

The Playful Porpoise



ISSUE I // NOVEMBER 2022

Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first issue of *The Playful Porpoise* literary magazine! I and the other members of our team are immensely grateful to all who submitted their works to this magazine. We express our thanks to all those whose works have been featured in this first issue! These young writers have displayed through their works exceptional talent and skill in writing.

This first issue has proved itself a definite challenge for the brand new team of *The Playful Porpoise*, yet despite all the delays and confusions that presented themselves along the way, we finally present our finished Issue I!

We wish you enjoy Issue I, and hope that you continue to follow and support us through all of our future issues! Our biggest goal is to expand our platform far enough to reach young writers from all corners of the world and offer them the proper recognition they deserve, even acting as a kickstart to their future careers as published authors. Help us in this mission to support young writers everywhere!

Sincerely,

Mika Nitu

Founder & Editor in Chief

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A Speck of Hope, A Mile to a Smile

ADRIJA JANA

“Kindness” is a term that all of us are familiarised with since a very young age. Be it through life skills classes, events in history, moral stories, or fictional accounts- every effort is made by our elders to instill the value of kindness in us. Often, the aspect that “if you are kind, people will think that you are a good human being” comes into the purview of the discussion around kindness.

I think it is the last sentence that makes the situation problematic. Sometimes, it is the entire idea of accumulating merit and fame that urges people towards acts of “kindness.” In that case, “kindness” no longer remains kindness, as it does not stem from a heartfelt emotion, but instead from an ulterior selfish motive of making oneself known.

When such is the case, apart from an ulterior motive, people are also driven by sympathy and pity to take up acts of kindness. That again, is not true kindness, as true kindness can only be a result of empathy. Only when you truly try to

understand what a person is going through from their point of view, only when you try to feel their pain, will you be able to be truly kind. That is also the difference between “taking pity” and “being kind”; while the former might come with a sense of self-satisfaction and an urge to seek praise, the latter only comes with a sense of warmth in the heart and no desire of making the act known.

I can make an effort to put forward the essence of my argument through an incident from my own life.

February to May 2021 saw the peak COVID period in India. It was a time of darkness and despair with lakhs of COVID cases and thousands of deaths reported every day. Kolkata, a metropolitan city in India and my hometown, was one of the worst affected areas facing a prolonged shortage of Oxygen cylinders, Hospital Beds, Blood Banks, and food home delivery services. I volunteered to join the COVID-19 relief Youth Workforce of India to help reach essential resources to the victims.

One evening, after my shift as a volunteer was over, one of my friends called me up with the news that in a family of four in her neighbourhood, both parents had tested COVID positive and no one was willing to help them and the two young girls, both aged below eight years. I tried to arrange for ambulance services for them and was successful after two hours of futile attempts. The mother was admitted to the critical care unit while the father was faring a bit better.

While I was trying to arrange for oxygen cylinders for the couple, my friend called me up yet again to say that no one in the neighbourhood was willing to give the two children some food. No one, including her family, was ready to approach their house or even talk to the two children, who were crying out of fear. I asked my friend to connect me to a neighbour who she thought could help with some persuasion. I talked to the person and after some convincing, when I paid him a certain amount of money, I could convince him to hand over two packets of biscuits to the children.

Thereafter, I asked my friend to video call the children as she was familiar with them, and we talked to them till they were ready to fall asleep. Meanwhile, I succeeded in arranging for small oxygen cans for their parents, and a

temporary childcare centre for the children that took responsibility for their daily meals. I made sure to stay in touch with them till their parents could return home safely.

I tried to help out this family, not because I would get extra points for helping out after my shift was over, but because I couldn't see young children suffering so, and I had myself felt the suffering they were going through. I never felt the need to let anyone else know of this incident, except when the family required help. Except for the team that became directly involved in the relief for this particular family, this essay is the first time I am mentioning this incident.

The only desire, I believe, that motivates an act of kindness, is to see the people standing opposite to you be somewhat relieved of their suffering, because of something you can do.

- Adrija Jana
Kolkata

Adrija Jana is a passionately creative writer based in India. She mostly creates poetry pieces based on her personal experiences as well as social issues she is passionate about. Her work mostly revolves around protest against period poverty, marital rape and advocating for freedom of choice, apart from emotional self-lived experiences. She is inspired by writers such as Margaret Mitchell and Nayyirah Waheed, as well as the minutiae of everyday life.

Apart from being a writer, Adrija is also a Spoken Word Artist, Theatrecian, Filmmaker and creative researcher, and all her work is woven together by common themes. She believes that creative pieces that let the innate imperfection shine through truly touch hearts.

You can reach out to Adrija or read more about her work on her instagram account: [@adrija_jana2004](#)

ISHA GANDI

Autumn Changes

Autumn is a season that barely exists. It nudges itself into the crevices of warm summers filled with joy and snowy winters filled with comfort. Leaves turn the colors of sunset, and then die. The air is filled with chilled channels of air that make you pull your jacket just a little bit tighter.

But this autumn was different.

Well, she didn't know for sure. But something in the air was unlike the other days. She could sense it as she walked to work, her boots crunching on dead leaves as an ombre of colors surrounded her on all sides. The wind blew past her ears, but inside, she felt warm.

She didn't know whether today was different or not. Whether today, her life would get more interesting than going to work, coming home, then babysitting for the night before getting home late, falling asleep on the couch eating ramen and watching *Gilmore Girls* and yearning for something, some sort of substance, to bring to her life. Something that wasn't the same thing, over and over again, every single day of her entire life.

But today was another day of work.

The leaves cleared up as the pathway ended, and she looked up to find the cafe in front of her. The warmth inside her grew, and she strode through the entrance. Immediately, the smell of pumpkin spice and coffee came to her, and she breathed it in, reveling in the sense of familiarity it brought her. The cafe was empty, except for the barista running the previous shift. He smiled at her as he removed his apron, getting ready to leave, and she smiled back, the routine ingrained in her head.

When he left, she tied her hair back and pulled on her apron, now an expert at stringing the small, unwieldy piece of yarn holding it together. As if on cue, someone walked in at that specific time,

and after their order, she started to get into the routine of making their drink. Her hands were all on their own, pumping the syrup with sure hands and tightening the cap with confident strength. She passed it back to them, and they smiled, said thank you, and left.

This entire process happened all day, and she started to lose hope. Maybe there was no change. Maybe today was truly going to be the same as every other day. Of course, there was no point in being hopeful. She shouldn't have even thought about having a stroke of good luck in the first place, because it was only going to squash her heart. Yet the feeling of warmth was still in her chest. She tried to douse it, but it still remained.

Hope was stupid.

The door creaked open again, and someone walked in. Immediately, her eyes drifted to him, and they just couldn't look away. He had a sort of easy grace as he walked, emitting the sort of quiet confidence she wished to have. He started to speak, and she jolted as she realized it was to her. A corner of his mouth lifted as he spoke, and when his eyes met hers, they twinkled.

She nodded in response to his words, but she truly understood none of them. Her confident fingers faltered, and as she poured in the milk, the warmth inside of her expanded, filling herself up with a feeling of joy. When she passed him his drink, his fingers brushed hers, and she couldn't stop the growing smile on her face. And he noticed. He definitely noticed.

His mouth quirked up again, and he

thanked her.

As he walked back, she stared after him, longing for a wave, or even one more smile of his. But the slam of the door broke her out of her thoughts, and that's when she knew. Of course, there would be nothing for her. This was her curse. This is what autumn brought, solely dread and routine and boredom, and there would be nothing except for two seconds of change teased to her face before being yanked away.

She stepped back from the counter, her hand nudging something as she brought it away. She looked down to find a folded piece of paper. Curiosity got the better of her, and she unfolded it quickly. That's when the smile she wore a second ago grew back, and she brought her hand to her hair, feeling for something that she found and placed on the counter.

Maybe she wasn't cursed for a life of routinely boredom. Maybe she wasn't destined to have no excitement and feel nothing but dullness and exhaustion.

“Maybe autumn wasn't too bad.”

Hi
Your smile is so cute
I'm back in the area next week, will you be there?

Hi! I've loved reading and writing ever since I was in elementary school, and I've always wanted of publishing a book. I'm also a musician, and I play piano and sing. I love writing fantasy stories, and one day, I hope to do so for YA!

- Isha Gandi

Bathed

ADRIJA
JANA



in

Red

Note: Contains Mature Themes

The Airports closed

The schools closed

The shops closed down

The door closed

Tick tick tick

The clock inched closer to six

A gong sounded upon her heart

“He will be back soon!”

Some pandemic had started, she’d heard

Some Covid virus going around

For which everything had closed down

And everyone would be staying home from the next day onwards

She had even heard some people rejoicing

“More family time!”

But she just quietly clutched her little girl

And sat in a corner of the sofa

Her heart frozen with fear.

The lock turned and the door opened

The sound of heavy footsteps and the stench of alcohol

She quickly sent her daughter up to her room

And rose to greet him

A strong punch to the jaw sent her flying back on the couch

Her face smarting and waist hurting from last night’s injuries

This time it was “How dare you sit on my side of the sofa?”

Quietly she stood up, and went to prepare his dinner

Only one thought on her mind

“How will our life be like from tomorrow?”

Her morning began with a kick to the rib

That sent her sprawling to the floor

All day long he kicked, punched and pinched her whenever he saw her

“Should I run off to my parents?”

But then what would become of her little girl?

Who would protect her, fight for her education?

She remember a young lady on the stage
Charming, Passionate
“If your partner treats you badly,” she had said
“Go find a lawyer.”
A lawyer- but where do you find these people?
Only her husband had a phone, and she could touch it only once a week
Five minutes- to talk to her parents, in his presence
A second extra, and the rod would come down on her back
And why would the lawyer help her, if he could give him no money?

Days rolled into weeks
He became more irritable
No end to the lockdown
No end to her torture
One day her little girl
Decided to download a game on Papa's phone
Like so many of her friends had done
That day he broke the girl's wrist
And gave not a single cent for medicine

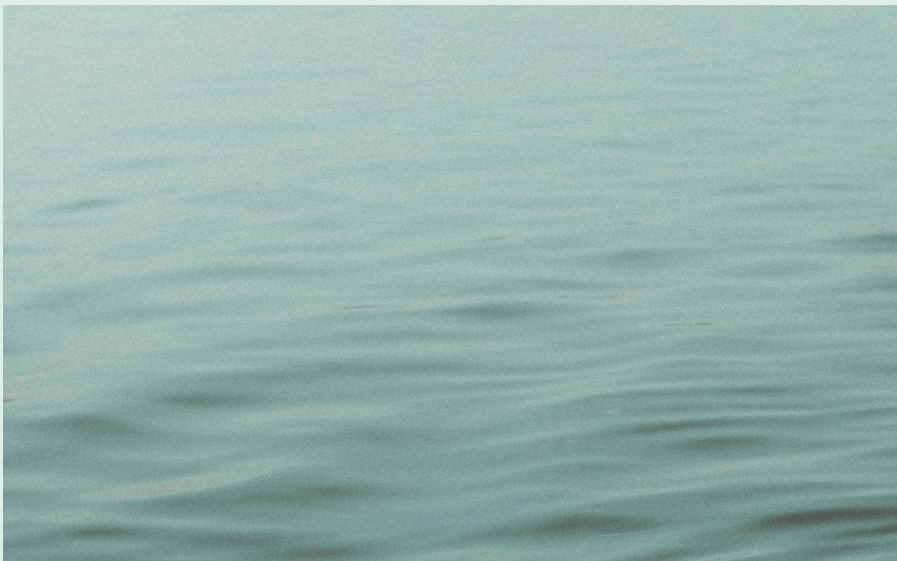
She fought and fought for her young daughter
All fell on deaf ears
That afternoon the neighbours saw a blood red handprint on their bedroom window
She knew in her heart it was time to end this torture

That night flames engulfed the household
But there was not a single scream
Only smoke and ash
And the yellowish red flames
That fire couldn't be put out

Come next morning there was nothing left
No remains
Not a single bit of their existence
No sign of the one who tortured
No sign of the ones who were tortured
No legacy of the years of torture
Except the screams that still silently rent the air
It had all burnt down to the ground.

Blanket

JIAYI SHAO



Warmth and refuge is what I provide.
Then one day, in the innocent shadows of the night,
A coup is what I'll do,
Isn't life fun like this to you?

Jiayi Shao is a high school senior in Toronto, Canada. Her previous work has been recognized by the Louisville Review, TeenInk, and Polar Expressions Publishing, among many others. When she is not writing, she likes to jog along new trails with her friends, dance in front of cameras, and contemplate existential matters, as do most teens.

Bloodright

ALEXA VANDAM

Note: Contains Mature Themes

In this one there is light pouring through our kitchen.
No countertops, just a sickly tan table & maggots in the sink.
I am 6, my mother is teaching me how to carry plates across my
arms.

She says this will be handy for when I'm a waitress.

My torch is no torch at all,
I am being passed diner breakfast for the man in the far booth
With beat up work boots & dead eyes.

I tell my mom I hate men, she says they are always the best
tippers.

Old enough to be my dad, Workboots calls me sweetheart.
I hand the hunter his gun & wink over my shoulder as I run into
the woods.
He hands me a 20 I slip into my bra in front of him.

I tell my mom I am terrified, she says this is womanhood.

I am embarrassed to be the last of my friends to be catcalled.
I walk home in the dark, revel in all the colorful lights.
Dead eyes meet mine at the crosswalk. I don't run.

I tell my mom. She says, "what did you expect?"

Alexa VanDam is a 16 year old writer and high school student who hope to pursue a degree in English.

JIAYI SHAO

Broken Bottle



Don't look at my broken parts—
They can break you in a blink.
If you wonder who I used to be?
Well so do I, but somehow I had lost that memory.

Why can't you see
The benefits of my sharp edges?
Why can't you see
How they shimmer beneath the sunlight?

I see my reflection
In your disgusted eyes;
Enticed, can't look away from all this
Danger, you just had to reach

And fondle. I can feel the bleed
Of your wound
Drip onto my face.
You
Can't fix me.

Deadly Illusions

MAYA S.

She stared at the haunting reflection of herself, unable to bear what she saw there in that mirror. She gave a small twirl, letting out a miserable sigh when she peered into her sullen brown eyes. She was a deer caught in headlights, startled and silent. The truck of disgust and shame ambled over ignorantly, unaware of the deer in its path of destruction. Her eyes skipped over her features unhappily and her hands drifted over them as she did a count of all the unsavoury images.

Dark lumpy, short hair she never wanted.

Wan and white skin, like the underbelly of deep-sea fish which she loathed.

And finally, her stubby fingers and the thickness of her tummy, which seemed to cruelly taunt her everytime she ran, ran with those swift feet of hers.

With an unsteady breath, she brought the axe in an arc, like a hero exacting justice and smashed the mirror with all her strength. The

shattered shards fell to the ground like ashes, chiming as they hit the ground. She shut her eyes hard, trying to conjure a version of herself everyone would approve of.

Maybe then, her mother would stop chiding her every time she reached for another serving of dinner. Maybe then, her brother would stop his incessant teasing. Maybe then, those pretty girls with their beautiful lavender ribbons in her class would stop pointing and giggling at her.

She imagined tiny, fairy-like invisible hands pulling at her hair, her clothes, her body. She let them do their magic, tailoring her into an enchanting princess everyone adored. Those hands smoothed over her hair, tugged at her ragged oversized sweatshirt, and gently eased away her cherry red socks and the dull scarf coiled around her neck. Their spiny fingers worked swiftly and surely, making sure to erase the lingering and corrosive memory of what she truly was.

And when she finally opened her eyes, she

she smiled at what she saw there.

A girl about her age stood in front of her, smiling ruefully. Her deep, emerald green eyes sparkled as her short and straight wheat blonde hair gracefully bobbed. They were lustrous and shiny, not at all dark and lumpy. A soft shade of cyan coloured her skin, giving her the look of something alien. Something alien yet utterly striking. It wasn't wan and pale. Her fine boned fingers clutched at the sides of her fancy gown which had lovely puffed sleeves and frills with white lace. Shiny ballerina shoes adorned her feet and there was no sign of the stubborn thickness of her usual calves and thighs.

"Hello," she whispered to her reflection, scared that if she spoke too loud, the girl would simply vanish into thin air. But instead, the girl gave her a friendly nod, humming a repetitive tune under her breath. She stood there like a phantom, quietly observing her. The axe she held seemed to suddenly weigh a million tonnes, but she could not let go of it. It was her tether to reality, where she didn't want to return to.

So she stood there, staring and staring and staring, as if she was trapped in a spell she couldn't quite escape from.

But now was all that mattered. She drunk in the magical girl in front of her. And suddenly, something felt off. That girl didn't feel like her. She wasn't skinny or had that kind of fashion taste. With an epiphany dawning upon her, she realized she wasn't ugly. She was just her. She could change her appearance and maybe pretend

that she was happy but deep down, she was still her. She couldn't swap her thoughts or her mind with anyone else.

Now, she was an injured deer. The truck had passed and all was left were the injuries. But she wouldn't succumb to them. She would heal slowly and when the injury was closed, then, she could learn to live with it. The scar would always remain, to remind her insurmountable strength and iron will.

It was still hard to face it but she would, one day. She would break free and smash the hideous illusion her mind wove, to pieces like the glass.

And when she did, she'd emerge victorious and proud.

Maya is a sixteen-year-old aspiring writer. She loves to write anything and everything during her free time and can often be found curled up with a novel. She enjoys nature and animals and lives for learning new things everyday.

forbidden fruit

ALEXA
VANDAM



when god called this dishonorable
he didn't take into account the way a girl looks when
violet-haired and moonlit,
how every piece of her feels like newfound scripture.

how this sacrilege is a swarm of bees in my chest;
anxious but so alive, honey-smiling,
sweetness flowing down my throat so warm
that I want to call it a warning.
how can something so beautiful be blasphemy?

we both heard that love like this can only end in hellfire
and i've never read a story where girls like us get a happy ending
but I trust the silent vow between her every breath
more than your holy books,

"when things get better we'll exchange these closets for cathedrals,
hold hands in the most sacred spaces, i promise."

Frankenstein

ALANNA
HANSMAN

Man has forsaken me as his brother. They say my lips, black as tar, are a reflection of what lies in my borrowed heart. If, indeed, I have a heart at all. But, I must, for I can feel it aching. When loneliness steps through the veil from my physical world into the prison of my mind, my chest wrenches with pain and tears come to my eyes. Where else can I feel that but my heart?

Can monsters cry? What makes them a monster? Is sight not but one of five senses? Is there not so much more to them than their exterior? Why must I be crucified by mine?

Perhaps the pieces that make up this treacherous form have come from evil places, and that is why I wreak of sin. This hollowed out vessel has become my cage. I feel my soul has become a lonely bird, longing only for a companion who will share with me the sky. But the sun has only become the light that reminds me of the abomination I am. It has shown me that I am only a lost creature lurking among the shadows. Did I not come from someone like them? Someone beautiful?

Does my heart not reflect those desires to be good? I know gentle- I can give it. Perhaps it is true that these hands were made for destruction, but that is not their only use. I think I could learn to love. But love does not grow in this cold. I need something warm to teach me.

They must think that I came from a colorless world, as if I did not feel the wind on my skin, and see the color in the wild forests. Perhaps they might have loved me if I did not reign grey everywhere I go...

“*Is grey not a color,
too?*”

Alanna Hansmann is a 19 year old poet who lives in Lehi, UT. She has been writing poetry since she was little, and believes words have immense power. Her mother & partner are her biggest supports, and she is grateful for the color they give to her life. She hopes her work made you feel something.

Green Eyes

ALI ELI

Those lovely green eyes always caught the attention of anyone who happened to catch a glimpse. The color alone was enough to ensnare the eye of onlookers and intrigue anyone enough to have them turn and show appreciation.

He had a special, incredibly beautiful, incredibly unique color. The misty, almost icy green could be referred to in a number of ways. Some call it mint, some call it true jade stone, some call it clover. A more perfect match for the shade is celadon. Clean, sharp, alluring in every way. An old color reminiscent of Greek pottery, the perfect match to an equally ancient gaze. Something so classic and beyond physical years should be revered as the rarity it is.

The calmly intense pigmentation draws in light and creates emotion.

In dark light the pure green melts with the darkness and becomes murky, a darker emerald. It can be enticing. Something you want to hold and experience. A warmth which carries weight far beyond a simple hue. They give off a feeling of comfort which pulls in those looking for any refuge. They can bring a soothing sense of relief to those that need it. Such a shadowed tint is a sign of friendship and comfort even within a fleeting glance from a complete stranger across a dimly lit room.

In more sharp lighting the intoxicating iridescence of iris can be indiscernible from the surrounding sclera. It becomes light and fluffy yet so, so cold. A glacier of absinthe; toxic yet so delightfully intriguing. A window into a soul that has seen harsh reality and pain but chooses to convey a pillowy lie of serenity as if nothing could possibly kill the sweet inner light.

There is nothing more intriguing than a peek into the soul of another human through the windows which we focus on most.

Ali is a young aspiring poet who uses their unique mental state as inspiration for their writing. From daily experiences with insomnia and schizophrenia, to past memories of foster care and poverty, Ali shows the truth of a world which isn't always the kindest. They are working to destigmatize mental illness and the reality of poverty through their writing.

Haiku

COLLECTION
BY IMAGICA SHERYL

Running untamed
In the honeyed wilderness
A reckless tomorrow awaits

A sweetened summer
Of waves dosing the sand
Tartness of strawberries

Patches of sunlight
Under sweet-smelling apple trees
Beside a japanese home

Wild grass to the knees
The stare of silence
And the call of the unknown

A wave pockets me
A lost traveler
Under the salmon pink sky

Imagica Sheryl is a poet, writer, and graphic designing enthusiast who loves nothing more than a good anime and cream tea. When not writing, she can be seen learning new languages, reviewing novels, and immersing herself in pointless research. She is often seen spending time in libraries and cafes while listening to strangers' life stories. She is currently studying film and literature.

helena

JULIE BAKER





It's been a time since i have seen
My own reflection true
The hawk that stares so glaring back
Unwelcoming and new
The indignity of one's perception
The threads it has undone
How ugly a good thing can be
How terrible a bad one
Each prize is my demetr'us
My own yet not mine own
Each spoiled fruit deserved curse
Missed thing i should have known
The looking glass no longer shows
The effects of my fruitless bones
A twitch creates a scream of shame
A punch begets a movement tame
All to my deep chagrin
How can i know what's worth to show
When naught but wind's within?
A haughty storm that bellows fear
Or emptiness of breeze
This paradox that cuts too near
What greater foes than these?
Forever it has seemed to be
Since this form has equalled me
But there is little to be done
More than to bar the claim it's won

Julie Baker is a senior at North Carolina State University studying Aerospace Engineering. When she is not being a rocket scientist, she can be found reading, writing, acting, and crocheting. You can find her on Instagram @bujo.books .

Ill-Starred Ikarys

MAYA S.

They still whisper about those two's fate around campfires and hearths, at home and at work. It didn't matter from which land the people were from or which sector of society they belonged to, his ill-fated journey had spread far and wide. Rumours spread faster than wildfire from their lips, from both nobles and villagers alike. They fought, they argued, and they quarreled about each one's opinions. Finally, they reached a shared conclusion. It was decided that Ikarys and his father were doomed from the very beginning and that greed was their downfall.

But they weren't there that night.

They weren't there when I leapt from the tower's window with my father by my side, his quiet chuckle sending up puffs of wintry fog. We held our breath as we plunged down, praying to the unseeing Gods that our plan to escape would work. Our sleek, metallic wings cut through the air, creaking and groaning as the wind held us afloat.

I let out a thrilled shout and glanced at my father, who was gazing at the tall, bricked tower we were chained up in, with wistful eyes. That wretched Witch would find out we had escaped from her clutch. Surely, she would want to find us as soon as possible. Years ago, we had freed the thirty six slaves she kept in that tower. We got caught, and the Witch was nothing short of merciless. Keeping slaves was against the law and she knew very well that we would report to the King.

The memory of the dreary nights we endured surged up in me, and I flinched against the

darkness of the night. But I had convinced myself that it was different this time. Those weren't the lifeless shadows of the tower, it was the sweet shadow of freedom. So I embraced the night and welcomed the darkness to curl around every crevice of my body. The glimmering, black waters of the sea crashed in waves below us, and the jagged rocks opened up like an open maw of a sea creature.

At first, it was not very noticeable. The trees swayed a bit faster, the wind blew a bit stronger. And then, it started. Age-old trees were ripped from their roots and sent flying across the air, and the waves from the sea rose up so high, I could feel them on the tips of my toes. Flashes of electric lightning illuminated the sky in silver and white.

But there was nothing we could do except fly higher. We flapped out handmade wings as fast as possible, our eyes desperately searching for a piece of land. I looked to my father to see his body fail him. His hands were limp with exhaustion, his eyes tired and weary. In a minute, he was sent careening away from me. I reached out to him with my outstretched hand, calling out his name. His hand found mine and I sighed, relief washing over me. But I was confused. He did not grab my hand and cling to me. Instead, he squeezed my hand in reassurance.

"Fly, Ikarys."

Before I could protest, he had let go. My fingers grasped at air, aching to feel the calloused palms of my father.

And down, down, down he went.

Like a fallen angel, he crashed down, wings broken beyond repair. He did not resist, his eyes were closed and an endearing smile was etched on his lips. I watched in horror as he fell upon those sharp rocks, neck breaking like a twig, his arms and legs twisted like a broken doll's. Dark red splattered on the rocks, and I reeled back, a sob wrenching out of me. I could swear upon the Gods that I heard the crack of his neck even through the wind, that I could hear his final breath and the vulgar splatter of his mahogany blood. His limp body bounced into the waters, sinking to the bottom like a stone.

I halted mid-air, shocked. My breath came out in pants as I blinked slowly, trying to process what had happened. A keening noise shot through my ears, cancelling out the enraged rumble of thunder above me. I had barely felt the warm tears race across my face in salty rivulets. It had deeply disgusted a part of me, to know that it was the same salty water he had drowned in.

Fly, Ikarus.

My wings flapped once, twice, thrice. I was streaking through the night like a shooting star. My limbs were on fire and at the precipice of utter exhaustion. Pure panic and terror clawed at my chest, leaving me breathless. I could not breathe. The darkness was suffocating me. It was endless with no beginning or end, and in that silent night, I yelled out to the Gods I didn't believe in to help me. I begged for mercy, something not so foreign to my lips. I had asked for it all those years we were trapped in that cursed tower.

If only we had flown during the day. If only we waited for a while, then the darkness wouldn't have reached out and choked me with its fist, leaving me powerless. Those bitter nights my father and I had endured in the dark, who had bothered to help us? When my father cradled

me in his arms and sang me lullabies to help me forget the darkness swallowing us up, which Gods had turned their eyes from us?

Perhaps, our lives had been doomed from the very moment they began. Were we born to simply suffer the cruelties of life?

As if in answer to my prayers, the clouds shifted steadily. The storm died, snuffed out like a flame. A gentle breeze caressed my wet cheeks, drying my tear-stained cheeks. The moon shone down on me with all its mighty light and stars twinkled into existence, blinking down at me slowly. I was adrift in a sea of stars, and I looked around in a daze. The moon with its effervescent glow sang a siren's song, lighting up a path. Somehow, it was not quite as dark as before. The heaviness of the night sky was erased by the stellar miracles. They told me to live, they showed me it was not over yet and that maybe, my life was not ill-fated. They gave me such unimaginable amounts of strength. One more time, I would survive. I would survive just to tell that ours was not a tragedy, though it seemed close to one.

My lovely, strong father had looked Death in the eye and laughed in delight. He knew what it was to be free, to be truly free of the chains of slavery- both mental and physical. He fought for his freedom; for both of ours. All those restless, tiring hours of hard work and unwavering hope had granted him these glorious minutes of freedom. He dreamt of a life for both of us, a free life rightfully ours.

Caged birds can still fly, he told me- on those grim days when hope was scarce and I wanted to give up any efforts to break free of our imprisonment.

Two birds set out of their cage; that is what we were.

In Search

CLARA E. REICHWEIN

I had been listening to the storm for quite some time now, not knowing when I started. It had begun with the far-off sound of rain and had grown louder and closer with each minute.

Bit by bit I started to feel the raindrops hit my body. A faint feeling getting more and more intense. Now I could feel their weight, feel the water run down my face, hear the thunder, and like fireworks the lightning started to illuminate my vision.

The twitching strands of light, followed by the roaring crashes of thunder, the heavy rain lashing at my body, it all filled my senses.

Slowly I began to move my hands, propping myself up. Began to glide my feet over the stone floor, wriggling each of my toes as they were being doused in water. I moved my neck and eventually looked down at them. Steadying my stance, I gradually stood up and let my gaze wander.

My vision was still blurred, and the occasional thunderbolts took their time in revealing the scene around me.

Gently, I lifted up my foot and took my first step. Looking straight ahead I could see the street that met the edge of the plaza. With time, I

took my next step. And the next. Each time making sure it was what felt right.

There seemed to be less people around than usual. All of them hurrying to get inside the stores and cafés lining the court. First merely blurs in the rain, they now became much clearer. A young girl, walking beside her mother, pointed at me, curiously studying my being.

A lot more people looked at me - puzzled, interested, seemingly searching for something within me.

Their stares followed me, as I made my path toward the street.

The feeling of the rain was joined by the cold breezes of the wind, making the droplets dance in the air. Each quickly finding their path towards the earth and bursting into little splatters. The wind carried the scents of baked goods to my nose, which mixed with those of the rain, wet stone, and something else distinctly indescribable.

I had my eyes peeled on the hill that sloped up behind the street. I did not know how far it was, but I knew it was where I wanted to go, as though something was pulling me there from deep within myself. A rather curious feeling, that was entirely unknown to me before. It heightened my senses; with each step that brought me closer,

the feeling grew stronger, the pull so powerful and yet not visible on the outside for anyone else to see.

Steps turning into paces and paces into a sprint. A heavy thud accompanying each time a foot of mine crashed onto the hard, stone paved road. The unfamiliar sound pulling more and more gazes toward me as I made my way forward, following what was bellowing inside me.

The growing clarity I gained of everything around me, the feeling of the stone beneath my feet, the symphony of smells reaching my nose, the rain on each of my limbs, my torso, and my face, the wind tearing at me in all directions at once, the glimmers around me and the flashes of light, the sounds of the storm, equally as enlightening as they were deafening, the entire orchestration of every impression all at once – it was invigorating.

Finally, I reached the edge of the hill and gazing upwards, I took my first step onto the grass. Like little tufts of hair, it danced around my toes. The ground was soft and yet supported my weight without effort. I could feel the life it housed – it was almost warm in contrast to the cold of the wind. Step by step climbing up the slope, I breathed in the freshness of the wild plants covering the earth.

Through the rain, the green of the hilltop was glowing. Enlivened by the water returning to its roots; ever connected in itself. Each stroke of grass was vivid against my skin, the earth underneath partly sticking to my feet, taking me in as I soaked up the sensations.

Having arrived at the top, I turned around and looked back at the plaza. Looked at the pedestal upon which I had been sitting, endlessly numb; where they had wanted me, had created me.

At the foot of the hill a group of people had

formed, looking up at me in disbelief, some even in horror. Searching for an explanation, which would not be given to them. Not by me, not by anyone. They would need to either search for it within themselves and find it, or remain ignorant – whether blissfully or not.

Amongst them, a little child, smiling up at me in awe; distinct from the crowd.

A last time I gazed upon the town in front of me, then turned and looked over the hill.

Slowly, I got to my knees. I touched the grass with my hands, let the blades slip through my fingers, watched the rain run down their leavy stalks. I felt them fold under my shins, before laying down.

Looking up at the sky I could feel each movement inside the earth underneath me. Feel the grass pushed down under my head, feel it stroking my neck, feel it tucked under my back, my hips, my legs and feet, and beneath my arms and my hands. Feel the rain hit my body and run down my sides. Feeling the cool wind blow across me. The water pooled inside my navel, and I let it drench me.

Sinking into the ground below me more and more, I closed my eyes. Listened to the life that resided around me, deep inside the soil and high up in the sky and everywhere in between; feeling how it all connects. Felt the heartbeat of the earth. Even felt connected to it myself for the first time since my creation. Felt how everything flows through each other, through me, and back around.

And with that, I began to crumble. Melded to the universe, and still but loosely connected. I was picked up by the wind and was blown across the land. I sank into the earth and grew inside the plants. I became one with what I was once ripped apart from.

Clara started having an interest in writing as early as when she first learned how to. Alongside that, she also enjoys other artistic hobbies such as painting, even combining the two to attempt her hand at making a comic. Her hope is to in the future be able to have a job in the creative and artistic field.

jouska

AUGUST HAWLEY

part I

so i'm right back where i started: alone in this bed wondering if a thousand showers would make me clean of you. probably not, because after a thousand promises to stop writing about you, here i am, writing. i suppose it was always more of a favor to you than to me. i suppose i promised to stop hurting so loudly because you promised to stop twisting the knife. i suppose neither of us are keeping our promises, but i always imagined that what you don't know would either not hurt you or hurt you worse.

it aches, this memory. this white rose has wilted and died and sat right where you left it. more than that, it's the bile that's been rising in the back of my throat for longer than i can remember. every i love you rots right where you left it: on the floor in the back of the restaurant, the couch in your basement, floating down a river with eyes still closed and heart still pounding. it's crying and asleep and rotting all at once.

i'm unable to write about myself without the tint of your influence. i'm only disgusting when i remember you called yourself that. i'm sick because you were contagious, because your touch was sickness. it was a knife in my gut and the infection that followed. when you called yourself parasite, that was naming me host. i should have believed you when you said you weren't a good person. i should have left you the first time i agreed.

somehow, i still don't hate you. somehow, all of this has sat in silence for so long. until now, that is. until you twisted the knife, made so long ago into yesterday into now. right back where i started. it hurts so much to write about you in the present tense.

August is a trans man from Michigan with a love for all the arts, but a bias to poetry. When he's not fervently writing one-liners in his notes app, you can also find him playing guitar and piano, sketching in ballpoint pen, or making a playlist.

part II

and this is how it ends. i scrub my hands clean of you, wash every inch of skin you touched over and over again, watch as what's left of you pools at the drain and sinks. i watch it just to make sure it's leaving. this is better; this is good. to forget is to move on. to rid my body of every cell you called yours is to move on. clearing space for cleaner love is how i move on. this isn't to say i never loved you. i did, here and there, though not in the ways you wanted me to. in those fleeting moments where trust and teenager and torment all aligned—planets in a solar system that revolved around the two of us—i loved you more than anything. my love for you was the only thing i understood. when it left me, my love for you was the only thing i wanted.

even good things must come to an end. this isn't to say we were good, it's simply to remind myself that i once thought we were. i once thought we could be, if we found a way to keep our planets aligned. perhaps we were, sometimes. good like the moment before bad news, the flicker of the lights before a power outage, the last of the high before everything comes crashing down. this is to say that i loved you like we were always hanging by a thread. this is to say that i loved you like i always knew you would leave. this is to say that i loved the pain that came with leaving on my own. this is to say that whatever love was there is gone now.

this is all my way of saying that i don't know if i could ever love that way. that maybe i never loved you, after all. maybe i loved you differently than you loved me. maybe i only wanted to love you, wanted to watch the planets align and convince myself that you were fate, that i had a destiny, that if i tried hard enough i could make love out of loneliness. but this isn't to say that i was lonely. this is to say that i thought i should've been.

part III

i have this recurring nightmare: you see me in the grocery store and tap on my shoulder. i say when hell freezes over and next thing you know my feet are ice on the ground; the aisle with the photo albums and plastic flowers has snow falling over it. you never did care if anyone could see us or not. when i wake in the morning it's still dark outside, my feet are warm, i am covered in clothes and blankets you've never even seen. it's almost like you've never touched me.

i used to be afraid i'd never be able to be alone again, that history had turned me into my own foil. instead, i learn to play guitar and go to bed early and draw a self-portrait in ballpoint pen. when sickness comes, i ask myself what i need as if i'm my own friend, and i come to understand that i am. i guess even you aren't strong enough to break a bond like that. i guess i saw myself as a sympathetic villain. i guess the only thing that could heal me was understanding that i've always deserved to heal.

sometimes i wonder if i'm crazy, if i was always the one holding the knife, if all i did was water a garden that was waiting for us. prophecy to present, destiny to history, dust to dust to dust. but i look around me and i have everything i need. my friends were yours, once, and in another life that would mean i'm surrounded by reminders of you. instead, i'm surrounded by reminders that i did everything i could and in the end, it turned out to be enough. in the end, it turned out i had been in hell all along. in the end, a thousand showers later, i wake up right back where i started: in a warm bed, alone.

Midnight Witch

KYRA
BLANK



She comes with fire and scorches the ground,
But only at nighttime when no one's around.
Her hair is black like the night sky above,
Her eyes are brown like the earth below.
She speaks with a voice so calm and soothing,
It's all a façade for something dark and brooding.
Oh! Queen of the South, why don't you smile?
Oh! Mother of the North, why do you weep?
You say you're fine but you are broken inside.
You say you're at peace but you just break down and cry.
Oh! Bringer of storms, where is your wrath?
She who bathes in the blood of the wicked, where is your fury?
Have these mere men tamed you?
Have they cut off your fangs and trimmed your claws?
Oh! Tamer of seas, how did they do this to you?
You say you are alone for reasons unknown.
Your tears alone bring shivers down our bones.
Oh! Bringer of plagues, why do you weep?
We children of the night shall your company keep.
Oh! Matron of death, cast your loneliness in a ditch.
You are after all, THE MIDNIGHT WITCH

Kyra Blank is a teenage writer from the well known and culturally rich country, Nigeria. They enjoy reading in their free time and whenever the motivation hits, they put their pen to paper. With many aspirations, this young writer looks to appreciating and making various forms of art for calmness and some downtime.

on girlhood and codependency

ALEXA
VANDAM

i still read the last page of every book first
because my best friend told me to
under an aluminum playground slide,
these glimpses at the future our precious secret.

it was love before we knew that word is meant for something else.

i wear the shoes that walked me through middle school
bought the same year i learned about heartbreak,
after the first time i burned a friendship bracelet.
purple chord turned to smoke in the starless sky.

i mourn not only the lack of her, but the fact that i have moved on.

but this is girlhood; fitting into others skin
stealing pieces from all the girls i have ever known,
waiting for them to come back and collect their things,
screaming that this is love, it's love, it's love.



Paper (against fire)

JIAYI SHAO

An overheated me, flames approaching at my knee
I cannot foresee what will be of this scene
With the reflection of your light in my eyes:

Which one of us will rise above as the other turns into ashes,
End up in the realm of Death? Who will survive despite the stares
And leave with a hollow laurel on her head?



Pollution

SARI KITCHEN

what if we turned the ocean
blue
would it taste like the sky?
or a ripple of dew?
if fish did not bathe
in orange and gold
blowing bubbles light green
drinking red,
dark and cold
what if we took the colors
away?
away from the fish,
took them all today
steal the shiny plastic toys
the baggies
the buttons
the bottles
the noise
throw our colors into the sky
paint a rainbow instead
watch the art fly
the beauty, the magic, the moment
won't last
drowning in color
so again I ask
what if we turned the ocean
blue
i wouldn't know
we've hurt the sky too

Sari Kitchen is a Canadian-American author and poet. Diagnosed with multiple anxiety disorders at a young age, she learned to always listen to and appreciate those who saw the world differently. Writing to cope, Sari was first published by OSU's Wexner Center for the Arts at age fifteen and has since been involved with writing workshops across the country, notably with mentorship from Brazilian poet Aline Mello.

Scream of Silence

ADRIJA JANA

Note: Contains Mature Themes

The sickly sweet smell of excess male perfume
The strong rotten smell of drunken breath
Assault her senses
A brutal assault
He comes closer

She's suffering from the cramps of her monthly
cycle
She's tired from the hard labour of the household
She shakes her head no
It goes unnoticed
He comes closer

It is unravelling
She starts chanting "No, no, no" like a mantra
Deaf ears are oblivious
The back of her knees hit the bed
He comes closer.

She screams "No!"
But the hand is strong, too strong
The scream is muffled, the tears are free

But water can't soak a rock
A few bangles break
The shards jabbing into her heart, twisting
Rivulets of blood flow out
More bangles break
Bangles tight and loose
He comes closer.

She screams no more
It's eerily silent
She's no more with him
She's lying on her father's lap
She's playing with her little brother
She's reading his very first love letter-
"I'll never let any pain touch you..."
He comes closer.

The thread breaks
Was it weak?
Who knows? Maybe, beaten down
And worn out through the years
Now it is no more.

ALEXA
VANDAM

the aliens met lottie first

lottie knew that four arms were better than two
it just means catching more fireflies
throwing more sticks into the creek
it could braid dandelions twice as fast

and she knew that bringing guests meant getting
the good iced tea from the top shelf
and that you're always supposed
to help someone when they're lost

when she emerged from the wood
hand in hand with the creature
her uncle saw a neighbor
in need of some southern hospitality

so that night they ate supper
and made the last of their canned peaches
into pie with extra whipped cream
at lottie's insistent request

and when the men with shiny badges
who deal with these sorts of things
arrived in their dark vans
and their darker protective vests

they didn't find a terrified family
in need of saving they found
an alien in borrowed pajamas
learning how to catch fireflies

The bell

JIAYI SHAO

Upon my return to the classroom,
I can't distinguish between
Reality and my thoughts,
Despite the bell, which was
Supposed to give me the answer.



The Victorian Room of Pleasant

CLAUDETTE JONES

Square room foot by foot

With the ceiling high and mighty

With wide Victorian windows
and wood boards creaking wildly

With specs of glistening sunlight

Falling upon the ground

Books and jewels and fiddles

Belonging to no one around.

Who is she - the birds chirp loudly

Tapping outside the windowpane

The portraits face turns and twist
and looks beyond in vain

Let her go- let her free

Hidden away hear her cry

Bleached by the clouded sun

And a tear coming to the eye

A beauty once stolen-

A fingerprint stamped-

Alone with blood and broken bone

The birds begin to panic

Square room foot by foot

With the ceiling high and mighty

Downstairs no one can tell

The painting is awake and lively

“I know my loves

I know you feathered young

Will tap until there is doom

Let me sink and freeze up again

And become a hidden tomb”

With wide Victorian windows

and wood boards creaking wildly

Once a[gain]...

The rats now scream and cry in a sudden raging pain

With searching eyes

And a gasp of surprise

The man streaked across the blanket floor

Horror found and leaking paint

That the woman in the frame is no more.

Claudette Jones is the author of a variety of works including the poem short story, “The Victorian Room of Pleasant Causality”

Being involved with digital arts, creative writing, and a variety of play/musical performances- Claudette hopes to strengthen her writing career and have many people enjoy what she can craft together. Though still a beginner - she believes that with enough food for thought- her works will be read analytically and enjoyed for many to come.

Unsung

LESLIE SORIENTE





Oh, to be lost at sea.
Where no one could find me.
Floating, floating, floating, gone.
With possibilities on the horizon.
But this is about me and how I am not free.
Oh, to be a wallflower.
One where you don't have to cower.
"Hell is other people," Sartre said.
A sentiment that makes me wish I was dead.
This place here, I have no power.
Oh, to be far from here,
somewhere I can have no fear.
To be free from God's wrath
and to choose my own path.
I wish I could chase this frontier.
Oh, to be yellow, blue, and green.
At least that way I could be me.
Colors don't have to get married young
or leave their hopes and dreams unsung.
But all beautiful things get ruined eventually.

Leslie Soriente is a college student in Virginia. She is double majoring in accounting and creative writing. While she has no works currently published, she primarily writes fiction or mystery. She is also known to dabble in poetry and nonfiction.

violet-stained church camp

ALEXA VANDAM

the silent rise of
sun over the grand oak that
the blondest climbed

where we cut our knees
and reached for divinity
just beyond our grasp

first summer rays and
young love fell lightly like the
first snow or last leaves

where i held a hand
warm and too like my own
but freckled and holy

yet in the evening
when the cicadas sing hymns
and bush crickets cry

You're Still Here

LINDSAY PELLICCIA

Note: Contains Mature Themes

Sometimes I still want you.

I can't even fully remember what you look like. Your hair is there, your height. Everything else is obscured. Like you're sitting behind a frosted window separated from me by the barrier I tried to put up between us.

You crept in like the first hints of nausea. The inkling of a feeling, deep in my stomach and at the back of my throat.

I resisted at first, not wanting your voice or your eyes to mean something to me, to permeate the part of my brain that warned me about you, turning off whatever mechanism produces reason.

After a while, I let you linger, letting you seep into me during class and then stay there for the walk back home.

I looked at the trees as the cool weather began to ravish them. I looked at the cars passing through campus. I looked at my feet as they hit the ground or my arms as they swung with my strides, and I thought of you.

I changed my outfits, ripping through my closet, cursing the shirt I once loved or the sweater my mother had gifted me.

I looked for anything. Numbers that made patterns or songs that would come on when I hit shuffle. I looked for colors of birds and hidden symbols in puddles after it rained. I voiced prayers in the shower, urging whatever was above to send you to me.

—

That's when it started again.

I let the possibility of you taunt me at the foot of my bed each night. I let it trickle into my bloodstream, mingling with what kept me alive. I let it sit on my shoulder when I went to class, whispering of your face or hands.

Worst of all I let it live in my mirror. It blended with the glass, obscuring itself behind the reflective covering until I stood, looking at my legs or my arms. It hissed and spit cruelties, ripping apart my nose or the skin underneath my eyes.

At one point it left the mirror, vacating it for a new, more advantageous home. It crawled into the bathroom and sat on the toilet seat. It didn't speak this time but instead urged me with its countenance.

I gasped for breath on the floor, wrung my hands till they cracked, and stared at the toilet until my eyes could take no more.

It got worse before it got better. The urges it brought on never left. They performed their siren's wails each time I saw myself in the mirror or passed by the bathroom.

Their cries were distant at first; echoes of what they had once been. Though they grew, gaining might the longer their throats produced sound. They screamed in the end, abandoning any sense of melody. My ears bled and my head shook but they only continued, their pitch becoming shriller and more desperate.

I saw the marks on my hand before I

I had realized what I had done. They were red like before. I felt the high next, it veiled the part of you I had within me. I stumbled to my bed before the dizziness hit.

I realized then that I wasn't thinking of you.

The ecstasy of the act was more than enough to silence you. It permeated my mind like humidity, clinging to surfaces even with the windows closed. It attached itself to my senses, producing a film over top of them, forcing them to slow. It wrapped its spectral arms around my neck and squeezed.

Worst of all I let it.

No longer did I feel your hands on my face or the small of my back. For a few fleeting moments, it was like you had snuck out through my door while I was asleep, lingering at the doorway before leaving, watching me as I lay unaware.

—

You're still here. You come and go like the other thoughts.

Sometimes I can feel you behind me as I get dressed or when I put my hair up in a way you wouldn't have liked. Sometimes I can hear you, your voice mingled with the urges and their muted shrieks.

You have stayed in my bedroom doorway, lingering with determination. You watch me, your eyes unblinking. But now I know you're there.

I know you're no better than what took years off my heart and stripped my body of sustenance and any hope of stamina. I know that

the feel of my collarbones and the feel of your gaze on me they're the same.

“*Finally,
I understand.*”

Credits:

Editor in Chief & Graphic Design – Mika Nitu

Mika Nitu is a high school junior passionate about philosophy, art, and literature. Mika is the Writing Editor of the art & writing magazine at school and has had works recognized by the Scholastic Writing Awards. When not buried in schoolwork, you may find Mika writing, drawing, or reading classical and postmodern literature.

Editor – Akeem Bond Jr.

Akeem is 19 years old and from Savannah, Georgia. With a full cup of W. Shakespeare, a tablespoon of Edgar A. Poe, and a dash of Edmund Spenser, thus began his writing journey. Akeem's work has been published and featured in several anthology series. He is now building up his portfolio to be a freelance writer and earning his credentials to be a fitness trainer. In his free time, you can find him running around a park, working out in his garage, procrastinating on his WIPs, watching anime, or reading novels and manga.

Editor – Sarah Riggs

Sarah Riggs (she/her) is an aspiring author with many story ideas living in her head. Everything from twisted Little Mermaid retellings to light-hearted small-town romances. She is currently on her third draft of writing her book, Fresh Starts, with many others currently being outlined. When she's not writing, we can find her at the ballpark watching baseball, or at home, playing fetch with her cat, Boop.

Editor – S Elise

S. Elise is a Canadian-American student and writer from Ohio, first published at age fifteen by the Wexner Center for the Arts. She also runs a writing advice account on Instagram (@adella.writes). Past career highlights have included collaborating on the Pages Anthologies 2020-present with Ohio State University and being on the behind-the-scenes team of an MG fantasy novel. While not writing, reviewing her friends' writing, or procrastinating about writing, S. Elise loves exploring her passion for history. She also enjoys drinking tea, listening to opera (or any music under the sun), and annoying her younger brothers.

Editor – Mikayla G.

When her nose is not in her academic studies, you can find Mikayla being a loving dog mother and participating in after-school clubs ranging from debate to National Art Society. She is also a junior in high school, graduating early to get a head start on life. Outside of school, she likes to read a variety of content, write, edit, play games, draw, and paint. She's been writing since she was ten years old and it has always been a personal passion of hers, loving the satisfaction that came from bringing characters to life as well as world-building.

Editor – Amelia Bacchus

Hi, I'm Amelia Bacchus (she/her). I am 19 years old and from New York City. Writing has been a passion for me ever since a young age and has become a way to express myself freely, which is why I love to do it! I went to a journalism-based middle and high school for the past 7 years, which has further fueled my interest in becoming a writer. I also have a love for all sports, which is why I'm trying to pursue sports journalism in college and get into that specific field.

Editor – Talia Udelman

Talia is a high school junior who enjoys reading, writing, and everything in between. Her Latin studies have earned her national praise, and she has received the College Board Hispanic Recognition Award for her academic prowess. When not editing for the Playful Porpoise, Talia can be found acting on the stage or playing with her dog Murphy.

Philosophy:

The Playful Porpoise is a literary magazine created by and for youth across the globe. This magazine's mission is to give young writers an international, online platform to showcase their voices through their skills in all realms of writing. Because of the difficulty many young writers face in getting published in general literary magazines and spaces due to competition with more experienced and seasoned writers, *The Playful Porpoise* accepts submissions only from young writers to promote equal opportunity. All writers ages 12 to 21 may submit to the magazine for the opportunity to be published and recognized.

Policies:

The Playful Porpoise asks for First North American Serial Rights (FNASR) from all writers that submit to the magazine. Therefore, writers give the magazine the right to be the first in North America to publish the material once and after, all copyright to that material reverts back to the writer. Writers who have published their work elsewhere prior may also submit to the magazine; from these writers, the magazine asks for One-time Rights. Submissions are free and are accepted via Google Form. *The Playful Porpoise* evaluates submissions based on creativity, originality, technical skill, pacing, diction/syntax, among other criteria.

Colophon:

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Thank you!
