

# Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Jour

Issue  
Six

Sept 2017

Celine Low • Coltrane Varela • Cynthia Grady • Donna Wiscombe • Emily Lu •  
Irene Latham • Jasmine Turner • Jaylen Moulton • Jesús Mérida • Joy Moore •  
Kristy Keller • Michael C. Paul • Rainer Pasca • Scott Merrow • Seth Ruderman •  
Stella Vinitchi Radulescu • Stephanie M. Bucklin •





**“Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.”**

**– Robert L. Frost (1874-1963)**

# Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue  
Six

Sept 2017



**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 our website:

**[www.balloons-lit-journal.com](http://www.balloons-lit-journal.com)**

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

**[editorblj@yahoo.com](mailto:editorblj@yahoo.com)**

*Founding Editor & Layout Designer*

**Ho Cheung LEE (Peter), Ed.D.**

*BLJ Advisory Board*

**Ricci FONG, Ph.D., Gary HARFITT, Ph.D., Lancy TAM, Simon THAM**

All original work published in this issue of BLJ is copyright © 2017 by the poets, authors and artists.

© 2017 BALLOONS Lit. Journal

ISSN 2520-0372 (Online)

ISSN 2520-3169 (Print)

Hong Kong, China

*Sponsoring body:*

**香港教師夢想基金**  
Hong Kong Teachers Dream Fund

# C N T E N T S

Words from Founding Editor 6

Foreword by Susan Gundlach 7

## Poetry

**Seth Ruderman**

*Transcript from Last Night's  
Dinner with My Parents* 8  
*What Actually Happened  
at School Yesterday* 9

**Kristy Keller** *No Elbows on the Table* 15

**Emily Lu** *Forgetting* 22

**Stella Vinitchi Radulescu**

*I Hung My Poem in a Tree* 26

**Irene Latham** *Cave Cricket's Lament* 27

**Cynthia Grady** *Time is Slower Here* 29

**Coltrane Varela** *The Lone Beach Ball* 34  
*Swing Set* 35

**Joy Moore** *Song of the Whippoorwill* 36

**Rainer Pasca** *A Metaphor for the  
Suspension of Disbelief* 41

**Celine Low** *Wild* 45

**Jasmine Turner** *Electric Dessert* 22

**Stephanie M. Bucklin** *Legend* 30

**Jaylen Moulton** *Prisoner* 42

## Artwork/Photography

**Jesús Mérida** *Water Games\** 16

*The Game* 17

*The Big Wave* 17

*The Big Brother\*\** 18

*Rojos de Pasión* 120

**Donna Wiscombe** *Luna Roja* 28

**Michael C. Paul** *Homework* 38

*Insomnia* 39

*Kite* 40

\* Cover art

\*\* Back cover art

## Fiction

**Scott Merrow** *I Will Not Blow up  
the Science Fair* 10





## Words from Founding Editor

**M**arching into the sixth chapter of this creative endeavour for readers with a youthful spirit, I am glad to see a drastic increase of submission numbers and a widened spectrum of people entrusting their work to BALLOONS Lit. Journal.

All the hard work paid off when the final selection of these brilliant pieces from 17 contributors was made, involving works from the US, UK, Spain, Australia, and Singapore. As a Hong Kong-based production, I am so proud that this project builds such a wide literary network.

All the selected pieces are of course the outstanding among the outstanding. I am particularly moved by Mérida's artistic photography capturing the summery movements of children, and the crimson-painted sky of a golden reef. Wiscombe's surrealistic artwork makes me feel the girl was really moving along the silvery path. And who would dislike Paul's talent in comics? Such an extraordinary illustrator!

On poetry, Ruderman's two-layered work offers excellent humour whereas Varela's subtle expression of loneliness will silence you. Moore and Pasca's symbolic poems expand their short narrations into novels while even the shorter pieces in this journal, such as Lu's "Forgetting", are so unforgettable: Keller's protest for elbows will surely bring a smile to your face; but if you have a darker taste, Latham's "Cave Cricket's Lament" is a witty one for you; Grady's portrayal of a beach will give you a new perspective to see the ordinary, as will Radulescu's new poem on creative minds. Finally, you wouldn't miss out Low's epic work on a distant fairy illustrated beautifully also by the poet.

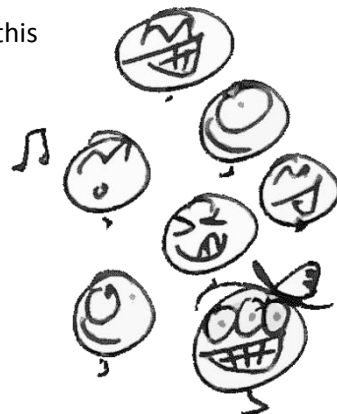
The short stories are equally impressive in their different ways as well: Merrow's science fiction has, surprisingly, a poetic touch; Turner's "shocking" tale offers a great life lesson; Bucklin's "Legend" is mystifying, thrilling and haunting; and Moulton's monologue is poignantly truthful and provoking.

I thank all BLJ's contributors of this issue for their marvellous creation and their interest in BLJ. And I will thank you even more, who are reading and enjoying the selected works here, for allowing these pieces to touch your heart, and importantly, for spreading the words and the literary atmosphere to young readers and language educators who will further cultivate the prestigious habit of quality reading and creative writing among the future leaders of our world.

BLJ remains a free electronic magazine with limited print copies freely distributed to contributors and associates of our journal. But as long as our work still means something to you, our fire for creative works will continue to burn. **You** mean so much to us.

Behold the glints –  
Lower yourself into this  
Jumble of gems

**Ho Cheung LEE, Ed.D.**  
Founding Editor, BLJ





## Foreword

"...to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice."

— Rebecca Solnit (*The Faraway Nearby*)

Issue 6 of *BALLOONS Lit. Journal* serves as a clear reminder of the importance of story. This absorbing magazine invites its readers to join in a celebration of stories told through poetry, prose, and visual form, pieces that take hold of us and can cause us to think, imagine, question, and even take action. Because human beings tend to think in narrative, we are always receptive to a good tale and ready to inject ourselves into the scenario, to enter the story and try to understand the characters and situations it holds – to become part of the conversation.

"I Will Not Blow Up the Science Fair" shows what can happen when a student unintentionally causes a disaster and is punished for his "actions." However, he is undaunted and emerges with high spirits. This story has a lightness, even though the main character is not treated justly. "Prisoner," however, sets a much darker tone as the main character intentionally persists in speaking her mind in a place where freedom of speech is not permitted. Similarly, the poem "Wild" addresses the idea of trying to put a free spirit in a "cage." This kind of theme draws the readers in and provokes good discussions about the consequences that might ensue when people are not permitted to tell their full stories, to be their full selves.

An especially interesting insight that expands the idea of story comes through in the poems "Forgetting" and "Time is Slower Here." Both of these lovely works describe quiet, personal observations, reminding the reader that even what seems to be a "snapshot" has more to it than just details. What is happening in these poems? What pictures come to mind? When you enter their worlds, what do you imagine? No doubt, readers will come up with similar stories of their own.

And the photographs in this issue enrich students' opportunities to look at storytelling through different media. Readers will love the black and white photos of children by Jesús Mérida. What are they doing in the pictures? What are they thinking? Why is the last one called "The Big Brother?" In which photo would you like to be included? Another technique students may want to try comes through in Coltrane Varela's "Swing Set," a poem that combines a visual image with poetry. Who can resist the "people-less rhythm" of the empty old swing set? Why is no one there? Who were the people who once upon a time played on those swings?

Issue 6 presents many kinds of stories and many ways to tell them. Reader-writer-visual artists are in for an experience that they will find engaging, challenging, at times unsettling, and always rewarding.

**Susan Gundlach**  
American Poet

Susan Gundlach's poems have appeared in various journals, including *After Hours*, *The Human Touch*, *Dark Matter*, *The Best of Vine Leaves*, *\*82 Review*, *In Plain Air* (forthcoming), *BALLOONS Lit. Journal*, *Cricket* magazine and in the walkway of the Evanston Public Library. Her work with teacher/printmaker Lea Lazarus was featured most recently in a show called "Stories in Images and Words: An Exhibition of Art and Poetry." She lives in Evanston, Illinois, with her family, human and canine.



# Transcript from Last Night's Dinner with My Parents

How was your day at school?

OK

What did you do at recess?

Play

How was the reading lesson?

Great

Who did you eat your lunch with?

Nate

What did you do at math time?

Add

Could you please give us some details?

DAD!!!

Will you tell us more next time?

Alright

Then go to bed, Sweet Dreams

Goodnight



Poet

**Seth Ruderman** is the winner of the 2016 RhymeZone Poetry Prize. His work has appeared in *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Birds Piled Loosely*, *Gravel* and more. He lives in Villanova, PA with his wife and two children. [[www.sethadamruderman.com](http://www.sethadamruderman.com)]

## What Actually Happened at School Yesterday



I had the most amazing day  
That there could ever be.  
Was picked to be class president  
And won a spelling bee.

At recess played three games of chess  
Won each and every one.  
Played stickball for a little while  
And scored the winning run.

We then sat down for circle time,  
My teacher read a book.  
About a boy named Peter Pan  
And a pirate, Captain Hook.

Lunchtime came, I ate with Nate.  
Had meatballs and cupcakes.  
It's funny 'cause I never tried  
The meatballs mommy makes.

In math we added fractions.  
First time we ever tried.  
Had a quiz and got one hundred,  
Gave me a sense of pride.

But I was very tired  
When I came home last night,  
Just wanted to eat my dinner,  
Go to bed, turn off the light.

# Seth Ruderman

# I Will Not Blow up the Science Fair

The background of the cover features a detailed line drawing of a science fair. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a young girl and a young boy are shown. The girl is on the left, facing right, wearing a dress. The boy is on the right, facing left, with his arms raised in a celebratory gesture. They are standing in front of various science fair displays, including a globe, a microscope, and other scientific equipment. The entire scene is rendered in a light orange or yellow line-art style.

Author

**Scott Merrow**

---

**Scott Merrow** has been writing short fiction for ten years. He's had several stories published recently, both online and in print, with a few more forthcoming soon. Publications include *BALLOONS Lit. Journal* (Issue 4), *Mystery Weekly Magazine*, *Pilcrow & Dagger*, and *Fabula Argentea*, among others. He and his wife Paula Merrow also co-write short screenplays. To date, ten of them have been produced. Scott and Paula live in Colorado.

School had let out for the day, and the seventh-grade classroom was empty and quiet. Well, not-quite-empty. And not-quite-quiet.

There was still one student left behind, a twelve-year-old boy, so it was not-quite-empty. And he was also the reason it was not-quite-quiet. He was making the only sound in the room, the annoying squeak-a-squeak-a-squeak-a sound of a dry-erase marker scribbling fast and furiously on a whiteboard.

Mortimer Smedley III ("Morty" to his friends) was standing at the front of the room, hard at work, writing "I will not blow up the science fair. I will not blow up the science fair" on the whiteboard, over and over and over again. "I will not blow up the science fair."

The board was nearly three-quarters full when the classroom door creaked open just a bit, and a face peeked in. A girl's face. She looked left and right, and when she was convinced the coast was clear she pushed the door open a little more, and she tiptoed into the room.

"Hey Morty," she said.

Morty snapped around at the sound of her voice. It was Annie Hernandez, Morty's best friend and colleague. Normally, he'd be happy to see her, but he was obviously preoccupied at the moment, so he just grunted and kept scribbling on the board.

"So... whatcha doin'?" Annie asked with a mischievous grin on her face and a teasing tone in her voice.

Morty rolled his eyes and turned to face her again. "What's it look like I'm doing, Annie?" he asked, a little annoyed. "A month of detention."

"Oh. How fun."

Morty went back to his writing. "You better get out of here," he said to Annie over his shoulder. "Mrs. Hartford's at a teachers' meeting. If she comes back and catches you..."

"But I brought you something," Annie interrupted. "Something to cheer you up. A poem."

"Geez, Annie," Morty said, gesturing at the board with a sweep of his arm. "I'm a little too busy for poetry at the moment."

"C'mon," she said. "You'll like it."

Morty rolled his eyes. "Okay, read it," he said, "but hurry. Mrs. Hartford'll be back any minute."

"Okay, here goes," Annie said. She fished a couple sheets of paper from her backpack, then she cleared her throat, mostly for dramatic effect. She read the title...

*Mortimer Smedley's Invention.*

"Oh great," Morty said. "It's about me."

"Of course. Who else?" Annie replied. She cleared her throat again and began reading her poem.

*Young Mortimer Smedley the third  
had a reputation for being a nerd.*

*He thought it was quite undeserved  
and based on a great misconception.*

Annie glanced at Morty to see if he was listening. He was. She continued.

*His friends called him 'Morty the Brain.'*

Morty rolled his eyes.

*His foes called him 'Smedley the Pain.'*

*But one day all of that changed  
when they heard about Morty's invention.*

As Annie read her poem aloud, somewhere in the back of her mind she was recalling the actual events that had occurred. The events that inspired her poem. The whole thing started on a Friday afternoon a few weeks earlier. Morty and Annie were walking home from school, and Annie was complaining about the pile of homework that Mrs. Hartford had assigned them.

"What does she think we are, anyway?"

Robots?" she grumbled. "It's the weekend. We're kids. We have lives to live."

Morty grinned. "Come on over to my house tomorrow afternoon, and bring your pile of homework. All of it," he said. "I've got something to show you."

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's my project for the science fair. It's almost finished."

"Seriously? Why do you think I want to spend *my* Saturday afternoon looking at *your* science project?" she asked.

"Trust me, Annie," Morty replied. "Just be there tomorrow. And bring your homework. You'll be glad you did."

"But I..."

"Trust me."

So the next afternoon Annie trudged over to Morty's house with a backpack full of school books and papers. She rang the doorbell, said a quick hello to Morty's mother, then bounded up the stairs to his bedroom.

It wasn't a typical twelve-year-old boy's bedroom, not by a long shot, because truth be told, Morty wasn't a typical twelve-year-old boy. He was sort of a genius, what some might call a science nerd, and his bedroom reflected it. There were no model airplanes, no rock star posters, no sports equipment of any kind, nothing like that. Instead, the room looked like a laboratory – it was full of all kinds of electronic gear and computer components and scientific this-and-that-and-the-other.

Annie knocked on the door, and when she opened it she stopped dead in her tracks. "Oh no," she said. "Not another time machine!"

Morty was in the middle of the floor, on his hands and knees, tinkering with a very large, strange-looking cardboard box. It was covered with all kinds of gizmos, wheels, bells, lights, and...you-name-it.

Oddly enough, a year or so earlier Morty and Annie had had quite an amazing adventure (a trip through time) in a similar large, strange-looking cardboard box. That's why Annie was a bit concerned.

"Don't worry, don't worry," Morty reassured her. "It's not a time machine." He flicked a toggle switch back and forth a few times, and with each flick a single sheet of printer paper slid – *zhizh-zhizh-zhizh-zhizh* – in-and-out, in-and-out of a slot in the side of the box.

"Good," Morty murmured to himself. "The servo works."

"Well, what is it then?" Annie demanded. "It looks exactly like the stupid time machine." (Their previous adventure had not gone well.)

"Did you bring your homework?" Morty asked.

"Yes. Of course," she said, holding up her backpack. "That's why I'm here."

"Good. Because this..." he said, gesturing to the box, "...is a homework machine."

He flipped a switch on the box. It came to life. An electronic humming sound grew louder and louder. Wheels began spinning, lights flashed, and the whole box began to shake.

"I don't know, Morty," Annie said skeptically. "This looks a lot like the time machine."

"It's not," Morty replied. "Now give me your homework assignment."

"Which one, math, English, sci...?"

"All of them."

She handed a stack of papers to Morty, and he fed them into the slot. *Zhizh-zhizh*, in they went. There was a series of whirrs and clicks inside the machine. They grew louder and louder, the shaking intensified, more clicks, more whirring sounds, more shaking, and just when Annie thought the box might explode, the sounds died down, the shaking stopped, and a little green light

on top of the box illuminated. There was a second or two of silence, then *-DING-* a little bell rang.

Morty rushed to the opposite side of the box. Page by page, the papers slid out of another slot. Morty snatched them and gave half to Annie. "Okay, let's check them out," he said.

They went to his desk, opened a few text books, and started checking the answers. Minutes later, they looked at each other, eyes wide.

"It got every answer right," Annie said, her mouth hanging open in astonishment. "Not one mistake."

"Me, too," said Morty. "Perfect. One hundred percent."

"Y-e-s-s-s-!!!" they both cried out as they high-fived.

The science fair was a few days later. The gym was a beehive of activity as students from all grades prepared their exhibits for judging. There were all kinds of experiments, mechanical contraptions, mini-volcanoes, flying things, crawling things, food made from worms, and other weird stuff. But most of all, there was a buzz of excitement in the air.

As Morty made the final adjustments to his homework machine, a young boy squeezed by him dragging a garden hose that stretched all the way across the gym floor from the utility room.

"Scuse me," he said, dragging the hose across Morty's feet.

"Careful," Morty said. "What're you doing there, anyway?"

"I need water for my exhibit," the boy replied. "It's right here, next to yours. It shows how to make fertilizer from cat poop."

Morty winced. "Y-u-u-c-k. Gross." The little kid shrugged. "No it's not," he said. "It's important." He began filling a bucket with water from the hose. The bucket was about half-full of cat poop.

Just then, there was a loud feedback

screech from the overhead public address system, and a scratchy woman's voice announced, "Students, the big moment has arrived. Please return to your exhibits. The judging is about to commence."

The little cat-poop kid turned to face the voice from the speaker, and as he did so the spray from his hose landed on Morty's cardboard box machine.

Morty was also facing the loudspeaker, so he didn't notice that some water pooled up on top of his project, and he didn't see it seep through a seam in the box. And, of course, he couldn't see inside the box, so he didn't see the water drip onto a wire and slide downward. He didn't see the small droplets gather into one large drop which dangled precariously for a moment, then fell. He didn't see it land on a circuit board causing a *h-i-s-s-s-s-s* and a small puff of smoke.

Nope, he didn't see any of that.

A short time later, three very official-looking judges, all wearing lab coats and carrying clipboards, arrived to examine Morty's project.

"It's a homework machine," he explained. "Just put your assignment in this end..." he told them as he slid a stack of papers into the slot, "...and flip the switch." He flipped it.

The machine came to life.

But something wasn't right. It immediately began shaking wildly. It lurched around the floor like a bucking bronco. It made a strange warbling sound, followed by a loud *POP*, and a cloud of smoke billowed out of the box. All was quiet for about a half-second, then suddenly...

...it exploded into a million pieces.

The explosion occurred just a few feet from the little kid's science project. The blast catapulted his bucket of cat poop skyward, higher and higher, until it almost hit the ceiling. And, as everyone knows, what goes up must come down.

Moments later what came down was an

empty bucket...and a large blob of cat poop.

When the smoke cleared and the dust settled the three judges stood there stunned... and covered with brown slime.

That's how Morty got a month of detention.

And that's what inspired Annie to write her poem.

Back in the classroom, where this whole story started, Annie continued reading...

*His machine had lots of bright lights  
and other incredible sights.  
It used seventy-six gigabytes,  
which was certainly worthy of mention.*

*It had bells and whistles and wheels  
and things made of cardboard and steel.  
The whole thing was very surreal,  
a surprisingly complex creation.*

*But one day the great thing exploded.  
The wires, it seems, were corroded.  
The homework, which Morty had loaded,  
was sent to another dimension.*

*An unfortunate thing had occurred.  
His invention had proved quite absurd.  
The judges were pelted with turd,  
so the teacher gave Morty detention.*

"The End," Annie said, grinning impishly as she stuffed the pages into her backpack. "So, what're you gonna invent next year?"

Morty shrugged. "I dunno. We'll see." Annie chuckled. "I can't wait," she said as she headed for the classroom door.

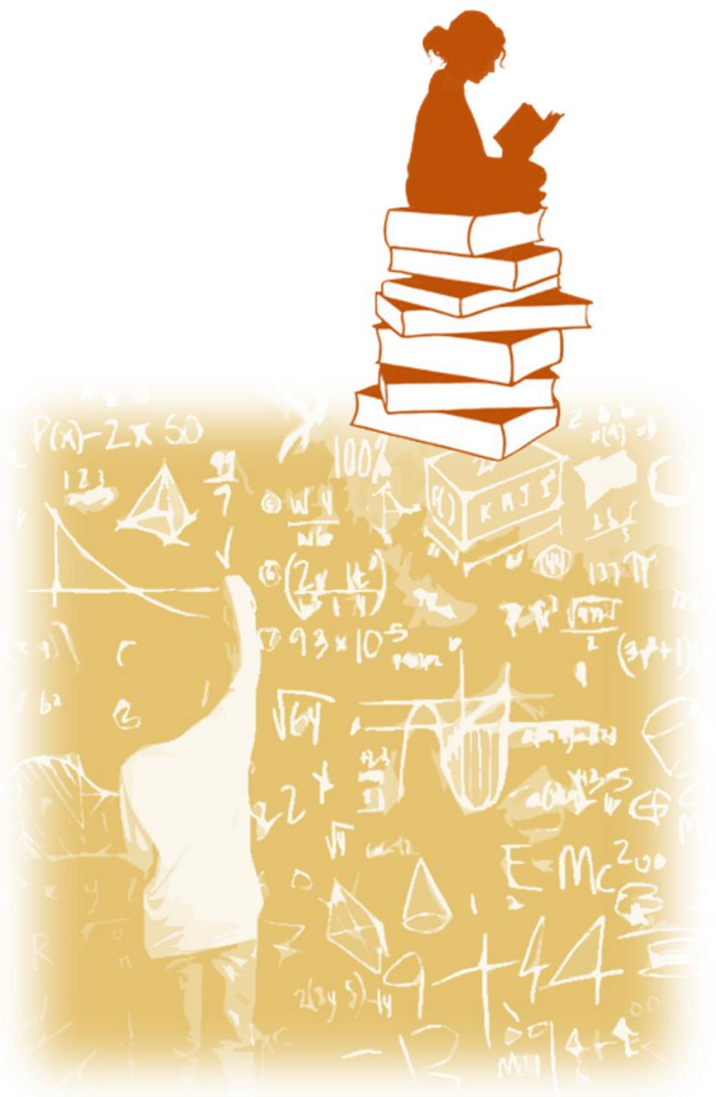
When she was gone, Morty took a break from scribbling on the whiteboard, and he went to his desk in the middle of the room. There was a small black notebook on the desk. He opened it

and thumbed his way through the pages until he reached what he was looking for.

It was a rough sketch of a cardboard box with wheels. And wings. The drawing was labeled: *EIGHTH GRADE SCIENCE PROJECT: FLYING CAR.*

In small letters beneath that it read: *Step 1: Learn to Drive.*

Step 2 was blank.



# Kristy Keller



## No Elbows on the Table

Elbows are people too.  
Well, parts of them.

Heroes heaving your cutlery  
up and down — up and down — up and down,  
shovelling lumps of everything  
from the delicious to the downright disgusting.  
Every...single...day  
without even breaking a sweat.

Why should they sit down below?  
Or worse, dangle aimlessly  
quaking in fear as they swing through the air.

Why must our dear friends remain bereft?  
Elbows have rights too! (And lefts.)

**Kristy Keller** hardly ever stops talking — this is why she took up writing almost eight years ago. When she is not writing, she can be found going on about a range of subjects from politics to pizza to birds of prey to whether or not her cat, Ripley, is truly evil (he is). When she is writing (or reading) she is finally silent and thus, the world can concentrate once more. For goodness' sake, read her poems and give everyone's poor ears a rest!

*Poet*





## Water Games



# Jesús Mérida

---



*Photographer*


# The Big Brother







**Rojos de Pasión**



**Jesús Mérida**, Spanish photographer, is in love with photography for decades. Portraits, and Wedding documentary are his specialization. But he also enjoys landscape. He is also a husband, father, uncle... [[www.jesusmerida.com](http://www.jesusmerida.com)]

# Jasmine Turner

---

*Author*

## Electric Dessert



**T**“That was absolutely delicious,” my cousin, Jameson, said as he wiped a string of cheese from his chin. “Way better than dinner last night. Thanks for shouting.”

“It’s no problem.” I placed my knife and fork next to each other on the pasta plate. “Especially after you paid for the theatre tickets, they were way overpriced.”

We discussed the play we’d watched that evening as we waited for someone to collect our empty plates.

After a short time, the lady who had served us shuffled over to our table.

“All finished?”

“Yeah,” I smiled. “The pasta was delicious.”

“Glad you liked it.” She pulled out a little book from her waist bag. “Now, will you lads be having dessert, or would you like the bill?”

I looked at Jameson, raising an eyebrow to ask if he was still hungry. I wasn’t sure I had the money to pay for dessert, but it would’ve been rude of me to answer for the two of us.

“I’d love a slab of that chocolate sponge,” Jameson said.

“One big ‘ol slab of chocolate sponge

coming up." She scribbled on the paper, then looked at me. "What about you, son?" I tried to think of what would be the cheapest option. Everything in the dessert display looked pretty pricey...

"Umm. A custard tart will be fine, thanks."

"Sure thing!"

Once she'd gone off to serve our sweets, Jameson licked his lips. "Did you see that cake, though? I'm surprised you didn't get a piece."

"I'm not that hungry," I replied. *And my wallet's not that full.*

A moment later two plates were placed down in front of us. That cake did look really good, but my custard tart was equally delicious. I scoffed it down in no time at all.

"That was amazing," I said, scooping a couple crumbs out of the little tray it came in.

Jameson nodded in agreement and started saying, "Best. Cake. Ev—"

"Hey!" We both jumped in our seats when the store owner's voice bellowed throughout the building. "You didn't pay for your meal!" She pushed her way through the tables, knocking over a couple of chairs, and towered over two high school students.

"I don't got the money." One guy folded his arms. "Sorry, but I ain't think it'd cost so much."

"That doesn't mean you can just walk out of here without paying!" She crossed her own arms but looked twice as frightening.

I felt a lump form in my throat. What would she do to me if I couldn't pay?

"Look 'ere, lady." The guy's apparent girlfriend stepped into the scene. "He said

he was sorry."

"And I'm not accepting his apology." The store owner's hands went into her waist bag, but instead of re-emerging with her little book, she pulled out a Taser. My heart thumped in my chest. She had an actual, shock-emitting weapon.

"Geez," Jameson whispered to me, "I bet this gets ugly."

"I hope not."

The other customers shifted in their seats uneasily. A few packed up and left the cafe, making a point of leaving money on the table.

"You can give me the cash now." She held the Taser by her side, a silent threat. "Or you can leave your details and bring it tomorrow."

"You ain't gonna do anything." The girl grabbed her boyfriend by his hand and pulled. "C'mon, let's leave."

They weren't fast enough. The store owner raised her arm and Tasered the guy's shoulder. His body stiffened and he stood frozen for a second as the electricity moved through him.

"Hey!" The girl shouted but her voice was full of fear now. So was I. We'd already eaten our dessert and I was growing ever more certain that I didn't have enough money for it.

"Oh, don't be a sook," the store owner said to the sobbing boy, "it's on the lowest setting. Now leave me your details, then you can go." She waved the Taser in the air. "And make sure you come back tomorrow. With money."

Out came the little book, and the high school kids reluctantly gave her the required information.

"I wonder if she'll call their parents,"

Jameson giggled.

"I hope not," I said. I might have been an adult, but I was still scared by the idea of my dad getting a call saying I'd stolen cake and a tart.

The kids left, and the store owner started wiping their table as if nothing had happened.

"So," she once again came to our table to collect the plates, "which was better? Your main meal or dessert?"

"The cake. Definitely." Jameson handed her our plates, not a crumb left in sight.

"Yeah," I quietly answered, "but the pasta was great too."

"I'm glad." She beamed. "I suppose you'll be wanting the bill now?"

I nodded, feeling myself blush. As she fumbled for her book, I fumbled for my wallet. Opening it, I saw three blue bills. For the pasta, that would've done it, but I didn't think that would cover dessert. When she handed me the bill, I knew it wouldn't.

"Umm," I started, imagining that Taser touching my bare skin, "I'm sorry, but I don't have enough."

She took the three bills I handed her, and stashed them into her waist bag. Her hand lingered inside for a second, and I was certain she was going to pull out that Taser.

"Perhaps I could just come back tomorrow," I pleaded. "I'll bring double what I owe, for the trouble."

"Honey," she laughed, "I'm not a monster." Her hand left the bag, and she held a small tea towel. A tea towel, not the Taser. I exhaled the breath I didn't know I'd been holding, and relaxed.

"Sorry," Jameson said to me. "I didn't think to ask –"

"Boys!" She raised her voice slightly, but not in anger. "These things happen." She slapped the tea towel on the table in front of me. "There's a load of dishes out the back. Wash them and I'll call it quits."

I snatched the tea towel instantly. "Sure," I smiled. "I'd love to."

"You thought I was going to Taser you, didn't ya?" She winked.

I blushed. "Yeah, I sort of did."

"Those kids were going to walk right out of here without paying," the store owner explained. "They were thieves. But you," she pointed a finger at me, "you owned up, and I appreciate that. I would never Taser an honest lad."

"Sorry for assuming –" I began, but she cut me off.

"Forget it, son. In fact..." Her smiling eyes flicked between Jameson and I. "If the two of you stay behind and help me clean up, I'll send you home with a couple more slices of that chocolate sponge."



**Jasmine Turner** is a young writer from South Australia. Having loved books since childhood, she has collected more novels than could possibly be read in a lifetime. Hoping to put this obsession to good use, she is currently studying librarianship. In her free time, Jasmine imagines herself in faraway places and translates her adventures into short stories.



## Forgetting

foaming licks  
of salty ocean water  
crawl up the gritty shores,  
leaving pebbles caught  
in the cracks of my palm.

but it won't be long  
before they tumble,  
for even a clenching,  
white-knuckled grasp  
will slowly start  
to  
slip.

## Emily Lu

**Emily Lu** is a 14-year-old student who often finds herself stalling on other schoolwork just so she can have more time to write. She enjoys many types of writing – short stories, poetry, and even research papers. In addition, she is an avid dancer and photographer.

*Poet*

## I Hung My Poem in a Tree

I hung my poem in a tree &  
 bent my head under  
 the gloomy sky a noise like  
 swarming dreams  
 a rush of bees –  
 bones are alive & loud who knows  
 the price of being or  
 the price of death I don't have wings  
 but I can fly with all the leaves  
 the birds the clouds  
 I speak your language god  
 & you speak mine  
 stay tuned there is much more to come  
 : come closer eye  
 you river  
 of light



Stella Vinitchi  
 Radulescu

*Poet*

**Stella Vinitchi Radulescu**, Ph.D. in French Language & Literature, is the author of several collections of poetry published in the United States, Romania and France. She writes poetry in English, French and Romanian and her poems have appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Pleiades*, *Louisville Review*, *Ginosko*, *Laurel Review*, *Rhino*, *Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Seneca Review* among others, as well as in a variety of literary magazines in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Romania. Her last collection of poetry “I scrape the window of nothingness – new & selected poems” was released in 2015 from *Orison Books Press*. At the present she lives in Chicago.

# Cave Cricket's Lament

I am all legs  
and antennae –  
no wings.

My camel-hump  
comes only  
in shades of brown.

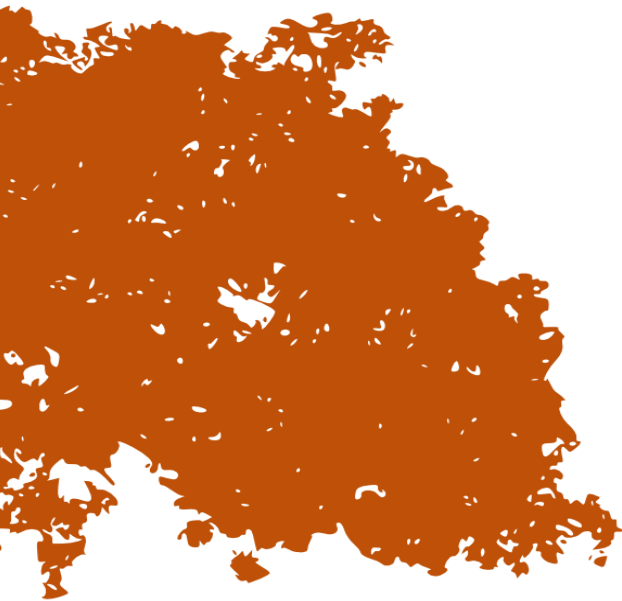
Each night  
I leave the cave  
to sing, to hunt.

When I forage  
in a pile of leaves,  
I savor the muck.

I know  
my purpose  
on this earth –

I'm here  
to feed the ones  
who can't leave the cave.

I'm here to give them  
a taste of a world  
they will never see.



# Irene Latham

Poet

**Irene Latham** is the author of more than a dozen current and forthcoming poetry, fiction and picture books for children and adults, including *Leaving Gee's Bend*, 2011 ALLA Children's Book of the Year. Winner of the 2016 ILA Lee Bennett Hopkins Promising Poet Award, she also serves as poetry editor for *Birmingham Arts Journal*. [irenelatham.com]

# Donna Wiscombe *Artist*



Luna Roja

**Donna Wiscombe** is a Digital Media teacher based in the West Country UK. She enjoys recreating traditional painterly styles through digital mediums. Her narratives often include female protagonists in surreal environments. Her degree in animation informs her illustration, adding a sense of motion to the stillness.

# Cynthia Grady

*Poet*

## Time is Slower Here

Fog hovers low, waiting,  
then dissolves into pink-morning-day.

Mountains stand near, breathing,  
while tree limbs bend and sway.

Sand along the pier lies listening,  
as the sea foam dances with light.

Stardust appears, blinking,  
and the moon hangs clear in the night.



**Cynthia Grady** grew up on the foggy beaches of Northern California. She now lives with her partner and two house rabbits in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for children. [[www.cynthiagrady.com](http://www.cynthiagrady.com)]

# Legend

Stephanie M. Bucklin

*Author*



I never knew I could be so afraid of something that didn't exist.

It wasn't like I believed it was real. Not really, not in the logical part of my mind at least. But as the boat rocked back and forth, moonlight glinting off the oily black waves, distant splashing triggering a set of tremors throughout my body, I thought to myself, What if I had been wrong?

"Here she comes," Renee said, rushing to the side of the boat. She gripped the side with her fingers and shot an expectant smile my way.

"Renee," I said, "are you sure it isn't dangerous?"

"I thought you didn't believe in her," Renee teased. Another splash, nearer this time.

"I don't, but —"

That's when the boat tipped over.

I wish I could say that Renee chose me, three days ago, as her partner-in-crime due to my well-known bravery and famous monster-fighting abilities.

But she didn't. She chose me because I had access to a boat.

A rowboat, to be specific. Courtesy of my father, who let me take it out on weekends sometimes in hopes the activity would somehow make me like the lakefront house that he had just moved into with Carla.

"It was Carla's idea to get it," he would say.

"Maybe we can all go out together sometime."

"Yeah. Maybe."

"Monsters," she said, at the library after school that day. She slid a picture over to me, and

I scowled. "In that lake, by your dad's new place."

"Uh-huh."

"Read it!"

"I'm good, thanks." I slid the paper back over to her, blushing. At that point, I was sure it was a prank — girls like Renee didn't talk to boys like me. Renee was a three-letter varsity athlete, straight-A student, and two-time homecoming queen. One of her older brothers played pro football.

"What kind of monster?" I asked, as she gathered her papers and rose. I don't even know why I asked — I was still suspicious of her, and it showed in my voice. But Renee Johnson was talking to me.

Renee smiled, and sat back down.

Mermaids. Can you believe it? The girliest, most whimsical magic creature you could imagine. I had a hard time keeping a straight face as Renee explained it to me: the lake had once been connected to the ocean. That's why it was saltwater.

And also, apparently, why there was a mermaid trapped in it.

And mermaids, Renee explained, whispering to me in the library that I spent most of my time in, could *grant wishes*. One to each person who summoned them.

"I've never heard of that," I said. "Don't they just fall in love with human men and sing pretty songs?"

"You worried she might like you?" Renee teased. I blushed, and started sputtering that no, of course I didn't think that, I was just referencing — "Relax," Renee said, giggling. "I was just kidding. These aren't your Disney mermaids." She slid the picture back over, and this time I looked down at it.

"That's not a mermaid."

"Oh, yes it is."

The creature on the page was hand-drawn in black ink. My first thought was that (after "that's not a mermaid") my mother would hire the person on the spot in her shop — "It's hard finding good artists these days," she would always say. And once, "Does Carla have any tattoos?"

"No, Mom."

"Hmph. Didn't think so."

My second thought was that the thing was *not right*. Sure, in the vaguest sense it might be a mermaid — there was a human head, and Medusa-like hair, and dark onyx eyes, and then a long scaled black tail that ended in some sort of spear. But the limbs were too long, the tail too big, the expression too wild. Even the face looked vaguely fishy, bulging at the cheeks, too flat near the eyes.

"Yeah, sure," I said finally. I was still affecting an unconcerned manner, waiting for Renee to say "gotcha!" Once, my friend Ryan had spent three days telling me he was dying from the growth of a third lung. When I finally believed him, and wrote a sympathy card, he paraded it proudly around the school for weeks. "Gullible Grant," he said once. It stuck for months.

"So what do you want to wish for?" I asked.

"I'm not telling you."

I shrugged. "I'll help you if you tell me," I said. This was it. If she said something ridiculous, I would know I was being set up.

But instead, Renee's face darkened. She folded the drawing up and placed it back inside her purse. "Meet me Thursday at the lake," she said. "With the rowboat. I'll tell you then."

"You want to go out Thursday?"

"There's supposed to be a storm," Renee said. "They're easier to summon in storms."

I knew it was crazy. Twice I called my dad to ask to



come over, and twice I hung up on the first ring. I still couldn't shake my fear that this was some elaborate prank. But then I would remember Renee's expression, the pure earnestness with which she had handed me the drawing.

Finally, I tried again. Carla answered on the third ring.

"Grant?" she said. "How are you! Your father and I were just talking about you."

"Ha," I said. "Listen — can I stay over Thursday?"

"Of course you can. Is everything alright?"

"It's fine." I'd already decided not to mention the boat, knowing how bad the weather looked. I'd just slip out after dark.

(And if you know one thing about boats, it's that you never, never take them out after dark. Another reason not to mention it.)

"Mom is pulling a long shift at the parlor," I lied. "So I thought I'd just hang out there. Get to bed early."

"Of course," Carla said. She sounded excited. "Of course, Grant. Stay as long as you like."

"Just one night."

"Yes! Sorry. I didn't mean — we're looking forward to having you."

We said good-bye and hung up. I wondered when Carla would get that no matter how nice she was, she'd never make me forget what she did to my mom. To my family.

It was almost too easy. I had dinner with my dad and Carla, making small talk about school and computer coding. Dad made bad jokes about "the next Steve Jobs" and "the future Mark Zuckerberg," and then grew sour when I pointed out that neither finished college, so that might be the best path to success.

"Education," he said gruffly. "Can't get

anywhere without education."

"Like Mom, huh?"

"You know that's not what I meant."

But I made up, and pretended to go to sleep, and by 10pm I was out the door in my windbreaker and a pair of sweatpants, headed for the edge of the lake. The boat was right where it was supposed to be, and then there was Renee, arms wrapped around her, an excited grin on her face.

"I hope you're ready for this," she said, laughing as the rain began to fall.

"Right into the middle of the lake," Renee said.

"Then we'll call her."

"Just like, hey, mermaid, can we have a wish?"

Renee laughed. "No. We whistle. I'll do it, don't worry."

"How did you find out about all this stuff anyway?" I said, as I handed the oars over to Renee. We had agreed to 20 strokes each before trading, but since Renee was facing forward and I was facing back, it was harder for her to row. I had started upping my strokes to 25, then 30, just to get us there faster.

And maybe in some misguided attempt at chivalry. I don't know.

"My brother has a friend who's way into this stuff."

"The pro football player?"

"Huh? No. My other brother Sam. He's a chemical engineer."

Of course he is. "And he's into monsters?"

"Well, no. His girlfriend is. Astrology and monsters and all that stuff. There's a lot of things that we can't explain, you know."

Like why I'm in a rowboat with Renee Johnson at 11pm on a Thursday, I thought.

"Hey, Grant?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

I blushed, for the first time grateful for the darkness.

She never did tell me her wish. I remembered only as I plunged into the water, the icy coldness striking me like a hammer. And then I was tumbling down, down, down, saltwater flooding my nose, and all I could think was that if it had been day, at least I could have swum towards the light.

Fingers curled around my wrist. And then I was being dragged through the water, up to the surface, where I broke through, sputtering. "Renee!" I tried to call, but I couldn't see anything, not even the rowboat. My clothes were too heavy, and I felt myself being dragged down again.

The fingers pulled me again. I bobbed above and below the surface, spitting out as much saltwater as I swallowed. Lightning flashed overhead. Somewhere, I thought I heard the piercing sound of Renee's whistle.

And then, quite suddenly, I was deposited on a bank.

"Renee?" I said, as a dark figure loomed before me, still bobbing in the water.

"No." The voice was high, the ringing of a bell. And even in the roar of the wind, I thought I could detect amusement in it. "I think you came for me."

A flash of lightning illuminated her. She was both more beautiful and terrible than Renee's drawing — black, flat eyes with hardly any irises, wild hair, skin that gleamed metallic in the flash of light. "Wish?"

"Wish?" I sputtered. Of course I had thought of something. Even if I had said it to myself as a half-joke, never thinking we'd find her, not really. A wish that Carla would go away, and my family would come back together, and every-

thing would go back to normal.

"Renee," I said. "Is she okay?"

"Is that your wish?"

I glanced behind her at the lake, wind whipping the top of it into a fury of waves. "Yes," I said hoarsely. "Save her."

The mermaid smiled and pointed behind me. When I looked, I heard a splash, and she was gone.

Renee was sitting on the bank, shivering. "She tricked us," Renee said. "That was my wish, too. For her to save you."

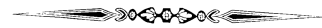
Carla picked us up the next morning, using her motorboat. She didn't even yell at us, or ask questions. I think she assumed something kind of embarrassing.

Renee's parents lost their house a few weeks later. It was a big deal, because they used to have all kinds of money.

And my dad didn't leave Carla and go back to my mom, either. But that's okay. I don't think magic can fix real problems.

Don't get me wrong. When Renee showed up in the library a few weeks later, and slid over a new picture to me, I looked up at her and grinned. "What does this one do?" I asked.

"Wait and see."



**Stephanie M. Bucklin** is a full-time freelance writer who has written for publications including *MUSE*, *NY Mag*, and *TODAY.com*. She also has a middle-grade book published under a pen name (JACK DEATH, *Creston Books*), with a sequel expected in 2018.

## The Lone Beach Ball

A cool summer breeze  
Envelops over the land,  
While the cool, salty sea  
Washes over the sands.

And next to the beach,  
Where the rocks are quite tall,  
Sits a dirty, forgotten,  
Worn-out beach ball.

Once as blue as the sky,  
And as red as a crab,  
This beach ball is waste  
That none would dare grab.

Sad and deflated,  
Never again will it play.  
It lies there until  
The sea takes it away.

**Coltrane “Cole” Varela** is a junior at The Field School in Washington, D.C. where he plays basketball and ultimate Frisbee. He was named for John Coltrane, his father’s favourite jazz musician. In his spare time, Cole volunteers as a buddy for an organization that serves as a respite for families with children with intellectual disabilities. He enjoys hiking, playing chess online, and reading and writing poetry.

Poet



## Swing Set

A solemn old swing set has none to ride with him.  
Yet he swings to his unique, people-less rhythm.



---

Coltrane Varela

# Song of the Whippoorwill

It was late one morning and long past breakfast when Lindy rolled out of bed. She got dressed and put on her coat for a stroll down Parkway Avenue.

The sky was drab.

The rain drizzled pellets.

The sun had disappeared.

Lindy wasn't sure if it was a song or a whippoorwill.

This is what she heard:

"Whippoorwill...

for a place of chummy friends and lemon tea.

Whippoorwill...

for a hope of finding one to stand by me."

Lindy pulled her collar up as she felt a shiver.

From the opposite direction came a gentleman with a top hat. He said, "Turn left at the fourth light and you will find a house of hope."

Hope.

The word warmed Lindy inside and out. She stood where she was and watched the crowd swallow the man.

Lindy wasn't sure if it was a song or a whippoorwill.

This is what she heard:

"Grandmamma...

For the dreams of bunny hugs and snuggle fits.

Grandmamma...

To a place where no one dares to call it quits."

At the fourth light was a tall brick building. Lindy opened the door and stepped inside...

to bedlam.

So many girls were shouting.

"Yippee yay...

To a place with twinkle toys and candy cane.

Yippee yay...

To a place where I can ride a bullet train."

On the other side of the room a girl with blond curly hair sat in a giant rocking chair.

**Joy Moore** is an active member of SCBWI, a graduate of The Institute of Children's Literature, Lyrical Language Lab and Making Picture Book Magic. Her publishing credits include: "Pink Riding Hood and the Warty Stick Monster" with *Bumples magazine*. "Wiggle-Wiggle, Scratch- Scratch, Itch-Itch-Itch" with *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*. "King of the Jungle" with *Kids Short Stories*.

She wasn't shouting.  
Or yelling.  
Out of her pink lips came a whisper.  
"Grandmamma...

is a wait for clever games and ruby rings.

Grandmamma...  
is a hope for wacky fun and silly things."

Lindy peered into the blond girl's eyes and saw something. She had seen that something, many times before.

In the mirror.

It was late afternoon and way past lunch when Lindy and the girl left the house of hope.

The sun was high.  
The breeze tickled their noses.  
Clouds tumbled across the sky.  
They weren't sure if it was a song or a whippoorwill.  
This is what they heard:  
"Whippoorwill...

To a place where tender hurts can truly mend.

Whippoorwill...

To a land where sweetie things will never end."

Hand in hand Lindy and the girl paused at the stoop and took a deep long breath of hope.

It was late one lifetime and many moons had passed, the blond girl was now a woman.

Together Lindy and the golden-haired woman rocked on a wraparound porch.

The sky was bright.  
The breeze was toasty.  
Song and bird howled an operatic strain.  
This is what they heard:  
"Whippoorwill...

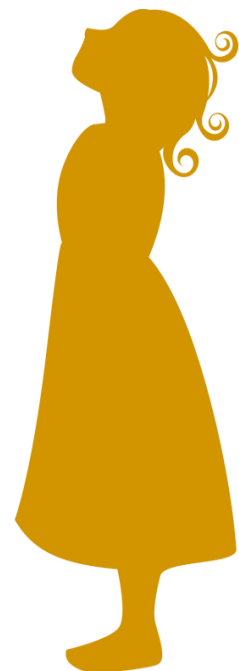
To a kind of kinship and lifetime of the heart

Fly away...

To a love for keeping that'll never ever part."

# Joy Moore

Poet





# Michael C. Paul



## Insomnia

Artist



## Kite

**Michael C. Paul** is an illustrator living in Virginia in the United States. He grew up in the Midwest and studied history. [[mcpaul1998.wixsite.com/mcpaul](http://mcpaul1998.wixsite.com/mcpaul)]

## A Metaphor for the Suspension of Disbelief

By plants upriver, three men saw three animals — their favorites.

The first man saw a dove. A twig in its beak, it flew to him and he was transformed into another dove.

The second man saw a stallion. Touching the ground in full gallop, the stallion transformed him into a stallion.

The last man thought he saw a unicorn in front of him, but he knew there was no such thing or at least he didn't want to admit this is what he saw. He forced himself not to believe in this creature. He ran away, hoping the creature would not re-enter his mind.

After that, no one knows what happened.

Only that the dove and stallion were hallucinations — the unicorn wasn't. The first man never became a dove. He just believed he had. The second man never became a stallion. He just believed he had. As for the third man, he was never seen again — although some say they have seen a unicorn begging to become the species he once had been.

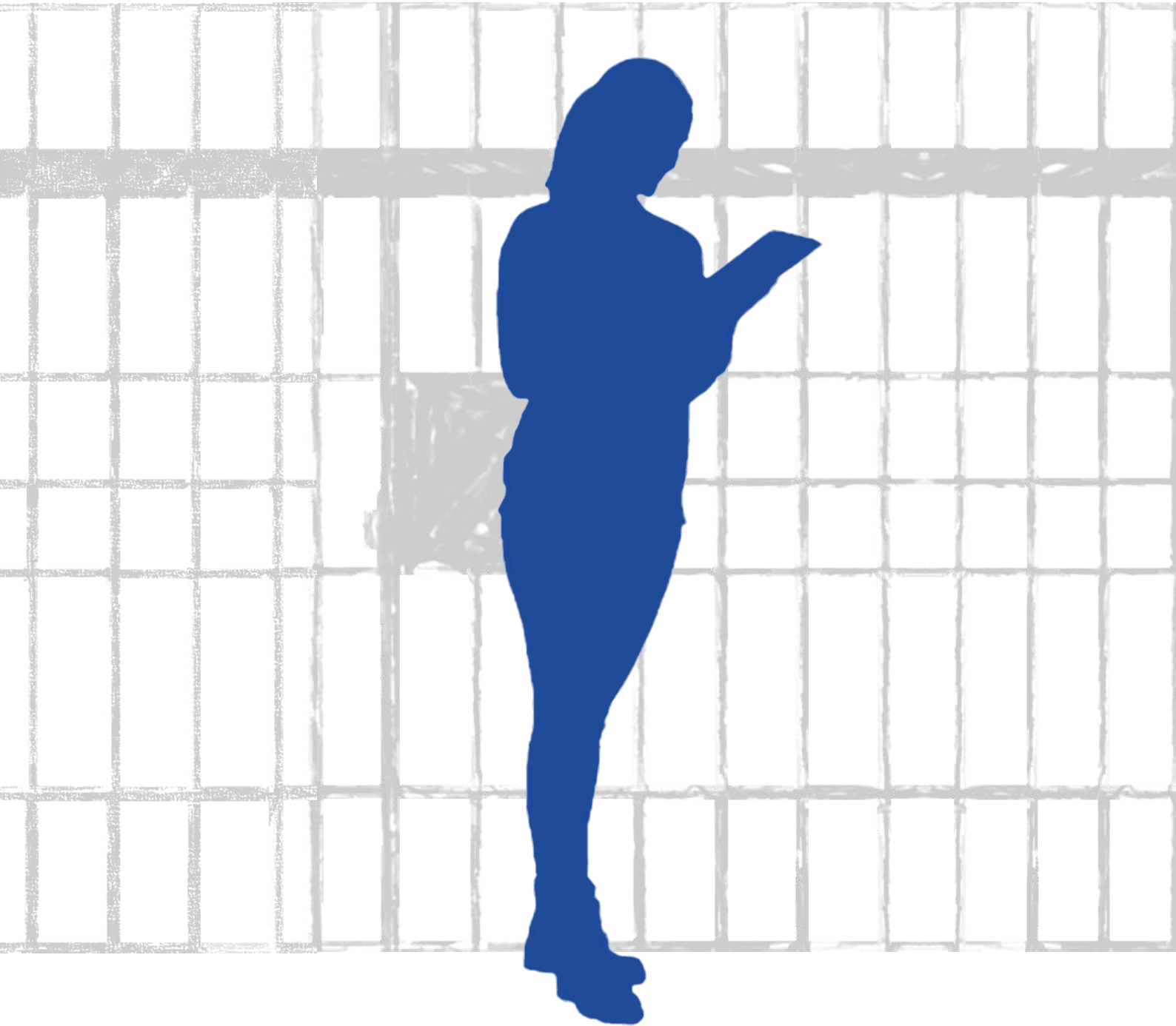
## Rainer Pasca

Poet

**Rainer Pasca**, 11 1/2, lives on the south shore of Long Island with his parents and little brother Atticus. He enjoys putting on shows and concerts, rapping new songs and writing poems. Rainer has been to 31 states and 11 countries and has been published in *The Louisville Review* (Issue #70), *Stone Soup*, *Skipping Stones* and in a holiday anthology, *Holiday Word Gifts* by J B Stillwater. Rainer also appeared numerous times as a "Presidential Expert" on the "Ellen Show". He is now in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He is currently at work on a homemade movie entitled "Livingston & Joe", starring himself and his friend, Jackson Mendolia.



# Prisoner



Jaylen Moulton

*Author*

Tension ran through the class as I finished my speech. The feeling was there while I presented, but the mood change did not faze me. I was aware my words would summon an uncomfortable reaction. My words were not inflammatory, but the way my peers were raised made them think otherwise.

After every presentation prior to mine, the students had given polite applause. Strong pieces, dull pieces, they were all given applause. However, when the last word left my lips and I looked ahead, I was greeted by stone cold silence. I slowly glanced over at my teacher, an easily offended woman, who preached daily during our 50 minute class the dangers of having certain opinions. I had written the speech in rebellion, knowing she wouldn't be fond of the "certain opinion" I held. My outspokenness stunned her. I was the quiet, shy girl. Who was I to have an opinion that the majority did not agree with? If I hadn't already committed social suicide, my speech must have done it for me today.

Standing in place, waiting for my teacher to tell me to go back to my seat, I gulped, worried I'd be sent out to the principal, but as the thought crossed my mind I heard a sharp slam come from her desk. She had purposely slammed her book down catching everyone's attention. The tension was now mingling with fear as my hands trembled holding the paper I had just read off. As if she was getting sick of seeing the wobbly paper, she called out, "Bring me the paper...RIGHT NOW!" Yelling? I didn't even think she was capable of such a thing.

I anxiously gave her the paper, hands no longer trembling, but almost mechanic as if I were disassociating myself from my own body in an attempt to leave the nerve-wracking situation. She coldly glared at me, and if looks could kill, I'd be as dead as I already felt inside. Rolling back on her chair, she stood up and walked past me, slightly shoving me but slyly so as no one would notice.

At that moment, the tinny taps of her high heels made my ears bleed, I had never been so afraid and irritated at the same time.

For a moment, she was only looking at her students, searching for something that wasn't there. Eventually, after five awkward minutes of simply staring into the distance, she must have found something, because she cleared her throat and started rereading my speech, emphasizing words in ways I hadn't intended and mockingly copying my voice as if to delegitimize the content of my piece. What did she have in store for me? Maybe the principal's office wouldn't have been so bad.

Smugly, she giggled when finishing my speech, and I no longer felt left out, because my classmates hadn't clapped for her either. She now walked past me again, but I moved as I heard the tinny taps approach me. I was not going to allow her to push me to the side as if that were appropriate. However, my new placement didn't exclude me from her newest plan to humiliate me in front of the class. Quickly, she ripped my speech in half. Shocked, I did nothing. Internally, I was screaming, it was the only copy of the speech I had. Handwritten, not typed. I almost wanted to yell at her, my emotions running wild, yet holding themselves at peace. Ripping sounds once again entered my mind. Once wasn't enough, but apparently ten times was plenty! Each tear made my body ache as if I were the one ripped apart, yearning to be stitched back together. Did she get satisfaction out of ripping my opinions? Symbolism at its finest. She opened her crooked mouth ready to scold me and make me more than merely the laughingstock at school. Surprisingly, out of my state of shock, I powerfully and swiftly walked to the front of the classroom, taking my spot as I had before.

"Hey, now..." she started, but I disregarded her. My mind didn't process her as my teacher,

but now as someone who fostered destruction of creativity in favor of her ideals.

Mindlessly, I began to talk. My palms were sweaty, but at least I wasn't shaking. "This woman, our teacher — OUR SUPPOSED ROLE MODEL AND CONFIDANT — just obliterated my opinion into pieces...LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY!" My teacher now looked as afraid as I felt, but soon the fear left her face and she walked up and the tinny taps started again as she led herself to her phone. I heard the anxiety-ridden dial tone and it was the catalyst I needed to do another full-blown speech. The spontaneity of the moment was apprehensive, yet paved the path to let me say everything I'd ever wanted.

My classmates were at the edge of their seats now, never having experienced revolution against the brainwashing tactics of the teacher they all held on the highest of pedestals. Engines running in their minds, the intellectual onslaught of questions befell on their pseudo-savior as she

tried to concentrate on the phone call she was making to request I be taken out of her classroom. I found immense pleasure in the sudden rebellion against our teacher who tried to make us a part of the mind controlled masses. Minds liberated, questions abundant, I was like a seed that paved the way for a forest of thought. The rusty jail cell of boxed opinions hadn't been opened by the corrupt warden, but by the wayward prisoner.

Awaiting the perfect opportunity to speak one last time, I was denied the chance to openly share my opinions. The warden demanded my placement in solitary confinement where my so-called inflammatory perspectives would never be heard. Escorted to the principal's office, looking back at my peers who were still causing a ruckus, I shed a tear knowing in minutes they would be sheltered in a bubble-wrapped mindset. Their voices, like mine, were never to be heard again.



**Jaylen Moulton** is a 12<sup>th</sup> grader (17 years old) attending Hawthorne Math & Science Academy. She is currently the Co-Editor in Chief of her school's newspaper and previously wrote for the A & E and Opinion Editorial sections. She has also been published recently in the Austin International Poetry Festival's *2017 di-vêrsé-city Youth Anthology*. [[aviatornews.org/staff/?writer=Jaylen%20Moulton](http://aviatornews.org/staff/?writer=Jaylen%20Moulton)].

## Wild

Once upon a time, not far away,  
There lived a prancing, dancing fay.  
She danced with wind and tree and flower,  
And sunbeams gold in green wood bower.

Then a king came hunting with his dogs and men  
They came upon the faery in green forest glen  
Their hearts all burned for so fair a thing  
But she found herself lost in the eyes of the king.

Come, he said, for I cannot stay  
And on your head a crown I'll lay  
She belonged in the wild with its wild wood scent  
But because she loved him, to the palace she went.

The palace was vast and gilt with gold  
By the window she'd daily sit and behold  
The sunlight gold, that played with her once,  
But now whose light the faery shuns.

No, said the fay, and turned away;  
I am now a queen, and crowned, I'll stay;  
I once ran wild as the wind, unowned  
But now for love, I'll stay enthroned.

Then the king grew jealous, for so fair was she  
That whoever saw her, in love would be;  
One day, perhaps, one greater than he  
Would sweep down in glory, and set her free.

# Celine Low

*Poet & Artist*



So he made her a cage, all gilt with gold  
 She was loathe to enter, but her heart was sold  
 She'd danced with the rainbows beneath branches bent  
 But because she loved him, in the cage she went.

Soon she was dying but she did not know  
 She stood by the bars and she felt the winds blow  
 They had danced with her, now they stroked her face  
 And called her to a better place.

She longed to be free, but no, said she  
 A queen I am now and a queen I'll be  
 I once danced free, she said with a tear  
 But now for love I'll remain here.

Then one day a wild wind blew  
 A trail of fire across skies of blue.  
 From the sun it came, blazing red with rage;  
 It blew from the heavens and it struck the cage!

The faery knew then that she had to flee.  
 She looked and saw that in a step she'd be free;  
 The doors to the wild were always ajar —  
 A slight of hand — she shattered a bar —

Goodbye my king, though my heart does break  
 To have to leave you, she tearfully spake;  
 For love I picked up and kept on the crown,  
 But now for love I lay it down.

The winds swirled and twirled, she breathed in their scent;  
 Because she loved him, to the wilds she went.  
 She knew the king, too, had to be free  
 From the cages of gold that he could not see.

The winds bore her up as her wings spread wide.  
 The sun warmed her heart, and she smiled and sighed.  
 In the wild wood again, now here to stay,  
 There laughed a prancing, dancing fay.

And, after a time, the king, too, came;  
 Leaving his crown, his royal name  
 Now hear the music of laughter soar  
 Above the trees, where they dance and pour  
 Their brimming joy through the open door.

Step, if you dare, child, through that door  
 And dance with them on green forest floor  
 The wild wood, remember, is just one step away  
 Look, through the door, a true gold ray!

---

**Celine Low** graduated from the National University of Singapore with Honours in English Literature, and currently tutors children in English and Creative Writing. Her novelette "White Bone" has been published by *The Bride of Chaos* in the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of *9tales from Elsewhere*, and her illustrated children's book, "A Planet in Trouble," was published by *Marshall Cavendish* in 2007. This illustrated poem, "Wild," won the second place in the 2014 *Eye Level children's literature competition*.





# Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal



*"Reading BLJ Issue 6 is like going on a journey through the teenage brain. The ride got kicked off by a cover boy who seemed to be saying, 'What should I expect?' There are so many contrary scenes jumping from the monotonous daddy-son talk to the amazing wonderful self-contemplation. The scenes change from the wild and dynamic sea to the poetic tree, then to the liberated swing. All these are true reflections of a teenager's mind...This issue is perhaps the 'youngest' in themes among all previous ones! Love it!"*

– Ms Lancy TAM Suk-yin, Principal, Law Ting Pong Secondary School, Hong Kong

*"Once again BLJ has done the unthinkable and improved on its previous version. Take your time and savour every single word, text and image contained in this literary gift. Immerse yourself in them and let them inspire you. And then when you're fully inspired, go and share them with your friends, family, students and teachers."*

NOT FOR SALE

– Dr Gary HARFITT, Associate Professor, The University of Hong Kong