



Ice Lolly Review

ISSUE 1 2020

Editor's Note

When I first founded the Ice Lolly Review I didn't have a plan, only a mission in mind. Back then the magazine was lucky to even receive a click on the website nevermind an entire issue filled with pieces. I had even thought the magazine would be lost in the endless abyss of the internet and failed dreams. But after much trial and error the magazine managed to compile up a collection of beautiful works written by young writers throughout the globe.

It has been such a joy to read every single one of your pieces. Every single one. I cannot express how impressed I am by the abundance of talent, creativity, and imagery. The magazine received a variety of submissions from short sweet poems to stories crammed to the brim with wonderful imagery and deep messages. I would like to thank the authors of the pieces in this issue for having the courage to submit to the magazine and put their work out there for the world to see. You guys are the real ones.

Now, I'm thrilled to show everyone writing that displayed a true voice and a strong style, that were sweet, sour, and bubble-gum flavoured, that stuck to teeth and left tongues painted red and pink, aching for more. I'm so honored to present issue I and I hope you enjoy reading through it!

Best,

Jessica Wang

The founder of Ice Lolly Review

Poetry

Summer - Melinda Deng

Goodbye - Alira Cohen

Reflections of Quarantine - Bo Walker

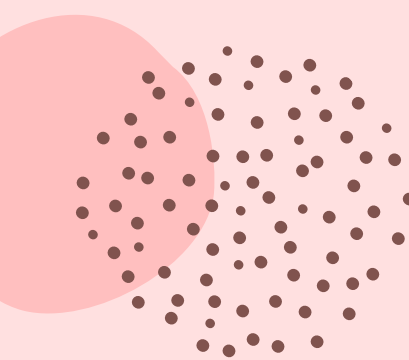
Croissant Crescent - Sanchi

God is love, love is God - Sanchi

I Want to Escape - Siya Dhamija

Ethereal - Sarah Chaudhry

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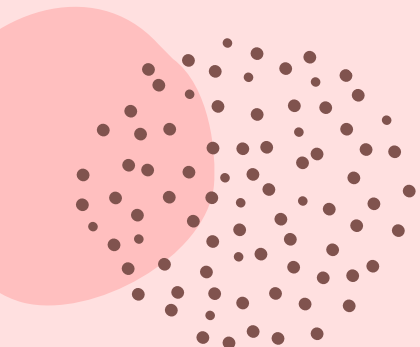
Prose

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Summer - Poetry
By Melinda Deng

Summer evenings,

Complete with the smell of cooling asphalt, late barbeques, lingering car fumes, fireflies, wet earth, and algae that reeks of sewage.

The cicadas choirs chirp as the squirrels chase each other down trees. There's an ever present hum of bike wheels under the shrieks of children. Their parents yell for them to go home while they yell back, "One more minute!"

It's been fifteen.

The air finally cools. A welcome relief from the oppressive daytime heat. Three stars manage to twinkle through the light pollution.

The sun's remaining few rays retreat as the moon takes over. Luminous and calming. It basks everything in a magical glow.

The desk lamp shines kinder and the breeze flows calmer and the bed is pure temptation. The temptation takes control along with drowsiness. The kids's screams faded long ago. All that remains are the cicadas. They've only been background noise. But now their melodies dominate the darkness.

Summer nights.



Melinda Deng is 14 and from New Jersey. She enjoys writing fiction and other random topics.

Goodbye - Poetry
By Alira Cohen

A rusty shell sits upon my shoulders.
It is heavy, cold, stationary;
It wants to be the only part of me that matters.
I'm still trying to shed it,
Trying so hard to get it off of my back.
But it hurts, hurts a lot...
There's no other truthful way of describing it.
I brush sleep out of my eyes,
I sit up straight and I stand as tall as I can.
Metamorphosis is never an easy thing.
But this is the way that it needs to be,
The only way to move forward.
Scales drop like flower petals at my feet.
Hard skin and bones, dropping, dropping.
It hurts like nothing I've felt before,
Leaving so much behind.
There is no more order, no more structure,
Nothing I can cling on to so desperately.
I melt and morph, twist and burn;
But there isn't any kind of horror in that.
The sounds of voices from my past
Don't echo in my bones or rattle in my brain,
They bring me only comfort.
My skin is shedding, becoming rain.
It falls all around me, falls like words forming old sentences.
The pain comes from missing these lost parts,
But I know that in time they will return,
They will only come back stronger.
Thank you for all that you've done.
Thank you for all that you've taught me.
Thank you for everything I will soon learn

Thank you,
And goodbye.

My name is Alira Lee Cohen and I'm 18 years old. I've had a passion for writing and storytelling ever since I was a young child; it is what makes me feel alive, especially in uncertain times such as these. On top of working on comics, short stories, poems, and essays, I enjoy reading, taking care of my pets, and going on long walks. I believe that it is important for young writers of all kinds to make their voices heard... if we all take the time to sit down and listen to what our fellow humans have to say, the world will be a better place.

Reflection of Quarantine - Poetry

By Bo Walker

In the mirror stands a little girl,
her face concealed with a rabbit mask.
I couldn't tell if she was looking back at me
since the eyes of the mask are red
and threatening
What is she feeling?
It's nearly impossible to tell.

If I peer in closer, I can see the world she lives in.
It's a nightmarish version of all I know --
home, but not quite.
Everything is distorted and filtered in red,
contrasting against her pure white dress.
The stillness and fragility of the fabrics
chill my pale skin
and make my spine tingle.

Suddenly her head jerks away from me
as she peers over her shoulder,
making me jump.
"What is it?" I ask the rabbit-masked girl,
my whole head now immersed
in the wavering cool of the looking glass.
She whispers, her voice quivering and meek:
"Shouldn't you know best?"

I watch with terror
as her rabbit ear twitches.

A gunshot cracks
and the girl squeals
and falls to the ground

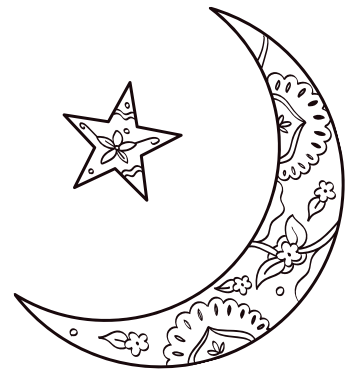
and her blood pours
pours
pours
from the wound
and onto her white dress
as if it weren't even white in the first place...

It feels like a nightmare.
but the girl still lays there in the reflection,
bleeding in the corner of my room,
and serving as a constant reminder.

Bo walker is an aspiring editor and artist from Hackettstown, New Jersey. They find the most joy in indie music, cosplaying, visual novels, and drawing. Although Bo spends most of their time in their room, that's where most of the magic happens.

Croissant Crescent - Poetry
By Sanchi

I could see the moon
From my room, that night
There was a silent roar and
Echo in my mind
Not that the moon was full,
It was croissant crescent
Yet something was full in it
Even when the silence screams
A peace in my heart stays
The chaos and fuss was all gone
The rage changed into nothingness
I could hear the silence
With a voice in my soul
The nights don't scare me
The days don't tire me
I love the solitude and
Silence I live within...



Sanchi's patronus is a unicorn and she is a universe believer. She loves to talk about fireflies, stars, and books. She is a selenophile and loves the croissant crescent. She is procrastinator who finds solace in writing and says, "I dive into books what's your superpower?" She is from Haryana, India.

God is love, love is God - Poetry
By Sanchi

There is a power beyond everything
everything is just nothing in front of love
love which is the most beautiful feel
feel that starts defining your true soul
soul which become powerless
powerless is the world in front of love
love which is the most powerful power in the world
world which dies for the emotions
emotions which is the taste of life
life in which inevitable is love
love which is complicated and complex
complex are the emotions and behavior
behavior which includes affection and belief
belief in GOD is what we call love

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I Want to Escape - Poetry
By Siya Dhamija

I want to escape
Not from reality
But this spiral of thoughts
That haunt me like ghosts
I want to escape
Not that i did something wrong
But because i am scared
What if I couldn't stay strong?
I want to escape
Not from the darkness
But from these shadows
That stays with you only when it glows
I want to escape
Not from myself
But this hollowness that resides in me
Just like roots of a tree
That won't ever let me free

Siya is a 16 year old simple girl who lives in beautiful country India. She finds happiness and solace in writing. She is a selenophile and believes in carpediem.

Ethereal - Poetry
By Sarah Chaudhry

I once read that it's better to love someone and lose it than to have never loved at all.
Loving you was a bittersweet game, a losing one at that,
but I wanted to burn in it and see
if I would rise above the flames reborn
or be reduced to mere ashes

Sarah Chaudry is a fifteen-year-old sophomore in Queens, New York. She enjoys reading and writing more than anything in the world, aside from watching Marvel movies and coming up with ideas for short stories and poetry. Sarah has work published on Cathartic Literary Magazine as well as aspires to publish a novel (or two) of her own.

Time's Souvenir - Poetry
By Anushka Mankodi

My head turned, enraptured
Lingering eyes on a roundabout
Like a boat tied on anchor
Bobbing head above blue water
A deep, intrinsic desire to go
Back to simpler times.
Days on the soft surf
Rays in the corner of your eye
The smell of memory, washed away
Like windswept specks of sand.
And a tug deep inside
Ghost noises, ghost yells, ghost joy.
A tug deep inside
The grey pebble sinks under
Under the lapping blue waves
Like doomed, splintered boats
under spotlights of sunshine

Anushka Mankodi is a 16 year old poet and fantasy fiction writer, living in Muscat, Oman who spends her time listening to music, reading avidly, and writing. She aspires to major in media and communication, and eventually go on to become a magazine editor.

Xiāng Xiāng - Nonfiction

By Jessica Wang

I have two names. One I use everyday while the other I keep stowed inside me, locked behind the bars of my lips and the breath of my tongue.

My caged name is actually quite pretty. It means aroma. Not a smelly one, but a homey, warm, odor like the scent of fresh laundry or the steam that bubbles off chicken soup.

Sometimes I say my name to myself, just to see if it's still there. It's strangely pronounced and forces my tongue to touch the roof of my mouth and often times I stumble over the loopy syllables. I only say it in the dark, face smushed between two pillows and huddled under layers of blankets, just in case it tries to make a run for it.

I'm afraid of my chicken soup-laundry name.

It's odd because you're not supposed to fear a name. Can you imagine if every Tim, Tom, and Harry were afraid of their names? Nobody would call themselves Tim, Tom, or Harry anymore. And that would be a strange world we would live in.

I'm afraid of my name because it's cursed. It doesn't belong here, on this soil or in this strange body that I try to call "American". If I were to let my name go from its cage, past my lips, people would stare and know that I too don't belong here. They would ask me what my name means and I would explain that directly translated it means "nice smell". And then they would laugh at the absurdness and wonder what the silly Chinese were thinking. Naming a child after a smell? What would be next? A girl named after the taste of a lemon?

If I said my name, it would betray me, reveal me as an outsider. It had done it before and would do it again. So I betray my name first. I betray it by wearing colored contact lenses and trying to look Caucasian. I betray it by buying creams to hide the yellowness of my skin. I betray it by waking up every day and wishing my name wasn't there, that instead of two names I only had one, one free name.

I dye my hair blonde one day, just to see what it would be like to have yellow curls and pretty

hair. The dye stung my scalp and smelled like bleach and acid and nothing homey or warm at all. I am not an outsider. I tell myself as I brush my new beautiful hair. I am not an outsider. I am not an outsider. I am not an outsider. The words taste funny on my tongue.

My mother no longer calls me by my caged name. She used to, back when I didn't understand what the word "foreigner" meant and my worst fear was getting an apple instead of cookies during snack time. I remember she used to say it in a certain way, curling her pink tongue and rolling the syllables off neatly. But she stopped after I asked her what the word "chink" meant. Now she calls me "Je-ssi-ca," the name neatly printed on my birth certificate, my official name, the free name. She named me after the actor Jessica Simpson because she's pretty and Caucasian and has blonde hair. The name is easy to pronounce and flows off the tongue smoothly, the American tongue that is.

My second name "Je-ssi-ca" does wonders. It helps me chain up my foreign name and even adds a couple more locks, determined to snuff it out. And it works. I can no longer hold chopsticks properly or handle the spices of traditional dishes. When I try to speak the language my ancestors once spoke, my thick American accent pokes through and slurs together the vowels and syllables. It's American-Chinese my grandma would murmur and shake her head at how far her heritage has fallen. I am no longer the little girl who listened to her stories about the immortal monkey king and his magical staff. She does not know who I am. I am foreign to her.

I have successfully locked up my name.

But even without saying my name, it still betrays me. People still look at me like I'm an outsider even though I was born here, even though I speak English perfectly, even though I betray a part of myself everyday just to please them.

And no matter how much cream I scrub into my skin, no matter how much I try to hide the dark brown in my eyes, they keep staring.

But I like my caged name. I think it's pretty, even prettier than light hair and blue contact lenses. It reminds me of steamed dumplings and curved mandarin letters and red paper lanterns with gold embroidered on the edges. And when I say my chicken soup-fresh laundry-oddly pronounced-laughable name. I feel good. The syllables punctuate the air

daringly and challenges the world around. When I whisper the letters, my name is free and so am I.

It's true that my caged name doesn't quite fit me. I can't write or read mandarin and my pronunciation is terrible. But it's still a piece of me, just like my skin and my eyes. I can't just scrub it off, mask it, or even lock it up. Because at the end of the day my caged name is mine. All its dents, curves, and ridges are mine. It's oddly pronounced, and it's mine. It is me and I am mine. My culture. My ethnicity. Me.

I don't want to look myself up anymore.

Jessica Wang is from Long Island, New York. She has been nationally recognized by Scholastic Art and Writing, It's All Write, and Bluefire Magazine. She is the editor of her school's literary magazine. She has pieces that are published or are forthcoming in The Weight Journal, Cathartic Lit, Clumsy Spider, etc. In her free time she enjoys eating cheesecakes and fangirling over Joseph-Gordan-Levitt. She hopes you have a wonderful day.

The Plague Dogs: A film against animal cruelty everyone should watch - Nonfiction

By Libby Taylor

The 1982 British-American animated adventure film is based on the 1977 novel of the same name by Richard Adams.

The film was written, directed and produced by Martin Rosen, who also directed *Watership Down*, another adaptation of one of Adams' novels.

The animation, which is surprisingly rated PG-13, depicts heavy animal cruelty themes, violent imagery, and emotionally distressing scenes.

The Plague Dogs is the first non-family-orientated MGM animated film.

The story is centred around two dogs, Rowf, a Labrador mix, and Snitter, a smooth fox terrier, who escape from an animal testing facility in the Lake District, UK. It highlights the cruelty of performing surgery on a living organism for experimental purposes, and animal research.

The film is shown through the view of the two dogs, as they escape from the animal testing facility. With the help of Tod, a fox they meet along the way, they try to survive in the wild whilst trying not to be caught by the humans.

Though the film is animated, it is not a kid's film. The tone of the film is dark, depressing and violent and viewers warn that kids will not be able to handle it. This tone is immediately set within the first minute of the film.

Despite the graphic and emotionally traumatising content, this film is a must-see for everyone.

It leaves you questioning how humans treat animals and the environment for days.

During the film, the animals are portrayed as humane, and the humans are portrayed as faceless creatures whose only role is to hunt the dogs we grow to love. This film is mercilessly critical of society and it is not afraid to hide its political opinions.

The characters in the film are well developed and easy to become attached to. Christopher Benjamin the voice of Rowf, and John Hurt who voices Snitter give phenomenal performances. They are able to give so much emotion through their voices, leaving unforgettable characters. The animation is beautiful and blends well with the tone of the movie. It is very advanced for its time resulting in viewers not being able to look away.

As a society it is important to remember that we do not own this world. We share the world with nature and its animals, and this film highlights the cruelty of abusing one's power

against innocent beings.

Libby Taylor is a 20-year-old journalist, poet, and aspiring author. She is originally from Leicestershire, England and is currently at University studying English Literature and Creative Writing. When she is not writing or working on her blog, she is usually reading a book, or playing with her dog and cat. You can find her work published in, Vaughan Street Doubles, Pendemic and Yellow Paint Magazine to name a few.

The Flame of Knowledge - Fiction

By Alina Tsoy

Sophie had never had the privileges that others had, and that those others did not even consider privileges. She could not ask her parents for new shoes when the old ones were worn out; she did not go hungry, but there has never been a birthday cake on the kitchen table for her; and when her younger brother Tom inadvertently spilled his stinking coffee on her favorite (and the only one) copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, she barely squirreled away for an old, battered, and not so pretty volume.

But what always seemed to hurt her the most was her lack of access to normal studying. This, among other things, was due to her gender: where Sophie lived (the author will not mention where exactly, since our character later wished to break all previous ties with that place), women were provided with only primary and lower secondary education, and higher education was not even possible. All this seemed to the bookish girl, a girl who was drawn to knowledge with all her soul, extremely unfair, but she could not change something, as brave activists do. However, Sophie had something in common with the activists, namely a spiritual flame that did not die down when logs were thrown at it, but on the contrary, flared up even more, so much so that in gusts of rage, its tongues touched the very clouds, so high that the Tower of Babel never reached it. When a little girl with a newly lit fire inside told herself that she would read every book in her father's library, even if it was difficult and completely unreadable, she secured a future for herself, as an adult, strong and burning in her own Hellfire.

part 1. courage.

Having a dream is a damn bold decision. It is much easier to live in good ignorance of the fact that there is something in the world that is worth fighting for, you can live happily without thinking about tomorrow, because today is enough. And a human dream, like a small but very annoying insect, will never allow its owner to calm down for a moment, or for the smallest fraction of a second. A dream, if it is a real dream, will rob its owner of sleep, will buzz until the poor man forgets that he ever needed sleep at all. It's a hell of a disadvantage to have a dream.

But Sophie, who had been given this name at birth for a reason, clearly weighed all the

pros and cons on a small imaginary scale, and although there were a lot of points against it (confidentially, more than points for it), the girl, who was extremely prudent before, decided to go to the end.

Yes, having a dream is dangerous. You cannot do it without courage.

part 2. love.

The dream is like an annoying child who was not lucky enough to be born second in the family. It demands all the attention to itself, and if you try to show even a little sympathy for someone else, it will raise such a howl that it will eradicate all love for the eldest child in the root.

It is not that the girl was spoiled by excessive attention in the family: times were difficult, and certainly not suitable for displays of sentimentality. But even in that situation, the little soul found the strength to feel for someone that tender, filling the very existence of meaning, affection. Fortunately, she was surrounded by people who needed attention and love, although they hardly admitted it. Her father was the most difficult person to approach, partly because Sophie rarely understood the character structure of men in general, and partly because her father left too few ways to find that approach. However, even that stern man, who spent his entire life thinking about politics and military strategy, could not help but thaw when a loving child climbed on his lap and wrapped her warm baby arms around him.

Sophie's father was not a gentle caressing flame for his wife, and the girl had to be one for her mother. She had never been able to fully understand her mother either, although girls and mothers were, of course, inseparable pairs. Sophie did not understand why mom worked at home, hunching, did not understand why she came to the light so rarely, so rare that the skin was faded, but readily took mother's wrinkled, calloused hands in her small ones and kissed out pain as she could. No one had ever taught her how to do this, but judging by the crease between mom's brows that grew smaller after her touch, she knew she was doing the right thing.

Yes, she loved her parents, but that love was born mostly of pity for poor, old people who had no one else to love. Her feelings for Tom, her younger brother, were much deeper, were much deeper, which scared her to the core.

Tom was clumsy, annoying, but would it be an exaggeration to say that younger and older siblings would always be a reflection of each other, always looking at each other curiously, as if they were from another Universe? Only to him did Sophie devote not only the pitiful impulses of her soul, but also her thoughts, and thoughts, as we know, bind people together more than any feelings. Every scratch the boy had got and that was kissed by his sister, had been a bittersweet reminder of what she would have to sacrifice.

Yes, she could have gone home. But is it possible, after seeing all the greenery of summer, to ever choose winter?

Every dream, every revolution, every bold decision is worth something. Most often, they are worth love. That is why so few of us get where we are going.

It is damned hard to go on without love.

part 3. talent.

To be a dreamer, you need talent, without it, nowhere. A talent for staying in line when all the soldiers behind you have long since fled in terror; a talent for remaining even slightly suspiciously resolute after the twelfth failed attempt, a talent for mentally recording all doubts on the loose sand, leaving them to the mercy of the approaching waves.

It was the eighth and final year of Sofie's state in secondary school. The teachers had long since exhausted information that might surprise her, so she spent hours at the rear desks, fending off anyone who intended to take a seat next to her. She had a carload of work to do: to scribble on the lined paper every day in her scrawled handwriting, exploring the topics of the day; to remain an exemplary student, a favorite of teachers (no matter how much it was disgusting to look obediently into the eyes of these arrogant smart-alecks), and also to prepare documents for universities in secret, without knowing, however, how to correctly compose a resume, typing on the only oldest computer in the school library during lunch breaks. She had so much to do, and life was just beginning, just holding out arms that were not yet fully open for her to embrace.

She did not have a hell of a lot of time, and no one was going to give her more than she already had.

And here it was, the long-awaited end of the school year, like rain in the Sahara. As soon as she jumped out of her old desk on the side of the classroom for the last time, Sophie prepared to end years of furious work and reckless courage. She pointed the mouse at the "Send" button and scroll, motherly stroked the mouse, jumped up from the table and prepared to delete, permanently erase the request for acceptance on the budget, but always came back and again, again fought with herself. There seemed to be no end to this cycle, until the girl finally released her finger and the sound of a message notification rang out.

So yes, talent and dream always go hand in hand. The dreamer needs different types of talents, and one cannot write them all down.

But the most important talent of any dreamer is to fall from heaven to earth and accept rejection.

When a dream does not come true, it is hard to start living again. Many do not try, and those who do remain only shadows of themselves in the past, echoes of the strength and firmness of a human character, which are dissolved in a bitter liquid or suspicious types of powder.

But it was not inherent in the character of Sophie, which she had formed herself. She tore up the University's answer, with her jaw clenched, tore up what she had been trying to get for years. She does not meet their requirements. Well, that is their problem.

"I will be great" she repeated to herself before going to sleep, like a mantra. Her wounded pride would not allow her to eat, drink, or go to sleep, and all she could do was work and repeat these words so that they would actually come true. There was no time to kiss mother's calluses or smooth out the creases on father's forehead. Love for anything but business was extinguished in the stubborn soul, so that the flame of dreams would burn brighter. "To spite them, but not only. I will become great because the name Sophie is given to me, in my very nature - to carry the light of knowledge. I will become a great scholar and a woman to be worshipped and feared. And to change that, you're going to have to damn well try."

Two more applications were sent by the end of this cold, dead month, when the mind

finally mastered her pride. The first letter arrived a month later. She hid it from her parents all day, so that she could lock herself in her room at night and repeat the words "we can't accept you" over and over in the dim light of the lamp. The situation at the front was becoming more and more difficult, and it was worth a lot of effort not to give up or at least not to go to the rear.

The second letter came three months later, when all the fervor was gone, and Sophie was cheerlessly working as a seamstress, in between hours of working in the kitchen and dozens of hours of reading and writing. The letter was delivered directly to her hands, in which the broken heart tried to see signs from above.

Her trembling hands could no more handle the envelope than they could thread a needle's eye. Yes. If only Yes.

"Dear Sophie,

Please accept our congratulations! We are glad to announce that you have been accepted to the faculty of English language and Creative Writing undergraduate program this academic year. You will be among the 10 students who were awarded scholarships this year.

We are looking forward to see you here!"

The University, with its immensity and endless rows of stairs and corridors, reminded the girl of a Minotaur's labyrinth, and Sophie herself played the role of Theseus, who had a hell of a hard time finding a way without Ariadne's rescue. Contrary to her expectations, in the faces of her classmates, she saw only tired, stoned idiots, not at all well-read young geniuses.

"All right," Sophie said, addressing to the owl with the glittering stones for eyes on her pendant. "If Ariadne does not appear, Theseus can only invent the thread himself." And on the first day of school, she entered the classroom with a flood of hopes in her soul, tangled in a light but strong ball that would never let her get lost.

The first pair she saw in the schedule was a delight to her. Building the plot of a fictional work. It seemed that nothing could be better. And when the Professor, an elderly man with iron-rimmed glasses, a threadbare tweed jacket, and a stack of classic books under his armpit, entered the classroom, Sophie could not resist jumping up and down excitedly, so much did everything she saw correspond to what she had so carefully erected in her imaginary castles in the clouds.

The man stood on the platform where the faculty table was located and looked thoughtfully at the new students.

"Welcome" he said after a long silence. Chuckles ran through the class. Sophie leaned closer. "My name is John Turner. I don't want to burden you too much today, so now I will dictate the main points, and then you will work by yourselves. So, we write: The structuring of any work is the basis of its existence..."

And John Turner began to dictate in a monotone, mumble, chew his upper lip, anything but dictate. Poor Sophie only had a chance to write half of the notes from his words, and the rest - to make up herself, due to the fact that it was simply impossible to hear everything. The rest of the students did not seem to care at all: they were automatically typing out line after line, or pretended to be doing it.

This "lecture" did not last long: after half an hour, the Professor stopped his mumbling, wrote down two tasks on the blackboard and went to the teachers' room, where he sat until the end of the pair. Sophie came out, perplexed, with a slight sprouting of anxiety.

Nothing. Perhaps he really did not want to burden us too much on the first day, or maybe this poor old man has health problems. Might it even be nistham, as twitched his eyes when someone in the back row raised his hand.

Nothing. It will be better next time.

But it did not get any better. On the second pair of structuring, everything went exactly the same, and it was literally the same: Mr. Turner, now suffering, according to the ignorant Sophie, also from senile sclerosis, repeated word for word what had been said on

the previous pair and carefully recorded by the girl, then departed to the teachers' room again, where soon the monotonous noise of the typewriter could be heard. Sophie pursed her lips. Perhaps the Professor has too much work to do, which is why he is so absent-minded.

However, and on the third, on the fourth, on the tenth pair everything was invariably repeated. Topics changed with the speed of a turtle, the teacher's speech lulled, Sophie had been losing hope every day, and the sprout of anxiety became a full-fledged Basil. Inaction is the worst medicine for a young heart. Every useless hour was a painful thud against Sophie's ribs. The rest of her classes were going well, and she was certainly doing well in them, but the terrible injustice of even one old man did not allow her to close her eyes. You cannot close your eyes or your heart to what is truly important to you.

Even the third-year students who had managed to find out and visit the most mysterious corners of the old building replied in unison that it was simply impossible to go to Mr. Turner's teaching room, which was surprising, because if the other professors did not invite the young people to tea between classes, then at least once they were obliged to help them with endless documents.

Now, in the early hours of the morning, when the unseen artist had just daubed a brush across the dark horizon, there was not a soul in the building. She had not expected to find the Professor at such an early hour, but the monotonous tapping of the keys under his old fingers swept away all her doubts.

"Hello, Professor Turner, I am sorry to bother you, but -" Sophie was about to invent a reason for her untimely visit, but stopped when she saw a thick stack of typed sheets. Instead, she was curious: what are you doing?

The Professor hastily snatched up the stack and shoved it under the table, but, realizing the futility of his action, threw them back with a sigh.

"Young lady, this is a very bad timing. What did you want?"

"Is it a manuscript?" she darted into the room, and a moment later was examining the Professor's precious papers with interest. Turner groaned:

"What are you doing? You'll get them mixed up, and I didn't have time to number them!"

"Don't worry, I won't mix it up," Sophie said, looking at words like "elves," "dragons," and even "sexy archers" as she carefully put the stack back down. "Do you write fantasy?" You don't look like it, of course, but it's great! How long have you been writing?"

The Professor wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. "It took all summer to develop the idea, and when you are always awaited by the students, it is not so easy to write a future masterpiece."

"Did I get you correctly?" Sophie slowly came to the realization, backing away. "Is this what you do every time you give a lecture?"

"I do my job as a teacher," Turner pursed his lips, stubbornly refusing to look at his student. "I'm giving you all the material you need..."

"And here it is again" the girl bitterly smiled, shaking her head in disbelief. It is dangerous to keep your fire in yourself, because sooner or later the fire will escape from under the watchful eyes of the observer. "Once again, the privileged man believes that it is possible to neglect the work of others."

"I do not mean that at all..."

"Do you know how many of you I've met? Hundreds. Thousands. You think you own the world, you are its masters, and the rest, especially women, are inferior beings who can be ignored for their own good. I am sick of people like you. I am sick of going through fire and water to get here, I have been up all night, I have combined the burden of a woman and the burden of a scholar on my shoulders, and you are waltzes in!" with a quick and unspeakably cruel gesture, she swept all the pages of the stack to the floor. The Professor started to stretch to get up on his haunches, but Sophie stopped him with a look. "I left my family for this place, and you know what? You will see me in every class until your last day here, even if everyone refuses to come to listen to your incoherent chatter. And when we get out of here, my book, which will be read by generations to come, will give it hot to

your work. And if you, an old fool, think that these are idle threats and my words are worthless – well, I will see you in the publisher's office.”

She kept her promise. Every week John Turner invariably saw the young, reproachful eyes of the wise girl, and this made the remaining grains of conscience awaken in him, and the incomprehensible mutterings gradually became more coherent, and there were more and more students on the lectures. In time, Sophie began to be ashamed of the memory of her angry outburst, but it was these words, spoken by the brave girl, that brought more spiritual benefit to both her and the old Professor.

Five years later, after retiring, Turner released his novel, which became the beginning of a great fantasy trilogy, which was read with gusto by people of all ages, regardless of all differences between them. The trilogy lived and celebrated the genre for many centuries after the author's death, and even Sophie recognized its genius, calling herself a student of Turner not with pride, but with forgiveness for all the hardships that she had to go through because of the teacher. The girl herself graduated from the University, and exactly five years after the release of the former Professor's masterpiece, she released her own: a work adapted by the best directors of the time, praising strong women, affecting the young minds of girls much more than her Professor's trilogy. With the money earned from selling the book, she moved her entire family to America, where they, previous residents of a God-forsaken country, learned to live anew, and since they moved to the States – also freely.

He was spoken of as the greatest fantasy author of almost all time. She - as his talented student, who absorbed all the best features of his style. Both became treasures among the writers of their time, and both sometimes, admiring the waters of the Mississippi river, or inhaling the coniferous scent of the Carolinas, or perhaps just writing lines of future works, mentally thanked each other for the lessons unintentionally given to the student from the teacher, and the teacher from the student.

At the end of this simple story, I would like to talk a little with my readers, if there are any, but not through my characters and my fictions, but personally, as friends gathered in the evening by the fire.

Fight for what is dear for you. There are things that you can just let go with the flow, but there is always something worth fighting for, even if it will leave ugly scars for the long years after. Fight for what you deserve, and you deserve the whole world. No one but you will be able to help you on your way to it.

Well, I put my typewriter aside and stretch my fingers, because everything that Sophie and I wanted to tell you has already been said, and it's time for the closure.

Alina Tsoy is a 16-year-old writer from Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. Born in a society not welcoming creativity, especially non-related to the culture, she made her way through restrictions, external and internal, and started to write. Having learned English as her second language, She participated in several linguistic and literature contests, all with a result. Unfortunately, her writings have never been published nor shown before, and the short story presented here is one among larger ones and novels. However, to write is to have a voice, and she is not afraid to speak up.

Dinner Time Story - Fiction

By Bhavika Malik

Living in a town is less thrilling after spending months in training to become the farcical definition of heroic future. I was the poster boy for the unifying history project, but I didn't do much unifying. The purpose was clear. I could summarize it in two small sentences and hand it out to others on chits, yet it didn't matter. I couldn't get lost in the meaning. I knew that. But it eluded me because it rendered meaninglessness when it reached out of the theoretical frame of reference.

My motive for joining the army is still unsure to me.

Maybe it was because of the patriotic surge that swept over the whole country, or perhaps the aftermath of 18 years of teenage rebellion. Either way, nothing good came out of it. My original plan was to become a playwright in New York, like Edward Albee or Eugene O'Neill but that didn't really pan out, so I enlisted.

Maybe my rendition of the war is more glorious than the rest, but I guess even a night spent on a sweat-soaked mattress would be more exciting once you have spent a night in this town. I thought that living in a small town would be a good thing. Like Henry David Thoreau's time near Walden pond, but unless Thoreau got the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in his backyard, I don't see how he found it entertaining.

I live in a one-bedroom apartment that I believe, weeps when I am not home. The walls no longer appear white, the worn-down corners of the house give it a self-deprecating personality. It feels as if the walls laugh at each other in wry shameless comments. The mildew growing on the outskirts of the house mingles with the smell of coffee from a nearby cafe, which isn't a good smell, by the way.

A crack about three inches wide runs from the kitchen to the living room door, and at night it turns into a breeding ground for insects. The nights are intermittently cold, and the alto chant of the crickets make them more lively. I also have a washroom, overlooking the desert behind my house, it is a good view, but the placement of the bathroom window is often problematic. Once, while in the bathroom, I had an unkind encounter with a mule

that traumatized both of us, for I have not seen the mule again, and neither have I tried to find it. Although it was a relief to discover that there is life on this part of our planet, even if it walks on four legs.

There is one part of this town that I began appreciating, if not being envious of it from time to time. Another apartment building resides on my left. I had previously thought of it to be empty, but I recently found out that a family had shifted into the first-floor apartment. A red AMC Gremlin was parked on the end of the street. I heard the sound of boxes moving in. Then a toddler accompanied by a woman went into the building. I pitied the lady at first, she had to raise the child all by herself, "it must be hard," I thought. Then I saw a man emerging from the vehicle. I wasn't sure how I felt after that.

A few days passed, and the streets echoed with the toddler's giggles. I wanted to welcome the couple, but no time was fit. I learned their names from the grocer, Alec and Martha. Martha had a small radio that sat on her kitchen window. She seldom stopped singing along with it. It was hard to fall asleep when I could hear Tony Orlando and Martha vocalizing in the next building, but I got used to it.

Soon, I found myself investing most of my time perched over the window that faced Martha and Alec's apartment. I was profoundly aware of the implications of my actions. Even then, it was hard not to pay attention to the crazy couple that lived next door. Every night they engaged in silly antics, and each time they argued, Martha, blasted her radio at full volume. They never addressed each other sincerely, and it was hard to distinguish derision from genuine appreciation. But, after an insincere reconciliation, they hid their vexation by participating in an aggressive version of parallel play.

Last week I had my first conversation with Martha. It was a short one, but I knew her better then. At the grocery store, I met her for the first time. She wore the same red coat and rolled the stroller into the market. I was checking out from the store when she stood behind me. I knew that if I continued my late-night stakeouts, there might be a legal implication to my actions, so I initiated our first conversation.

"H-hi, aren't you the lady who shifted into the apartment across the street?" I said.

"Yes, and you are the strange man who sometimes looks at our apartment through his

his window?” she replied, laughing, and slightly concerned.

“Uh – yes, I am sorry about that, I’m Rainer,” I said, embarrassed.

She started laughing again. Her voice, vibrant and full of love, it was strange because while singing her voice was like the cacophonous chirping of a panicked hummingbird.

“No problem. Anyway, what brings you to Bisbee?” she asked.

“I shifted here after the end of my service in the army,” I said.

“Really? Why here?” she asked.

“It seemed like a fine choice at the time,” I said.

“My husband is in the army too – he’s a reserve soldier though. But I am afraid that if the war is not over soon, he might have to go on duty, God knows if he can get out of it,”

“Has he ever been to war?” I asked.

“No – but he wishes he could,” she said, as she looked at her daughter.

“So, what’s her name?” I asked, pointing at Martha’s child.

“Susan,” she said, stroking her child.

“What is it like being a reserve soldier?” I asked.

“Well, he is mostly out running errands, but other than that it’s much like retired life, but it pays well,”

During the latter half of our conversation, Martha talked about her old home. She mentioned her life in Brooklyn and her life before Alec. It was clear that Martha resented her husband for uprooting their whole life and moving to Bisbee, but who could blame her? However, I was happy to learn that Martha and I shared the same distaste about this

town. Although her hatred was on a greater extent than mine. She described Bisbee as "a rotten sinkhole that should be filled with dirt, so it can be forgotten,"

We reached the end of our conversation, and she invited me to join her family for dinner. She wrote down her apartment number on a receipt and walked home.

I was getting ready for dinner, but I was nervous. The Army Boot Camp never prepared me for socializing with people outside my platoon. I spent months with the same group of men walking through the jungle with a bag that weighed twenty-seven pounds, so I wasn't expected to bring housewarming presents. At the Boot Camp, I was prepared for one thing, war. Although they didn't prepare me well for that either.

At the end of my basic training, I was told I would be the machine gunner. According to what I understood about the job, it wasn't demanding because being a machine gunner meant standing behind the snipers and taking refuge until told otherwise. But I had underestimated the war. I reached Vietnam hoping that it would be my new home, but the air tasted different. The smell of rain infused with cadaverine sunk into the ground, and later, into our skin.

I was on active duty for months, in the same clothes, with the same men. Some days honoured brotherhood, but others were like penance for past crimes. I couldn't tell if the suffering was self-inflicted, but sometimes even my platoon scared me. They were all good men, but a regressive trait lurked in them, in all of us, I suppose. The fear was less of the evil and more of our excessive freedom.

I experienced the complete erosion of my altruism in Saigon. My platoon elapsed under the blanket of shrubberies and wet marshes. The humid, hot air hovered close to the ground. It was hard to focus because the humidity had worsened the smell of the napalmed corpses.

The afternoon sun peeked over our heads. It was the hour of sadness, and grief suspended mid-air from the overwrought trees. There was a common anger predisposed in nature, and the more we engaged in it, the more easily its savage joy took over. Unfortunately, these impulses were unteachable.

As a machine gunner, I was told to stay low, until someone said: “guns up”. While we walked through the thick murk of trees, a soldier in my platoon was shot. The bullet flew from the bushes on our left. The snipers took their position, and I was told to stand down. The gunfire erupted moments later and lasted for two seconds. The encounters were brief but more destructive than anyone would imagine.

At dusk, we found a place for rest. We slept with our backs facing out, boots and clothes on. One of the men employed the claymores near our RON, which is what we called our resting place. Amidst the faecal dirt and muddy swamps, I listened to the distant sound of gunfire that I led myself to believe was the fireworks of Copacabana. By then, the smell of blood and manure had sunk into my skin. I knew that the Viet-Cong would attack at night, so I stayed up until my eyes closed involuntarily.

I don't remember the day or the month of the night attack, but I remember the sound of gunfire approaching. I got up at once. The Viet-Cong moved fast and once again a bullet was fired from the forest. Each of our snipers, alarmed, put their rifles to their chest and began shooting. We remembered that the claymores were still set up, so I was told to collect them along with another machine gunner, Wayne. Amidst the gunfire, we crawled towards the claymore. Wayne clutched the cross around his neck and murmured a prayer, “Hear our cry, Lord we need Your mercy, and we need Your grace today...”

Bullets flew from both ends, nobody could see the target clearly. Wayne and I rushed to the claymores and began collecting them. The overwhelming tides of panic washed over our faces. I could no longer control my reflexes, but I had decided that I wanted to leave Vietnam, the route of exit did not matter.

As we collected the last set of claymores, a bullet flew over my head. We stopped and laid flat on the ground. Soon I felt a warm liquid running down my back. But I couldn't feel the pain, I thought that the fear had a numbing effect on me, so I waited for my body to respond. It didn't. So I put my hand on my back to find the wound, but it turned out to be the pulp of a squashed orange in my bag. I got up in an instant and began helping Wayne. Another bullet dove towards us, and in a swift jerk, Wayne fell down.

His eyes were transfixed on a black silhouette that was looming six-feet away. I shot over and over again until I heard a loud thud, and then silence. A two-inch deep wound,

frothing blood, appeared on Wayne's thigh. I waited for the captain to arrive before I could search for the Viet-Cong.

We found Viet- Cong convulsing on the ground. He breathed faintly, whispering the same words, "shoot me, ". At first glance, he looked like a thirty-year-old man with a wife and a child, but he was seventeen. I didn't give him a chance to have a bride or child. I didn't know if this was worse. Jack, a soldier from my platoon said, "You should shoot him, Rainer,"

"What's the point?" I said.

"What do you mean? He shot Wayne, he could have shot more," another soldier said.

"But there is no need, he'll die anyway," I said.

"For God's sake! If you can't do it, I will. Either way, I won't leave this place unless there's no chance that he can survive," Jack said as he picked up his rifle and shot the seventeen-year-old.

I don't know what made me think about that night, but I could smell it all once again. The strong smell of acrid bite floated around me. However, once I reached Martha and Alec's floor, the smell of ham and spices had consumed the hallway, and I could feel the memory of that night ebbing away. For now, at least.

Martha opened the door in a hurry and rushed back into the kitchen. When I stepped inside, I could see that their apartment was much bigger than mine. The walls were decorated with various artworks, and the curtain swayed from left-to-right along with the wind. It felt as if a blue and white Colonial Mansion was fit inside a 3 1/2 apartment.

There were carpets placed in the living room. A long white sofa occupied most of the room. Its pristine condition surprised me since they had a child. Small replicas of Greek sculpture were placed on either end. And a large painting hung over the sofa. Looking at their house, it felt as if it was an anachronism of the twenties.

I sat on the chair as Alec entered the living room. He wore a long blue coat over his sweater, and it made him sweat visibly. His wisp brown hair was styled perfectly, and it

appeared as if his hair was unmovable. He walked in great strides and smiled in a discerning way.

“Hey, you must be Rainer,” he said, shaking my hand.

“Yes –er, thank you for having me here,” I said.

“Oh, what are you talking about, it’s our pleasure. Sit, sit,” he said, as he sat down.

“Sure,” I said, unsure if he meant the sofa or the chair.

“So, my wife tells me, you’re a fellow grunt too?”

“Yes, I just left,”

“How long were you there?”

“Thirteen months,”

“What are you doing now?”

“Nothing currently but I am thinking of moving back to New York soon, Bisbee isn’t the place for me,” I said.

“Yes, not many people can slow down enough to keep up with Bisbee,” he chuckled.

“You want to go to Vietnam?”

“Yes, of course, there’s no greater pride than the pride of fighting for your country. Oh, why am I telling you all this, you already know that,” he said.

“Yes, I do. But if you’re so keen to go, then why don’t you volunteer?” I asked.

“Well I can’t just leave Martha and Susan alone,” he said.

“Yeah, too bad. They could use people like you,”

“Yeah well, what can you do?” he said, pulling out a picture from his wallet. It was a picture of two young boys. “That’s me and my brother. We were fourteen when this picture was taken. We were getting ready for boarding school, and it was during this time when my old man told me to enlist in the army. He said that I’ve got what it takes. So I enlisted, and my brother went to one of those east coast colleges,”

“Do you like the army?”

“Well of course, but I’m not really doing anything related to the army though,” he said, unable to keep in his disappointment.

Fortunately, Martha called us for dinner so I didn’t have to discuss Alec’s childhood traumas any further.

We sat down on the table as Martha brought in the food. She carefully put down the casserole and finally spoke with me.

“Ah – hello Rainer, I’m sorry I couldn’t talk earlier, I thought that I had burned the casserole, anyway, did Alec bore you enough,” they both laughed.

“Not yet but there’s still time,” I said.

As we sat down, the telephone rang behind Martha. They were both confused and agitated. Martha went to the kitchen and picked up the phone. At first, she listened to the caller attentively, but then she looked at Alec in complete horror. Alec, confused by Martha's reaction, went to her. Martha hummed something as she stood there like a concrete effigy. When Alec shook her, she handed the phone to him and whispered something in his ear. Then she went into the bedroom.

The same look appeared on Alec's face. He tapped the receiver and quietly pondered over the contents of the phone call. Then he went to the bedroom as well. I guess they went into the bedroom for privacy, but I think they forgot that their walls weren't sound proof, so yelling made it easier for outsiders to pry. Although that wasn't my intention.

"Shame!" Martha yelled in the bedroom.

“What do you mean ‘shame’?” Alec asked.

“Shame!” Martha repeated it over and over again.

“I need to go, don’t you understand?” he said.

“Why? Why do you need to? You got out of it the last time, can’t you do it again?”

“It’s out of my hand, Martha,”

"I shifted here because of you. I never wanted to live in this backwater town. The animals outnumber the people here, for Pete’s sake! This was all you. You wanted the 'small-town feel' I didn't, and now you expect me to live here alone? No,"

"Calm down, I'll figure out a way,"

The argument continued according to the regular schedule. In ten minutes, there would be a food offering, and the cycle would start again. I was getting ready to leave, but I heard a faint crying, so I went to check up on Susan.

Susan's room was decorated more fashionably than my house. A row of family pictures hung on the left wall, and a few tasteful drawings sketched out by Susan were on the wall adjacent to her crib.

When I looked inside the crib, I saw Susan crying. Her eyes were still closed, and she was fussing with her thumb. Interrupting Martha and Alec's argument was not an option, so I did the only other thing that I could.

I held her so she would stop crying. I have heard many people describe this experience as uplifting, but no one told me she would be sticky. Her hands were covered in a jelly-like material. I knew that children are messy, but I thought that by the time I would have to hold a child in my hand, the children would be more self-evolved, or maybe jelly would be discontinued. So, in my re-telling of this story, I would have to exclude the rigorous hand-washing that took place after holding Susan. I sang lullabies until she was asleep, and admired the family pictures that hung in the room.

The argument was going strong, and the casserole was finished, the wine bottle was empty, and the receiver was hooked to the phone. It was time to leave. The shape of the road extended into the dark silhouette of the dessert. The elongating flicker of streetlight glinted in my window.

It was time to sleep again, amongst the crickets that lived in the hollowed-out crack of my wall, under the inconspicuous skyline of Bisbee. I imagine Bisbee was a happy place. Now, it beats against the currents of time, as it drifts into the horizon, hoping to restore the happiness of the bitter end. It might be long before I return to this place, but for now, I want to focus on the drive back to New York. The place where air tasted familiar. The taste of home.

Bhavika Malik is a freshman in high school, she is from Gurgaon, India. In her free time, she likes to read or catch up on TV. She is a novice writer and hopes that she can start with Ice Lolly Review.