

THE HEMLOCK

A LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL



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FIRST
ISSUE

www.thehemlockjournal.wordpress.com

EDITORS' NOTE

Welcome to the latest issue of 'The Hemlock', a literary arts journal that celebrates the beauty and power of words and art. Our journal is dedicated to showcase a wide range of literary arts, including poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, and visual art.

In this issue, we present a collection of stunning works that showcase the boundless creativity and imagination of our contributors. From evocative poetry to thought-provoking non-fiction, each piece explores different themes and issues that are relevant to our world today.

Our visual artists also offer a feast for the eyes, with a range of pieces that encompass everything from traditional painting and drawing to digital art and mixed media.

Each work is a testament to the skill and passion of our contributors, who have poured their hearts and souls into their creations.

We are honoured to showcase the talent and creativity of our contributors, who come from all corners of the globe and represent a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Whether you are a seasoned reader or a newcomer to the world of literary arts, we hope that you will find something in this issue that resonates with you.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, and we look forward to continuing to explore the rich and vibrant world of literary arts together.

Editorial Team

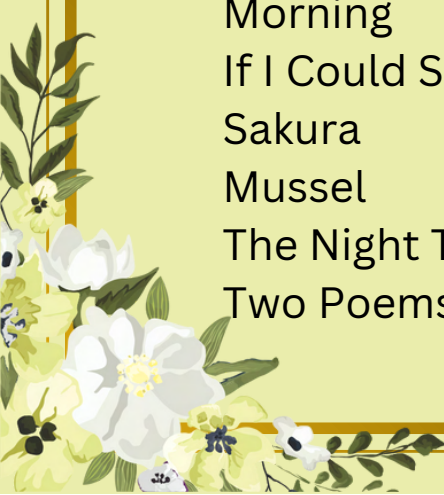




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Featherbed

By Ellora Lawhorn

the
thing with
feathers is
easily bent, is
changeable, go
where the wind takes it.
impossible to catch, and
harder to keep intact.
sometimes it is
hollow, splinters when
you fill its fragile well with
the potential for
words, a way
to show that really,
you are staying sane.
futile to preserve,
but it is cowardice
in the guise
of realism not to try.
i am nothing if not
a weaver of myths,
each exhale and
flick of my wrist
another fairytale, another
happily ever
before, during, after.
even if i am not.
i bring visions of the
maybe-future, and

the if-laden past.
my feathers are impossible
to catch and harder
to keep intact,
but i find them
nonetheless.

i will stuff myself
a quilt, and
under it i
will sleep
all winter

l

o

n

g



In Every Part Of Me

By Kaavya Silambanan

We all hold stories
In every part of us

The fingertips,
That felt the soft contours of your face
And trace the lines on your skin;

The hands,
Tell stories of the warmth that was felt
When they moulded to fit within
The confines of your fingers;

The ears,
When they fell asleep
To the perfect lullaby
Of your beating heart;

The nose,
When they touched
Every time we laughed and leaned in close,
Your perfume intoxicating my blood;

The lips,
Could still feel the remaining heat
Of the last kiss that scorched the future
Extinguished by tears;

The feet,
That had always found comfort
In knowing that you were there
Within the distance of a breath;

The waist,
That was pulled towards you
And danced to the music of your voice
On those slow sparkling nights;

And finally -

The eyes,
That hold the images of you
Stored in the best memories of us
Clouded by the mist in the longing heart.

We all hold stories within us.
Our own secret tales
That are remnants of a magic
Long lost.



Kaavya Silambanan is a Lawyer by profession. She started dabbling in poetry when she was 16 years old. She then compiled some of her works and published her book "Dusk Dreams". She has been a part of a few anthologies and taken part in poetry readings and performed pieces of her work. She has also been an editor for children's stories and written screenplays for some cartoons. Her poetry has a style that is simple to understand and open to interpretation so that people may connect to it in any way they choose.

Farewell Party

By Ali Ashhar

On the eve
of farewell
while reminiscing all
the crests and troughs
we went through
we laugh and cry
cold breeze dance with
the flashback of memories
written on the horizon of the sky
is an era—
of whose
vestige is etched eternally
upon our hearts
the next day we gear up
for the party
we click pictures and save emotions
we eat muffins and devour the sorrow.
In the end,
there's deathly silence
the farewell note reads—
moments become memories
people become stories
and that's life.

New Year In London

By Ali Ashhar

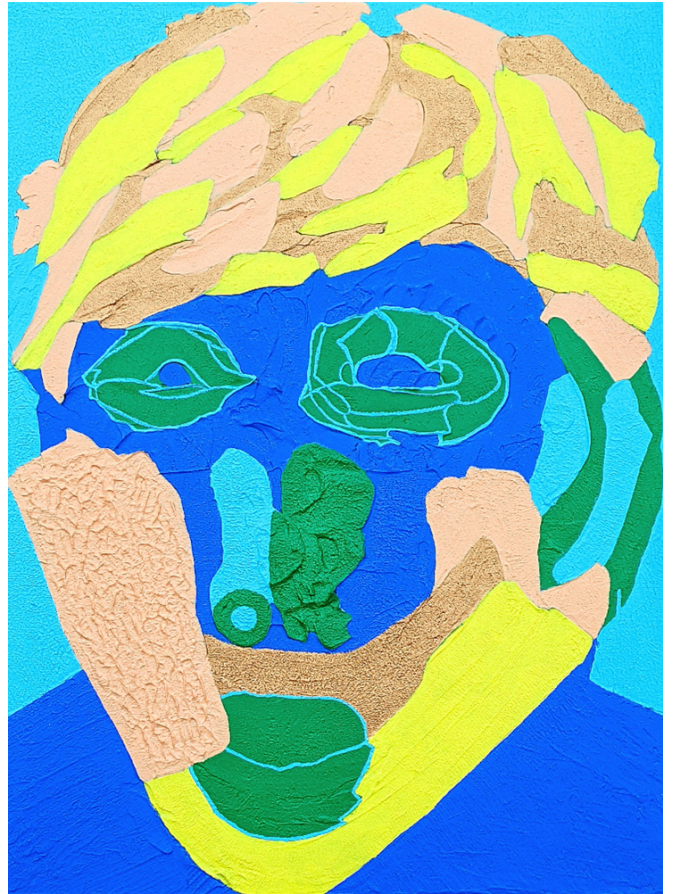
Hazy winter embrace
the ambiance in London
we stroll through Westminster bridge
as the breeze of memories gush
the new year gives a call
we seek to chase it down
amidst the melodramatic
December adieu
in the meantime,
we are held by erstwhile flashback
aftermath of grim
bygone nights
covered underneath
the seasons of sunshine
like the rollercoaster
London Eye ride
filling the fleeting time's palette
we anticipate new dawn of life
lucent rays of faith
descending from the
horizon of January—
a new beginning awaits.



Ali Ashhar is a poet, short story writer and columnist from Jaunpur, India. He is the author of poetry collection, *Mirror of Emotions*. At the age of 22, he received India Prime 100 Authors Award and was chosen as Best Debut Author by The Indian Awaz for the year 2021. His works appear in *Indian Review*, *The Raven Review*, *Bosphorus Review of Books*, among others.



Woman in Orange Dress
Thomas Carpenter



Blue Man
Thomas Carpenter



Woman in Yellow Dress
Thomas Carpenter

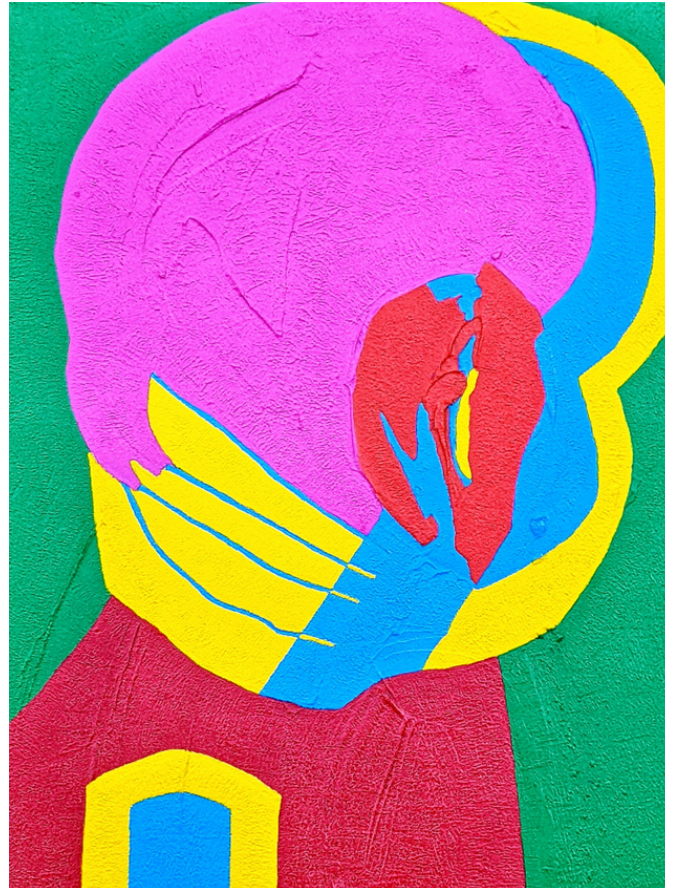


Man in Gold Shirt
Thomas Carpenter



Man in Orange Suit

Thomas Carpenter



Man in Red Shirt

Thomas Carpenter

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I'm an American contemporary artist living and working in the Memphis, Tennessee area. I enjoy studying psychology, religion, philosophy, and mythology and my biggest inspirations are drawn from my studies and my personal experiences. I love to explore color and texture and portray emotions that many might consider intense or disturbing. I want to captivate viewers and tap into their central nervous systems in a profound way, deeper than words. My goal is to bypass the process of reasoning and directly impact the soul. I believe being an artist is a spiritual vocation that carries with it a great responsibility, and it's something that I don't take lightly. My calling is to transfigure my personal experiences, good or bad, into images, and do my best to charge them with numinous power.

I'm Not Angelic

By Divya Shetty

I have committed many sins.
Don't call me angelic,
Today I helped a kid who was
Waiting for the school bus
Cross the road,
I Fed a starving street dog
Which is was Wagging his tail
I fed some biscuits,
An elderly gentleman
to call his son
I helped him by offering my phone.,
My neighbour waving at me
From her backyard
I waved back,
I helped my wife in the kitchen
My wife asking me
To cook for a day
I cooked & served her,
After watching my kids, who were fighting for the
Television remote
I said nothing
My elderly parents who were
Looking for medicines
I purchased them online,
My office staff greeting me
With good morning
I asked them to sit,
After doing all my duties
Yet I feel I'm not angelic
I have committed many sins.



Divya Shetty

Author Ms. Divya Shetty is an M.Com (Finance) born & brought up in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India. Loving both her current & her native city Mangalore, Karnataka, India. Published as an Author of her debut poetry book "The Vintage Devour" in July 2022 with a good global ratings of 4.4 out of 5 for her book. Soon she will be coming with her second book. This time with some short powerful stories. Earlier published in many anthologies more than 40. Fond of literature, art & music. A lady never procrastinating to write even in the middle of the night. Not the kind of reader indulged only in books but reading all that she gets to from any sources. An artist attached to & in love with different hues, sketching the images her soul sees. A melophile spending time listening to both modern & old music but believing old is gold always & thus her favourite. A thiest who strongly believes in God. Seeking the blessings of her Deities, Daivas & her Family, she believes no matter people leave you in your bad times but God never does. So keep praying & keep worshipping "God Will Surely Bless You One Day".

Fluorescent Memory-lane

By Saptarshi Bhowmick

There is a sense in remembrance, or is it called an essence
to reflect upon the past.

Be it an incident or a distant memory,
that fluctuated like a fluorescent lamp
when it had aged.

The more I recollect, the more it dims
as the mercury vapour is sucked in,
into millions of electron wavelengths.

But the memory, like it was relived,
left asunder;
palpitating as it was neglected
for a long time,
stored in a soft corner of our hearts.

Then,
it had its rebirth from the ashes of our evocation;
and like a phoenix with fiery wings
they float aback into our minds
in the nights, we spend
commemorating erstwhile trepidations.

Though ample electricity can save a fluorescent lamp,
but a memory-lane is more than a dead bulb.



Slumber

By Saptarshi Bhowmick

In my deepest slumber, I saw a vision,
a vision that scrutinized the time I spend
to create an Image.

Like the aesthetic self I poised before,
it nullified my existence
into a modicum of serenity. When I breathed in
the air of my anomalous figure, my eyes loomed
in realization.

It was the box that contains me,
that morbid me, who was in prison
for a long sentence.
The key in hand I gaze,
in pretense to stare down the after image.

But being in sleep, my dreams made me
an irascible man,
who turned to hope for his last rescue.
In hope, he stared outside Pandora's Box,
But all he could see, was darkness, Again!



Curating the solid imageries taken from real-life experiences, Saptarshi Bhowmick makes his sanctuary of sublime poems. Each of them toils to tell you a different story. Came from the outskirts of a town named Berhampore, Saptarshi strives to write even when everyone in his locality claims writing as lethargic. Aside from being famous for his bilingual poems, Saptarshi got published in many International Magazines, including The Rainbow Poems, Tofu Ink Art Press, The Anonym, Wingless Dreamers, Sparked Literary Magazine, MOIDA, The

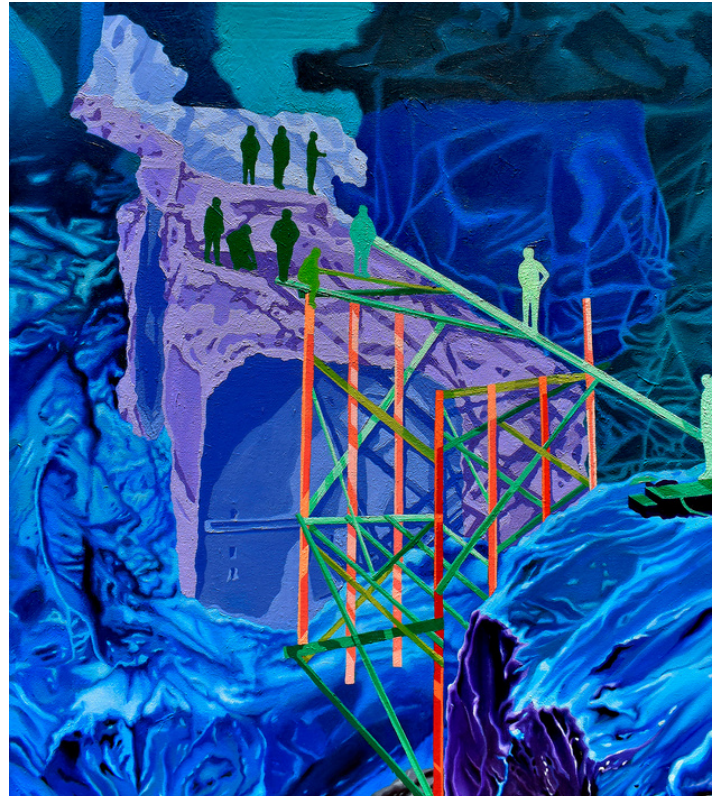
Compass Magazine, SeaGlass Lit, Aster Lit, Firefly_Archives, The Graveyard Zine, The Dried Review, Meadow Mouse, Overtly Lit, Meditatingcatzine, The Hyacinth Review.



Confluence I Decline and segments, 2021

Oil on canvas, 125 x 108 cm

Fernanda Morales Tovar



Bringing together, 2020

Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm

Fernanda Morales Tovar



Viraje II. Condición de equilibrio, 2022

Oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm

Fernanda Morales Tovar



Displaced Nexus, 2021,
Oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm
Fernanda Morales Tovar

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

She is a visual artist whose work explores the analogies and dialectics existing in the environment that promotes the conjunction of nature and urban devices in everyday life. Through the use of paint, she constructs a visual archeology based on the interpretation and proposal of signs of the intersection of spaces, the human being, the stories, the ruin, and the landscape.

Fernanda Morales Tovar

Fernanda Morales Tovar (Mexican, b. 1992). She earned her MFA and BFA in Visual Arts from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She did an Academic Research Stay at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain (2019). She was a beneficiary of the "Young Creators" in the Painting category, Fellowship of the System of Supports for Creation and Cultural Projects, and Secretariat of Culture of the Government of Mexico (2021-2022). Her work has been exhibited in various museums and institutions in Mexico, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Chile, as well as being part of the Arte Lumen Collection of Mexico.

The Tree Of Beauty

By Shamik Banerjee

When Beauty's seed was planted,
a rich tree from it came;
The most of mankind wanted,
to wear its robe and name.

Some for its mere taste followed
and some, a life to own;
they hastened, shoved and wallowed,
to have its feast alone.

Its crumbs, to some were granted,
and few, they hollow came;
but some who had lamented,
had vowed to raze its fame.

To raid, when they were seated
with grudge upon their leed;
their troops but were defeated,
by the abyss of their greed.

And those, for years, have relished
but matched with other's store,
in plenty; then it perished;
they never found its door.

But they who never fought it—
so happily they went;
for out, they never sought it;
as found in heart's content.

To A Stranger

By Shamik Banerjee

Stranger, what thoughts do you go by, within?
Are pleasant they, or, in fardels very?
Are your hours, slave, or, like a peregrine?
I know not, if sprunt you are, or, weary.
Are your guardians, kindreds and clans many;
a scion bright and comforting helpmate;
or, do you not appertain to any
and made an unaccompanied helmsman by fate?
You, soothfast, are a sustainer at last,
but disclose not on your persevering face
and heart's deterrents, you fought in the past,
but gently pass me, without any trace.
Yet, O' stranger, I may ne'er know your flame;
but know, I commiserate, all the same.

Shamik Banerjee

Shamik Banerjee is a poet and poetry reviewer from the North-Eastern belt of India. He loves taking long strolls and spending time with his family. His deep affection for solitude and poetry provides him happiness. He has recently founded a poetry journal and aims to contribute immensely towards its future.

Sunset

By Sunayana

I watch the sun dipping beyond the edge of the world,
streaking the cerulean sky with crimson and tangerine tears,

The solar grief seems nostalgic,
as hot tears once flowed over my red cheeks too,

The white knit sweater I am wearing smells foreign now,
A property of a stranger, forgotten long,

My trembling fingers find the loose string,
I want to pull, I want to unravel,

Can I afford to just do as I please?
Or am I still supposed to be the porcelain doll, nodding yes to whims?

The cake made from my grandmother's recipe,
catching the shadows cast by the cool moon,

I choke on the words I left unsaid,
I wanted to hold you one last time,

for my fingers to run through your hair,
to trace your lips, clavicle, spine and every other inch,

I learnt goodbyes can cause castles to crumble, brave to surrender,
can render a speaker to a mere spectator,

I sit here, staring at the moon,
as your reflection fades from the picture of us by the backyard door.



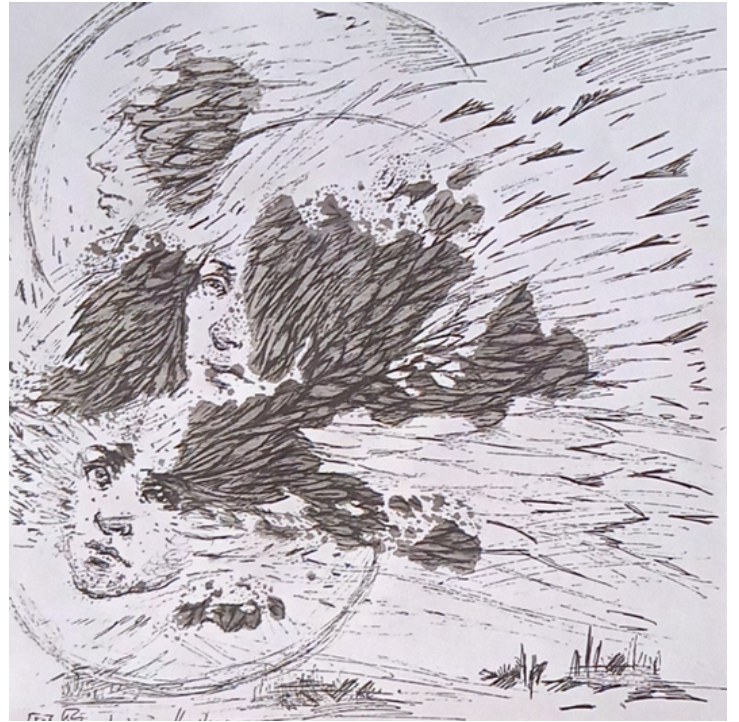
Sunayana

Sunayana Dash is an IT consultant who lives in Bangalore, India. Her poems explore emotions and the inner workings of relationships among humans. She loves taking pictures of the sky, sunset and moon and believes art exists in every form in nature. Her works have appeared in The Great Indian Anthology Vol.3, The First Line Poets Anthology and Letters to Lovers Zine: Issue 2.



Sirin, 2022

Ink, ink paper, 10x15 cm
Irina Tall Novikova



Creatures, 2023

Ink, ink paper, 21x21 cm
Irina Tall Novikova



**Fantasy. Dedication to
M. Chagall , 2023**

Ink, ink paper, 10x15 cm
Irina Tall Novikova



Willow, 2021

Wax crayons, tinted paper, 21x15 cm
Irina Tall Novikova

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Drawing began to interest me from an early age, the first subjects for me were fantastic birds and animals. By my first education, I am an art critic (State Academy of Slavic Cultures), and by the second I am a graphic designer (MGTA).

The main techniques that I use are watercolor, ink, gouache, and acrylic. I love experimenting and mixing different materials. I draw a lot on environmental topics. The first big series that I drew is the Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds.

I make illustrations, invent various creatures and stories for them, and draw nature and portraits. I like to do whole line drawings, composing the composition in my head first. I am inspired by baroque music and black and white films. Lately, I've been leaning more and more toward symbolism.

Irina Tall Novikova

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of Ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster and draws on anti-war topics.

Midnight Morsel

By S. Kavi

Picking off the strawberries
From the chocolate cake
Eat them individually
Chewing up small bits of health
Throughout the entire week

The water jug judges me
Sitting in the dark
When the light switch
Stands next me
An arm's reach away
Next to the jug
My body misses water

Dragging my finger across
The rim of frosting
Rectangular slice
Licking my fingertip
Taking a deep breath
For the rich sweetness
Before closing the box for the night



S. Kavi is a South Indian American poet, writer, and artist. Her work explores Indian culture, nostalgia, nature, and healing. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and appeared in *antonym*, *Rhodora*, *The Indian Feminist Review*, and elsewhere.

(Not So Good) Goodbyes

By Karizma Ahmed

Abstract: A point comes in life when you're tired of things. Of the way things have been and the way, others have been treating you. You start seeing things for what they are and understanding people for who they are. Once you reach that point, the menial tribulations of life cease to bother us. There's a defeat in that acceptance that comes from acknowledging the distance that had once planted and has now grown between you and the people you really love. You stop trying. This poem is but a verse for that fatigued defeat.

In case I couldn't before,
my goodbyes sound like silence
my absence reverberating
blistering with memories of what were
and sighing for what could have been
you wouldn't notice me slither
stealthily down your callous hands
panicked, perhaps precipitous
you reach out to tighten the slippery grip,
to find none but your own fingers
curled, clutched in an empty fist

Because,
in case I couldn't before
my goodbyes sound a lot like defeat,
from failed attempts at reconciliation
one followed by another.
With conversations receding and
company bereft of warmth;
does the loss of a loved one materialise
I see your once familiar face
searching for the smiles

crinkle of your eye, the curve of your jaw
but the harder, and better I look
A stranger Metamorphosize.

Because, my goodbyes
sound like distance; echoes from afar.



Karizma Ahmed

Karizma is a second-year English major at Miranda House, University of Delhi. Melancholic with a tinge of humor, she goes through her life in ephemeral moments of euphemistic passivity. Naturally exhausted and perpetually overworked, she struggles to strike a balance between ambition and availability. She survives life with good music and trashy rom-coms.

Moss

By F. C. Andrews

Clump after clump, you swell to silence—
you, the master hide and seeker

the expert insulator.
You are the captain of absorption

your capillaries ingesting each bead of rain, mist.
You, the decumbent wetland archivist

the ancient rug of bogland, forest,
churchyard, marsh.

You are the stalwart ground commander,
the chief illuminator

you shine and glow that brilliant emerald
colour. Your reputation is retention—

a pad of sphagnum sponge to wrap
a laceration,

or a clot to plug a soldier's wound. You have
weathered in caves,

in knots on mountains, bound to the knuckles
of an evergreen. Your veinless

tufts emboss our temples, then climb
the stones of our loved ones' tombs.



F. C. Andrews achieved his undergraduate degree in Human Nutrition from University College Dublin in 2021. Andrews is currently a student in M. Phil. in Creative Writing programme at Trinity College Dublin, where his writing explores themes such as nature, isolation and transience. His work has previously appeared in literary and arts magazine *Icarus* and *Drawn to the Light Press*.

Pedicure From Nana

By Erin Jamieson

Nana paints my toenails lilac
the way she used to when
I was barefooted and white-haired
before dark eyes lined my eyes
and my freckles faded over the hours
spent inside, poured over emails
and submissions and applications
that never amounts to anything
before ice cream sandwiches
were calories to be counted

She's 90 now, with cataracts
and a bad shoulder, a smile
that doesn't quite meet her eyes

Every once in a while, she glances
at the collection of photos:
my cousins, my older brother
who only I speak with
a few times a month

I wonder if she too
is wondering where time
went, how we drifted apart

But for now, we focus
on the color on my nails
the way it adds a pop
of life to my pale feet



Erin Jamieson

Erin Jamieson (she/her) holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio. Her writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, and her fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is the author of a poetry collection (Clothesline, NiftyLit, Feb 2023). Twitter: @erin_simmer



Sketch 1

Megha K. Nambiar



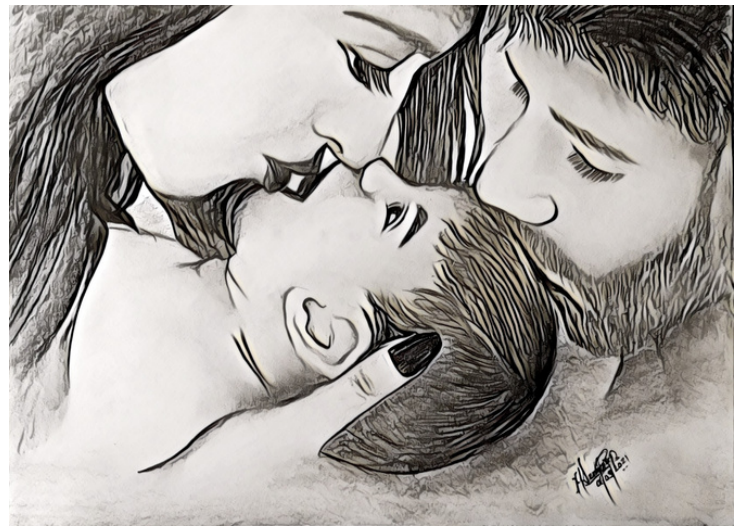
Painting 1

Megha K. Nambiar



Painting 2

Megha K. Nambiar



Sketch 2

Megha K. Nambiar



Painting 3

Megha K. Nambiar

Megha K. Nambiar

Megha is from Kerala, India. She completed her bachelor's degree in Computer Application (BCA) and Data Science & Artificial Intelligence course. She is now doing an internship as Python Developer. So basically she's an IT professional. But she's passionate about being an artist. She loves classical dance, reading books, writing quotes, and moreover, painting is her life. Because she just wants to add more colours to her life. She's very passionate about creativity, using her imagination, being inspired and inspiring others if possible in the process. Her writings and drawings are mostly focused on her thoughts and surroundings. She was and still is someone who likes to be alone. Because she gets to know herself better when she's alone. And she's still learning to love the parts of her that no one claps for.

Hope Repurposed

By John Muro

In the abandoned courtyard,
a grove of olive trees in want
of water is gathering up the last
of afternoon shadow, green bleeding
to grey, limbs littered with spent
casings turning in a dejected wind
like pieces of worn tinsel, and
transfigured into feeders for the
great congregations of migrant
birds and, in the higher boughs,
tear-gas canisters set out as wind-
chimes seeking to make a sanctuary
of this space that might yet nourish
the soul and lend a voice to hope
in a grim landscape where everything
alive appears to be in mourning and
even an indifferent God must surely
find it all unsettling. Now, as day
slowly folds upon itself, there remains
only the dim glow of lantern-light
tethered to lime-washed walls too
broken to repair, pimped with the
hollow hurt of bullet holes that, curiously,
form the outline of a wingless bird,
inkblots of soot and a thin veneer of
dust while, in the distance, an untended
scarf apes a solitary red blossom
flailing haplessly in an acrid breeze.



Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and, more recently, for the Best of the Net Award, John Muro is a resident of Connecticut, a graduate of Trinity College and a lover of all things chocolate. He has published two volumes of poems – *In the Lilac Hour* and *Pastoral Suite* – in 2020 and 2022, respectively. Both volumes were published by Antrim House, and both are available on Amazon and elsewhere. John’s work has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *Acumen*, *Barnstorm*, *Grey Sparrow*, *New Space*, *River Heron*, *Sky Island* and the *Valparaiso Review*.

Daydreaming At The Burial Grounds

By Tinamarie Cox

I'm not coming undone.
It's just that the things I left for dead
and buried
are rising up.
Demanding to be cleaned, polished, and displayed.
Poking up from the graves I tried not to visit.
This is my fault.
I was caught lamenting, like a widow with my flowers.
Remembering the past as shadows seeping out through me.
Bringing all that darkness back inside my body.
The hand breaking through the dirt hasn't rotted.
The fingers are still fresh and strong as they wrap around my ankle.
And I can either be dragged down, accept the earth is eating me alive,
or I can pull with all my light and remain above ground.
Do I dare
bring the ghosts back to the land of the living?
Swallow the pieces of me I hadn't ever forgotten about.



The Isle At The Center Of It All

By Tinamarie Cox

I was searching for a harbor to drop my anchor after
swimming for years across the sea between
Who I Was –and– *Who I Could Be*.
I fought against the currents alone,
certain I'd drown in the next swell.
Observers on the shoreline pointed and stared.
And the place I finally found rest,
to silence my screaming limbs and
fill my aching heart,
was an island in between.
We remain an ocean apart.



Tinamarie Cox lives in Northern Arizona with her husband and two children. She writes to escape her mind and explore the universe. Her poetry has appeared in *The Sirens Call*, *Oddball Magazine*, *Poetry As Promised*, *The Elevation Review*, and several others. You can follow her on Instagram @tinamariethinkstoomuch and Twitter @tinamarie_cox.

She Hid, Like Father Like Daughter

By Cailey Tarriane

Whenever people claimed to dislike her, she hid her true feelings-
which was pleasure and delight.

Whenever Halloween was around the corner, she hid that she cared,
she hid away every October as she searched tirelessly at her late father's

three-story mansion, quiet and still, but won't be left alone by jeering
youngsters
whom she chased away without running, scared away without becoming
scarier.

This mansion, with grills by its windows where shattered glass stayed
where it was, broken but too frightened to break, with many corridors

that led to different rooms, with what seemed like a gray cloud watching
over.

Darkness expanded by following her steps while shadowing the places she
had stepped on,

with bats screaming from a distance and the scent of a mystery behind
someone's
past, threatening to be unraveled with its consequences.

She hid her genuine reaction to all this behind sunglasses with a dark tint,
and that reaction was none other than thrill and excitement. Every
Halloween.

She destroyed rotting drawers and pulled out the best, most colorful
flowers
as disappointment caused her to jump every so often as that feeling came
and went.

A thorough search for the Left Behind of a close member in her life led to having dinner while she inspected the chandelier for secrets.

The lights didn't flicker and the napkin she wiped her lips with didn't hide any twitching of the face or quivering of the mouth.

She searched all over the mansion until suddenly her decision was final, and that decision was to never come back, for the chandelier had a light

that was too bright for her to handle in that lifetime, the mansion too dark for her to keep memories that were once treasures of her own.

When winter came, the house was left by itself, and if anyone could continue exploring the secrets her father hid and left behind, whether

those people found more or nothing, there was no discovery to cherish—only someone else's past.



Cailey Tarriane (she/her) is an avid reader, poet, and writer of everything that stills the shaking of her miserable heart. She has poetry published in *Your Fire Magazine*, *Gypsophila zine*, and *Fairfield Scribes*, among others. She has written over four novels to share with the world once they've reached peak misery.



Like we used to
Anastasia Clarita Budiyanoto

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"Oh, how close we used to be... " A stay-still image in my memory fades in every time I think of my special someone. The warm and fuzzy feeling I'll always get staring. I remembered the warm feeling, as if we were on a garden during the season of blossoming. We would talk about everything, with no barrier in-between, and exchanging eye contact here and there. Even if time passes by and you start to forget me, I will always remember the sunflower that used to be mine.

Anastasia Clarita Budiyanoto

A 15 year old Indonesian digital artist and illustrator, Anastasia Clarita Budiyanoto (simpleicetea on social media platforms), has been creating artwork pieces since 2019. Their pieces are often connected to the seemingly colorful background and past memories and emotions, wanting to share it with others.

Firstborn

By Kaylin Weir

We will always remember you as our first
 The one who taught us sleepless nights,
 the agony of potty training, the joy of being welcomed home
 Dependent on us for food, water, belly scratches
 Stealer of our hearts and sanity
 Fearless fighter against enemy one: the mailman
 Honorary vacuum and meal cleanup service
 A second pillow, doodle fur above my head
 A halo of comfort, my security blanket
 as you self-soothed with your own
 We should have taken you on more walks,
 To more dog parks, more games of chase and catch
 Given you stacks of toilet paper to deck the house with
 I catch myself filling your water bowl
 Instinctively protecting our snacks
 Fighting back tears
 instead of your greedy mouth, at the ready
 In the end, I'm not sure who needed who more
 You defined us as parents
 Made us a family
 Annoyed us endlessly
 Loved us completely
 They get it wrong about dogs
 Man's best friend never fits you, buddy
 You were brother material,
 Our son through and through



Kaylin Weir lives in Arlington, VA, with her husband and two young daughters. She is a full-time mother and part-time graduate student, studying to become a licensed professional counselor. In her spare time, which is often short in supply, she enjoys hiking, reading, and writing poetry and prose centered on motherhood, mental health, and self-compassion. Her poetry has been published in The GGP Collective's fourth issue and she can also be found on Instagram @kaylinwrites.

Three Little Poems

By Yuu Ikeda

The long moment

cigarettes pile up
on the ashtray,
as if they try to fill
my empty heart
with ashes and smoke.
i don't remember
the taste of your kiss
any more.
i'm just feeling
breeze that wipes my tears
instead of you.

Painless but painful

i never feel any pain,
because my veins are dyed in
scorching whiskey.
my waving brain can draw
many abstract arts
like burning roses in darkness.
someone may notice them.
no one may feel them.

Wound

*the fatal wound
is not living without knowing love,
but continuing to believe that
love is a medicine.*



Yuu Ikeda

Yuu Ikeda (she/they) is a Japan-based poet. She loves writing, reading novels, western art, and sugary coffee. She writes poetry on her website.

<https://poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/>

Her latest poetry collection “A Knife She Holds” was published by Newcomer Press. Her Twitter and Instagram:

@yuunnn77

Morning

By Ivan de Monbrison

There's a bunch of bones bleeding in the dark we won't go further away the sky is starless now it's freezing cold outside I can see out there some people going to work walking alone and blind in the dark and seen through a window pane they don't have any precise shapes anymore they don't have anything human anymore too actually they don't have any thoughts left and no more faces neither there's a bunch of bones bleeding in my hand and there's music coming from nowhere that sometimes rings in my ear too we won't go further away the city stretches endlessly the city is ugly and sick we won't go further away despite or rather more because of all these men who keep disappearing one after the other in the darkness despite the bunch of bones left in my hand despite the white silence of the houses that almost look like empty and abandoned wrecks out there despite this crazy silence that goes out screaming at all hours in the cemeteries at night but without ever really making any noise there are flowers that are bleeding into the night and I often hear the same music sometimes ringing in my ear since she has left me on a fine day just like any other day I've stoned since then with a terrible and tenacious hatred the memory I had of her such an ugly memory indeed and I imagine that just it was the same way that I've killed my own future with stones meanwhile hope tonight has taken the appearance of an old tramp sitting alone against the wall of a building somewhere in the night and that nobody never looks at as they pass by him, yes, the appearance of a toothless old tramp.



The Ivan de Monbrison is a furry little animal of about 5 inches long which can be found living in some cellars in Paris, France. It's a vegetarian specie. The males tend to get bald with a pouch belly growing with age. Snoring loud at night seems to be another behavior of the males, the usefulness of it still needed to be found, but could be a way to declare to the females that mating is over. With age some males seem to get more and more found of poetry while drooling around the city, drunk at night.



Sketch 1
Renad Alharby



Sketch 2
Renad Alharby



Sketch 3
Renad Alharby

If I Could Steal My Tomorrow

By R.S.

I'd steal the sun, the stars, the moon
And stardust I would borrow,
And make a heady concoction
And call it my tomorrow;
I'd pull the ocean,
Tie the waves,
Spill the rainbow in the sky;
And while I write the last octave,
I'd put the rain to dry.
I'd hold the wind upon my palm,
And whisper it your name;
I'd sing your glory like a psalm
And put your griefs to flame.



Sakura

By R.S.

Such beauty does the blush impart,
The bloom of cherry no less an art;
The heart be lost among the hue,
Could eyes entreat a better view?
Fleeting through this dream of spring,
The heavens let down the flower strings;
And beneath the rosy bower sighs
A lone tear in the lover's eye.



R.S.

R.S. is a denizen of Delhi, India who writes Poetry to find harmony in life. She had fallen in love with versing during her days as a student of literature. She rises early to feel inspired with the morning star and create new rhymes.

Mussel

By Christian Ward

Every shell is dipped at night.
Place an ear against the ceramic
to eavesdrop on fox squabbles,
crows watching rubbish bags
left split open like unfinished
operations, brambles unfurling
their fruit. Humans, extras
with no dialogue. Open every
shell to reveal day - the glazed
pottery, a perfect sky. Of course,
there's the meat: An orange muscle
on a ready-made plate. Quiet,
contemplative. I threw up the sea
the first time I tried it. Didn't know
I was chewing its prayer.



The Night Thieves

By Christian Ward

Foxes peer like schoolchildren
through letter boxes, ponytailed curtains
and the backs of cars for signs
of the darkness we've supposedly
stashed away. Moulded into plugs,
concealed in an eclipse of mascara,
moody teenage photos and cloistered
in bad poems are likely places.
They can't accept the darkness
might not want to return
It's the criminal's accomplice. A place
we plod through without looking back.
A cracked wing mirror that's always lying
on the road, begging for a little faith,
some vague reverence disguised as light.

Christian Ward

Christian Ward is a UK-based writer who has recently appeared in *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Double Speak*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Primeval Monster*, *Clade Song*, *Uppagus* and *Blue House Journal*.

A Talk

By Ved Prajapati

The night saw him mumbling, some stories untold;
Some considered it madness, no one heard but God.

"What it takes for people to love me too?"
God answered smiling, "Maybe they're the ones who don't deserve you!"

"But I changed myself too, just to make them feel good,"
"The change was for you my dear maybe you misunderstood."

"If they're wrong, why am I getting the pain,"
"It was to warn you now let me explain"

"You have a kid inside you don't let him die;
let yourself be happy to let your soul fly"

Memories

By Ved Prajapati

You think people stay, which is possible never,
They'll change and leave eventually, with their memories lasting forever.

Time passes, people leave and become a ghost
You think bad memories are sad, well the good ones hurt the most

You'll miss everything from the start of January to the end of December,
But you'll get flashbacks only of memories you don't want to remember.

People will condescend to you even though nothing gets right
Some memories hurt you while others haunt your night.

Just like people's pain and memories too get deceased,
Maybe you'll value and miss me, in your memories at least.



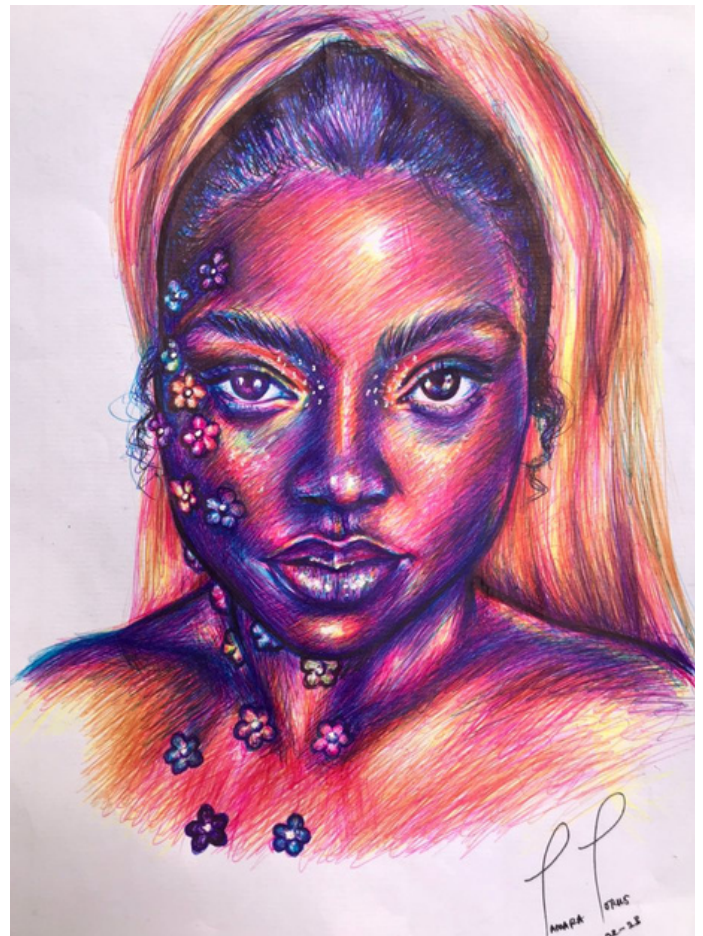
Pistis (by grace through faith)
17 X 25 inches
Tamara Torus

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

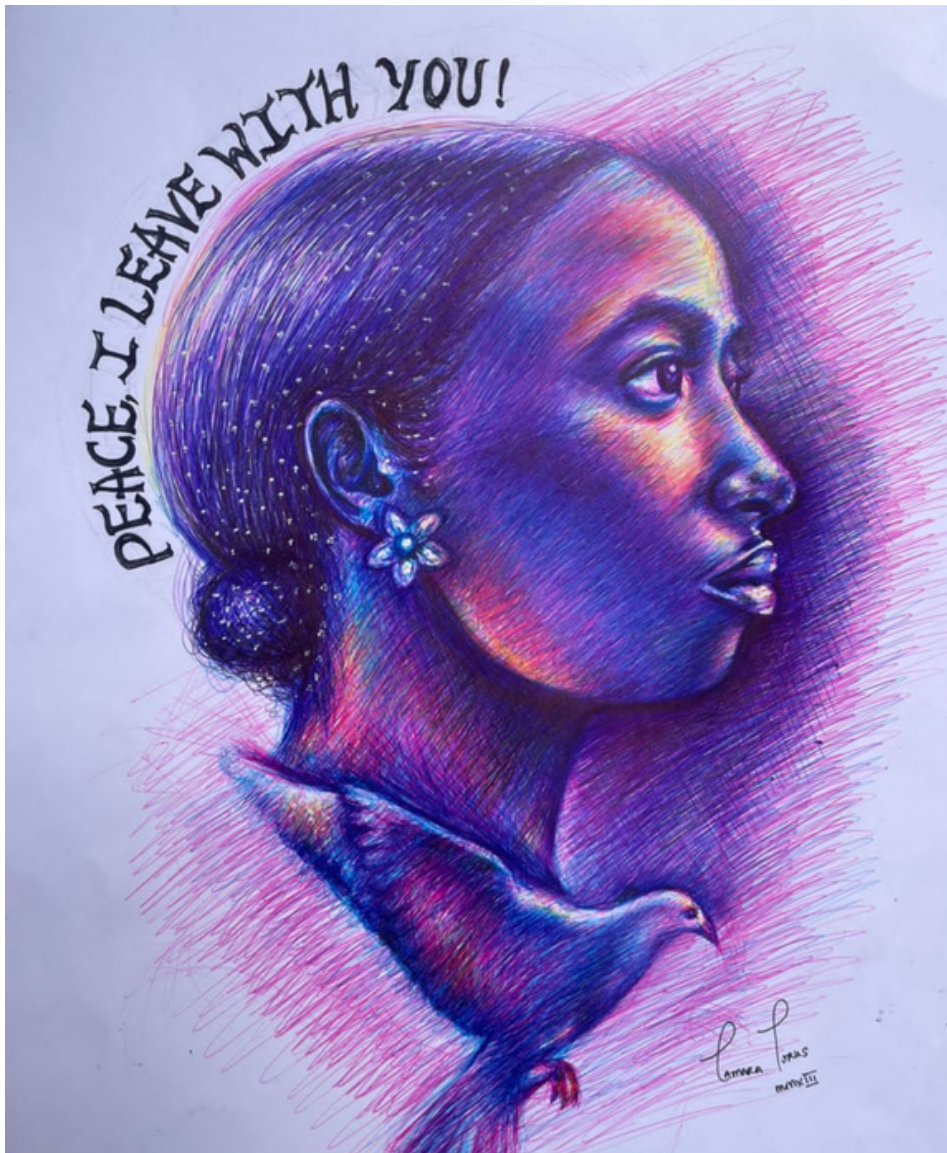
The drawing tells a visual story on salvation. Salvation means liberation from illusion into God's vision, the greatest love story. Salvation is a state of complete healing through Jesus Christ (The light). The flowers budding from her scars indicate the occurrence of that healing as she is brought into His glorious light, causing her to radiate that light.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Pistis is the Greek word for faith. The artwork embodies the dynamics of faith. Faith helps us to build flexibility even in rigid situations. It stretches us to humble ourselves by believing and trusting God more. As shown in the drawing, she bends over backwards to see the bigger picture even with her eyes closed.



Into his light
8 X 11 inches
Tamara Torus



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Eirene means peace in Greek. Eirene illustrates God's promise to us in John 14:27

With the use of cool colours, the artist intensifies tranquility. This piece was created to visualize internal and external peace.

Eirene

12 x 16 inches

Tamara Torus

Tamara Torus

Tamara Torus is a 21 year old multichromatic ballpoint pen artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. She is a full-time artist, an art student, and a fashion illustrator. Her style is called Multi-chromaticism. Her aim is to intentionally communicate and express God's heart to the world through the lens of imagination and the sensations of hues to stir up a sense of balance, connection, and healing to the eyes and mind of the beholder. She is deeply inspired by the source of life and the stories of life itself.

Spring Is Here

By Dipti Silvia Romould

But dear, spring is here, am I blossoming again in your memory?

I was sixteen when I was diagnosed with the first pimple on my skin, the doctor said I think too much. It was then I realised that it takes too much to be a prodigy. But after I woke up from my sleep this morning, Mumma said I was glowing flawlessly on my cheeks all because I don't experiment with any cosmetics on my skin but she hardly knows I never forget to apply the night cream you gifted me on my birthday.

That's how I keep you alive in my memory. But hey, do you remember me?

I go out in the courtyard only to find that the eucalyptus tree has dried completely, and birds that used to visit every afternoon to nibble off the minute shreds of chappatis I used to throw at them to eat, haven't

returned yet. I sit down in deep sorrow only to come back to an incongruous answer that they might've found a better home. Hope died a slow death. But dear, do you still hope our paths would meet?

It rained heavily this afternoon only to remind me that you're not here anymore. The rattling windows kept on alarming me to close it asap, but I didn't bother because the cold winds reminded me of you. But dear, did the wind convey to you that I was remembering you?

The sky was almost clear by evening I thought it would be better if I went out for a walk and embrace the fresh air and glance at the *Tabebuia auria* tree (the yellow tree), when suddenly in moment I unlock the dial screen of

my phone to dial your number only to find it out of coverage area and my heart unlike spring skips a beat in agony.

For I hardly know where you are and you don't remember me, I hope when spring leaves you are reminded that a

woman is sitting by the same tree remembering you because you seem to have forgotten her in your memory.



A lover of solitude. A best friend to midnight poetry. A selfless girl, who camouflages her pain behind her smile and never gives up on hope. An epitome of grace and simplicity. A postgraduate in English Literature, Dipti Silvia Romould has presented papers at the National Conference held at Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow. She believes that writing is essential as it revives her soul.

Good Morning

By Srishti Gahlot

“Life is so unchanging and boring! How could I possibly be happy waking up at such unGodly hours and leaving to do the same boring work?” I am sure all of you ask this question and trust me I do too! This is why I am here to introduce our new product... A Happy Mindset and believing in yourself to bring change! Humour me with this example...

Every day at 6:30 you will stand in front of the bus station. 6:32 a man with a brown laptop bag will stand next to you. Every day, at 6:37 the bus stops in front of you. Every seat is taken except one, your usual, next to a lady who stubbornly takes up 2 seats. Every day, your eyes travel down to the shoes but never the owner. Well-kept mat black shoes with three white streaks like the darkness of a night with shooting stars – probably from Costco. And then your eyes slowly slide to yours,

hidden, trying their best to not attract attention. If the shoes in front of you were like a starry night then yours were spoiled milk. You and the lady get off at the same stop. She takes out her cigarette and lights it, a daily ritual, while you follow behind her breathing in the toxin as you continue with your never changing day.

Another morning starts at 6:30. 6:32, the man with the brown laptop bag waits with you. 6:37, the bus arrives. Every seat is taken except one, your usual seat. You take your seat and stare at a new pair of shoes, black with a neon pink outline. More confused eyes board the bus looking for places to sit. At last, a guy jumps in slightly panting, Beads of sweat forming on his forehead. He says loudly and clearly to the bus driver “Good morning”. It was as if a ray of

sunlight hit the bottom of the ocean. That is the first change in your unchanging day.

Today, the morning pierced your eyes with how bright it was. The bus seemed to come early. You stepped on and tapped your card. “Good morning” the words came out stiff but they felt good. The driver smiled, relaxing your nerves. You sit in your usual seat but today you look at

the people and not just their shoes.

We get so stuck in our daily lives that we forget we have the ability to bring change. Often we do not realise this on our own, so we need a reminder. For me, the reminder was that stranger.



Srishti Gahlot is a young adult navigating through life as an experience of stories. Beginning from reading books; to watching movies; indulging in people’s lived stories; she is now experiencing them by telling stories. She loves to tell stories in many different forms such as animation, illustration, and writing. She is completing her school education and hopes to venture into learning Digital Arts. One of her dreams is to have a cat.

Gasoline And 99¢ Cones

By Julia Reising

The billboard casts shade onto the balding grassland, and the cows gather under its respite from the scorching sun. It advertises “Gasoline and 99¢ Cones Exit 145” without taking a breath in between; no time to cleanse my palate as I taste each of the words in my mouth. The shadow inches indecipherably east as the day wanes, stretching its grasp over the dirt-covered earth, coaxing the dust to settle. The middle of nowhere seems to follow me everywhere I go lately.

Sister says not to drink the water today because it shimmers more than usual. But I like to watch the little rainbows swirling on the surface. It looks like the road where it touches the horizon on a hot day, reflecting wavy pictures of the sky before it materializes into asphalt.

I let the water wet my lips, and I actually taste gasoline this time instead of the fading letters on the road sign. I nod and shrug my shoulders the way Dad does when I throw the frisbee—I wasn’t too far off.

We drink from plastic bottles filled by plastic jugs, and the cows disperse as the sun sets. The house feels like an island despite the fact that there is no water to lap at the veneer siding or seep through the screen doors. And once it is dark, I sink into sleep the way the sun sinks into the earth and the way the little rainbows sink below the surface, quiet and unremarkable in that we all knew it was coming.



Julia Reising is an interdisciplinary artist who received her BFA from the University of Minnesota Twin-Cities in 2022. Her family of seven grew up in Wausau, Wisconsin, where she first became interested in language and the intersection of the two and three dimensional worlds.

On an ideal day, you can find Julia walking her dog up Rib Mountain, watching a movie, and cooking with her friends.



Devine Pop Star Mayari

Inspired by The Goddess of the Moon from
Philippine Mythology
Zhen Prado

Zhen Prado

Zhen Prado is a 21 year old artist, writer, and student from Philippines. He says he's an Alien-Elf trap here on planet Earth. He is looking forward to the future, to travel and explore things, and settle on his abode of escapism existence. He posts most of his art on his DeviantArt: 18shi, and poems, short stories, opinions, etc. on Commaful: The Wandering Soul. He also has a Facebook page: Arts of Zhen, where he takes a commission.

March Is For Endometriosis Awareness

By Maggie Bowyer

I was just 11 years old when I felt the pain of being stabbed, alone in my bedroom. Doubled over, I screamed out for my mother, someone, anyone, to help me. I was afraid of the invisible knife that was tearing apart my insides. Upon seeing my state, unable to even lift my head off the floor, my mom attempted to rush me to the hospital. I say attempted because the pace I was able to move at was anything but rushed. After hours in the ER, with my family and I scared of all the wires in my arms and potential test results, we were told there was nothing wrong with me. They recommended taking a strong dose of Advil next time.

“Take more Advil.”

“Have you tried a heating pad?”

“Some people just have painful periods; that’s life.”

“Why don’t we get you some psychiatric care? A therapist?”

I would hear this repeatedly for

nearly a decade after that first horrendous night. Honestly, at that point in my life I really thought that all doctors were capable of was running meaningless tests and telling patients there was absolutely no medical reason for their excruciating pain. As the years dragged on, I changed my mind; I decided doctors were incompetent and unable to help patients like me, young people in pain, particularly those who menstruate, and even more so if you are anything but a thin, white, cis, straight person. Eventually, I just stopped looking for answers; I went to the psychologist and the psychiatrist like they recommended, did everything I thought I was supposed to do, and I never truly felt better. Eventually, when people asked, I said I felt fine. I lied. I allowed the years of invalidation to combine

with severe dissociation and buried my pain.

I know so many other people with this story. In fact, there are millions of patients who are routinely misdiagnosed, invalidated, and misinformed about what is happening in and to their bodies. It wasn't until 10 years after that first ER trip that I found my answers. On August 29, 2019, I woke up from my first laparoscopic surgery that revealed I had endometriosis.

I learned the word Endometriosis in March of 2019. Despite being an illness that impacts over 176 million people worldwide, I had never heard of the disease. People in my own family had Endometriosis, but it was never discussed. When I woke up from surgery, I was positive another doctor was about to tell me my pain was psychosomatic.

“Did they find it?” I remember slurring the moment my eyes fluttered open. “Yes, sweetie, and they got it out,” the nurse patted my hand softly, warmth radiating through her.

I began to sob. Years of medical neglect poured from my eyes. I wept with every bit of my bloody,

bandaged, broken, and literally bruised body. As I let the tears tumble down my chin, a woman called from beyond the partition. She crooned, “Oh, honey, don't cry. It was real. And you're going to be okay now.”

I hang onto those words even now, nearly four years later. Even as my pain continues to get worse.

That's the reality of Endometriosis. It is a relentless disease. It has no cure. Excision, the complete removal of the lesion, is difficult to access. Getting excision with a true specialist is nearly impossible, often takes years, and can cost upwards of tens of thousands of dollars. Excision with an untrained specialist can lead to recurrence rates of up to 40%, though some top experts say their results are closer to 10% recurrence, or return of the lesions. Even if your disease doesn't return, many people have continued pain because Endometriosis can do long-term damage along with co-morbidities like Adenomyosis, Pelvic Floor Dysfunction, and Fibromyalgia (all of which I am lucky enough to have). Endometriosis is incurable and

painful, costs us billions of dollars annually, and is truly a public and personal health crisis.

I actually sought out the care of one of those top experts in 2022. I traveled across state lines with my fiancée, fleeing from the poor Endometriosis care in North Carolina. I saw someone who could be considered one of the top ten Endometriosis surgeons in the world. He removed extensive disease, fibrosis, and adhesions. He recorded the whole surgery and took beautiful pictures of my insides. I am so thankful for his diligence in dissecting my insides. The hospital cared for me better than I could have imagined and truly soothed my medical trauma. My night nurse even had Gastroparesis just like me and stayed very on top of my post-op nausea.

I am over eight months post-op and am still healing in many ways.

Unfortunately, despite his removing deep Endometriosis, I continue to have pelvic pain. My Pelvic Floor Dysfunction has not been resolved with excision and long-term physical therapy. My other diseases are getting worse. Recently, my left ovary has begun to pull and stab - a pain

that reminds me of when it was adhered to my pelvic floor. Since my Endometriosis was over a centimeter deep, along with other factors, I do have a high chance of my disease returning. I fear it has already come back. Eight months of minimal relief after expert excision is discouraging, even if I truly believe my surgeon was amazing and did everything he could.

The crippling pain that comes with endometriosis is no joke, and this pain is not limited to the menstrual cycle. Someone with endometriosis loses 11 hours of productivity a week. This can also make it more difficult to hold a job, and all of these stressors increase the chances of depression and anxiety. I have been unemployed, or “in full-time rehab” as one of my friends calls it, for three years. It can become defeating to watch all of your peers move on in their lives while you’re stuck deciding if you’re getting a hysterectomy at 24 for Adenomyosis (Endometriosis’s sister disease). We shouldn’t be dealing with this kind of pressure and we lack the social support necessary to handle this burden.

There are over 176 million people worldwide with Endometriosis. It is a debilitating illness that costs the world billions of dollars each year and can make life significantly more difficult. There are also amazing warriors out there screaming from the

trooftop, and fighting for proper care and treatment for each of us. And above all else, I am fighting for us to have the support we need no matter where our Endometriosis journey takes us.



Maggie Bowyer (they/them/theirs) is a poet, cat parent, and the author of various poetry collections including 'Allergies' (2023) and 'When I Bleed' (2021). They are an essayist focusing on Endometriosis, chronic pain, and trauma, and have been featured in Bourgeon Magazine, Capsule Stories, Plainsongs Poetry Magazine, The Abbey Review, Troublemaker Firestarter, Wishbone Words, and more. They were the Editor-in-Chief of The Lariat Newspaper, a quarter-finalist in Brave New Voices 2016, and a Marilyn Miller Poet Laureate. You can find their work on Instagram and TikTok @maggie.writes.

Courageous Cowardly

By Vinay Gavhane

I am weak emotionally, mentally, logically; and yet I don't want to change, neither I desire to be strong and practical. Yes, being strong and practical could give me stable life but, this stability comes with its own subtle hypocrisy and shallowness; the depth and richness of emotion are given to me by my so-called 'weakness', this weakness allows me to float freely into that river of emotion, then it doesn't matter even if that river contains the water of sadness. This weakness doesn't hold me or restrict me from diving into that suffering, it does not threaten me by reminding me of my priorities, my interests, or my image, it sets me free to suffer wholly and not partially, and that is the beauty and simplicity of it; pure and natural. Because after all, it is the natural sadness that is more peaceful than the cultivated happiness.

You, strong people, are fearless in every moment of your life, indeed you are damn courageous, you

may not be afraid of anything, but there is one thing you people persistently avoid, and that is this weakness, softness, yes, your strength is frightened of this weakness; you escape from it through your commitments, through superficial positive assertions, through your cunning intellect, you suppress it with the help motivational speakers which in turn gives rise to petty self-centered desires. You are in constant conflict with this 'weakness', you don't want to even taste a bite of it but you do like to give advice about it by standing at the edge of the pool of emotions, your very tendency denies diving into that pool, but I hope one day you will jump into that pool freely by putting aside your mask of strength and then probably you will discover the beauty and innocence of it.

Murder Of Art Through Art Of Murder

By Vinay Gavhane

The hunger for recognition and admiration has killed the soul of my art, the art of writing, and all that I have now are shallow superficial words; Initially, it was just me and my writing, it was a serious affair, a strong intense bond between us, but now I am cheating on her, I cheat her by getting intensely seduced by another lady called fame;

Now our old relationship has lost its essence, its beauty, it has no soul left in itself, now there is the birth of this ugly self-centred affair between me and public opinion about me; And what relationship do I have with my writing now, absolutely nothing, now I simply abuse her, I use her to please my new lady of fame; However, now, this fame lady has turned into an oppressor, the chosen oppressor, it is unbearable, she is

extremely dominating, she always demands to oppress my writing so that she can please herself by bathing in flattery.

The sword of fame has killed that joy, the joy which I used to feel when I used to hug writing, kiss writing when I used to merge in it, swim in it, when I used to dive in it without bothering about the world, I used to throw myself in writing and used to get lost in its intoxication, but now these are only memories; and at the end see what I got by cheating on her; guilt, regret, shallowness, I am left with the burden of words and am a slave to public praise. And I am uncertain whether those lines up there are the result of my love of writing or is it again driven by the lady of fame.....!

Vinay Gavhane

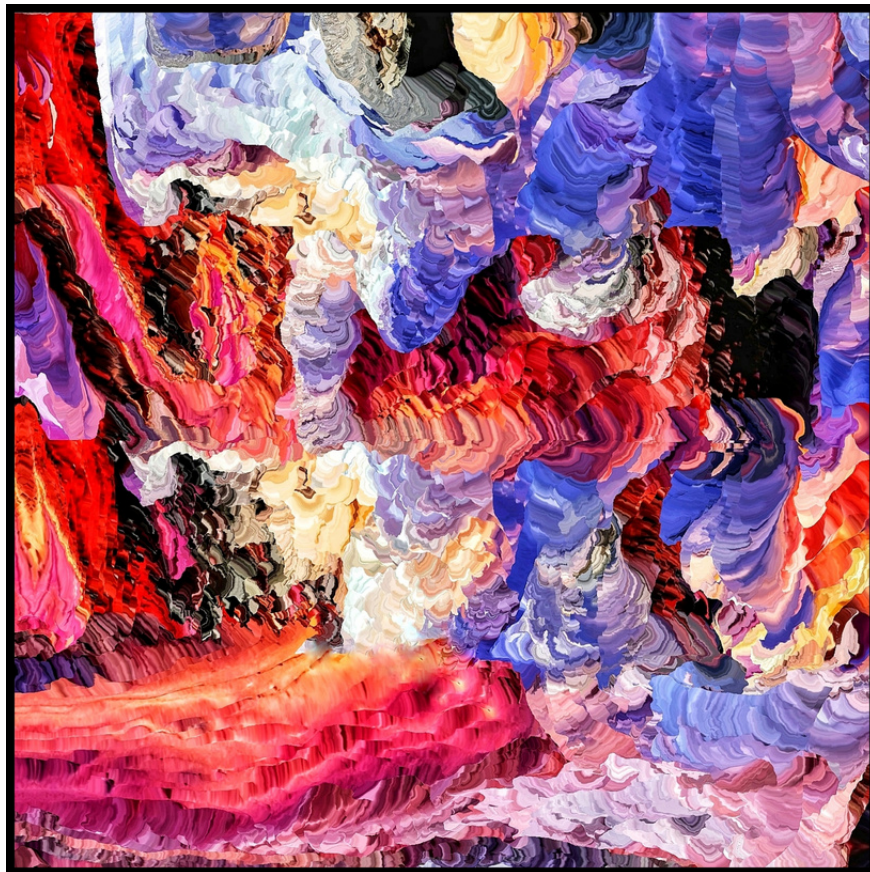
Vinay Gavhane is from Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India. Talking about his education, he is in his B.Sc. final year. His Instagram account is @philosophicintoxication.



Submersive Distortion 1
Alexandr Luc



Submersive Distortion 2
Alexandr Luc



Submersive Distortion 3
Alexandr Luc



The Institution of Maritime Discovery 1
Alexandr Luc

DESCRIPTION OF ARTWORKS

The selected digital art pieces foreground the artist's focus on the study of the status quo, its history, impact, and subversion. These pieces are part of the artist's ongoing project 'Metaphors in Frames I.' whose aim is to investigate symbolic violence and represent it through both digital and analogue art.



The Institution of Maritime Discovery 2
Alexandr Luc

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Through his art, Alexandr Luc - born in Transilvania, România in 1994 - showcases the creative and subversive stance that he takes in relation to the study of social constructions and the production and perception of visual art.

Having mainly studied linguistics and sociology - gender, religion, migration, political myths -, the artist aims to combine research tools available to social sciences with conceptual approaches to art. By doing so, a new angle of conceptual art is envisioned, and the artist thus challenges the fine line between art, science, creation, and deconstruction. Specifically, his conceptual approach analyses social constructions whose meaning derives from their relationship with the artworks made by the artist.

So far, the media used for his projects and exhibitions have been acrylics on cardboard, pencils and markers on watercolour paper, digital photography, digital art & design, and text production/poetry. By deploying various artistic means and sociological concepts, the artist's work ultimately centres around recontextualising diverse ways of understanding social reality and its impact on individuals.



Alexandr Luc (b. 1994) is a Romanian visual artist currently residing in Berlin, Germany. His artwork aims to raise awareness of unequal power relations permeating social reality. He has studied humanities (linguistics, gender, ethnography) at five European universities, and his passions include minimalist photography, conceptual poetry, cinema, and long trips.

Blind Cartography

By Ellora Lawhorn

Have you ever tried to map the fog?

This is what I am asked to do when I am asked where I see myself in

5 years

6 months

tomorrow.

The leaning tower of Pisa has been leaning for almost 800 years since part of the foundation collapsed in the middle of its construction.

It still stands, and I'm sure physicists have figured out how, but I like to imagine that they haven't.

I like to imagine that so many things are great universal mysteries simply because I do not know them.

I hold this with the same hand I hold my desire to know everything. Whimsy and drive, citrine complacency.

What I have learned is that I do not have to blow the fog away.

I do not have to see everything, do not have to fix everything, do not have to be the force of nature; I am empowered by saying I am.

Have you ever known someone who builds you up and then one day decides to shatter your foundation?

I did not see a future after that day.

I still don't see a future after today.

Is there a psychic who can see their own future?

Probably, but I am not one, so I like to imagine they don't exist.

I am in the company of the best charlatans.

Despite all this uncertainty,

I still stand, wavering, tottering.

Sometimes I sit on the couch and forget how to breathe, and my mom takes me for a drive, and later I feel guilty and put gas in the car.

Sometimes I roll the same obsessive thoughts in my mind like caramel in my mouth.

Once I drove to work in a mist so thick it was my best guess whether I was in a lane,

my best hope that I was alone

on the road at 5 a.m.

Maybe I can fumble my way through anything.

Have you ever mapped the fog?

Me neither.

But I like to imagine it's possible, even though I haven't done it yet.



Ellora Lawhorn (she/her) is a queer writer from Northeast Ohio. Her work has been published in Iceblink Lit and 2021's limited run of *Preposition: The Undercurrent Anthology*. She enjoys collecting rocks, loving on her cats, and exploring bookstores. Ellora's poetry centers mainly on mystery, trauma, grief, and hope. She also writes mystery novels. She can be found on Instagram @ellrosewrites.

A Handful Of Life Advice

By Shilpa Sinha

"I guess sometimes we reach just too far, to go back.

And end up bad.

Realisation is all we needed, got it too, just too late, and it all started there.

We gave up, we gave up going back since it would take just really long to get back.

This laziness costs a lot in life.

To some, it costs family, some friends, some love, some teacher, some home, some sleep, and much more, but the only common thing cost here is peace.

Peace of mind."

"Dear You,

Stop finding love. It will come to you ultimately, in some corner, or on some wide beautiful evening, maybe in a bar, maybe on a starry night, or on a car ride at 1 a.m. or on a glorious sunrise; maybe in your office while you'd be running to the elevator, whenever or wherever, it would willingly come to you. It's the love that has been searching for you and it doesn't have to be the other way around, trust me on this.

With Love,

..."

"There's a day when you find yourself in a state that earlier you laughed at, the state in which you are not capable of thinking, you're not crying nor you're trying, you have reached a state in which you are lost, a state where you want no one to be looking out for you nor they're trying; a state which you earlier despised, a state that took away the power through which you used to realise, a state where people are standing and you're right there, already fallen down on the floor; you're not wanting to get up nor they're trying, you are in a state where you have lost your own self, and found the darkest soul in yourself, the state in which you're unaware that where you are.

Until now."

Scenery

By Blanka Pillár

I forgive him for the little lies. The little fibs that slip away and the promises that go unkept. He always tells the same lies, and sometimes I believe him because the story paints itself like a vivid oil portrait; first, the figures are painted, then the background, then the corners, edges, contours, and finally it becomes as if it were a real scene on the canvas of life, but only the immensity of human imagination has made believable what could never be real.

It tells me what I most desire, and so I reach for it with all my heart, stretching out the arms of my soul to preserve all that its lips say, and to hold it within me for eternity. I love him with all my heart, but when my reality is keen-eyed, it sometimes smells like the scratch of jagged-edged infidelities in the dawning dawn or the wistful night. The cold realization slips into bed beside me, or touches me as I walk.

Today we take it into our heads to walk around the riverbank. We get caught in the cool

January breeze and he starts coughing. I take off my thin pink cotton scarf and wrap it around his neck with careful movements. He gives me a weak half-smile and walks on. My chest gets hot, even though my whole body is shivering from below-zero temperature.

Sometimes we stop. We look at the broken-legged seagulls on the slippery waterfront stones, the sloppy sidewalk ahead, and the footprints of giddy pedestrians. As we spy on one of the old buildings covered in melted snow, he rubs his hand. His fingertips are almost purple, so I tug off my black fabric gloves and slip them on his frosty palms. He thanks me quietly. His silent words creep into my consciousness like angelically soft

notes, wrapping my trembling body in a gentle embrace.

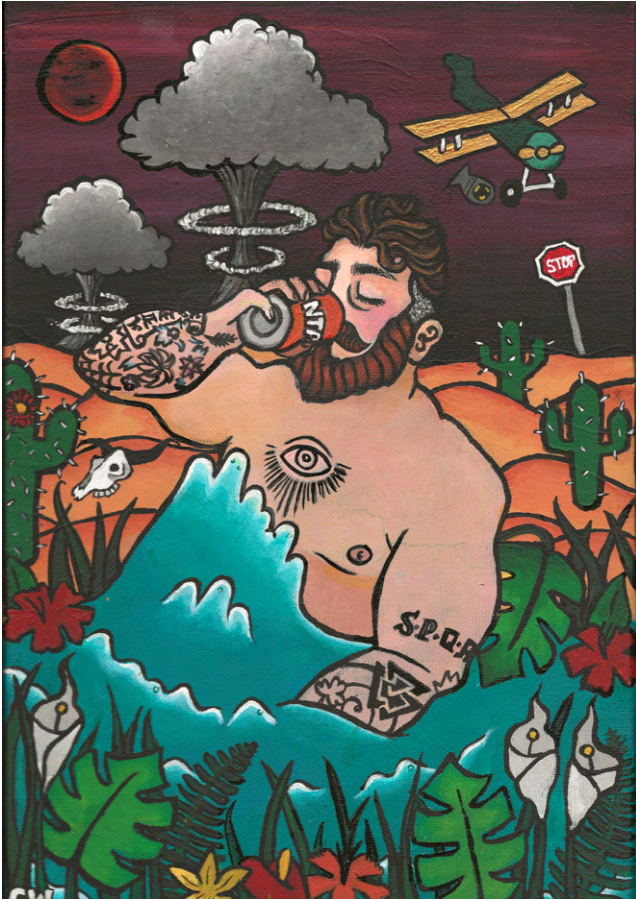
Barely perceptible, the milky-white sky opens and it begins to drizzle, but we are unperturbed. We sit down on a stinging bench and stare silently at the glistening toes of our wet boots as they tread the snowy ground before us. Somewhere in the distance, expensive hand-painted china plates clink, light pages of newspapers crinkle in the city breeze, the iron bells of a dilapidated church jingle, and a delicious golden-skinned duck roast is being prepared in a warm oven. I feel him move beside me, and I put my head down. He sways back and forth with folded arms, while tiny particles of dripping snowfall on his knitted flame-red angora sweater. I slip my thin arms out of my expensive laden-lined coat and place them on his back. He looks me in the eye. At the sight of his delicately delineated perfect face, my tongue curls and confesses. It humbly confesses the truth it has admitted so many times before, and hopes. It hopes that for once its love's answer will not be a lie. But once again he replies, I love you too. I-love-you. He utters each elaborate detail of the gracious lie in a wordy way. The first syllable is trust,

the second is passion, and the third is loyalty. He feels none of these, yet he testifies to them. He savors the shape of the voice.

First bitter, then sour, then finally swallowed. After all, it's only one word. But for me, it's so much more: I put myself in his hands.

Maybe that's not how it all happened. I've been sick for a while now; my lungs are weak from the January freeze. Every time I close my eyes, I try to remember our last story. Embellish it, add to it, rearrange it, and change it. Maybe one day I'll grind it to perfection and that word won't ring so false. Or the memory will turn yellow, like an old letterhead, and no longer matter. Or maybe "I love you" will become just another fluffy phrase to be whispered in the harsh winter, bored, picked up by the wind, carried far away, across the world, to where it means nothing.

Far from the eager, greedy arms of my soul.



Normal Ben, 2020
Caitlin Walton



Picnic, 2022
Caitlin Walton



Tesco Value, 2022
Caitlin Walton

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I struggle with body image and use painting as a way to combat that. I do this by using my body as a reference for all the figures in my work. This allows me to see myself in a different light as momentarily I am no longer concerned with how other people see me, I'm just interpreting my own self. I change features such as gender, skin tone, weight, muscle etc. so that I can include lots of different beautiful bodies in my art. However, I still get a sense of putting my physical form into my work as well as my emotional self.

I experience thoughts of self-doubt and self-criticism however the response I get from sharing my art is overwhelmingly positive which is so validating and inspires me to create more.

Caitlin Walton

Caitlin Walton is from Kent, England, and considers herself to be an outsider/armature artist. She likes to portray a slightly unsettling vibe in an otherwise calm environment. This is due to the fact that she's comforted by the odd elements of life as well as the beauty the world has to offer.

Twice a week for two years, she visited a resident at St. John Care home in Tankerton. This was to help her achieve her goals with her own personal art. Her daughter employed her privately from 2018 to 2020 and she really benefitted from these sessions as she suffered from brain damage and was a former art teacher. Her favourite medium was acrylic on canvas so that's what they used and she still uses it to this day.

February

By Blanka Pillár

Somewhere there was a crossroads near the border, in a smoky child's face with round eyes. Blue-yellow brick low houses and dark green pine trees surrounded it, and in summer, the purple statics opened in the garden, in spring, the hot sunlight stretched across the forest canopy. The first memory of round eyes was of this landscape, where years of warm embraces and happy barks were repeated over and over again. They called this place Life; it was as they imagined the world of fairy tales. Until now.

Something shook the earth. It shuddered, deep and angry, as if the grey sky had fallen. Morning dew covers the blades of grass, and a thick mist has descended on the cool ground; even the air is swirling backwards, and the birds are flying far away. They run out of the brick house and stare at the Thursday shadows. The button eyes watch as all the spring, summer, autumn, and w

winter gather in two grey canvas bags, as the faltering zipper is pulled on the resin-scented warm wool sweaters and the smiling stuffed elephants, as the Mother and Father pray in whispers, as they lock the door of Life without a key. Lacking a vehicle, they walk away from the crossroads, the blue and yellow brick low houses, the dark green pines, the purple statics, and the memory of warm hugs and happy barks. The child's round face fills with hot tears, with the helpless sorrow of incomprehension and lack. She doesn't know where the touch of silky grey dog-tails and the fresh scent of the short-cut lawn has gone; before her and behind her lies an endless sea of concrete surrounded by barren trees. All around her, words she had never heard before, harder-sounding names of unfamiliar places are repeated with terrified powerlessness in their voices.

Meanwhile, the time's arrow marches on, the wind picks up, and the horizon bends to dark blue. The Mother takes a brown bun from her canvas bag, caresses the child's cold face, and then holds the tiny body close to her, cradling it and humming the song she used to sing when the family was ill. The melody rings sweetly, filling the lonely night and drowning out the deafening noise of strangeness.

Twilight and dawn meet; the dust is heavier on the feet, and the eyes look wearily into the bare winter. Farther lies Life than the round eyes and the child's darkening face could possibly look back.

They can only guess where they are going as they leave fading footprints on the edge of towns, hoping to cross something larger soon. They dare only believe that the sun will come out the next day, that there will be night, and that the clear sky stars will shine with the same piercing light.

Blanka Pillár

Blanka Pillár is a sixteen-year-old writer from Budapest, Hungary. She has a never-ending love for creating and an ever-lasting passion for learning. She has won several national competitions and has been a columnist for her high school's prestigious newspaper, Eötvös Diák.

Kabul, Salam

By Akshita Chaudhuri

Kabul,
Salam.

My Maa often asks me to put down my grief, and I can't help but ask her where I should put it all down, and now that my pain has built a home inside me, the next time the postman asks me, for an address, should I instead tell him about how almost all heartbreaks are the hardest to heal?

Janim, what If I told you that the knife split me into half, what if I told you I was the knife?

I am a sinner; I have the blood of a defenseless child on my hand, as something somewhere had to die for me to exist.

Today Maa asked me about the cobwebs that have taken up residence on the ceiling of my room, and I couldn't help myself but ask her what to do about those that have formed on the splinters of my spine

Bibi, my heart is a graveyard of buried hopes, and there rests the coffin of a child who left helpless claw marks on everything she ever held close.

Tell me, Janum, don't you understand the feeling of loss only too well? Haven't you found yourself drowning in the sorrowful mornings held each morning for your children who were killed yesterday, but who owes you the biggest apology – has been cruller to you than yourself?

From,
A battered soul with crimson dreams



Akshita Chaudhuri

Akshita is a 16-year-old high school student, hailing from Kolkata. She considers herself to be the first of her kind and a revolution within herself. To read her, find her on Instagram- [_shaerha_](#)

Like Her Daughter

By Soniya Ahirwar

Warm sand, the last remains of the sun: glowing every inch of my vulnerability, me running towards the ever-rebellious waves. And when the cold water touched my tepid skin, I became alive. I remember the ocean like this from my first time. I was 14.

"I would merge into waves and disappear in the pearly froth. That's how much I love oceans," said Roohani once, jumping on seeing the photographs of my vacation. She had never even seen an ocean. I imagine; How she must have seen it? Did the ocean do justice to her?

Roohani, the happiest girl I knew: happier than the adolescent waves, than the setting sun on the horizon, even more than the children building sandcastles. Her laugh was loud: enough to silence every mind around her and eventually, the mouths. It was almost unreal, erratic, and, naive. But, she wasn't naive instead very well aware.

I insulted her intelligence once, and she laughed. Even though she topped the class; her aspirations always remained a joke. At first, it was certain predictions concerning her future: by her friends. Then it was her: who knew they could be true.

How little did everyone care?

Right now, I can't help but envision her sitting in front of me; before the ocean. And my heart turned into ice, slowly. Digging my nails, further, into the sand, I longed for some warmth. Like she might have: when I slammed her with my judgment, "PREGNANT! Why, Roohani?"

"You still got a year in graduation; at least you could have waited till then." She joked, "He was so irresistible. I just couldn't."

I did not understand; why she would get married this soon, in the first place.

When asked, she dismissed all my speculations, smiling. Handing out her wedding invitation, she said, "they asked me, never forced it. I have free will."

She often used the term 'free will', since the day we learned it. "Roohani!" I nodded disapprovingly: as if I had any right over her life.

Guess, I was no different. Like others, I also tried to own a piece of her life.

But, Roohani had free will: credulous and rotting.

She was steering in a rough stream, holding a fragile branch; her will. It was non-existent to me. I am sure mine also doesn't exist, relative to someone else.

Her matrimonial ceremony was not free like her will; her parents did pay a dowry: in the middle of the wedding. And Ruhaani, free willingly smiled; wearing strawberry sweet lipstick with a sour tongue when her husband tied the mangal sutra around her neck.

And the happiest girl waited patiently for her husband on their first night. Her sister-in-law: Geeta came first, with a bottle of water and a glass of milk in the dimly lighted room,

along with some advice that went like this, "never deny anything my brother asks from you" Roohani searched inside her soul but her 'free will' retired for the night. So, mortified she was, smiled 'unwillingly' and tried to find her way out by joking, "I am prepared already." Her whispers slipped into a transparent veil of embarrassment: hoping no other words would be, exchanged.

But, to the disappointment of her insane optimism: which in a minute will stare her directly in the eyes with her jaw on the floor. Geeta said, "No, you cannot use any contraceptives, or else we will send you to your mother's."

Roohani closed her eyes: remembering the day she ran to her mother, crying in the kitchen. It was her 13th birthday.

"Ajeet is coming," Geeta stood up to leave. Roohani nodded.

"Your husband will be your everything," Roohani's mom taught her, and she dared not ask: if she was everything to dad. But, she believed her. She wanted to. Because that is how your first love feels; everything. Even though it

was an arranged marriage, for Ruhaani: he was the first-ever boy; who talked to her and became her crush. She could never allow anyone before: misuse of liberty, she would say.

If you put a baby bird in a cage from birth, he wouldn't know to fly. Even in an open environment, he wouldn't try: until one day, he gathers courage and attempted it's in nature, after all. Then only he will understand, there is this thing: cage. You can't understand freedom if you don't know; whether you have it or not. For her, the cage didn't exist.

"Talking to Ajeet would be the best idea," said her insanely delusional optimism. But her perception was gonna change: exactly, in 15 days, and 9 months; when she will give birth, to a baby girl.

"Isn't it difficult?" Everyone asked her to see juggle between college, baby, and applying for job applications at, the last minute.

She would call herself; a superwoman and boasts about, never getting tired.

Unless it's Saturday night, which she would spend alone in one BHK

apartment as her husband lived in another town.

After putting Piya to sleep, she would sob: slowly sinking into the night: letting every tired bone in her body, drowning in pain. Her job applications were denied; before she could appear in interviews: by her 'families'.

Roohani saved the best of her jokes: for the last day of college. We laughed; till we feared dying. The best joker of all is, one who dares to laugh at himself. Indeed, she was the best of all.

I watched Piya growing up in pictures. Like her mother, she had the precious gift of the same smile. All of our friends continued our friendship but, the 'happiest', 'free-willed' Roohani, distant herself.

Whenever 7-year-old Piya cried after bruising her knee or hurting her elbow. Roohani would rub an ointment, and tell her to smile: as if that was nothing.

And, whenever Piya got furious and came to her complaining about her friends, teachers, or the

the creepy guy standing at the corner of the street: Roohani would advise her to ignore and laugh at silly things. She had a solution to every problem: laugh, and it won't make you upset. It will not get into your head.

One day, 10-year-old Piya came to her saying: Tayaji touched her at places, which made her feel yuck. Roohani looked for her will, again: now, there was just a tombstone with dried-up flowers on it. So, 'unwillingly' she advised her to keep quiet and forget.

That night, Roohani was silently awake while everything inside her was asleep. Except for one thing: her insanely delusional optimism; it sang a lullaby to soothe her mind, blindfolding her with the little less vibrant, rainbow; she was not ignorant.

With time, everything left Ruhaani except her 'delusional optimism,' eternal smile, and her daughter. But none of them was going to stay for long. There will be nothing: but tombstones. Her less vibrant, but rainbowed eyes were not able to see the greys of the surrounding.

She kept teaching her daughter: the

art of living, the key to happiness. She kept telling her to smile until, one day, she couldn't. There was no one to listen, Piya couldn't turn 16. These waves must have calmed Roohani: her agitated mind. She must have kept repeating the day she turned 13th.

When she came running into the kitchen: to her mom, crying, "a taxi driver called me to suck his dick." Her mom hushed her immediately: scolding her in whispers, "it must have been your fault. Stop saying these words."

"Here, peel some potatoes. And, smile: never be sad." Roohani followed her mom's instructions: burying her anguish beneath the pillow for the night.

Gradually, she learned to stretch her lips. So, whenever somebody cat-called her: she adjusted her dress.

When her father stomped on her dreams: she nodded at the statement, "isn't the freedom given to you enough?" She agreed that not many girls even get this opportunity. A desire for more made her selfish. Her ambitions,

dreams, and courage labeled her greedy.

She smiled and followed: when her in-laws came, with their bits of advice. When she was shouted at, in front of everyone, or slapped by her husband: she closed her eyes to hear the echo of her mother, "Nobody should know you are upset: because you are not. You are happy. You should smile, always."

She opened the letter left by Piya; before hanging herself from the fan.

Roohani's branch was in pieces.

The letter said,

I am sorry mom! I know, I am not happy. Something has kept me awake for years now. I could feel it, crawling on my skin. Every night, I breathe the rotting smell of my scars: makes me puke. These restraints around my mind and body are too much to tolerate.

It makes me want to end this pointless life. I am choked with laughs and pretending. I try to forget every night but, I can't keep going. The pillow is just too wet to sleep. The more I smile, the more I feel like a 37-year-old: who has no idea; what real happiness is. They are definitely, not the curves on your face.

Be happy: for once, for me.

Please, forgive me.

A few months later: drowned in guilt and pain, Roohani took this unread letter and came to Kerala, where I live. She didn't stay. That was the first time she saw an ocean. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she smiled for the last time: before merging herself in pearly frothy waves. Because that's how much: she loved oceans, like her daughter.



Soniya resides in Ahmedabad, but her heart belongs to the sunrises of Varanasi, where she was born and brought up. She writes poetry and has participated in some anthologies. Her love for oceans, sunsets, and writing is infinite. And, she believes sharing that love makes this world a better place.



Nineteen Stories High
Cailey Tarriane



Nineteen Stories High
Cailey Tarriane



Nineteen Stories High
(Photography)
Cailey Tarriane

Into The Darkness

By Aarchi Advani Saini

I was angrier than I could have ever remembered being. Sitting in the backseat of the family station wagon, I watched the city recede and give way to more rural surroundings, what I had always feared. The damage that I had caused seemed irreversible. My life – and everything I knew – was on the line. I felt condemned.

Just the week prior, I had walked into the gymnasium with my best friend Rumi after sneaking off for a quick smoke in a hall bathroom. Neither of us participated in Physical Education, and the coach never made us, leaving us to our own devices. His main focus was the football team, anyway, and P.E. was just a free hour for him. At least, that's how I saw it.

Usually I would have been nervous about being caught smoking, but there were other stresses in my life that took precedence over my juvenile fears. Rumi seemed to understand that I was on a

metaphorical ledge and was probably curious as to whether or not I would fall into the abyss or pull myself back from the brink.

“There's something different about you lately. It makes me wonder what direction you're heading in,” Rumi said.

I think he was waiting on me to say something but I remained silent.

“I guess we'll just have to wait and see,” Rumi said, finally.

Rumi's morbid curiosity was not comforting. We'd been friends since the age of eight and sympathy was not an emotion, I had ever seen him display.

Recently, a sort of darkness had begun taking hold of me. In my inexperienced life, I didn't understand if this 'darkness' was an actual entity or just a state of

mind. I believed it was more than mental and considered something sinister could be oppressing me. Each day, my hopelessness only grew.

In the family car, my parents remained stoic. I could feel their disappointment reverberate. My attention remained fixed on the back of their heads. I wondered what they might be thinking. But it didn't matter now. The time to talk was over. I guess I had gone too far.

For two years, I had rebelled openly against my parents and anything else that represented conformity. I felt suffocated. I wanted to do things my way. Some of this rebellion I learned from my four older brothers, who had since moved out, or been kicked out, all of them having left home prematurely and under unfavorable circumstances. I always felt that this would be my fate, too. And, to make a bad situation more complicated, there was something markedly different about me: I was hypersensitive. The smallest of things could feel astronomical to me. In the right setting, this could be a beautiful thing, but more often than not it was disconcerting.

Rumi and I finished our cigarettes

and snuck back into the gym and up the bleachers. The coach was talking with a female teacher and never noticed us slipping out, or back in. After a few minutes, Coach looked at his stopwatch and blew the whistle suspended from his neck, signaling that P.E. was over, never diverting his attention from the woman in front of him.

Most of the kids quickly complied with the coach's whistle, but Rumi and I didn't buy into his self-entitled nobility. P.E. was for rejects and everybody knew it. None of us were on the beloved football team. We were regarded as less than human. The coach had even told me once in front of all my peers that I would never amount to anything and that I'd probably be working for the local 'Jiffy Lube' once I finally dropped out of school. The snickering that came from the students was more of a burn.

As we walked towards the locker room, I was carrying so much aggression that Rumi actually noticed and asked if I was all right. Before today he had never expressed this type of concern

and it left me feeling a little suspicious.

“I’m fine,” I replied, trying to take the focus off of me as we continued on.

Stepping over the threshold of the locker room I was hit with the nauseating gym smells of sweat and body odor. A movement to the right of my peripheral caught my attention. A large musclebound bully was pressing a younger, weaker, obese kid into the lockers and taunting him about his weight, making him cry. Something inside snapped.

“Get your fucking hands off him!” I yelled with hot, acidic anger.

‘Perplexity’ would be the best word to describe the look I received from the bully. The perceived puzzlement quickly abated as I became the victimizer’s focus. His face and chest were soon pressed into me. While grinding his forehead into mine his foul breath filled my nostrils. The anger I had been harboring suddenly blistered, and then exploded, creating a reaction from deep within. I struck out to the surprise of my adversary. My fists flew, blood was drawn, and I maintained the upper hand, which surprised me as much as the kids

watching. To my astonishment, the bully didn’t fight back as I punched, kneed, and kicked him.

The kids were all going nuts, yelling ‘fight, fight!’

The next thing I knew the coach came in blowing that damn whistle. He quickly collared both me and my opponent and forcefully escorted us to the Principal’s office. Soon after, my parents were called, and I was issued a week suspension from school. And once my dad had picked me up, he lectured me in that way that makes you confront your own shame.

“You know I forbid fighting of any kind.” My dad said as his eyes looked over the tops of his glasses and met mine in the rearview mirror.

“But I stood up for another kid that was getting picked on.” I responded, hoping that he would see my noble action.

“You do not fight under any circumstances. I will not accept that type of behavior from you. I am very disappointed. You can

think about that while your mother and I figure out what your punishment is going to be. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir,” I replied as his piercing blue eyes bored into mine.

That night I lay in bed estranged from my father.

The next day after school, my friends came to my house to show me love and respect, all except for my girlfriend, who was acting withdrawn and avoiding me. Normally she would have been nuzzling into me, or holding my hand. Instead, she seemed to purposely engage in conversation with my other friends to avoid talking with me. The ‘darkness’ that had been ever so enveloping seemed to stir, and I swore I felt it feeding on my girlfriend’s contempt. My smiles and reactions toward my friends became nothing more than a masquerade and Rumi seemed to notice this. He gave me a knowing look as I attempted to mask my emotions.

When the visit was over my friends said their goodbyes, and my girlfriend was the last one to the door. I tried to embrace her, but a cold shoulder was

all I received. Whatever had been bothering her seemed to amalgamate with something new, hidden behind her eyes. I wouldn’t know what it fully was until the next day when she broke up with me using a payphone from school. My phone rang and I ran to the kitchen to answer it.

“Otis?” said a strange, male voice.

“Yeah?” I replied.

“I can’t do this. You tell him,” The male’s voice said. Whomever it was sounded like they were holding the phone away from their mouth.

As I continued to listen, I heard shuffling on the other end of the line and then recognized my girlfriend’s voice.

“Otis. I want to break up,” My girlfriend said.

“I know,” was all I could think to respond.

After my lame response, I abruptly hung up, trying my best to counter her tactic. The reality was she probably didn’t care and was glad to have the phone call over with.

I felt a weird sort of relief because I knew our time together had been expiring, but then my fractured heart finally cracked all the way through, and the ‘darkness’ strengthened.

From there my trouble at home only increased. My punishment consisted of sitting at the study desk in my room and only doing homework. I could not get up or use the bathroom unless I asked permission. I would be allowed to eat dinner only when told, but otherwise, I had to remain at the desk. I was not to use the phone, listen to music, or do anything that deviated from school work. I would go to bed early and at my parent’s discretion.

Days into my sentence, I packed clothes, a few cassette tapes, and my skateboard, and left home for good. Rumi picked me up and dropped me off at another friend’s house, where I hid until his divorced mother returned home from out of town.

“Why did you run away from home?” she asked, dripping in concern for my situation.

“I don’t know. My parents are being unreasonable. All they do is go to work, come home, watch the news,

and go to bed.”

“What’s so bad about that?” My friend’s mother asked.

“It’s not about that. My dad tells me that he doesn’t like my friends and that he doesn’t want me hanging out with them. He doesn’t even know my friends! My mom wants me to dress like the preppy kids, but that’s not me! My friends are skaters and punkers, and my parents hate them! They leave me alone most of the time, but now they are telling me how to live my life minute by minute. All of a sudden they’re interested in my life,” I replied all worked up.

“That’s what parents are supposed to do.”

“It’s too little too late,” I scoffed.

She seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say and continued to ask questions. I’d poured my guts out to her and let her know things that I would never have said to any other adult, only to have her betray me. I didn’t expect it but the next day my parents picked me up from school and confronted me about all the things

I said to my friend's mom.

Second-hand smoke hung in the air as my parents held their cigarettes to the slightly cracked windows of the family station wagon. The city had vanished entirely and now hayfields and cow pastures made up the scenery. I had been banished to stay with my cousin in the country because no one knew what else to do with me. Deep down, I always expected this would become my destiny. There was no reason that I should have turned out differently than my brothers. Not only had the 'darkness' fastened onto me, but found its way inside.

My dad pulled the car into the driveway of my cousin's house. There was only one neighbor within an acre's distance, and another half a mile away.

My cousin was quick to greet me outside as my parents made their way inside his house. I was too coiled up with rage and hurt to be indoors and asked my cousin if he wanted to go for a walk. After setting off I offered him a cigarette. He smoked with me as we made our way down the empty highway that stretched away from his house. My cousin tried to make small

talk but my words felt empty as they left my mouth.

We took a side road and soon came to a break in a barbed wire fence that accessed a place my cousin liked to go when he wanted to be alone. The place was nothing more than a clearing among a grove of trees with a log big enough for both of us to sit on. We sat and pitched pecans at a rusted tin can as my mind reeled from the loss of everything that was familiar to me. My friends, my ex-girlfriend, and my life were suddenly gone. All my worries had finally come to fruition. Through my disconsolation the 'darkness' continued to expand, filling every crack and crevasse that remained.

After returning to my cousin's, I saw my parents exiting the house and onto the drive. As they made their way to their car, they neither consoled me nor barked about their decision to cut me from their lives. I did, however, receive a warning from my father to behave, but nothing more. Then as they drove away I watched the taillights of their car fade into the distance.

As I began to adapt to my new

surroundings, I became increasingly morose, withdrawn, and longed for solitude. My cousin – who thought that it would be cool to have me live with him – only grew to loathe being around me as the ‘darkness’ continually filled any space I inhabited. His mother watched and grew concerned, and swore that something sinister was at work. She had mentioned church to me and that maybe my cousin and I could go to the new youth group in town. I responded by expressing my doubts about God’s existence, hoping that she would give up trying to help me. I knew that my aunt was watching and praying for me.

As the days stretched from one to the next, the season became colder, the days shorter, and my hopelessness grew stronger. I became increasingly desperate and began to consider an irredeemable alternative. I knew the location of a .357 revolver, kept in my cousin’s house, which could easily accommodate what I was considering. I had held it a few times and was amazed by its weight. My cousin and I had also shot cans off of a fence post, and I felt that I could operate the gun easily enough. At one point, I sat in the cold, empty kitchen and decided to place the barrel into my mouth,

tasting the oiled metal against my tongue. I thought about how I could manipulate the gun while holding it backward. My teeth clattered against the steel as tears filled my eyes. Darkness closed in around me, seeming to snuff the light from the room. And at that moment, right before the hammer fell I stopped. Call it my aunt’s divine prayers. Blame it on cold feet. Or give credit to whatever higher power that you choose. I just couldn’t go through with it. Whatever entity had laid claim to me was not going to win. Not then; not today.

There is so much more that contributed to that desperate moment on that cold winter’s day. But it’s not about putting blame on anybody. Believe me, I have played out the scenarios through my mind many times, but it really comes down to just one thing. Who I am; who anybody is. It’s the understanding that we are all vulnerable. If anything could come close to consolation, it would be to understand one’s self.

I am an empath and an introvert. I have been this way for as long as I can remember. And understanding

that explains why I feel so intensely. And that fifteen-year-old that came close to ending everything was experiencing so much more than he could have ever understood. Adversity gives birth to defeat or perseverance. And as I sit here, years later, I am finally okay with it all. We

have all faced our traumas in one way or another. And one might wish for a different outcome. But not me; I wouldn't trade any of it for a different story. Because this is my story, this is who I am.



Aarchi is a 20-year-old Indian girl with big dreams. If you ever meet her, you can observe it by seeing the spark in her eyes. Her journey is from an ordinary girl to a young author. It was on July 15 of the year 2021 that Aarchi first published her book 'The Loads of Poetry'. In just two years, she published 33 books and it has been entered as a record in magic books of record, a national government-affiliated book. In a span of time, she became the bestseller of more than 10 books, and then she compiled two anthologies 'The lost life' and 'Musafir'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of the contributors, readers, and supporters who have made 'The Hemlock' possible.

To our talented writers and artists, thank you for sharing your creativity and imagination with us, and for bringing your unique voices and perspectives to our pages. We are honoured to showcase your work, and we are continually inspired by the passion and skill that you bring to your craft.

To our readers, thank you for joining us on this literary journey, and for embracing the power of the written word to connect, inspire, and move us. Your support and enthusiasm mean the world to us, and we are continually motivated by your passion for the arts.

Finally, we would like to thank our staff and volunteers, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to bring each issue of 'The Hemlock' to life. Your dedication, hard work, and passion are the driving force behind our publication, and we could not do it without you.

Thank you all for being a part of 'The Hemlock' community, and for helping us to celebrate the beauty and power of the literary arts. We look forward to continuing this journey together.

*The Hemlock
Journal*



ABOUT THE HEMLOCK

The Hemlock is an idea as potent as the name it bears. It refers to a plant from the Pine family which is an age-old herb and also to an ancient poison known to Greeks that supposedly killed Socrates, the great philosopher. Likewise, art heals us but at the same time, it possesses the ability to kill us, if not used well.

The Hemlock Journal is a space built for writers to learn, explore, grow together, and be a unique source in reaching the distant perspectives of the poets and storytellers to the tribe. Our prominent aim is to help writers advance their careers, and establish their brands by providing a global platform.

We are a dedicated team with a common purpose, united to enlighten as well as delight the crowd through our passion. We hope to inspire and positively impact the world around us.

We welcome writers and poets from around the world to share their works of art and literature through our journal irrespective of their background, gender and ethnicity.

THE HEMLOCK



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ABOUT THE ISSUE

As Spring symbolizes a new beginning, hope, rejuvenation, and optimism, our 'Spring 2023' issue marks the beginning of 'The Hemlock Journal' in the field of online publishing with a goal to enter the print media as well. It is the first ever issue of our journal and we hope that it brings colourful blossoms of literature and art into your life.

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GET YOUR WORK

PUBLISHED!

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