saw the night sky reveal its flashing stars. She always thought that they were fairies in the night sky, looking after her when she was afraid. This seemed especially true as she shivered. She thought the sky would look different across the River, but it was still the same.

Her body could not stop shaking and the girl rose to look for branches to start a fire. Her father had taught her how to build one years ago, long before he had purchased a gas stove, and although she had not made one in two years, she still remembered fiercely rolling a piece of branch between her palms, its tip against a wooden plank and some tinder.

With the scavenging done, she sat down beside her shelter and began rolling. Faster and faster, the sticks twirled between her small hands and soon enough, sweat

formed in her palms. Though she didn't find tinder, some dry leaves did the trick. Testing for warmth, she put her hands against a flatter piece of wood. Sure enough, it was gaining heat. Soon, the girl was basking in the glimmering warmth. Although it was small, she tended to it with fierce attention and care, as if she were looking after a child. The fire turned to glowing embers and the night sky became darker. Laying down, she planned her morning, starting with finding the trail that her father had explained would be only an hour's walk from the River. Maybe she would run towards the path. Maybe that would get her there faster.

At the bottom of the path there would be a town. Maybe there would be people walking by. Maybe her father would be waiting for her and she would run up to him and take comfort in his embrace. Then, as the embers died, she fell asleep despite the cold, hoping to wake up to the sunrise.

Yoon Soo (Suzy) Shin is a Senior at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT. She enjoys reading shorts stories and essays by David Sedaris, Nella Larsen, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Edwidge Danticat and likes exploring themes such as love, transnational identities, and the cross section where these two themes meet. In her spare time, she likes watching "Parks and Recreation", going hiking with her dad, and playing "Cards Against Humanity" with her friends.



Pomegranate

Oil on canvas, 12"x9"



Artist

Three Apples

Colored pencil and acrylic paint, 12"x9"



Alexandra Bowman

Magdalen College

Graphite, watercolor, and acrylic paint, 13.5"x15"



Alexandra Bowman is a high school junior and student artist from Northern Virginia. She earned a "5" on her AP Studio Art 2-D Design portfolio as a sophomore and was selected as 2016 Studio Art Student of the Year for Underclassmen at Chantilly High School. Alex has played the piano for twelve years and the cello for seven years. She also enjoys British film and literature, science fiction, creative writing, traveling, and distance running. She lives with her parents, brother, and English Lab.

Maddy Barker is 13 years old. She lives in Miami, Florida and goes to Miami Arts Charter. She is enrolled in the creative writing program and enjoys reading and writing poetry, short stories, fiction, and more. Maddy is in 8th grade and would like to have a career dedicated to writing.



The Sky's Flowers

Through the slivers of my curtains,
there are just enough clouds to cover the sky,
the sky filled with a stench of old flowers
that had been thrown away,
the sky covered in bouquets
of rejected roses,
the sky masked with torn petals
from little girls' hope,
the sky shattered with broken vases
that were smashed by cheating husbands,
the sky crowded with a girl's tulips
that a boy had taken.
There are just enough clouds to cover the sky's flowers.



Maddy Barker

Poet

Balloons



Jay Lee *Author*

Jay Lee enjoys surveying the landscape around him while mixing the latest EDM songs on Spotify. He resides in New Jersey where the abundance of good food makes life great.



Beatrice twisted little golden strands of hair between her small fingers as she curiously stared at the array of colors that decorated the street below her. She felt something tickle her on her forearm. She looked down to find a spider on her white, Mickey Mouse pajamas.

Spider, she stared at it in awe. During their hikes, she and Anna always looked for insects and caught them in the tiny jars Mom gave them. Unfortunately, after many incidents, Beatrice had learned that trapping an insect wasn't so fun: they always died.

She picked up the spider and gently placed it upon the floor before looking back to the street outside. An ice cream truck had arrived and little children started to crowd outside its tiny window, eager to get their hands on a rainbow snow cone; Beatrice preferred vanilla ice cream, but Anna loved rainbow snow cones. Beatrice felt her pockets for change. She patted the cotton material of her pajamas, feeling hopeful when she discovered the little impression of a coin in her pocket. She pulled it out: a quarter, just fifty cents short. Elated, she turned around and walked to her dresser, using the chair to get to the highest drawer. Popping it open, she used her palm to feel the bottom of the drawer: empty. She sighed.

Maybe, next time, she told herself before walking back to the window. The flood of children around the ice cream truck had disappeared, and the ice cream truck began to move on; Beatrice had always wondered if the ice cream truck drivers drove these trucks as their own cars. She could just imagine the ice cream man dropping his own children off at school. That would be funny.

A flurry of balloons littered the sidewalk as children released them and stared in awe as they floated towards seemingly endless heights. Kids clenched unblown balloons in their hands, competing against one another to see who could blow the biggest ones. Others played volleyball,

running back and forth to make sure the balloon never touched the ground. One time, Beatrice had tripped on the sidewalk. Mom had made sure to put a Spongebob band-aid on it. Beatrice lifted her right leg, the scrape from the incident now a small scar.

Tap, tap. Beatrice turned around, noticing a balloon gently knocking on her window. Beatrice opened the window panel, eager to grab the floating globe. However, once she pushed out the glass pane, it bumped into the balloon, pushing it just far enough that Beatrice couldn't touch it. She sadly watched it float away.

Suddenly, screams exploded from the street. Beatrice immediately shifted her eyes, observing a girl around her age push a smaller boy onto the ground before snatching the boy's balloon.

That's not very nice, Beatrice thought. If she had done that to Anna, Mom would have taken away ice cream for a week. *No ice cream*, Beatrice couldn't imagine the horror. In seconds, a mom and dad arrived at the scene, each one taking one of the children and separating them from one another. The father started yelling at the girl, and in seconds, tears streamed down the girl's face as she, most likely, mumbled something to make her dad feel apologetic about scolding her. As expected, the dad hugged his daughter, whispering in her ears to comfort her, before handing the balloon to his son. A smile quickly emerged on the boy's face when he felt the balloon string return to his palm. Then, the two siblings hugged each other before running back into the streets to play with their other friends.

A small grumble prompted Beatrice to rub her tummy; looking at the pink clock on her nightstand, she noticed that it was almost lunch time. Maybe it would be something special like chicken nuggets?

A parade of ringing bells flooded the

street: bicycles. Beatrice wondered how hard it was to ride a two-wheel bicycle. She always used training wheels while Anna rode a two-wheeler. Anna could even ride off bumps, though, one time, she accidentally cut her elbow trying that. When Anna arrived home, her left elbow covered in blood, Mom had screamed before scurrying to find Spongebob band-aids and medicine. When Beatrice asked Anna if her elbow was okay, Anna attempted to look tough and shrugged it off. Beatrice wished she could do the same about the budding hunger in her stomach. Lunch wasn't being served until 12:30. It was only 12:00.

Maybe there are leftovers from last night? Beatrice thought. She put on her pink, wool sweater, knowing that the hallways were always cold. She twisted the doorknob before pushing the door open. When it didn't budge, she remembered that this door needed to be pulled.

Once she found herself in the corridor, she hesitantly glanced both ways. She knew the kitchen was at the end of the hallway closer to her room, but as she stared both ways, she realized that her room was in the middle of the hallway: both ends were the same distance. She decided to go right. As she wandered through the corridor, she could hear a telephone ringing. Someone always answered the calls; maybe it was Mrs. Nickles.

At the end of the hall, she turned right. A dim light illuminated the kitchen counter, but nothing else. Beatrice was just getting used to the kitchen layout. She blindly stuck her hand forward, trying to feel the rubber handle of the fridge in her palm. After feeling the oven handle and microwave, she was finally comforted by the feeling of the rubber handle. She pulled it open before scavenging through the leftovers from yesterday's dinner. When she touched the plastic wrap on the leftovers, however, the wet, sogginess of the potatoes and meatloaf immediately compelled her to pull her hand back, doing nothing to appease

Beatrice's greedy stomach. She was aware that there were snacks, but Mrs. Nickles always kept them in an unknown location, just like Dad.

Beatrice sighed before returning to the corridor, this time a one-way direction back to her room. As Beatrice walked past the many rooms on either side of her, another realization struck her: she didn't know which was hers.

Luckily, she was able to identify her room by its pulsating silence. She pushed her door open, feeling a swell of pride at the fact that she finally knew which direction to pull or push the door. The alarm clock's glaring red 12:15 greeted her, aggravating her already unsatisfied stomach. Beatrice plopped herself on her bed, feeling a tiny itch arise from the wool rubbing against her skin.

Her eyes turned back to the street. The crowd of people had disappeared. The balloons loafed around like lost, wandering children as the wind nudged them into all directions. They bounced sluggishly, picking up the grime and dirt from the street. A car swerved into the street, the front tires mercilessly crushing two. *Pop! Pop!* Beatrice watched the balloons that bounced along the sidewalk, trying to reach the sky. They reminded her of the balloons that Dad had bought her and Anna at the circus. But she hadn't held on tight enough to her string. She had cried when it floated away, but Dad had bought her another one. She felt sad looking at the deflated balloons. Maybe Anna, Mom, and Dad had all floated into the sky like her circus balloon. Why couldn't Beatrice be one too?

LUNCH! The caregiver alerted. Soon, a medley of excited voices and footsteps flooded the hallway. Beatrice jumped off her bed, her mind speculating all the different options for lunch.

Maybe we'll have grilled cheese, Beatrice smiled at the appetizing thought before pulling the door open to join the other children in line for lunch.

Zoey Ruzic is a freshman in high school attending Miami Arts Charter, and majors in Creative writing. She has won two silver keys in the Scholastics Competition and first honorable mention for National Poetry Society of Virginia, as well as being published more than once in Creative Communications. She lives in Miami where she enjoys reading, making short films, and 7/11 coffee.



Behind the Magic

Indigo smoke oozes
from the glittering lamp.
An iconic vibrant creature idolized
for the magic they could grant
only three times over.

The smoke evolved into a misty figure,
awaiting its master's request.
Living silently in an enclosed darkness,
waiting to be summoned.
It's independence was unlikely,
for now it was the master's fingers
that depended on the lamp,
who depended on the genie.
A prisoner in their own world,
bowing down to all who rubbed the lamp.



Zoey Ruzic

Poet



Fishbowl



Author

Savannah Tabor

Savannah Tabor is currently a junior at Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts, where she majors in literary arts. She has a published poem in a children's anthology, *Acclaimed*, as well as a memoir published by Stigma Fighters. Her work has been recognized regionally by *Scholastic Art and Writing Awards*. When she is not writing, she has a passion for astronomy, and, above all else, birds.

I was twenty-years-old when I got my first pet. I'd waited this long since my parents had said no, and my last roommate was allergic, but they were all gone now and no longer mattered. I'd wanted a dog since I was little, or at least something that would fill the quiet apartment with noise, but the experts on the internet said to start with something small, like a fish.

When I went to the pet store that night, I chose the most beautiful blue betta fish. His scales reflected the fluorescent light that filled our home, and his feathery fins waved to me every time he moved. His name was Bach and Beethoven.

I loved Bach and Beethoven. I know it seems kind of funny to give a fish two names, but I didn't really think he would mind. After all, I thought he looked a little lonely, swimming alone in his little glass enclosure for hours at a time, contemplating his confinement and solitude. I wanted to get two fish originally, but the worker at the store said one would eventually kill the other, and I figured one miserable fish was better than one monster and one corpse. I decided maybe with two names he'd feel a little more comfortable talking to himself, blowing bubbles with the company of his own faint reflection in the translucent glass beads on the bottom of his bowl whenever I wasn't there with him. It was a skill I'd mastered years ago, and I knew in no time, Bach and Beethoven would be able to do the same.

I'd like to think that Bach and Beethoven enjoyed his short time with me, in our shoebox apartment in the middle of a town that was slowly fading away. Each day, the walls seemed to grow a little closer, and the sun seemed to burn a little brighter. He didn't spend much time without me, and I spent Friday nights reading by his side on one of the few chairs we owned. I kept my apartment relatively empty, with only one person and one fish living there, I really didn't think I

needed that much furniture or noise or really anything. My mom once told me I should go out and explore and have fun while I was still young on these nights, but I shook her off. Of course the idea of traveling excited me, so much so that some nights I couldn't sleep, but I always closed my eyes eventually. Sure, there were cities to see and people to meet, but I knew I shouldn't leave my fish alone. Anyways, I had no one to wander the roads with, and I knew I couldn't carry a fish tank around with me everywhere. The thought of making actual human friends to venture with seemed much too scary to me as well. After all, a fish can't reject your company.

In school, I learned 95% of the ocean is unexplored.

"95!" I told Bach and Beethoven, "I bet if you were there, you'd explore it all."

Bach and Beethoven blew a bubble back at me.

Yet as time went on, I began to worry Bach and Beethoven was depressed. After all, even if I spoke to him for hours at a time, I knew he didn't understand. Water distorts noise, and besides, we spoke two totally different languages. As much as I hated to admit it, I knew Bach and Beethoven cared much more about his feeding than about me. I wasn't enough for him. This felt like a dagger through the chest, making it hard to breathe, but I still decided to see a vet about it. Even if I was unhappy, that didn't mean it was okay for him to be, too.

She laughed.

"Fish only have three second memories, Alice," she said, "they don't care about having company. If you really feel bad, you should've gotten a more social breed and built an aquarium." I smiled and thanked her and went back home, but still felt worry brewing inside of me. I had a friend long ago who once lived in this washed-up town alongside me told me the same

thing once, but as the years passed, her name had slipped off the tip of my tongue and the phone never rang. All I could remember now of her is the echoing proclamation from an alcohol induced mouth that everything leaves you eventually. Then, she left me, only one of many. She was right, and I had a whole list of names of past abandoners to prove it. Bach and Beethoven wasn't going to be any different.

The truth was, Bach and Beethoven was getting old. Fish don't live very long, and most of his days were already spent. I knew he'd die eventually, but that didn't make the fear of losing my best friend any less.

The worst part of it all was the guilt. He never asked to live this way, in a forever providential existence of constant "okay." I knew a short life full of good memories and late nights was better than an interminable state of quiet satisfaction, but never anything more. I knew Bach and Beethoven would agree. It was selfish of me to force him to bask in loneliness with me. Sure, he took up space, but both of us were bad company and neither would ever be enough. It was a fact I'd been neglecting for years.

"I can't keep you trapped in this fish tank forever, can I?"

Blub.

"The vet was wrong. You really do want someone of your own kind to be with."

Blub.

"I have to do what's right for you, huh?"

Blub blub.

The very next day, I carried the small glass world that had become Bach and Beethoven's prison for the past few years to the river and set him free. As I watched him swim away, teary-eyed and shaky-kneed, but without a shred of regret, I knew I would never see the little guy again. No matter how much I would miss him, there was no doubt both of us were in a better place.

The day after that, I booked a plane ticket to New York City and never looked back.

We'd spent so long simply working to keep the other alive, yet neither of us were truly living. It took me much too long to realize this, even if he'd been trying to tell me for years. Sometimes, I had to let go first.

Now, I had no idea where Bach and Beethoven is. I'd like to think he made it to some lake or bay and made some new friends, but I'd never have a real answer. At this point, it didn't really matter. What I did know for sure was that he was happy now.

And I was, too.



Take the Time to Dream

A companion piece for "Let No-one Steal Your Dreams"

Take time to dream your dreams
Take time to be inspired
Take time to find your wildest dream
And your heart's desire

Take time to dream your dreams
No matter where you are
From just one grain of sand
Until the farthest star

Lose yourself in clouds and sky
Follow each and every breeze
The whispered secrets of the wind
The oceans and the seas

Take time to dream your dreams
Let creation be your friend
Let inspiration be your guide
From beginning to the end

Take the time to dream your dreams
Take the time to believe
Take the time to make them real
If you give you will receive



Paul Cookson

Poet

Paul Cookson lives in Retford, UK, with his wife, two children, a dog and several ukuleles. He has worked as poet since 1989 and since then has visited thousands of schools and performed to hundreds of thousands of pupils and staff. With over sixty titles to his name, Paul has sold well over three quarters of a million books and his poems appear in over two hundred other books. Best known collections include *The Poetry Store*, *Pants on Fire*, *The Truth About Teachers*, *I'd Rather Be A Footballer*, *Give Us A Goal*, *Spill The Beans*, *The Truth About Parents*, *The World At Our Feet* and *It's Behind You!* As well as a tenth anniversary edition of perennial best seller – *The Works* (now sold over 200,000 copies).



Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal



This 5th chapter of **BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ)** is proud to lead all our youthful readers (that means everybody!) to another voyage of colours, warmth, depth, memories, magic and wittiness. In this collection of thought-provoking works of artistic and literary intelligence, BLJ lets readers see the world through a spectrum of lenses – you will not see a youngsters’ literary magazine the same way again!

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NOT FOR SALE