

The background of the cover is a colorful, abstract painting of a city street. It features multi-story buildings with various colored windows and facades in shades of yellow, orange, red, and blue. Several cars are parked or driving on the street, rendered in similar abstract, painterly styles. A rainbow is visible in the lower center of the image. The overall style is expressive and modern.

Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue
Three

Mar 2016

Alex Hill • Allen Forrest • Aubrey Bjork • Daniel Galef • Daria V. Diachkova • Garin Ashby •
Helen Hu • J. D. Smith • John Foster • Jung Kim • Katie Gustin • Laura Sweeney • Min Jin Song •
Rachel Anne • Ricci Fong • Seth Ruderman • Sonya N. Groves • Susanna Lancaster •
Virginia Boudreau •

“I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.”

– *Anne Frank (1929-1945)*

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

www.balloons-lit-journal.com

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

editorblj@yahoo.com

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* Back cover art adapted from this work

** Cover art adapted from this work



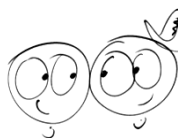
Words from Editor-in-Chief

This felt like writing an award acceptance speech when I composed this introduction to BLJ's third issue. Surely it has been a blessing that this humble Hong Kong-based journal receives so many brilliant pieces from all over the world. This issue especially displays great craftsmanship from a very wide range of places including UK, Hong Kong, Canada, US, South Korea and Russia. These memorable entries from the 19 outstanding contributors fill the pages with fire, ingenuity and inspiration. How could I not feel grateful and honoured to be able to present their work to our global readers?

Not so long ago, BLJ celebrated its first anniversary and I invited readers to submit words of reflections and encouragements for this magazine. Some of these words collected exactly hit the core value of our endeavour – to present child-friendly works without talking down to children. This may sound unrealistic to some but my experience as a primary school teacher for over a decade tells me that our younger generation possesses incredible potential in language arts should you be willing to unleash it. Therefore, BLJ has always been proud of collecting the best composed works of sophistication from poets, writers and artists aiming at touching the hearts of the young.

It is inappropriate for me to indicate any favouritism here but I must say that, again, among all these chosen works which I admire a lot, I am particularly moved seeing entries from veteran poets/writers such as John Foster (again with important messages), and artists such as Allen Forrest (with a China Town painted in a style so remarkably resembling Van Gogh's), and also from students such as the two South Korean artists Jung Kim and Min Jin Sung (highly skillful with symbolic visual) and Daria V. Diachkova (whose work brings me into an impressionistic zone of magical realism).

I often wonder, and am often asked, when I should contribute my own creative work in an issue of BLJ. But having received such an extremely high level of body of work for Issue Three, I am happy to say that, still, there is no room for me this round except this introduction, and I am happy enough being an honoured fan, presenter, and promoter.



Ho Cheung LEE, EdD

Foreword

I was puzzled when I was given the draft of this 3rd edition of “BALLOONS”. The cover is so earthy; the paintings are so impressionistic. Where are the dreamy balloons? Once I started reading the poems, the prose and the short stories, I realized that the balloons were all hidden in a giant earthy “wonderland”. Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!

*When you thought you entered the “REALITY” kingdom to “eat your breakfast”,
you actually fell into the FANTASY LAND of “marmalade”!*

*When you thought you entered Mrs. Miller’s “HOMEROOM”,
you were thrown into “Mum’s murmur cart” on the ROLLER COASTER!*

*Up above the sky, you see people standing on the “cliff edge”,
pondering on “what they want”, “lifting their hands”, and asking for “no referees”.*

*A sharp plunge would bring you down to the “sound of the sea”,
the scallops “beneath the surface”, the “singing of the cows”, “the moon and the butterfly”,
the “feeding of a flower”, and land you on the vase of “dandelion and roses”!*

*Shortly again you find yourself flying past the “door”, the “multi-road” with Gina,
the pote, Emily from the snow and the invisible lover that “does not exist”.*

Gosh! This version is full of immense agility! The alliteration in “Sun-Moon Diamante” made the whole poem so dynamic. On the contrary, the shape of Ballerina added a dangling delight to the whole book. Besides, there is so much depth in between the lines, moral behind humours and greatness in simple context...

On the one hand I adore the energy and dedication of Dr. Lee who made such a big effort to put the journal together for the read of the young generation; on the other I appeal to all teachers, particularly local teachers in Hong Kong, who should spare no efforts in cultivating the reading culture among their students and nurture more creativity in language education.

Let’s take a balloon and soar into the world of imagination and make yourself invisible in the fantasy land of literature!

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



The Cliff Edge

Step back! Step back!
Before it's too late.
The cliff edge is crumbling
It won't bear the weight

Of the things that we make
That we don't really need,
Of all of our selfishness,
All of our greed.

Stop now! Stop now!
Stop the fracking and drilling.
Stop the mining and digging.
It's the future we're killing

By spoiling the land
And poisoning the air
With gases that
Destroy the ozone layer.

Step back! Step back!
Don't hesitate.
The cliff edge is crumbling.
It'll soon be too late!



John Foster was born in 1941 and grew up in a village outside Carlisle called Scotby. After university, he became a teacher and taught English for twenty years in schools in Oxfordshire, before becoming a full-time writer. He has compiled over 150 poetry anthologies and written twelve books of his own poetry. Today, he lives in an Oxfordshire village with his wife Chris. He has two grown-up sons, Ian and Simon and two grandchildren, Evie and Louis. More information about him is available at www.johnfosterchildrenspoet.co.uk.

All that they want is to live in peace.
All that they want is to be free.
All that they want is to find a country
Where they can live like you and like me.

All that they wanted was a future
Across the sea in another land.
All that they wanted was a safe passage.
All that they needed was a helping hand.

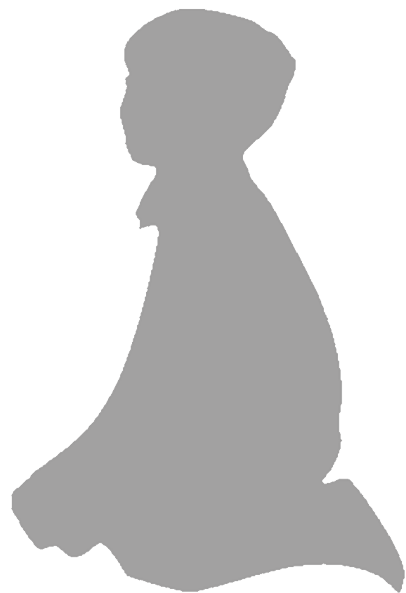
But all that the others wanted was money.
They said it was safe but they lied.
They didn't care about the people.
They didn't care if they lived or died.

All that he wanted was somewhere for his children
Where they could grow up safe and free.
But what a terrible price he paid
When the boat capsized and they drowned in the sea.

All that the others wanted was money.
They didn't care about the lives that were lost
As they counted the notes with blood on their hands,
The grieving father counted the cost.

All that they want is to live in peace,
In freedom and in harmony.
All that they want is to find a country
Where they can live like you and like me.

All That They Want



Poet

John Foster





The Moon and the Butterfly

Artist

Ricci Fong

Ricci Fong spent her teenage years in Singapore before studying at the University of Hong Kong where she earned her B.A., M.Ed. and Ph.D. She is now an Assistant Professor at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Beyond research, she is a foodie with a sweet tooth. She also enjoys painting and reading stories and poetry that offer different layers of meaning to readers of different ages. Children's picture books have recently given her a treasure trove of inspiration and a new aspiration to publish a picture book collection for children's well-being. This is a long-term dream.

Virginia Boudreau hails from a sea side community on the south western tip of Nova Scotia, Canada. She is an itinerant Learning Disabilities Specialist with her local school board who continues to be inspired and enlightened by the amazing creativity of her students. Her poetry has appeared in a wide variety of North American literary journals and anthologies.



Sun-Moon Diamante

Sun
 Sweet, Swelling
 Smiling, Stretching, Spreading ,
 Surrounding, Scorching, Scalding, Sweating
 Shimmering, Shrinking, Setting * Shading, Shadowing, Silvering
 Secretive, Sombre, Solemn, Solitary
 Sullen, Surly, Scowling
 Shy, Silent
 Moon

Virginia Boudreau

Poet



Seth Ruderman is the husband of an incredible wife and the father of two wonderful children. He does much of his writing while commuting on a bus from his home in Wayne, NJ to his office in Times Square. He is a graduate of Hunter College High School, Emory University and Michigan Law. These are his first published work.

No Referees

The best kinds of games
Have no referees.
They're played out in fields
Surrounded by trees.

They're played out in schoolyards.
They're played in the park.
They're played on the beaches
Until it gets dark.

No coaches, no practice,
No parent who screams.
We'll make our own rules.
We'll choose our own teams.

No uniforms, trophies
Or medals to win.
Just a field and a ball
And the fun can begin.



Seth Ruderman

Poet

Bottle of Whine



On the 10th Anniversary
For these parents of mine
I decided to get them
A bottle of whine

They're whine connoisseurs
They'll love it I know
I'll give them a vintage
"I don't want to go!"

A classic "Not Fair"
From Nineteen O'Three
And a glass of
"Tell him stop looking at me!"

I'll have to go shopping
At the local whine store
Head straight to the aisles
Of "Pleeeeeease" and "One More"

Might pick up a case
Of "Why Why Why Why"
Or the whine in a box
It's worth giving a try

They'll drink every drop
'Til they need some dessert
I guess that a carton
Of I Scream can't hurt



Lift Your Hand

Lift your hand up in the night
And reach into the sky
As if your thumb were on a flight,
Your fingers just as high.

Now you hold stars on a string.
Let go — those stars won't fall.
Other stars might make a ring.
Try reaching for them all.

Sound of the Sea

Hold up a seashell to your ear.
The sea, they say, is what you'll hear.

What does the sea hear,
Or the shell?

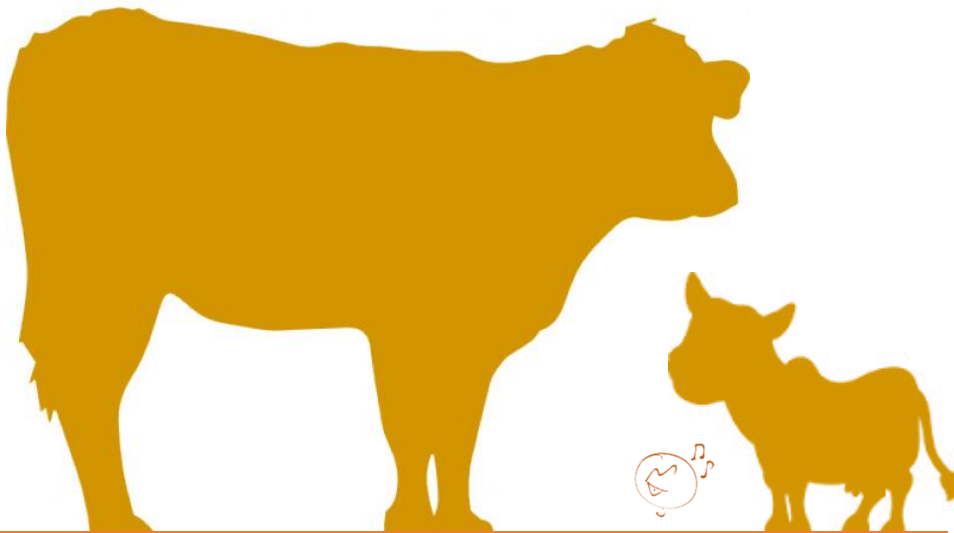
They never tell.

They never tell.

J. D. Smith's children's poetry has appeared in *The Caterpillar* and *Stinkwaves*, and his picture book *The Best Mariachi in the World* was published in 2008. His other books include poetry, essays and humor for adults. "Sound of the Sea" is part of Smith's poetry picture book manuscript with the working title of "Beach Day".

When Cows Sing

To me and you,
Cows just say moo,
But left alone, cows sing —
While they walk and while they chew —
About most anything.
Cows sing about green grass in spring,
Fields filled with flowers and hay.
They sing of how their cowbells ring,
Of how their small calves play,
And how someday they'd like to stray
To nibble on a neighbor's lawn.
Cows really have a lot to say.
Cows like it when we're gone.



Poet **J. D. Smith**

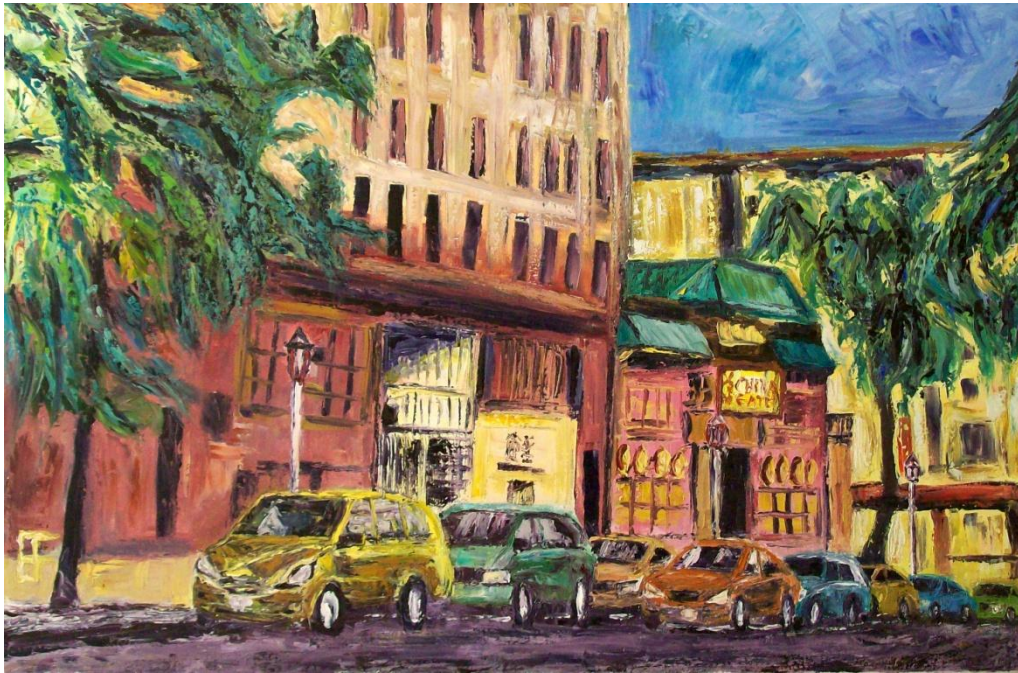




Hong Kong Café (oil on canvas 36x24 2011)

Allen Forrest

Artist



Street View 2 (oil on canvas 24x36 2011)



The Players 2 (oil on canvas 24x24 2011)

Seattle Chinatown Series





West Archway (oil on canvas 24x36 2011)



Allen Forrest was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has worked in many mediums: computer graphics, theater, digital music, film, video, drawing and painting. Allen studied acting in the Columbia Pictures Talent Program in Los Angeles and digital media in art and design at Bellevue College (receiving degrees in Web Multimedia Authoring and Digital Video Production.) He currently works in Vancouver, Canada, as a graphic artist and painter. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's *Reed Magazine* and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of Van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

Aubrey Kirkham Bjork works as an online instructor for Brigham Young University-Idaho. When she's not teaching, she works as a freelance designer/editor and mothers two active children. Her favourite bucket list item: to own the complete collection of Andrew Lang's fairy books.



Mud Memories

Author

Aubrey Bjork



I

I slipped in the shallows and my hand plunged up to my wrist in the shifty river silt. It felt smooth and cool. The black silk slipped from my fingertips and plopped back into the river. The river returned me an idea. My fist closed around a hearty handful of black.

“Hey, Terik —”

Whap! The fistful of mud splattered him square in the chest as he turned around. He stared in disbelief as the brown circle dripped past his belly button. He slowly raised his eyes to meet mine. I knew that look. I was going to need more mud. I ducked behind Jesse as she bent over to flip her tube. Splat! She froze as grainy river mud slipped across her scapula.

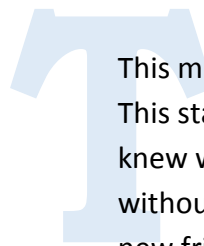
The mayhem broke loose, flung in rough handfuls by six sets of arms. Jesse took a mud ball to the face, and tripped into a patch of reeds. My brother cowered behind the bank, hurling handfuls from the relative safety of a hawthorn bush. Terik sprinted across the shore, flinging mud like a trebuchet as he went. Thick, black, gooey silt globbed the air. Joseph and Melanie transformed from blonde to silt-styled Brunette. The mud covered all of us — heads, toes, hair, noses, feet, and the lines in our elbows.

Eventually our arms were too tired to fling more dirt. We crawled out of the river and pulled the tubes up onto the beach. Their yellow bellies flipped up to face the sun. We peeled like lizards, scaled and crackling as the mud crusted and dried on our elephant kneecaps. Joseph smiled at me. His teeth beamed like a new white crayon against the smudges on his cheeks. The sun warmed my back, sweet like a lullaby and thick like a blanket. Somewhere, across the lawn, my uncle called us in for lunch.



From One Who Does Not Exist

Author



This must be what it feels like to lose someone. This stabbing pain in my chest, something I never knew we could feel, stings as Mason leaves without saying goodbye. He hasn't told me of his new friends and the adventures they have. He hasn't even asked to take me along. Do I mean that little to him?

This must be what it feels like to be alone. All day I sit here, trapped behind walls that used to be home. I was once part of the family. Mason's parents couldn't deny my existence. His grandmother would even entertain me from time to time while Mason was away. My entire life has been filled with companionship. There's never been a moment when I don't feel alive. Now I feel more dead by the minute.

This must be what it feels like to be jealous. Fire replaces the stabbing pain as I watch Mason from the window. He's in the backyard with his new friend, throwing a football and sharing jokes hidden from me. If Mason would just talk to me again I could join in on the fun.

This must be what it feels like to understand. Mason's mother and father are talking over dinner. They don't realize that I'm sitting down with them. "It was just a phase..." she says. "At least we don't have to pretend anymore..." He adds. "Don't let Mason hear you say that. He really believed that little boy was real..." She replies. I was told that this would happen, warned that I wouldn't be around for long. But I didn't believe a single word of it.



Rachel Anne is a preschool teacher from Maryland who is also involved in youth basketball programs as a coach. It wasn't until her senior year of high school, just six short years ago, that she realized her passion for the written word. Novels are her main focus, but short stories are just as often. She enjoys the story between the lines almost more than the story the words create. As she works toward completing her degree in English, Rachel hopes to break into the world of publishing.



Rachel Anne

Mason's always been a good kid. No way would he let me go. Yet that's exactly what's happening now.

This must be what it feels like to start anew. I can't ever look back as I'm led away from the only real home I've known. My transferor wouldn't let me stay a second longer than we had to. Grumpy old thing he is. Someone once told me that you never forget your first assignment, good or bad. I know I'll never forget Mason. Even as I read over the file of the next child I'm assigned to – a tiny girl with blond curls on the other side of town – I know she'll never replace the boy I watched grow up here. If only there was a way to ditch the system and keep myself visible to Mason past his seventh birthday. But that's how the Imaginary Friends Corporation has worked for centuries. There won't be any changes. It's not nearly enough time for us, but the others have come to accept it. I have yet to.

This must be what it feels like to never forget. This is my fourteenth assignment. She's a brat of a kid. Her parents actually bought her a pony for her fourth birthday. Now she's six and wants some video game. The pony has since been given away. Nothing stays long in this house. Everyone runs around, babysitters are hired and fired almost every month. The family is a mess; nothing like my life at Mason's. My heart aches even from the thought of him. I find myself longing for the warmth of their house.

Mason died this morning. We passed his

house on our way to my new assignment. I stopped at the window, something my transferor didn't appreciate, but he didn't stop me either. I could barely watch as Mason's wife sobbed on the shoulder of a much younger man whom I assumed to be her son.

I never got to see Mason's funeral. I never got assigned to a descendant of Mason. Yet in all of the three hundred and thirty-five years I've been employed by Imaginary Friends, I've never forgotten him. I see him in each new child I'm assigned to. He fills my wandering thoughts as I protect the children while they sleep. I find myself longing for the days when Mason and I would play cops and robbers and adventure out into wind storms.

This must be what it feels like to love. I don't like it.

Alex Hill expressed interest in the arts by drawing pictures and doodles as an adolescent. When he was in fifth grade, he joined a UIL writing team which ignited a passion within him. He began drawing inspiration from the supernatural, exploring the subject and its contents. He evaluated and analyzed the basics of both dark and light, good and evil. The essence of these topics provide a tremendous opportunity for writing. He believes that society will continue to battle within themselves over light and dark, striving to control the decisions of good versus evil.

Alex Hill *Poet*



Feeding of a Flower

Why when flowers start their bloom
Do we not appreciate their presence
Only when they start their doom
Do we start to mourn their absence

I wish there was a way to know
The good old days had been here
While the days begin to grow
Before the time had left clear

There is no sorrow in appearance
Only in the lack thereof
Respect won't start until the clearance
Then we'll honor those above



Susanna Lancaster loves traveling through time with words and often has her head buried in a good book. She is a writer of both historical and contemporary fiction for young people of all ages. She graduated from the University of Memphis and won the University's Children's Literature Award in 2011. She continued to pursue her passion for writing, and in 2014 she earned an M.F.A. in Creative Writing for Young People from Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Susanna enjoys teaching English at the community college near her home and has been thankful to have many editing and proofreading opportunities. She lives in Memphis, Tennessee with a Yorkie named Boston.



Susanna Lancaster

Poet

Little Ballerina

The Girl's
D b
A e
N g
C i
E n
W her s
I birth, a
T keeps n
H on d
Going
Until
She
Can no
More.

At the barre, she practices
What awaits her at the centre,
And in her flat, pink slippers and lacy tutu,
She learns the positions and to balance,
How to **relevé** on her demi-pointes, plié,
Piquée, or fondue, so that when she is on her own to
Perform a glissade
Pirouette, or an
Arabesque, and
Must wear
Pointes,
She can
Catch
Herself
And
Avoid
A fall
And be
The best
O a
F l
l.



The Silver Slave

He stands lonesome,
The night air breezes past,
Trapped until his savior comes.

Some still believe he will become free,
Some think he is the devil's craft and impossible to be freed,
He, himself has lost hope.

He has stood tall throughout the darkest times,
Sickness, death, darkness, and despair,
He is mysterious, only half of him is visible.

He has a heart of steel,
The greatest of warriors,
Never experienced love, just lies.

The boy comes and embraces the moment,
He glances down at the forgotten hero,
He glimmers in the moonlight, like a lost star.

He places his hands on the hilt,
Takes a deep breath,
And frees the sword from the stone.



Garin Ashby *Poet*

Garin Ashby is an 8th grader at Lufkin Middle School. Throughout the duration of his childhood, he enjoyed engaging in the world of comic books. He was intrigued by the relationship of both the protagonist and antagonist. He enjoyed comparing and contrasting the two types of individuals and learning the cause of their rivalry, and how they tried to pursue each other. As he grew older, he began writing his own renditions of good versus evil and how an individual triumphs over adversity. He also enjoys personifying individual objects, writing about their struggles and experiences.

What is it like to be a dandelion in a vase full of roses?



It's like a penniless provincial girl in a frumpy frayed frog gown showing up at the ball dignified merely by her presence. She will never figure out why she is the misfit or why they have been so cruel. Thwarted and scolded, the odds are against thriving, but she grows rogue despite a lack of attention. Like a fish bumping against the sardine can's edges, she searches for the clearing to wriggle out into the woods or ravine, to join the trees the birds the squirrels the buck the doe and the blue heron. The rose admires the wayward one, how she enchants with superstitions and madness. She is not a trophy or a fragile mirage. Her brilliance is resilience, a stubborn persistence against erasure. No matter the rips and tears in her seams, a turquoise butterfly may alight on her dress. She will astonish like waterless clouds, wild waves of foam, wandering stars.



Laura Sweeney

Poet

Laura Sweeney facilitates Writers for Life which offers grant-funded creative writing workshops throughout central Iowa. She represented the Iowa Arts Council at the First International Teaching Artist's Conference in Oslo, Norway. Her publications include poems in *The Daily Palette*, *Poetica*, *Pilgrimage*, *Broad! Appalachia*, *Evening Street Review*, *Negative Capability Press*, and *The Journal of Poetry Therapy*.



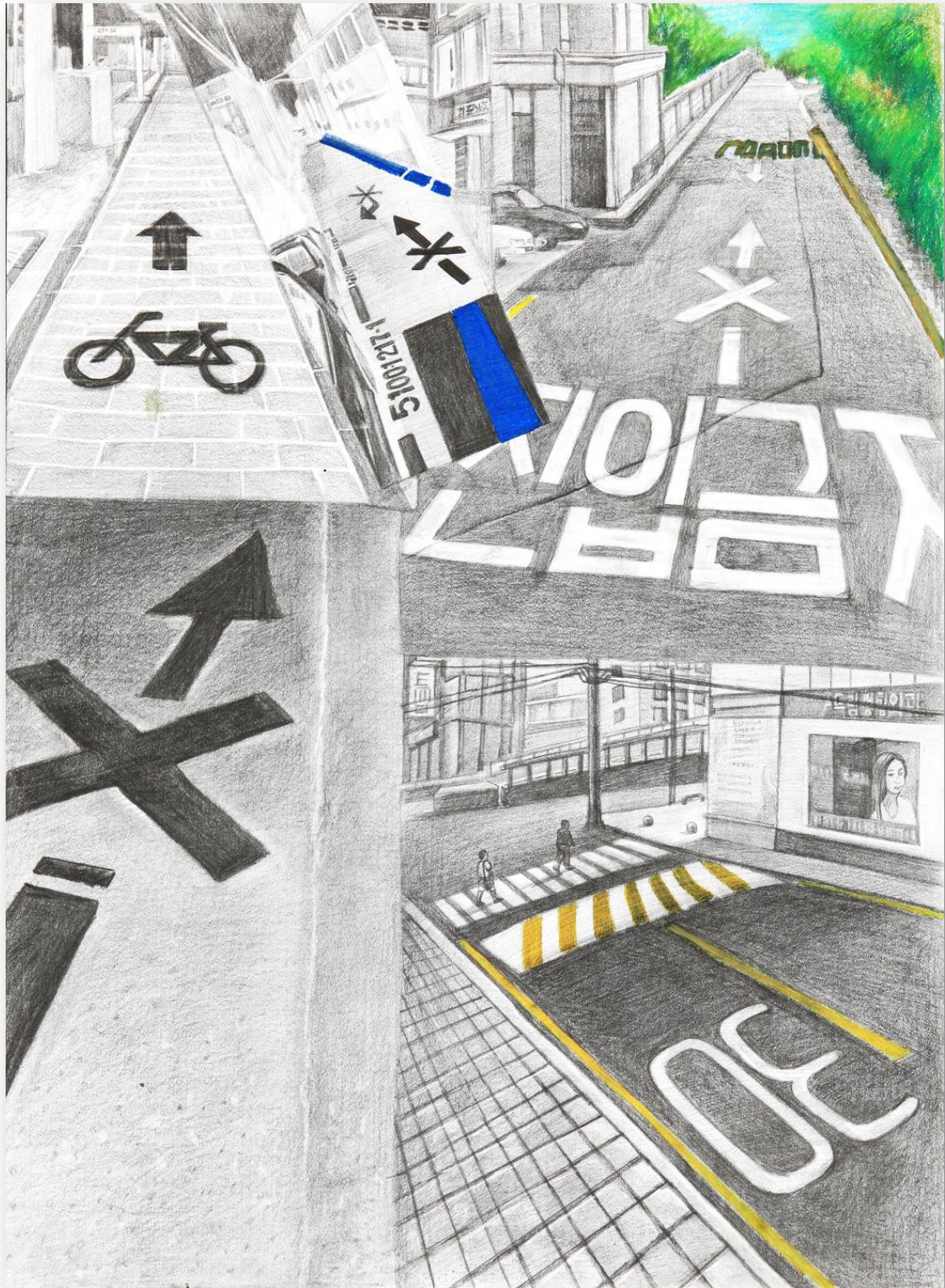
The Door



Artist

Jung Kim

Jung Kim is currently a senior at Daewon Foreign Language High School, South Korea, but has lived most of her life in Boston, Massachusetts. The experience of living in two different countries with contrasting cultures has cultivated her unique perspective and vivid imaginations. Although she enjoys reading, figure skating, and practicing the violin, painting is her favorite activity – a hobby she has grown to love since she was four. Her other artworks can also be found in the national anthology Celebrating Art Summer 2015 and Fall 2015.



Min Jin Song

Artist

Min Jin Song is a senior attending Taejon Christian International School in South Korea. In 2013, she founded a community outreach program to teach the kids at her church how to express themselves with art. She has also participated in a student-run art exhibition with her artwork inspired by Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She is also the captain of her school's varsity swim team, and plans on majoring in Fine Arts.

Gina the Pote and the Hoot and a Half



Katie Gustin *Author*

Katie Gustin is Brazilian and went to live in the United States when she was three years old. She is a language teacher and over the years has taught both Portuguese and English as second languages at Yale University, The International Center of New Haven, Connecticut, and Associação Alumni, in São Paulo, Brazil.

Among Katie's pupils, there have been many children and teenagers – some quite brilliant, some quite jolly, some way too cool for words. And a four year old who never learned the language, but could run around and around the table in circles, leaving Katie very dizzy indeed.

Katie Gustin has been writing fiction since she herself was a child. Her most recent story appears in *Emerge Literary Journal*.

"Hurry up." Melanie took Gina's hand and guided her to the dining room table. "We have work to do."

"Melanie —" Gina let herself be pulled by little Melanie, following the gentle sway of her cascading ponytail.

"Here —" Melanie courteously pulled out a chair for her. "You sit here." She pointed.

Gina obeyed. "Do you need help with your homework?"

"Well, see —" She sat at the edge of her seat and spread open her notebook. "You *are* my homework." She uncapped a big pink pen.

"What?"

"We have to write reports on everyday people with unusual interests —"

"Babysitting's unusually interesting?"

"— and I told my teacher that my babysitter's a poet so she said okay."

"'Okay' what?"

"'Okay' I could do my report on you."

Gina raised her eyebrows. "I've been '*okayed*'?"

"Yeah. By Mrs. Boone."

"Who?"

Melanie squiggled a little pink doodle in the margin. "And her husband is Daniel. Isn't that funny?"

Gina frowned, puzzled. "Why is that funny?"

"Daniel Boone?" She shook her head pitifully at Gina's obvious failure to compute, then drew a pretty pink daisy in the upperhand corner of the page.

"Wendy Gerber is interviewing the man who works at the town landfill, and Stacey's doing hers on the attendant who mans the telescope at the observatory...I chose you."

Gina crossed her arms on the table, and then buried her head beneath them.

"Okay then," began Melanie, taking on an air of high efficiency. "Let's begin."

"This won't take long, will it?" inquired Gina.

"Nope," promised Melanie. "Short and sweet."

"Okay, shoot —"

Melanie poised her pen on paper--the genuine ace reporter.

"Where does poetry come from?"

Gina's jaw dropped.

Melanie sniffled.

"Um..." Gina gestured awkwardly, at a loss. "It comes from in here." She pointed at her chest. "I don't know where it comes from —"

Melanie fixed a serious gaze on her, tapping the back of her pink pen against the notebook's surface. "I'd *like* to get an 'A'."

Gina sighed. "From the heart. Poetry comes from the heart."

Melanie wrote it down carefully.

"Why the guy at the landfill?" Gina was perplexed.

"Don't worry," assured Melanie without looking up. "You're more interesting." She colored in a large period, and proceeded.

"When does poetry come out?"

"When does it come *out*?" Gina stared at Melanie. "It's not a turtle that pokes and retracts its head at whim —"

"So what is it?" Melanie waited — pink pen poised.

Gina thought a bit. "It's a feeling. When I'm moved — the feeling wants to come out. So I write it down."

"Why don't you sing?"

Gina looked at her. "Sing?"

Little Melanie shrugged. "That's what I do. Or I pedal my bike really fast."

"Oh," Gina nodded. "Well, I *do* write *lyric* poetry. And it's called that because it used to be poetry you could sing or recite to the melodies and rhythms of musical instruments. You know, like lyrics. But now, lyric poetry just means to write what you feel inside. Let it all flow."

"Wait — you're going too fast." Melanie



gripped her pen as she wrote.

"Sorry."

Melanie looked up. "How much do you get for babysitting me?"

Gina covered her face with her hand and moaned.

"A pretty penny, I betcha..."

Gina raised her voice. "Is this part of your report?"

"Nope."

"Okay then." She concluded that children were intergalactic beings sent in from a very distant planet, where babbling knew no bounds and brains were lined with peach fuzz.

The ace reporter and her large pink pen vied for an exclusive.

"What moves you?"

"What moves me..."

"You said you write when something moves you. Like what?"

Gina gave some serious thought to the despicably low wages currently awarded to the average babysitting professional. "Many things move me. The color of this rug — royal blue — the way the shag feels soft against my fingers..."

Melanie stared downwards. "You write about rugs?"

"No, I don't write about rugs —" Gina gave her a soft pinch on the wrist. Melanie pulled her hand back and giggled.

"But maybe later I'll be sad — and in the poem, I'll color the sadness blue — because of this rug. Or I'll be lonely--and the texture of the loneliness will feel soft like this rug. Do you know what 'texture' is?"

Melanie pushed her pen across paper. "I'm not a *total* moron."

Gina chuckled. "You're a hoot and a half, you know that?"

"Hoo...Hoo..." Melanie amused her, then focused her attention on the task at hand.

"You see —" Gina tried to explain — "we feel things —and we feel them big. But feelings just swim around inside us. Artists are people who take feelings, and give them shapes, sounds, and textures. A painter can paint what happiness looks like--so you can see it hanging on a wall; a composer takes anger and turns it into a thundering, beautiful melody; a sculptor in love, will shape that love into a statue that you can touch. I give emotions a language, so our secrets and our silence can have a voice — Do you understand all this?... Sometimes —"

"Okay, that's enough."

"Oh, I'm dismissed?"

Melanie colored in her final period — closer in scale to a marble.

"Don't you have any questions about what I've just said?"

"Nope."

"So I'm off the air now?"

"Not until you finish —"

"Finish what?"

"You still have to write the poem."

"What poem?"

"For show-and-tell when I read the report."

Gina plastered her forehead against her palm.

"Don't start moaning," Melanie admonished her. "We don't have all night."

"Look you —" Gina reached out and pulled her in by her skinny little arm.

Melanie doubled over in giggles.

Gina squeezed her tightly. "You know what you are?"

"A hoot and a half?" Melanie laughed deliciously before managing to wriggle free from Gina's ticklish embrace.

"Any other requests?"

"No," shrugged Melanie. "Just make it rhyme. I like rhyme."

Gina let out an exasperated laugh. "What do you think? You can order a poem like a pizza?"



Melanie gathered her notebook, her striped pencil case, and her trusty pink pen. "Will you correct my spelling after I write the report so I can copy it onto a nicer sheet of paper?"

"And maybe in between writing you a poem, and correcting your report, I'll still have time to fly to Paris and back —"

"Oh, Gina," sighed Melanie, brushing Gina's cares away with an unperturbed sweep of her hand. "I have faith in you."

"Why, you little —"

And Melanie dashed from the room.



Soon after, she returned, declaring, "I finished —" She leaned over the table and placed her report before Gina — her ponytail slipping over her shoulder and falling in small upturned curls by her chin.

Gina the Pote

Gina is my babysiter and a pote too. She has big fillings and writes them down. potry comes from the hart. When Gina is movd the potry comes out. Blue movs Gina like a rug. Latur she is sad She writs lirik. gina maks tekshure. Hanging on the wall, a stachew to tuch. Gina will rime now.

Gina contemplated Melanie's report.

"What are you waiting for?" inquired Melanie.

"What?"

"The poem?"

"Oh —"

Melanie rolled her eyes and sighed. As usual, Gina was not on the ball.

Gina fumbled with the notebook page Melanie had been so kind as to provide her with. She brushed a bit at the crumpled fringes with her fingertips.

"Is it finished?" asked Melanie.

Gina shrugged. "I think."

"Okay then — hit it!"

"What am I — a lounge singer now?"

"You're on, baby!" Melanie pointed at her with a definitive flourish of her finger.

Most definitely — after this, Gina thought, she was going to approach Melanie's parents about that serious hike in her hourly babysitting fees.

"Come on, Gina," encouraged Melanie, "— be a poet!"

Gina cleared her throat and then read aloud the poem she had written for Melanie:

The Hoot and a Half

*Pedaling my bike fast
past lawns and green trees —
singing out, my long ponytail
cascading in breeze...*

*My thoughts are all pink,
if you squeeze me I'll laugh —
I've a heart made of gold
I'm a hoot and a half!*

Melanie looked up at Gina and grinned sheepishly.

"Hey...that's me!"

"It sure is." Gina smiled.

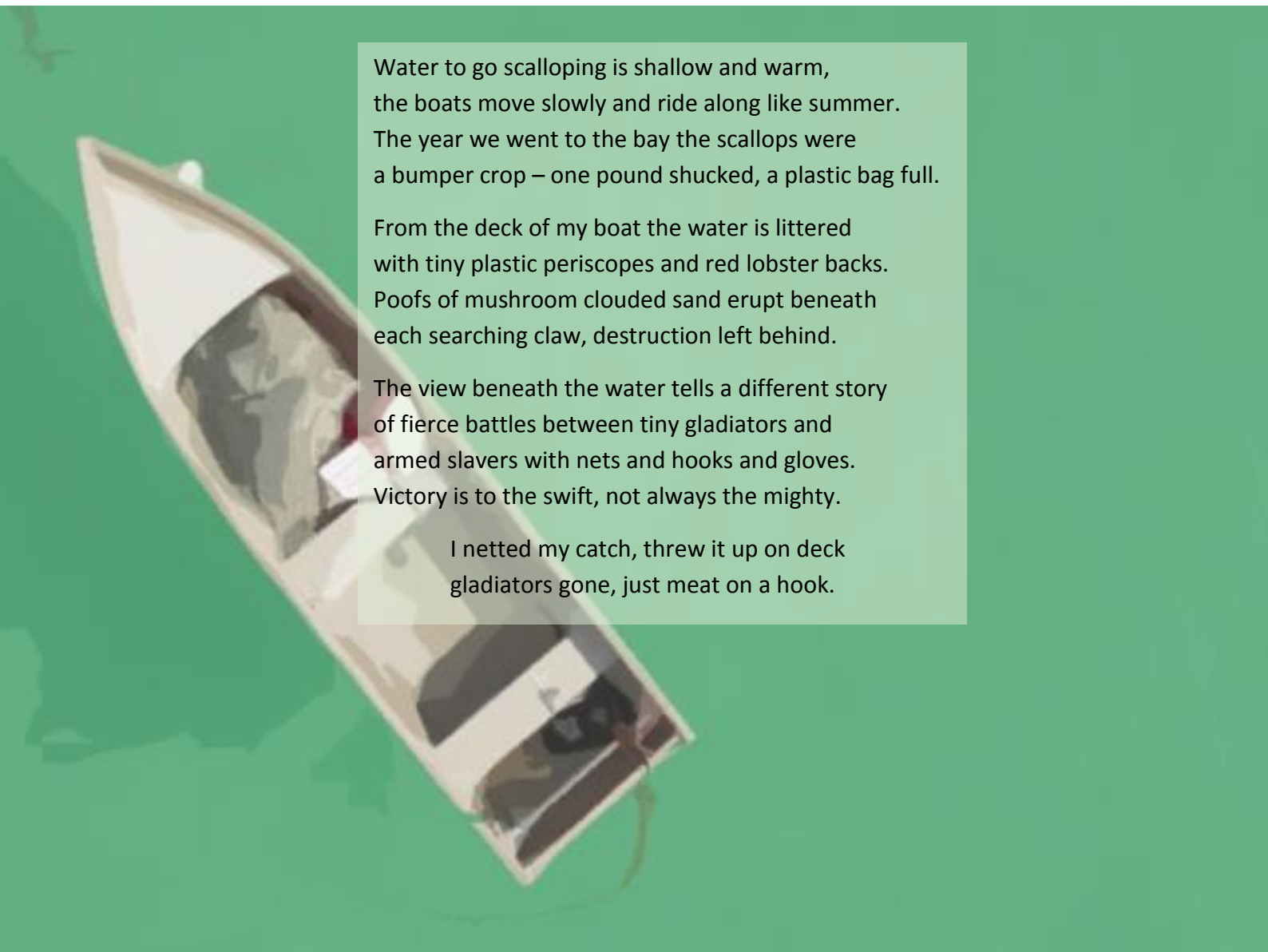
Melanie came around to Gina's side and stared a little at the piece of paper, placing a loving hand on her babysitter's shoulder.

"See, Gina —" she assured her. "This is way better than the landfill."

Gina folded her arms across the table and fell — forehead-first to the surface — moaning all the way down.

Sonya N. Groves is a teacher of English in San Antonio. She has poetry publications in over 20 journals, the latest including *La Noria*, *The Voices Project*, *Aries*, and *FLARE: The Flagler Review*. Currently she is pursuing her Master's degree in English at Our Lady of the Lake University.

Beneath the Surface



Water to go scalloping is shallow and warm,
the boats move slowly and ride along like summer.
The year we went to the bay the scallops were
a bumper crop – one pound shucked, a plastic bag full.

From the deck of my boat the water is littered
with tiny plastic periscopes and red lobster backs.
Poofs of mushroom clouded sand erupt beneath
each searching claw, destruction left behind.

The view beneath the water tells a different story
of fierce battles between tiny gladiators and
armed slavers with nets and hooks and gloves.
Victory is to the swift, not always the mighty.

I netted my catch, threw it up on deck
gladiators gone, just meat on a hook.


Poet

Sonya N. Groves

Helen Hu is a real life living breathing 16 year old. She spends her time resisting angst, trying to discover things she is instantly excellent at, and breathing slowly and shallowly. All messages should be written on leaves and taped to the turtle mailmen for delivery. All phone calls will be ignored.

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Eat Your Breakfast



A tired Tuesday morning
stained, crumpled, and flattened out again
air thick with heavy sunshine and
the weight of distant rain

You raised a jar of orange marmalade
up to the kitchen window
the most meticulous jeweler
eyes narrowing in the light

Isn't it pretty?

The sun twitched and shivered
slashing a tangerine gash
across the wide plain of your cheek
and into your gimlet eye

I looked at the strips of orange peel
suspended in the amber
sickly pale and thin
like maggots

Helen Hu *Poet*



Dried Flowers



Daria V. Diachkova
Author

Daria V. Diachkova has been writing short stories since the age of 14, now 18 and successfully enrolled in the High School of Economics, Moscow. Her story “There For Me” was published in the annual anthology of St Paul’s school, Barcelona. She has a fascination for photography and writes about the places she has visited.

Hi.

My name's Emily.

I'm five feet tall.

I have auburn hair and hazelnut eyes.

Although... I guess hardly ever anybody notices them over them.

Freckles.

Freckles everywhere. Those brown spots seem to cover every single inch of my body.

Not that...

Anyway...

I've – erm – I've always enjoyed collecting things. I guess some of us are collectors by nature. One summer, having tripped over something, I fell into a rain puddle. Soaked to the skin with water dripping down my freckled nose...

Freckled.

Ahem.

I was nearly crying – but then I saw it. The prettiest stone I'd ever seen! It was ivory white with vein-like emerald inclusions. There was no way I could've left it in that cold water. So I took it with me. And then I thought, "And what other stones are out there?"

That was how my first collection started.

One autumn a yellowish red leaf fell on my face when I was sleeping under a maple tree. I sneezed – at first frowned and, still being drowsy, tried to throw the thing off my face – but noticed its veins were forming peculiar pictures. It was pretty. So I took it with me. And then I thought, "And what other leaves are out there?"

Later there were ribbons, buttons, stamps, flower petals, even pencils... anything that once made me think it was "pretty".

It was then when I heard a sound. Not just a sound. It was magical and touching, charming and magnificent – the prettiest tune I've ever heard! I followed it and saw two girls sitting on a wooden bench. One was around eighteen or something. The other was a tiny one. I grimaced. It

was the elder who was making those miraculous sounds while the little brat was ruining it all: she was singing along but had no voice whatsoever, kept on missing the notes and singing out of tune in her shrieking voice.

"It's such a waste of a pretty thing," I thought.

"I want that," I thought.

So I took it with me. I put the beautiful song in a small cream casket which I decorated with pearls of white and pink. To suit the tune. And then I thought, "And what other voices are out there?"

Soon on top of the boxes with stones, near the sticks and twigs, right next to the floral albums, small caskets piled up. I decorated them myself in such a way that it enhanced the beauty of each tune. I have all sorts of voices: raucous and nasal, resonant and shrill, husky and plummy... there's no kind I don't have. Almost as many as...as... them.

Freckles.

Um...

I never open either the boxes or the caskets. I know the things will be there no matter what.

There's no need to.

It may harm the quality.

One day I took a small ball outside to play with. It was a lovely salmon pink one with silver stripes and petite blue daisies.

...

No longer.

Alas!

It was then when I understood: taking items out of their cases is dangerous. So I never do. No pushing my luck, who knows when I'll...

Achoo!

Huh, I can't believe it's already winter. Freezing cold with heavy snow everywhere. It's so hard to get around for someone as short as me.



I hate winters.

Oh.

Maybe...

Well, I do know what can cheer me up.

Maybe just once...

I'll call it an exception.

I rush to the white and pink pearl casket.

My favourite one. I bite my lip in anticipation.

Now I'll hear the magic sounds again...

...

Nothing happens.

I mean... I mean, something does happen.

The song sounds from the small casket, it's still the very same song with every note still being perfect, every word where it should be, but...

I don't know.

Something's just not right.

Tears stream down my cheeks. I cry. Dash outside and just run somewhere, anywhere. On, and on, and on...

Duh.

I've forgotten to put my coat on. I think I'll freeze to death if I stop.

And I fall down. My face right into a huge pile of snow. It's cold. Small ice crystals are scratching my face. It's painful.

"I should stand up," I think. But what's the point? The prettiest thing in the world's ordinary. The loveliest thing in the world's no longer magical. It's so wrong...

...

I've been lying here for I don't know how long when I feel a pull on my shirt sleeve and hear a childish voice ask, "Are you ok?"

I sniff. The last thing I need now is some little brat playing super-save-everybody-hero. I'll chase her off, I will.

"You know, sis forbids me to lie in the snow. You can get a cold."

I raise my head.

Jeez.

It's the very same tiny one from before. With her high-pitched voice and an upturned nose.

"Colds are bad. Your head hurts and your nose runs." She giggles.

The elder sister comes into the view.

Wow.

Now at a closer look I can say for sure, she's stunning. Extremely pretty. Yet... she seems... sad? I remember her smile that autumn.

She gestures to the tiny one and dashes to pull me out of the snow. I can't move. I let her brush the snow off from my shoulders and out of my hair.

Hers is beautiful. Chestnut, neatly put into a plait and pinned with shiny clover-shaped clips.

She utters something.

I blink.

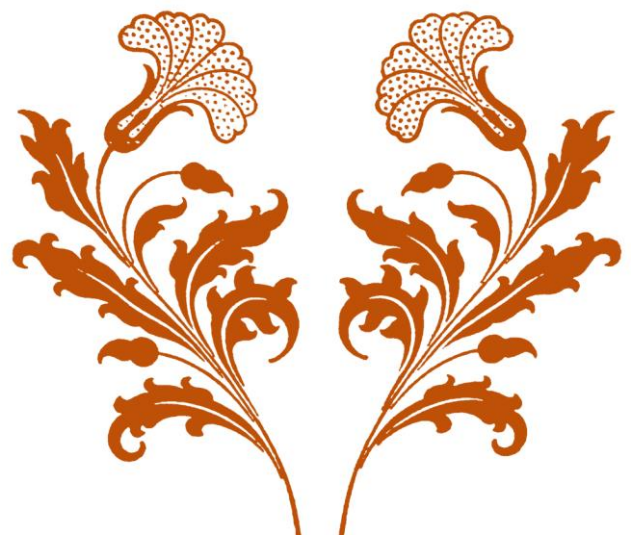
She whispers something but too quietly for me to understand.

"Sis can't speak. Sis lost her voice," states the tiny one. "I've been looking for it everywhere."

I blink again.

She can't speak.

She can't speak – who cares – she can't sing... My fingers finally let go of the small pearl casket they were clenching all this time and it falls to the ground, breaking into pieces.



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.

Dear Mrs. Millner

Dear Mrs. Millner (May I call you “Ma’am”?),
I’m sick — I mean, my son is very sick.
I think it’s from that cafeteria ham
(I promise this is not some kind of trick.)
Or maybe it was fish. I couldn’t see.
He warned us that it tasted kind of funny.
He told us it was bad, that he would be
Better off just eating his lunch money.
You can’t come by or call: he needs his rest,
And, after all, he’s in a lot of pain.
(It’s such a shame he’ll miss his spelling test.)
I probably won’t sue, but I’ll complain:
I’m only sick because of that salami!
I mean, he’s sick. Sincerely, Johnny’s Mommy



Daniel Galef *Poet*

An impressionistic painting of a street scene. In the foreground, a yellow car is parked on a dark, wet-looking street. Behind the car is a red brick building with a white lamp post. To the left, there are large, leafy trees in shades of green and blue. The overall style is painterly and vibrant.

Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal



BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ) is dedicated to literature and art lovers of all ages around the world. Here, we would like to thank all our readers and contributors for their trust and devotion. In particular, a big thank you must be given to members of the BLJ Advisory Board for their time and support, especially Ms Lancy TAM, who gives us an incredibly ingenious foreword for this issue. Thanks must also be given to Mr. Simon THAM, Mr. Vivaldi CHUNG Long-hin, Mr. Justin LEE Chun-hei, and Mr. Richard WOODS for commenting on the earlier drafts of this issue.

BLJ wishes all its readers very good health and a very good time reading every piece chosen for you here.