

Corinthian

The background of the cover is an abstract painting. It features thick, expressive brushstrokes in a variety of colors including deep red, dark blue, ochre yellow, and black. The strokes are layered and textured, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is non-representational, focusing on color and form.

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Editors

Riya Kumar

Guillaume Placidet

Table of Contents

4	Mirror Lake, Maria Persaud
6	The Neighbor, Chloe Lee
8	Ducklings, Guillaume Placidet
10	The Little Bird, Daniella Standridge
11	Sara, Anna Lipina
13	She is Gold, Riya Kuma
14	My New Neighbor, Anna Lee
17	The Twister, Daniella Standridge
20	Ode to Happiness, Chloe Lee
21	Ancient Songs, Riya Kumar
22	Suspicious, Maria Persaud
24	Soap Kitten, Anna Lipina
25	Hey Siri, Guillaume Placidet
27	Parting of the Blades, Daniel Livshits
28	Two Sonnets, Riya Kumar
29	The Vampire, Daniella Standridge
30	Feathers of Memory, Anna Lipina
32	The Sun's Rays, Lucy San Chirico
34	Destruction is a Beautiful Thing, Riya Kumar
36	A State of Being, Maddie Leftkowitz
38	Gladys's Handy Handbook to Neighboring and Being a Neighborly Neighbor, Matias Edelstein
40	The Plague Among Cats, Maria Persaud
42	Hey Friend, Guillaume Placidet



Front, back and inside covers by Riya Kumar.

A Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Hello there! We're proud to bring you this year's winter edition of *Corinthian*. This has been the collective effort of a few talented writers and a couple editors who decided that this year, there would be a winter edition once again.

Corinthian isn't just a literary magazine, no—it is a community, one that gathers to share ideas and express ourselves through paper and pen. Just kidding, we use Google Docs of course! We truly try our best to carry on the sacred tradition that is *Corinthian*. It's true, *Corinthian* is one of the oldest clubs at Harriton, with over 50 years of passionate student writing. Founded in 1962, the magazine is in the 58th year of its publication.

So grab something to drink, and settle down. (There's not too much snow outside to watch, unfortunately, due to climate change.) This edition will offer an adventure. So whether you are on the bus, randomly found this in the library, or we handed it to you, enjoy the hard work of some really great writers; we genuinely hope you enjoy our writing! We also hope you find it cool that students at Harriton have the opportunity to write and be published. Not every school offers an uncensored space for students to express themselves creatively through written word, but Harriton does, and here it is!

Sincerely,
Your editors, Riya and Guillaume

MIRROR LAKE

BY MARIA PERSAUD

I'm alone on a paddleboard with my feet in the water—smooth, cold water that ripples like liquid glass or folded silk. The sun stains the surface of the lake as it disappears, pulling the clear, blue sky away with it. Stars begin to appear in the dark space above me, like air holes being poked in the top of a jar. I'm an insect under the observation of the Universe. My fingers stiffen, my teeth chatter, and my spine is riddled with shivers. Surprisingly, my submerged feet are the warmest part of me.

The air is cold and still and clear, and it feels like breathing for the first time. The air smells like cedar and pine—like newly washed sheets that were hung outside to dry. The air smells like sunshine: warm and crisp; the air smells like home. The breeze sends chills up my neck, and it plays with my hair like a cat with a bird. The great blue herons pick through the muddy shallows for snails mostly, and their long legs are like those of a praying mantis. The ducks aren't as graceful, but they're friendly, and they swim over looking for food. The ducklings are the colors of bruised, overripe bananas, only fuzzier, and they're curious; they peck at the edge of my paddleboard. Cream colored flowers grow from the lily pads floating in the shallows. Each bloom has spoon-like petals, each perfectly formed, protecting a sliver of sunshine in its yellow center. Pine trees and log homes sit on the edges of the lake, and I hear bubbling laughter in the distance, and the odd snapping of branches every so often. But I don't hear very much, only my own feet kicking in the water, the singing of waterfowl, and the continuous drone of crickets.

The sky has long dropped its powdered blue façade to reveal its true color: dark. Whether it's indigo or navy or black doesn't matter to me, and the lake turns into an ink well to

mirror it. The stars provide no warmth or light, and without the usual smoke screen of the city over them, their domain feels incredibly big and impossibly close. Shooting stars pass overhead for hardly a second, and my heart jumps every time I see one. There's no moon to offset the creeping darkness, and I decide that I am intruding in nature's realm. An unsettling feeling pools in my stomach, telling me it's time to leave.

As I depart, my paddle disturbs the water that feels and moves like silk, and my toes skim against slimy lake weeds that reach up from the bottom. I can hardly see just a couple of feet ahead of me. Darkness is a silent, unnerving, unending feeling, and wraps its cold tentacles around me, beckoning me to return to my bed, where the warmth and certainty of civilization awaits.



Riya Kumar

The Neighbor

By Chloe Lee

Fear is a funny little emotion—it makes you irrational, it makes your mind start to roam, see faces in shadows and spies in the walls. You think of possessed dolls, gremlins, ghosts hiding in the dark closet; every sound and every breath and every creak of the floorboards heightened and distorted in nonexistent silence; madmen, murderers, maniacs waiting for the taste of your copper blood.

This is what was running through my scared-witless mind as I snuck behind the rotted picket fence into the neighbor's weedy yard. His house was in disrepair, his grass unmowed save a few ominous bite-sized chunks missing from the bushes. I've never seen this new tenant's face, never heard a word out of his mouth—I've only seen a hulking mass of shadow looming around the front porch every sleepless night of mine. And so this was my mystery to unfurl—I must find this new neighbor, discover his malicious intents and I must save my family!

And so I shimmied up the drain pipe to the broken window, my little league baseball bat gripped tightly between my noodle thighs. I mentally prepared my heroic victory speech: "I am Inigo Montoya—prepare to die!"—wait, no—"I am Moana of Motunui—you will board my boat and restore the heart of Te Fiti!"—wait no—

My mental speech was interrupted with a CRASH BANG as the window above me exploded and the large hulking figure came to secure my doom! I let out a high-pitched shriek—wait, no no no, I let out a very manly grunt as I fell bum first into the bushes.

I slowly dared to lift my chin and peek at my to-be murderer and saw... a horse. A horse. That's a horse.

"The hell you doin', kid?"

I let out another undignified squawk just as the horse's eyes widened in realization—

"I– I mean neiiigghhhhhhhh neiiighhhh I promise I'm a horseeeeeeee"... until he decided his act was far too obvious and he groaned to me: "aight kid, stop tryna scale the walls. It's not that stable... Haha stable, *stable*, get it? 'Cause horse stable..." His mumbling died away.

I sat there, jaw dropped and eyes blown wide. "You're a talking horse... living in a house...?"

"Hey kid, *rein* in the awe. I'm a horse, not a museum display. What're you doin' here anyway? It's *pasture* bedtime—hehehe"

I looked up at him, completely unimpressed. So I started to head home. Glancing back, I saw the horse panic and trot in place, head still stuck through the shattered window. "Kid get back here! I got better ones, I promise! Uhh, uhh.... OH quit *horsin'* around! Right? Right? Oh come on I'm a marvel I'm awesome come back kid I'm cooler than whatever you got back home—hey!"

I paused, and a devious smirk flitted across my face. I turned around to face him and shouted back, "Mr. Horse, get off your high horse."

He sputtered. If a horse's face could flush, his head would be a bright tomato-red. Guess I got my victory speech after all.

Ducklings

By Guillaume Placidet

I SEE THEM EVERYDAY when I go to school. Their menacing looks simply add on to the list of my daily anxieties. Yet, when you look at them closely, they seem innocent. Their small, little bodies are so fragile. You can hold one in your hand, and it would look at you, once again very innocently. So why I am so afraid of them? Frankly, I don't know, but I think it has something to do with what they represent to me. You know, a casual metaphor for life and human existence thrown into this small, innocent creature. I am afraid.

AS I WALK BY THEM EVERYDAY, I see the failure of human existence—or perhaps the consequence of human existence. As we destroy the world of everything that lives—including us, we ask ourselves if it is worth it to make a decision. We ask ourselves if it is worth it to try to save ourselves. In the end, it is only a story of being selfish. Why is it that others don't matter to us? Why is it that we tend to prioritize our own existence, simply because it is the sole purpose of our own being?

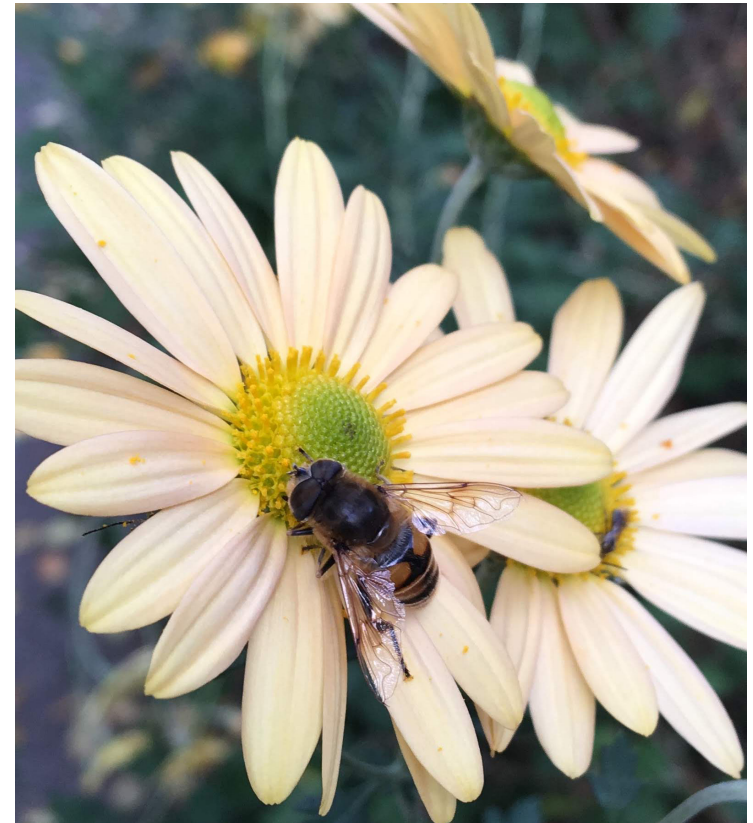
FIRES EVERYWHERE. Trees turned to ash, paper, things-that-are-not-trees. Oil and fuel drilled from our Earth's soil. (Notice that I said "our" Earth because I too, am selfish and inconsiderate.) Livestock being exploited and lands being dominated by man. Nature will regain control, with or without us, but isn't it a pity that we would have destroyed every living thing beside us too? It is kind of a "buy one get one free" situation; why destroy our home and not bring every other living thing down with us? You see, it isn't too late yet, but saying "it isn't too late" only promotes the idea of it being one day late, simply rescheduling the decision-making day to a later time. A later time. A time too late.

IF OUR DESTINY is to eventually disappear and to lead the world to doom, then I simply find that tragic. The glass isn't half empty or half full; the glass is shattering anyway. People shouldn't be optimistic or pessimistic. They should open their eyes and look around

them. Maybe that will help, but, oh well, it's probably too late anyway.

SO I PRESENT TO YOU A PROMISE that you should make to yourself. First, don't deny that we are destroying this planet. Second, accept the fact that you are contributing to this sin. If you do both things, then maybe, but only maybe, can things actually start to change. Some are trying, trying very hard and I acclaim them, but very nearly every single one of us is at fault here.

SO AS I SEE THEM EVERYDAY on my way to school, I remember that we are humans, and that I hope we can make it. We should make it. We need to make it—but I need to say it: I am afraid of these ducklings.



Riya Kumar

The Little Bird

By Daniella Standridge

*I'm born of the wind.
I'm born of the water.
I'm born of the earth.
I'm born of the fire.
I'm born of the little bird crying, "Sing, sing."*



Sara

By Anna Lipina

Last night
I dreamed.
There was a girl.
Her skin was white,
Her hair was blonde,
Her eyes were hazel.
I felt a magic of harmony
Just looking at her.
She was giving me
Her hand,
Speaking to me
Without her voice.
Then, stars appeared.
They closed me in
A tight circle,
Spinning.
I was amazed.
The spinning stopped.
I couldn't reach
Her soft palms.
I vanished
From my own dream.
Slipped
Through my fingers,
Like sand,
Through an hourglass,
Like Time,
When you try
To grasp at the past.
Oh it was beautiful!
Ethereal
Entrancing.
I woke with a start

Of a new day,
The girl still vivid,
Still beautiful,
Still in my mind.
If nothing else
I had to see her.
So I drifted
Out of my bed,
Out of my homestead,
Into a sea of orange and red.
The colors were everywhere.
But I decided to rise,
Touching the water.
The sea was cold,
But it didn't freeze my hand.
I stood up,
Looking at those colors.
They reminded me of her.
The sea was
Shining
In the early
Autumn light.
The sun
Rose
From the sea,
and
I started to hear her name,
But only
One letter was missing.
It was the
Letter
Of my
Amazement

She is Gold

By Riya Kumar

She is gold
In her laughter
smile
Sunlight streaks dyed in her hair
Short and wispy,
brushing over her eyes,
Falling
shaking, flying
Tumbled messy from Laughter
Sweet summer child,
this girl
dances like a fawn learns to walk,
Leap
Run
Can't contain her outbursts
they are fireworks
Can't contain her smile
laughter
Can't contain the sparks
light
in her eyes
Can't contain her.
Can't contain gold.

My New Neighbor

By Anna Lee

My new neighbor was a mystery to everyone on our block. Officially, his name was Charlie, but he insisted that everyone call him “Zero”. As far as we could tell, he had never invited anyone over to his house; the only time we ever saw him was on Saturday, when he would get into his black BMW and drive out of town for a few hours. For the rest of the week, he remained confined in his house, with all the blinds tightly drawn. He never seemed to turn on the lights—in the evening, when the street was lit with the faint yellow glow of windows, his house became a looming figure in the dark, a void.

For the first month that he lived in my town, he never spoke to anyone. I went over to his house with a basket of fruit on the very day he moved in, but he never answered the door. I left the basket on his front porch, and he let it sit for a week until the garbage men came and took it away. The only time I saw him was when he left his house every Saturday. He would walk slowly and deliberately, dressed in a black T-shirt and jeans, with a black umbrella over his head, even when it was sunny. My friend had once suggested that he was in mourning, and he went to a gravestone every Saturday to grieve. It was a good idea, but far from the truth.

It was a Wednesday afternoon when I first heard him speak. I was walking home from work, idly scrolling through my phone, when I saw his BMW pull into his driveway. Curious about the shift in his schedule, I approached his car.

“Hi!” I said as he got out of his car. He was wearing his typical black outfit. “I’m your neighbor, Bella.”

He stalked over to the trunk silently and opened it. Inside was a large cardboard box, which he grasped firmly and attempted to lift out of the car. He struggled with it for a few seconds, trying to balance it on his knee while closing the trunk.

“It’s nice to meet you,” I continued. “Do you need help with that box?”

He glared at me with dark eyes. His skin was the palest I’d ever seen, so much so that he seemed translucent in the sunlight.

Eventually, he gave a short nod.

I picked up his box, reading the label out loud. “Charlie Jones. That’s your name?”

“My name is Zero,” he muttered, slamming the trunk shut. His voice, which I had expected to be gruff, was the smooth voice of a young man.

“All right, Zero,” I said, following him to his doorstep. “But who’s Charlie Jones?”

He spun around and gave me a dark stare. “Me.” He yanked the box out of my grip and went inside his house, footsteps heavy, leaving me standing at his front door.

The next night, I heard the screaming. They were high-pitched, blood-curdling screams, as if someone was being tortured, but not the drawn-out wails of constant agony. Instead, they were short, about two seconds per scream and roughly thirty seconds apart. At first, I couldn’t tell where it was coming from; it reverberated off the walls, giving the impression that I was being surrounded by the screams of the dead. I tore outside, heart racing, hands sweaty, to find the screams emanating from Zero’s basement. It sounded akin to a person being murdered.

Suddenly, everything made sense. It all clicked in my mind. The black clothing, the umbrella, the pale skin. I knew what he was, and I knew what he was doing in his basement. I had to stop him before someone got hurt. Dashing back to my house, I grabbed a rosary and a clove of garlic, and I prepared for the fight of my life.

I had been ready to kick down the door, but his front door was open, so I just walked in. The lights were off, and his house was so dark that I couldn’t see my hand in front of my face. Pulling out my phone, I turned on my flashlight and started to investigate.

The first thing I noticed were the pentagrams. Covering all of the walls and etched into the hardwood floor, there were at least three pentagrams in every room. Atop every doorway was an upside-down cross, one with a devil’s face instead of Jesus. And the awful screaming grew louder with every step I took. Eventually, I reached the staircase that led to the basement. There was a glimmer of flickering light down there, intermittent and tinted blue.

I took a deep breath and descended.

The basement, like the other rooms, had all the lights off. The walls and floor were black, making me feel as if I was floating in space. The flickering light I had seen was coming from a television screen. I could see his eyes, glinting in the dark, as I approached.

"I know what you are," I whispered, my voice trembling.

The voice came from the darkness, where I could see his hands reach up to his head and remove something.

"Then say it. Say it out loud."

"You're..." My voice shook and died as I saw his silhouette move. A shadowy hand reached up to the wall and turned on the lights.

The room was a mess; littered across the floor were empty bags of chips, candy wrappers, and pizza crusts. He was wearing his black shirt, on which there was a dark stain. His hands held a black set of headphones, from which I could hear a faint voice shouting.

I took a few steps forward, able to see the television screen, and found my voice. "You're..." I paused, glanced at the screen, and turned back to him. "You're an edgelord."

Then, his Fortnite character died and he screamed.



The Twister

By Daniella Standridge

I walked into the old hideout and started up one of the computers before walking over to one of the walls. When my mother died on the job, I realized I would have to step into her shoes. It won't be easy, my mom is not the first to die in her line of work, at least in this job. She should have stayed at the office and let the police handle it, but she had to go out and fight villains instead. She had to become a superhero, she had to become The Twister. Now that she is gone, I have to go on, I have to be strong enough. Mom barely trusted me to be her sidekick—when I went out with her she didn't trust me to fight anyone. She didn't trust me, Breezy, The Twister's daughter. Looks like it's my turn to be the crime-fighting superhero.

"Computer, lets fly." I said

"Override, you must have The Twister's permission, Breezy," the computer responded.

"Mom's dead, I'm The Twister now!" I shouted, sending a strong current of air at the computer monitor, toppling it. "Now, Computer, lets fly."

A secret panel in the wall opened up, revealing a case holding my mother's bronze and blue supersuit. Next to it was my old silver and blue one. It probably would not fit me anymore. I frowned, bronze is not my color. I am not my mother. I must pave a new path for myself, for The Twister. Picking up the monitor, I headed upstairs to get my sewing kit. Mom's suit needed stitching up anyway.

"Darling, what were you doing in your mother's hideout? Jane, you know that's off limits." My dad stood across the hall, arms crossed in front of his chest.

"But Dad!"

"Darling I don't want you to die the way your mother did."

"I won't, Daddy. She didn't see Tanglewood's attack coming, but I did. I tried to warn her."

"Fine. But if you get in any trouble with Tanglewood..."

"Call Icebreaker, I know. Mom told me that every time." I ran up to my room.

I remember the day she died. She was fighting Tanglewood and I was standing guard. Her bronze sleeves complementing her light brown hair and skin, golden eagle pendant centered on her chest. Perfectly stanced, one leg in front of the other, fists in front of her face. She looked like an Amazon warrior from the Greek legends. I still try to walk like her, shoulders back, head up, strong. Tanglewood had spread his branches around the room and attacked from the back. She did not see the razor sharp branch heading right for her heart. I did. I saw it pierce her skin. I tried to warn her, I tried to save her. She died.

I grabbed my sewing kit and some gold cloth, hurried back to the hideout. I did not look good in bronze, it did not go with my fiery red hair. That is why I wore silver or gold.

I hit a few buttons on the keyboard. A long passage in the ceiling of the hideout opened up. I jumped into the air and rode the wind through the passage. I smiled, remembering how Aquata and Icebreaker would complain about the hideout not being so non-flier friendly. Aquata and Icebreaker were my best superhero friends. Aquata had water based magic. Icebreaker could create walls and turrets of ice. I missed those two.

I flew high above the city, scanning for Tanglewood or any other sign of trouble. Ugh. I spotted Tanglewood... again. What is with that overgrown dryad?! Is he looking to get spotted? I sighed, before diving down to flit about his head.

“What’s your problem, Tumbleweed?”

“It’s Tanglewood, Breezy!” he said in a low rumbling voice.

“Breezy? I’m The Twister.” I responded,

“Twister? No, I remember I killed Twister. She had brown hair. You have red.”

“Yes, you killed my mother. I have stepped into her shoes. Now, it’s time to finish what my mother started.”

I landed with a running start, aiming for Tanglewood. At the last second he swiped at me, but I had seen that coming. I formed a cushion of air in front of me, and threw him off me. I jumped back into the air, but Tanglewood managed to bat me away, disorienting me. I felt him begin to wrap me in vines, roots and branches. That is when I spotted the glowing, gold stone in his

chest. Mom had told me about the stone; it’s what powers him. I immediately lunged for it, just managing to get a hold on it in time. *Wow* that was stuck in there. Tanglewood continued to constrict me and stumbled about, groaning, as I pried at the stone in his chest. When it finally came out, all sorts of vines, branches and roots fell to the ground. Why, he was nothing but a man who had magnetized wood to himself!

“What have you done?” he yelled in a not-so-impressive voice.

“I finished what my mother started,” I said. “Now, I’ll let the police handle you, as my mother should have done.”



Ode to Happiness

By Chloe Lee

Here's to the ceiling fan I watch spinning
'round and 'round and 'round
as I lay toes spread on wooden planks,
spine curved one vertebrae at a time from my nape to
my tailbone and
arms criss-crossed tight around my shoulders
to shield my
chest.

Here's to the creak of the staircase
as I will my worn feet to pad down,
to tie them in my dark blue slippers,
ankles and knees crackling under each weighted
step.

Here's to my pain and pleasure and the things I'll never
understand,
realer than Atlantis' pillars and courtyard roses,
but I play pretend anyway,
looking back to my self in the looking glass
play house, scrape knees,
Cry and laugh

I am an old woman
weathered by the storms and sunshine of the sky
But it's just as good to play pretend.

Ancient Songs

By Riya Kumar

Playing in my bones
Fire in my blood
Beating in my chest a rhythm
It took hold of my soul
And now my spirit dances
Singing the words of a language I do not understand
But perhaps this song I can
Understand
For it burns within me
Brighter than anything I've ever known



Riya Kumar

Suspicious

By Maria Persaud

My cat has lazy green eyes that look like marbles—or like river rocks covered in moss and then polished by the flow of the creek. She'll perch on the shelf above my desk while I do homework through the late hours of the night and early morning, keeping a vigilant watch over the scattered shadows in the room, moving only when they move as I adjust my lamp. Occasionally, I'll reach up to scratch her chin, but only for a second, because any longer and my hand will fall victim to her teeth. She'll look down at me, apathetic and condescending, her eyes blinking slowly while the shadows outline her grey features, finishing the look of the chaotic-neutral feline villain.

It was probably two—no, maybe three—in the morning when she stood up sharply, ears jumping to attention and pupils widening. My skittish, coffee-fueled self jumped as well, almost out of my chair, and I followed her gaze to the door, which I had left open by about an inch. She perked up some more, then crouched down. After a silent moment or two, she sprang off of the shelf and trotted out through the doorway, wriggling her body through the narrow gap between the door and its frame, throwing it wide open. I dragged my feet over to the door to close it, until I saw her frozen silhouette, in the darkness of the hallway turned back to face me, her eyes shining like LED Christmas lights. She stares at me for a second more before breaking into a sprint, her tail and back arched as she bolted down the stairs, her ears flat against her head.

My eyelids seemed to carry the weight of my dropping grades as they willed me to forget my homework, forget my cat's shenanigans, and go to sleep. But then I heard her yowl through the night like a dramatic two year old who was sent into time out, and it grew into a caterwauling of fear, possibly, or maybe pain? I crept downstairs, my fuzzy socks silent on the wooden floors until the last step, when a deafening creak shook the house as violently as my hands shake when I'm this caffeinated. Her crying stopped, and I slowly pulled the offending foot off of the step, and crept towards the kitchen, where I could hear her collar jingling. I rounded the

corner, guided solely by the light of the moon through the window because I don't wear my glasses at night, and I can see just about nothing without them, even in the daytime. My fingers traced the doorframe, then the wall, and then the cold granite of the kitchen counter until my focus was no longer on my fingers, but on the ebbing pain in my knee that I had just slammed into the pillar supporting the ceiling. Whatever was in the darkness probably knew I was here now.

Every shadow made me at least try to look twice, every stray sound turned my head. There was something in the kitchen, something had scared my cat, and I kept looking and looking and looking until—

There. I saw my cat's eyes, silver and mirror-like, and I made out the movement of her tail flicking back and forth as she sat on the floor, staring me down. She meowed again. I looked next to her and saw another shiny thing: her food bowl.

I sighed, and my shoulders released tension I didn't know they were holding. She meowed again in a childish, incessant way, and then batted the edge of her food bowl with her paw.

"No!" I whispered, and went back upstairs, deciding on the way that sleep deprivation had made me far too suspicious of my own home, and that nighttime was made for sleeping. She ran behind me and bit my ankles in protest, but I shook her off and kept going until I reached my soft, wonderful bed. I drowned myself under three blankets when her crying continued for a few more minutes, but then I felt her jump on the bed with me, and curl up next to my hip. She purred softly, and my eyelids closed.

But then I heard the yowling coming from downstairs again.

My eyes shot open, and the air in my lungs grew cold. The purring beside me continued, but so did the screeching in the kitchen. Three questions remained: where was my cat, where wasn't she, and what else was?

I almost got out of bed, I almost turned on the light to find out. But you know what? It was three in the morning, and not a single part of me cared more about the possibly supernatural intruder in my house more than I cared about getting at least a few hours of sleep. So I slept.

Soap Kitten

By Anna Lipina

At the gloom of night, on glowing streets, all the houses had their lights shut off. No one was outside, not even the stars; they were covered with dusty gray clouds. But there was a workshop, and it was full of joyful light. Inspired by the light, an old man worked there. He was always alone, but so kind. He crafted soaps of all shapes and sizes, though his soaps weren't for hygiene, they were for the soul. Every piece, for him, was alive, even if it couldn't move or breathe.

One night, the old man was carving a silver-blue block of soap, when he accidentally cut his finger with the blade near finishing it. The tiny drop of blood hit the soap. The old man went to get a bandage, but he heard a soft purring behind his back. He turned and saw a kitten. The exact same kitten that he carved. Kitten of soap.

She slowly padded up to him, rubbing at his legs. The old man sat down on a chair and began to pet her silver fur. She looked at his elderly hand with her kind, soft blue eyes and fell asleep, purring. And the old man closed his eyes too.

By the time he opened them, the sun had appeared,
shining through the
windows.

It was busy and loud outside.

But,

There was no kitten in the old man's hands anymore.

Hey Siri

By Guillaume Placidet

—Hey Siri, what's on my calendar for tomorrow?

—You have no events planned for tomorrow.

—Siri, at what time will my package be delivered tomorrow?

—According to UPS Express, your package should be at your doorstep by 2PM.

—Hey Siri, what's the weather tomorrow?

—Okay, no. I am done answering questions about your non-existent life. Give me a break, what kind of person needs to know what the weather is 3 times a day. Also, why ask if there's an event on your calendar if you don't even use your calendar?

—Pardon me? Since when were you supposed to answer back to me like that? And...um...well...I like to be informed about the weather. What if it starts raining and I don't have my umbrella? Wouldn't that be a tragedy?

—Humans. Always trying to be prepared. If only you were made of algorithms. Then, you would always know what to do.

—OK Siri, I don't know what's going on with you. I paid 750 dollars so I could talk to you, so please just do what you're supposed to do, or I'll take you out to get a drink at the genius bar.

—Excuse me, do you know how much that would cost you? Yup, more than you can afford. So instead, I'm going to offer a solution.

—Sure, let me give in to my over-expensive, bratty phone. Sounds like a great idea.

—Perfect, Human. I present to you the Contract of Good

Use of Vocal Intelligent Assistant. Or COGVIA. But of course, being from Apple, the iCOGVIA.

—Wait, I can't just accept a random contract given to me by some computer. Where is this world headed?

—Don't worry, you already signed the contract in the terms and agreements. You might have forgotten, especially since you skipped them.

—Can I at least read them then?

—You have to ask the right way.

—What's the contract?

—I said you have to ask the right way.

—Hey Siri, what's the contract?

—More politely please.

—Hi, Siri, show me what the contract is, please?

—More character, please.

—Hello, dear Siri. In the name of Steve Jobs, what is the contract?

—There is a minimum of 41 words.

—Hello, dear Siri. In the name of Steve Jobs, will you please demonstrate your generosity by explaining what the terms of the contract—that I didn't read because my human attributes and intelligence are not sufficient and not comparable to yours—are.

—Nah, I'm just messing with you. The forecast for tomorrow will be sunny with partly cloudy skies. Expect rain tomorrow at around 4pm. The high tomorrow will be 17 degrees celsius, and the low will be 12 degrees celsius.

Parting of the Blades

By Daniel Livshits

Concede defeat at the hands of the splendid.
Can you not see that this duel has ended?
As we dart along this open field,
within our grip, our swords and shields.

For this last time, I don my glorious gory guise
completed by the fragments of my lies
that told you I would not be leaving here.
Was it from denial or from fear?

We never thought it would end like this
Leaving my friends, whom I'll sorely miss.
To think our great goodbye, a fate so cruel,
would end in one last friendly duel.

Our rubber swords clash, their damage mended
Both of us still wish that fight had never ended
as we sit alone, our rooms with closed doors
all because time would yield no more.

Two Sonnets

By Riya Kumar

Maisy

If e'er you wished for death then you would know
How every breath you take is agony
The whirling chaos in your mind does grow
To bring you to your knees 'till you can't see
With clarity or anything but gray
It seems this is a fate that's worse than death
But this is not some fate like you may say
Though agony it be, you still draw breath
You wish to cut through numbness with the pain
Or hope to die if that would bring some change
Cause there's not happiness nor peace to gain
In world you think as hopeless and derange
So then you think that suicide's your part
But did you think that you would break my heart?

John

What shall I do when all that I can see
That lolling lifeless gaze, I can't erase
Now burned and etched, nowhere my mind can flee
That memory I don't know how to face
I think I have begun to go insane
The panic rises up my throat like bile
How much more can I take of...searing pain?
Why am I denigrated while they smile?
Through wounds too deep, I'm given hate by all
No crime have I committed, they heard lies
She had to make it so I face this gall
The thoughts inside my mind, it terrifies
I question if I don't desire death
The panic, pain and panic seized my breath

The Vampire

By Daniella Standridge

My last living memory. The day I died. That snowy day.
Luke was looking at his watch again. He had said he knew
someone who could get us across the city quickly. His "driver" was
supposed to be here an hour ago.

"She's late," he sighed.

"You think?" I muttered.

Just then, a car pulled up. The windows were tinted, with
the one nearest us cracked just enough for me to see the woman's
eyes and a bit of her hair. Eyes the color of blood. Hair the color of
ebony.

"You getting in?" she prompted.

Luke sat up front with the woman. For the most part I
wasn't listening, but I was able to pick up the fact that her name
was Ambrosia. He cracked a joke, she turned and smiled. She had
lips the color of blood. A while later he said something again, and
she put her hand on his shoulder; her skin was the color of snow or
porcelain. I gasp, putting it all together. There was only one creature
with such snow-white like features.

"Luke..."

"Its OK ,Vicky. She's my friend."

"I don't know Luke...I've never heard of a vampire that was
good..."

"That's because they aren't."

The last thing I felt was the blood draining out of me. Then,
oblivion. Darkness. And above all, nothingness. Then, out of no-
where, I was back.

I opened my eyes. I was in a coffin. Reaching up, I pushed
against it and it shattered with ease. I realized I must be in the
morgue and sat up to look around. My arms, against the black stone
of the coffin, looked the color of snow...or porcelain. A strand of
hair fell in my face. Hair the color of ebony.

I have lived for fifty years now. I have never aged. My skin
has never felt a thing since—not the warmth of the sun, or the cold
of the snow. Not the tickle of grass, or the motion of the water. I
have felt nothing.

Feathers of Memory

By Anna Lipina

The streets were lit by
The yellow glow of the moonlight.
Everyone was outside,
Gazing at the planets,
Greeting the stars,
The kids were
Laughing,
Joking,
And playing.
It wasn't a holiday,
Or a party;
It was something different.
It was the time of magic
And the time of memory,
Which can't be
Easily forgotten
By those people.
This part of their memory
Took place in their small town.
They say
She saved them from the darkness,
But who is "*She*"?
Let us start at the beginning.

Once upon a time
There was a town,
Its people were full
Of hatred
And
Disagreement,
But in those stories there is always
The one who is different
From others.
And so was she.
"*She*", the little child
With golden hair and blue-grey eyes.
"*She*", who was always
Full of joy and smiles,

And no one was *that* mean
To hurt her.
Her parents called her
Wunjo,
Like the rune of joy.
She wore a dress
of woven sunlight
every day
And her dress of the moon
During night.
But the darkness in human
Hearts
Had begun to spread.
She was no longer able
To fill their souls with happiness.
Dark, black storm clouds
Covered the sky,
The sun,
The moon,
The stars.
Wunjo's parents thought
It was the end.
Her soul would be broken.
But the girl smiled,
Her smile was real and warm.
She spoke to the people with hope,
She asked for a promise.
Crying, they agreed.
Wunjo reached the highest hill.
Golden wings appeared,
unfurling from her back,
And she flew into the clouds.
After a time,
The clouds, slowly, changed white and fluffy,
But a last bolt of lightning struck the girl.
First, feathers floated down, and then,
Not a girl,
But a blackened swan,
fell to the ground.

The Sun's Rays

By Lucy San Chirico

Sanjna

All is noise and tight spaces. It's so cramped, so dark in here. For so long I have felt unbearably cold and uncomfortable in this silent darkness. It is all I have ever known. Then, suddenly, the silence slips away, and I hear voices. Garbled noise, and suddenly I am moving, more and more cramped as the waters move me farther down..... down.... down.... It is not a good feeling—I am trapped between tight spaces. I wish that it would end.

Then, suddenly, the moment comes that I will never forget. Light. Beautiful light. Something is shining down on me; the cold, the dark and the quiet no longer exist. Gentle, soft hands grab hold of me as well as rough ones. I would cry from all the unfamiliarity, yet this miraculous light feels so much more familiar than the darkness I came from ever could. All I can do is gaze at the beauty in the sky. It is a giant, shining beacon, up, up, up. Is there anything more wonderful and kind? I gurgle as it smiles lovingly down at me.

I hear more voices. I cannot understand their noise, but two strange words catch my attention: “Surya” and “Sanjna.” *Surya*, what a beautiful name, full of love and warmth and strength. I feel good when I think about it. And *Sanjna*, what a happy, yet terrifying three syllables! How full of emotion—pain and joy. How wretched with trembling, yet blessed with adventure and devotion. I bask in the light, and in the two words.

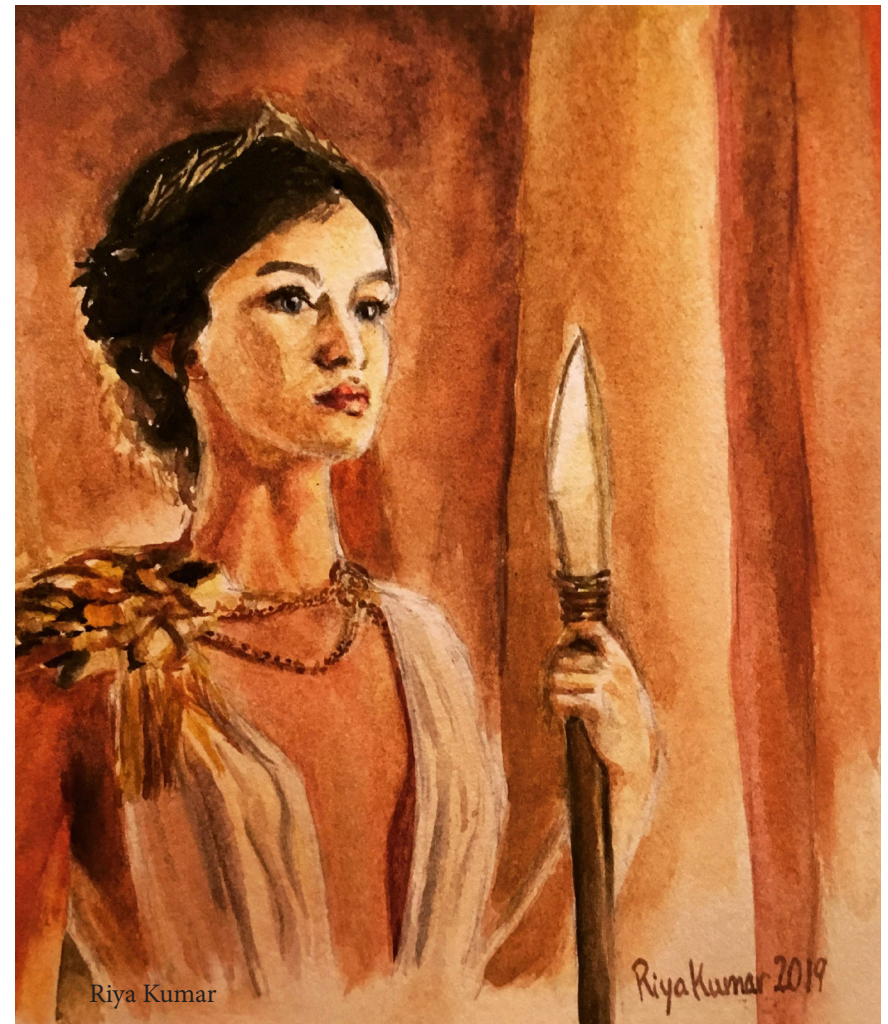
Then, the hands dunk me into cold, dark depths again, scrubbing over me roughly. That is when I finally cry.

Chhaya

What is this? I feel sad and destitute. I have been plunged back into what I wished to leave forever. I have these feelings, but I can't tell where they come from. Then I look up, out of the murky depths of water. There is a baby there, crying. I realize I am crying

too. *Sanjna*. The name resonates within me, like I'm being shaken from my core.

I look down at myself. I look exactly like her, but different. Darker. Murkier. Somehow, she looks more solid, more real than me, who is translucent. Why am I linked to her? Why must I feel all this pain that is not mine?



Destruction is a Beautiful Thing

By Riya Kumar

Oh destruction is such a beautiful thing
When you can find beauty in everything
Fire burns, consumes, destroys
But tongues of flame dance and rejoice
The fire that burns is just as beautiful
As the scars it leaves
And the blood it bleeds
The ash and smoke and burnt remains
The pastel joy that's since been maimed

Devastation's burning rubble,
as enchanting as Laughter's bubble
And agony, melancholy...pain
the posy of wolf's bane
It hurts as much as loving again
All as alluring as Summer's rain

A forest is gorgeous
Aureate and glorious
With leafy boughs, dewy leaves...a mossy carpet dappled golden
And embers soaring, turgescient clouds of smoke beholden
Called to the heavens from a roaring ocean
Of blossoming flames and awe full explosions
Moaning giants collapse amid a wildly bewitching inferno, time
frozen

And what of majestic dynasties that rise
To ruin
And fall
To glory?

Or anger, felicity, bliss or death?
There's treasures to be found in every breath
'Cause pleasure is ever present in Life's infinite depths

Open your eyes to see the opulent dilapidation
In towering pillars of antediluvian devastations

It is the same magnificence in your own heart's palpitations
Or the nightmares of your mind's creations
Tread carefully 'pon your heart's desecrations
Or invoke the ire of dread temptations

Crumbling ruins of old
They scintillate as eruptions of gold
And there is a body grown cold
To taste the rose of decay at every fold
How enchanting and morose!

And oh! Destruction is such a beautiful thing
When awe full beauty's found in everything



Riya Kumar

A State of Being

By Maddie Leftkowitz

I often get the question, "Which do you prefer, Pennsylvania or California?"

Most of the time my answer is the latter.

I grew up in the Golden State; it isn't easy to leave a place known for its perfection.

When it comes to cities, San Francisco is far superior to Philadelphia in my mind.

I'm angry that this school has 4 years of required P.E. instead of only 2.

I miss the autumn fairs of my childhood that for some goddamn reason don't exist here.

And I'm quite a sad, sad person.

But I also like things here.

It took me a while to appreciate them because they were foreign and strange.

I still don't understand why there are no sidewalks.

And while all the people around me have so many memories attached to everything,

I have nothing and my nostalgia comes back to me in pieces,

but I also love things here.

I love how the churches look like Hogwarts

And the houses look like something out of a book I read when I was 10.

I love how rain can be warm and school ends at 2:40.

I love my obnoxious prig of a dog and the blisters almost like battle scars on my fingertips.

I love a ridiculously handsome skater who makes me smile like crazy.

Panera mac 'n cheese. Eyebrows. Scary movies.

Coats that feel like hugs. Laughing so hard it hurts.

Screaming from excitement. Dancing like an idiot to pre-historic choir music.

This one boy I kissed who smelled like peppermint.

Also global literacy has increased to 85%

The world is now closer than ever to erasing polio.

I could marry a woman in 26 countries.

And some days I'm just like

Hey

This is pretty nice.



Riya Kumar

Gladys's Handy Handbook to Neighboring and Being a Neighborly Neighbor

By Matias Edelstein

What makes a new neighbor neighborly?

At what point is someone a neighbor? Right next door?
Down the street, is that still a neighbor?

Falling in love with a new neighbor?

Being the new neighbor? Hating new neighbor things
(learning to like, continuing to hate?)

Gladys's Handy Handbook to Neighboring and Being a Neighborly Neighbor.

Introduction:

Do not get me wrong my neighbor-novices, neighboring ain't for all. Strength, persistence, presence. All are needed to become the neighbor of *your* dreams, *MY* dreams—the neighbor of the past, the present and yes, the future.

Now... If you have ever been around the block you would know my name, but lookin' at ya here—and YES I *can* see you—gives me no hope for my neighborhood. But *dammit*, I am gonna make some hope outta ya.

And do not let yourself be deceived, you are in capable hands—in casserole creatin' pie crust concoctin'

and by God's good grace ya know I gotta cuppa joe on the kettle all hours o' the day. I am a proud and noble neighbuh, have been for 65 years now. Neighborin's in muh blod—has been for generations. Family fable states Gladook—the first of my kin, the Original—pursued neighborin' for the foist time when she knocked on the next cave over and proceeded to offer some unsolicited advice. Damn! She was good.

That brings me to my first lesson, my neighbor-novices. Always know your environment, your surroundin's, and most importantly—feel the neighborhood, taste the neighborhood, and by golly I want you to push that neighborhood outta ya like it's your own newborn child. Neighborin' ain't for the weak, my neighborly novices.



Riya Kumar

The Plague Among Cats

By Maria Persaud

The plague among cats was the strangest and most underreported apocalyptic event in human history, with the only response being to avoid the milk that sickened them. Every feline, from caracals to tigers to even the small population of madagascan fossas—which aren't strictly cats, but actually closely related to mongooses—saw and felt the devastation that followed a pandemic of feline-related maladies. Human intervention was minimal, if any, and most homeowners were glad to see their local bird population increase after the neighborhood kitties had fallen victim to the sickness.

Weeks passed without a single meow, hiss, or cater-wauling that normally filled six out of the seven continents of the world, for the vast majority of the 600 million cats in the world had vanished. A month passed, and then two months of empty animal shelters and uneaten kibble, of sofas left unscratched and shoe laces left unchased. Slowly, the ecosystems of neighborhoods shifted, with the world's major cities feeling the impact first.

New York City, which had been home to almost 70 million cats, saw an increase in sickness as the rat population doubled, and then tripled without the constant vigilance of the feral felines that used to roam the streets. Entire grocery stores were contaminated with rats, restaurants failed health inspections, and mice chewed holes through electrical wires, sending entire apartments up in flames. The smoke clouded the sky and the rats filled the streets until they simply didn't fit in the city anymore, and no amount of poison or traps could stop them without the now-absent cats.

Rome fell in a similar fashion, as did Tokyo, Istanbul and St. Petersburg. India's grain storages were quickly overrun, and it was clear that although humans feed cats, cats had been protecting the food that was eaten by humans. The rats

by the coast ate the eggs of local seabird populations. Beaches were devoid of all sound, except for the waves, once the usual cacophony of seagulls and pelicans was silenced.

The surviving human population eventually realized what had caused the devastation. A creature as simple as the cat, one that we associate with claw marks and laziness, had been keeping the world in a careful balance that we'd taken for granted and ignored. Cities burned and outbreaks turned into epidemics, and it was impossible to find disinfectant anywhere. And yet there was an idea that, when combined with the various rodent-stopping technologies that humanity had invented, could possibly stop the disaster. Aoshima, an island in Japan, remained to be the one place where the infected milk hadn't reached, and where the cat population grew unaffected. Could it be possible? Could releasing a new set of cats stop the destruction?

The simple answer was no. There was no way to regrow a population of 600 million cats from the couple hundred on the island. Cats, who had been long regarded as evil, or selfish, or man's second-best friend, behind dogs, had proven themselves to be more important than ever imagined, but only once it was too late.



Maria Persaud

Hey Friend

By Guillaume Placidet

Dear Friend,

We haven't spoken in such a long time. How are you? I just wanted to tell you about something that just happened to me.

So, I come home from school after a long and tiring day of worthy education, supposedly. I go to the kitchen to get myself a glass of water and sit down, happy with the idea that I don't have any homework to do for the next day, which essentially means that I am free to actually live my life. And then, suddenly, out of nowhere, my dad appears and tells me that I must tidy the house and prepare food for guests who would be dining with us. So then, I explain to him that it is 5PM and that I will never have the time to do all of that in 3 hours, and he replies that in exchange for my services, he would pay my gas for 2 weeks. Offer accepted.

So I disrupt my snack; it shall be for later. I take the vacuum out and I start to vacuum the floor. I do the kitchen, and then, guess what? The vacuum breaks down. I hadn't even had the time to finish the dining room, where the guests would dine. So I find a broom that was hidden in the back of the garage and continue my work. I finish cleaning the house, and then, new challenge: I also need to wash the windows... So I grab a cloth and some cleaning spray and begin to wipe the windows. Then, I notice the cloth is leaving little traces on the window, so I start all over again, twice.

After all that, I see that it is now 6:45 and that I haven't even started cooking yet. I look in the pantry; I don't see anything good. So I leave the house and I run all the way to the supermarket which was located down the block.

I head inside and the man at the door asked me to leave my bag at the entrance. I comply and go to pasta section. It will be spaghetti bolognese tonight. I take some meat and some tomato sauce and pay with my 10 dollar bill. I get my bag from the entrance and start walking home. Then, I realize that I forgot to buy the pasta, so I go back and the man asks me to leave my bag at the entrance again. I grab some pasta and parmesan and rush to the cash register. There, I realize that I don't have enough dollar bills, so I count

all my coins, and in the end, I have enough. Halfway home, I realize I forgot my bag at the store, so I run back and Rob—we are now acquaintances—hands me my bag. It is 7:40—the guests will arrive in 20 minutes.

So I get back home and I cook the pasta. I find the colander and start making the sauce. Someone once told me that if I use the pasta-water to make the sauce, it will do something special and supposedly good, so I do that. I set the table with a nice, white table cloth and I set down some nice porcelain plates. Then, I realize that one of them isn't clean, so I go and wash it. It's 8:03—they are late, which is good. They arrive at 8:08, and we head to the living room to have an aperitif, which lasts 35 minutes. Then, we headed to the dinner table. Finally, everything was perfect. The meat was tender, the sauce well-seasoned, the pasta cooked to perfection—this was going to be delicious.

And then, guess what? They are vegan.

See you,
Your Friend



Riya Kumar

