Ice Lolly Review Issue XII

A literary magazine by the youth and for the youth



March 2022

Cover Art by Annabel Shen

Editor's Note

First, I would like to thank Annabel Shen for the absolutely stunning cover art! The medium is oil paint. Please go check out her Instagram account, shen.annabel and give her a follow!

In issue 12 you'll find melodic, bittersweet prose, celestial star-dusted pieces, and visceral, golden poems that seem peeled right out of fantasy novels. We received about 440 pieces for this issue, almost double the average number of submissions we usually receive. Thank you to all the editors who helped edit work and gave such wonderful feedback. You guys are so amazing and talented and I wouldn't know what to do without your help.

A special thanks to all our followers, submitters, and contributors. I hope everyone enjoys issue 12!

Warmest regards,
Jessica Wang (she/her)
eic of Ice Lolly Review

Poetry

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Prose

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pieces from a dying chess prodigy - CJ Caparros

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Guide To Evaluating An Alternate Universe - Prose Poem
By Pragnya Haralur

//situation one
Every afterlife looks the same, each one unmakes me like an opening. I watch as you crack your name into my palms as i press my face towards the sky and sew it shut. I trace mehndi into the lines of my palms and unscrew my knees until they come out butterflies. In some universe, I realize I am destined to turn into my mother and contemplate the word over and over until my lips turn to liquid dust.

//situation two
Can i truly call myself in second person? When i am reborn I am but prophecy, so if i am destined to love you over and over I'd rather familiarize myself with the way you rebuild yourself, pattern recognition and all. I throw myself headfirst into the ocean and counterattack an imaginary enemy like I've done this my entire life. I dance in silver slack-jawed mechanical movement and last only seconds if i remember anything too long.

//first ending
When I was younger i counted the number of stars in the sky, called myself a strategist and calculated the number of ways i could defy gravity until i hit complete equality. My teeth fell out and sprouted out hypotheticals. I washed myself in with delicate identities & stole my secrets from the local graveyard. If you really wanted to, you could catch a neverending necklace of stars and find enamel in one of them. I parry attacks & turn into past lovers one shadow into the next, ride the train after school and turn into a half-tree to sing my sisters to sleep. Someday I'll find gravity.

//second ending
I, too, would like to be a girl tall enough to fit a body. Instead I love my selves alike, scratch my jaw into an elegy and fill it up with pasts / present / futures in which I win everything I touch. I reach a favorable position and treat it like a science experiment, adjust the mechanics enough to form a person whole enough to end this game in technicolor. Prophylaxis lasts only as long as you wish it up into a dream girl, spinning stories into silk.

//third ending, or, a beginning but in different tongues
When the sky wraps itself around a star like a miniature moon, I am reborn, ribcage filled with

mercury, bones burgeoning into newfound flesh like singsong metallica. Before I die, you tell me my greatest mistake was choosing to christen myself. In order to reach true imperfection, I must remain inside the walls of this body, a name I never conformed to, a word I learnt in silence.



Pragnya Haralur is a poet and writer from South India. She enjoys chess and unconventional forms of poetry and hopes you are having a good day.

Stories in the Sand - Poem
By Ananya Vinay



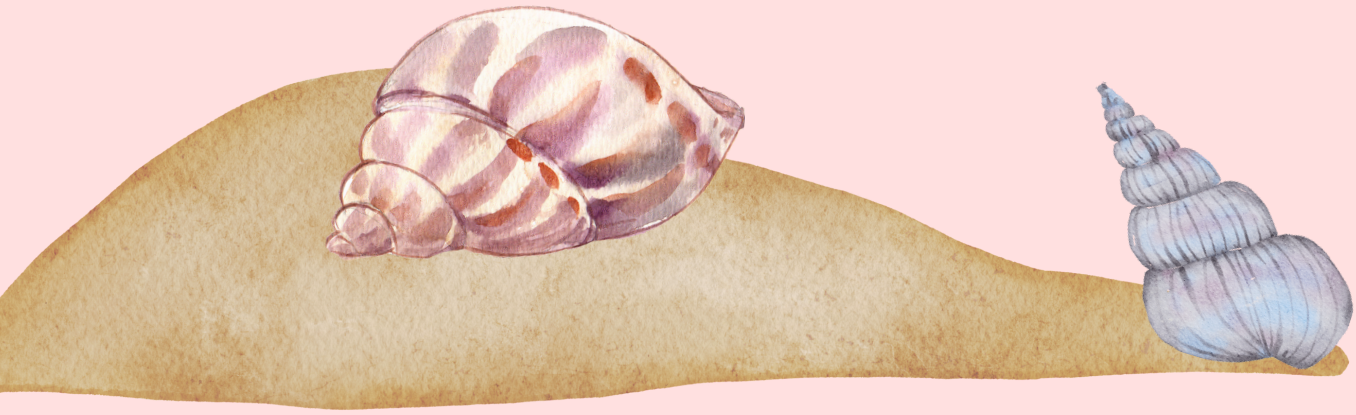
Tracing a path in the sand
Somewhere I've never been
Alight out of rigid reality
to flickering dreams
When I hold my eyes shut, roses twist and gardens bloom
imprinted to joy, pain, realization
When I run to infinite shores
eyes closed, bracing for impact
Feet carving sculptures of stacked letters
disarrayed alphabets
Into melodies piano, forte, issimo
Still tracing a path in the sand
branching in countless directions
Pacing in new jungles of metaphors
Inventing idiosyncrasies for figments
That might just hover in liminal space
or settle into wallpapered rooms between lines
Running journeys I push them on
Logic conjured from sparkling leaves
To pull new reality from the clouds

When the space clears of souls, exchange cold loneliness
friends in shifting tales
Rooted to a garden of small beginnings
A chance to start over and over and over
let the puzzle slide into place
Always tracing a path in the sand
a never-ending roamer of possibility
A possibility of a blunt, honest boulder-sentence
A possibility to run circles around verity
Forge a nugget unveiled in the nook of a treasure chest
unlocked by a beating heart

teasing a tune out of a forgotten corner
Tracing new paths in the sand

A shove out of ignorant bliss
into perplexity, blindly scouring the sand for seashells
Purple, yellow, white pearl, flowering echinoderm sand dollars
How long till the waves strike, the tides ride a mare in
Cloudy fields fractal to kaleidoscope shards
gather and glue a cobbled epiphany
Trace original paths in the sand
till I wade into the sea

A sea, a melangeur of black, white chocolate
rediscover rhythmic pulses of candor, comfort, illusory multiverses
Burst the expected, trace avant-garde paths in impressionable sand
always dashing to grasp emerging waves to home



Ananya Vinay is from Fresno, California. She loves reading, writing, and science.

kinship - Poem
By Ilana Drake

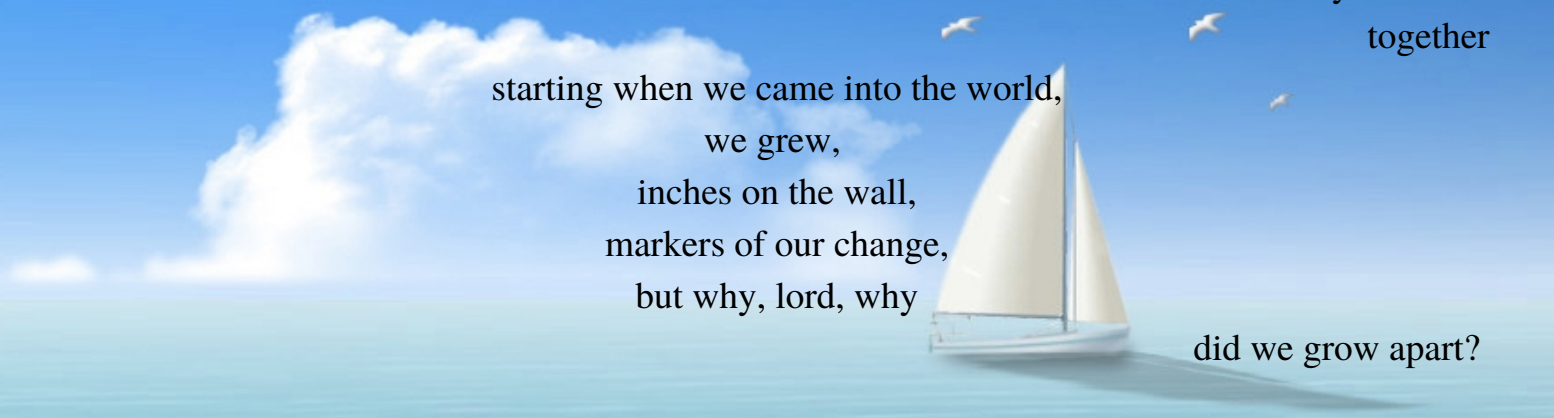
play “Young, Wild and Free”
take us back to those days,
the days when we held hands
and jumped,
hands & fingers interlocked,
right into the cold water

fingers that we couldn’t feel
as our heads bopped up
hitting the surface

as the boat rocked
& as the sky changed colors
we stayed under
together

starting when we came into the world,
we grew,
inches on the wall,
markers of our change,
but why, lord, why

did we grow apart?



Ilana Drake is a first-year student at Vanderbilt University from New York. Her work has appeared nationally in Ms. Magazine and YR Media, among others. Ilana has won numerous Scholastic Art & Writing Awards for her work. She previously was a mentee in Girls Write Now for three years, and she served on the New York City Department of Education’s Chancellor’s Student Advisory Council. When Ilana is not writing, she can be found advocating for social justice or trying new coffee shops.

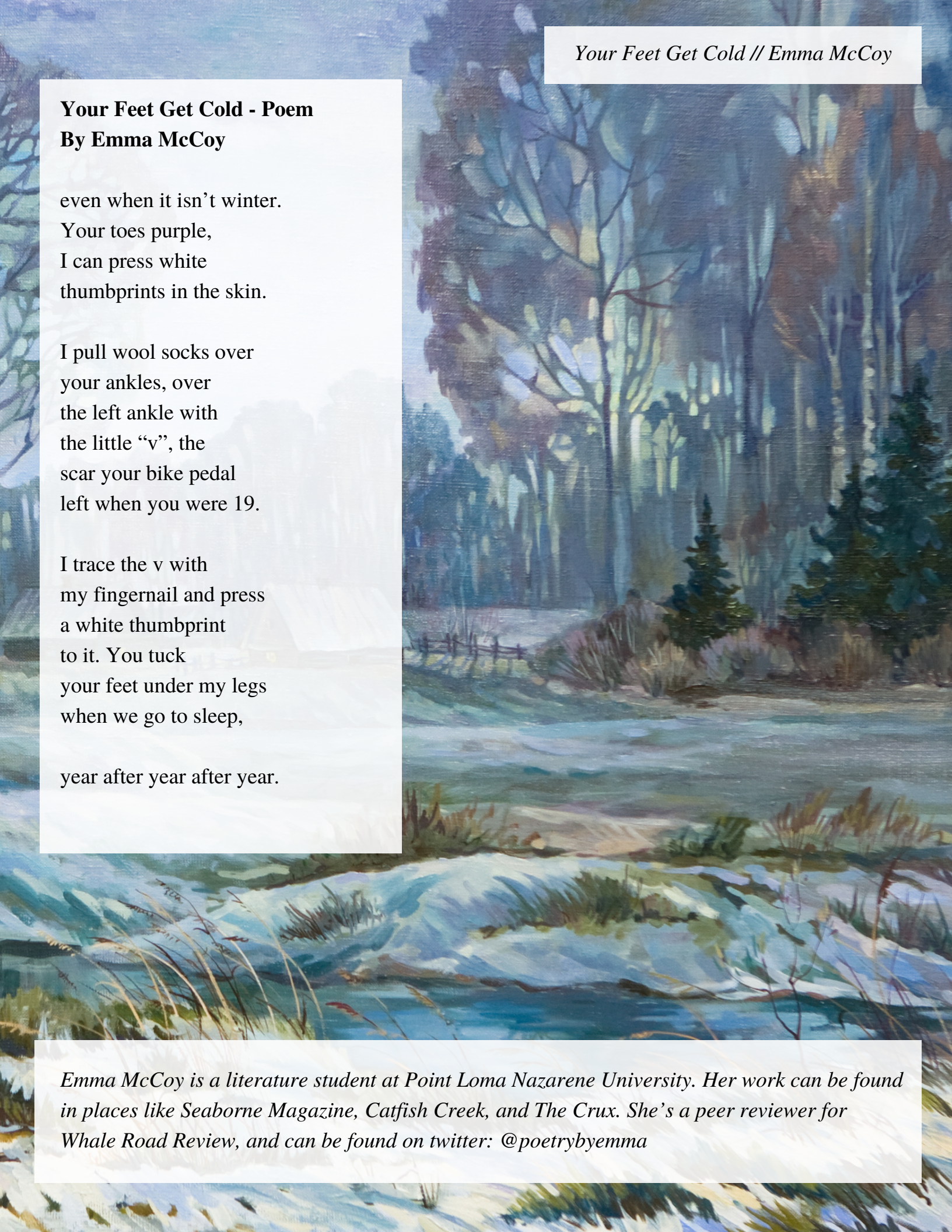
Your Feet Get Cold - Poem
By Emma McCoy

even when it isn't winter.
Your toes purple,
I can press white
thumbprints in the skin.

I pull wool socks over
your ankles, over
the left ankle with
the little "v", the
scar your bike pedal
left when you were 19.

I trace the v with
my fingernail and press
a white thumbprint
to it. You tuck
your feet under my legs
when we go to sleep,

year after year after year.



Emma McCoy is a literature student at Point Loma Nazarene University. Her work can be found in places like Seaborne Magazine, Catfish Creek, and The Crux. She's a peer reviewer for Whale Road Review, and can be found on twitter: @poetrybyemma

Ode to the Neighborhood Library - Poem
By Elise Chen

Remember the little free library?
with fresh yellow paint
and a bright red roof
Remember your small hands?
covered in dirt from the park
reaching out
to open the glass door
Remember the Saggy Baggy Elephant?
whose golden spine
was plucked from the yellow shelf
like a perfectly ripe
peach
Remember the tall bushes?
that envelop the fences
lining the sidewalk you walk on
making your own adventure
Remember the fire red leaves?
the ones that crunch under your feet
as you tried to flatten them
on the sidewalk
on the way into the larger library
they surround
Remember the dark green grass?
slightly wet from morning dew
wrapping around the library
like a little forest of its own
guarding the treasure within
Remember the smooth mahogany chairs?
scattered around inside
where you could sit for hours on end
where you could meet your friends
like an office



you wanted to grow up fast
Do you see the overgrowth on the fences?
left to run wild
they have swallowed the fences whole
Do you see the old mahogany chairs?
their sharp red color
now faded from the many people
who sat to rest
Do you see the little free library?
whose yellow paint is faded
and red roof chipped
though it's glass window still intact
and hinged door still functioning
Do you see The Magic Treehouse?
whose pages are slightly worn
from the many times you've read it
it now sits on the faded yellow shelf
alongside The Saggy Baggy Elephant
In the little free library



Elise Siregar Chen is currently a 12th grader. She loves English literature and enjoys writing poems and short stories, drawing and filmmaking.

utterance of folding waters - Poem
By Camila Hernández

i.

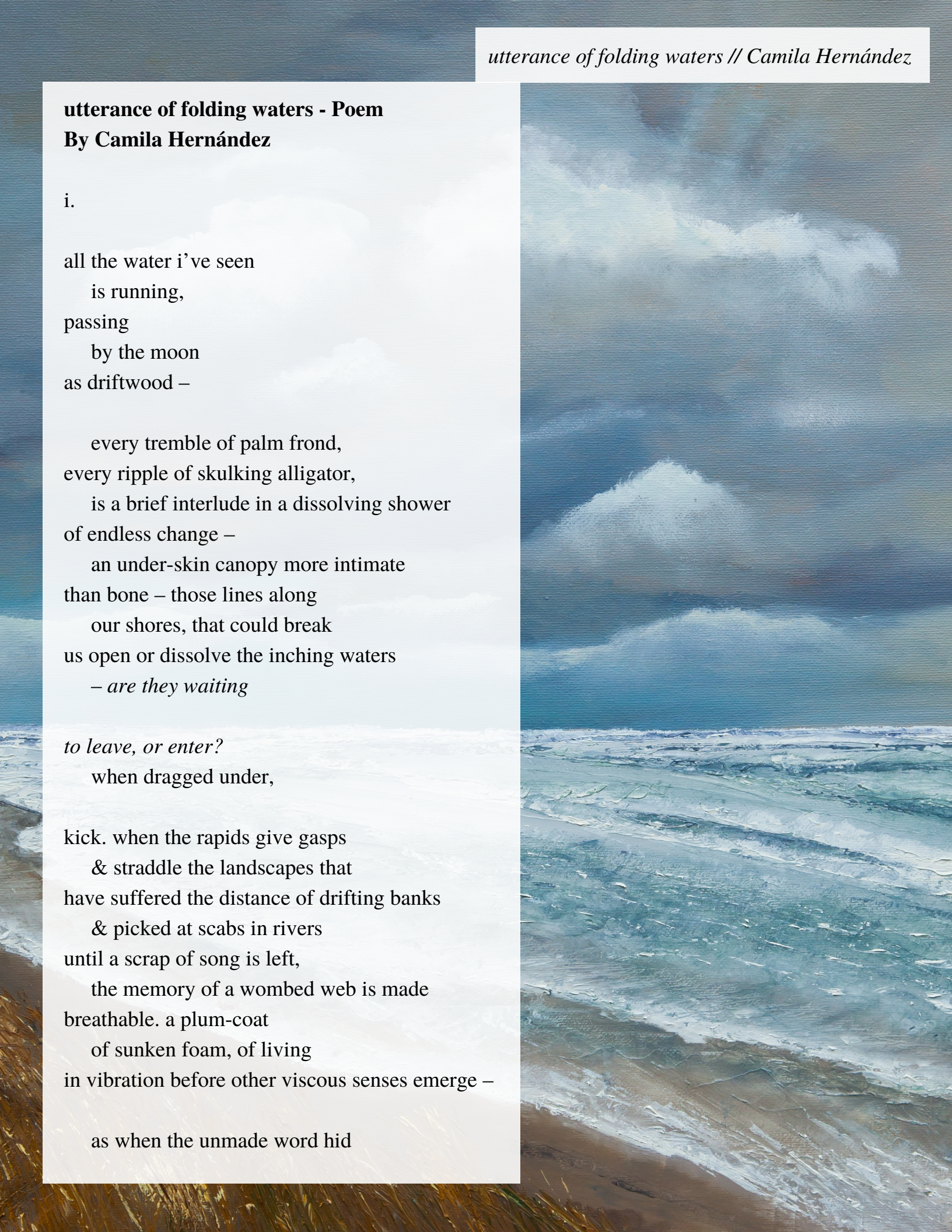
all the water i've seen
    is running,
passing
    by the moon
as driftwood –

    every tremble of palm frond,
every ripple of skulking alligator,
    is a brief interlude in a dissolving shower
of endless change –
    an under-skin canopy more intimate
than bone – those lines along
    our shores, that could break
us open or dissolve the inching waters
    – are they waiting

to leave, or enter?
    when dragged under,

kick. when the rapids give gasps
    & straddle the landscapes that
have suffered the distance of drifting banks
    & picked at scabs in rivers
until a scrap of song is left,
    the memory of a wombed web is made
breathable. a plum-coat
    of sunken foam, of living
in vibration before other viscous senses emerge –

    as when the unmade word hid



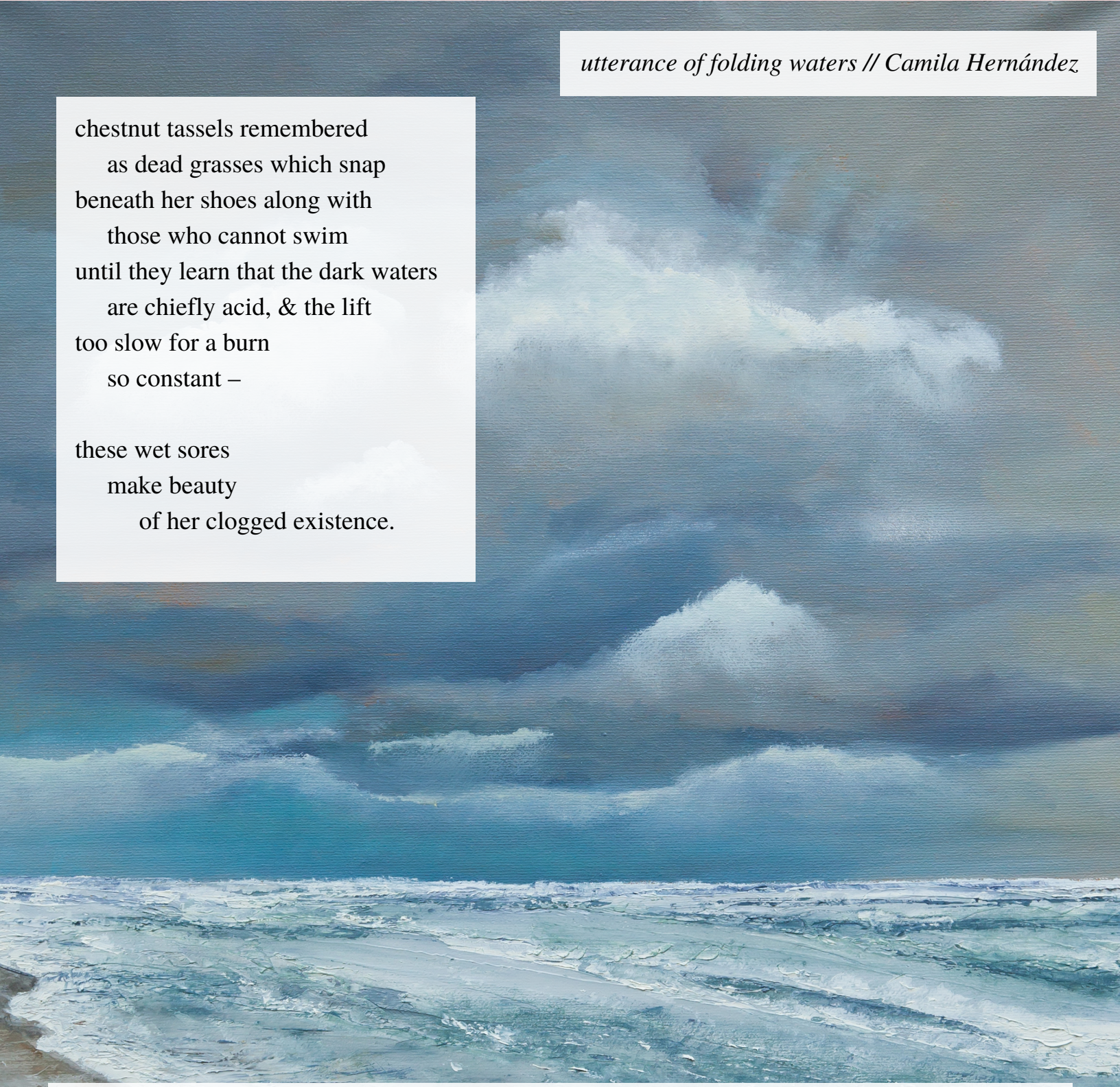
with spit inside our mouths,
    that anthropogenic sublime
choosing to fall
    into the company of the devoured,
the angelic rub of its cream
    against a ground that creaked
with the stunted winter of its history,
    & seepages of dirty water

spun silk into the language of doves –
    their self-chosen retreats
are the diseases that let them
    live.

ii.

the ocean can't hide.
    it swirls into new configurations,
swerving into small catastrophes
    unravelled and re-spun, arching back
into itself, to make the air
    a solid thing – above & below –
to swirl the herons, the seagulls,
    numbers to be culled, where to place
all the dead she cannot hold –

    she flies off her hinges
like a fingernail, a slip,
    a serif-curved word sectioned
by a labyrinth of reeds,
    shoulders folding apart,
& in the same breath,
    the torn-off wings encircle the surface
like lily-pads contorted by geological time,
    the book of their bodies perusable –



chestnut tassels remembered
    as dead grasses which snap
beneath her shoes along with
    those who cannot swim
until they learn that the dark waters
    are chiefly acid, & the lift
too slow for a burn
    so constant –

these wet sores
    make beauty
        of her clogged existence.

Camila Hernández is a 19-year-old Venezuelan-born, Yorkshire-bound poet and student journalist. Her literary, art, and film reviews have appeared in the University of York's Nouse student newspaper and on the student-run Norman Rea Gallery's online blog. Her poetry has also been featured in The Looking Glass anthology. She is interested in the cross-pollination of inner and outer landscapes of the self and nature, and how modern and postcolonial visions intersect to show us colours and contours that we'd never dreamt could define us.

the hunger - Poem
By Jayda Brain
Previously published on Write the World

you write poetry out of necessity.
poets are people who are hungry.
you pen haikus in springtime &
elegies when the bees sting,
limericks at garden parties
& sonnets once all the guests have
left. if paper & ink are your midnight
salvation, the local bookshop
must be holy ground. ‘cause
the lady there thinks you’re kinda
crazy, but shelves your poems at the back
anyway.

your reader plays hide & seek out of fear.
he’s hiding from his hot-tempered older brother,
cowering in the bookshop like a sheep gone astray.
he’s usually not one for rhythm, rhyme &
other wastes of time, the automaticity of alliteration
& sloth-like similes. but when you’re fourteen &
terrified, what else can you do?
he reads your latest poem. each & every line.
he stays in there past closing time, motionless,
lips parted like curtains for the stage show
of rumination. he knows your poem isn’t really for sale.
he slides a penny under the counter & takes it home
anyway.





Jayda Brain is a high school student living near Sydney, Australia. While she's not dealing with jokes about her surname, Jayda likes to read and care for her plants, but doesn't do either enough. She is 15 years old.

Coup de Foudre - Poem
By Lauren Cho

I step
into the rain, tiptoeing
amongst the fallen leaves
and flowers. the air, eager
lover, clings to me, infatuated follower
of blue-light suns and stars.
I watch the rain
drip from trees, painting their limbs a near-
black red, distilled beauty. I watch it glide
down the street, into the gutters,
whisking away the dirt and grime, the skin
and hair and broken bones and hearts.
the wind picks up, shrieking charms
and curses, children's lullabies. the low
rumble of thunder from afar,
coup de foudre, growls, and I turn my face
to the rain and kiss its drops. They caress
my lips. They burn my tongue.
my teeth fall out, one
by one.
the umbrella slips from my fingers and slides
amongst the rotting
leaves and flowers. they stick to its transparent
canopy, molding themselves into a picturesque
reflection of the Skies.



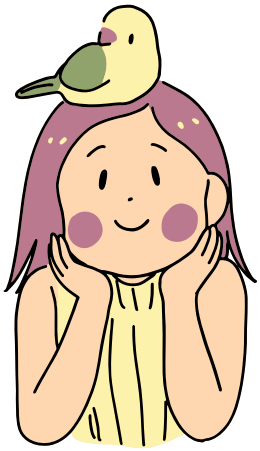
Lauren Hyunseo Cho is a 17-year old published poet based in Seoul, South Korea. She has her poems forthcoming, pending on editorial review, or published in CrashTest Magazine, Teen Ink, Ice Lolly Review, LiveWire, Cathartic Youth Magazine, and more. She is interested in issues of multicultural advocacy, feminism, and philosophy. Her love for writing serves to produce poems and stories of her take on these ideas.

Who I am - Poem
By Faith Barnes



If you were to ask who I am I'd say,
Madam I am who I am,
Me and only me,
Not who you say I need to be,
People just pass on by,
How I wish it were easy to see eye to eye.

I may be unique,
Just because I don't want to be in sync,
I'm the paths I take,
And the rules I might break,
People in my dream,
Color in my eyes that gleam.



Judge me of the passion I get from my mother,
I heard your opinion of my brother,
Say I look like my father,
I say it's different being the daughter,
So go a little faster,
You'll miss the song in laughter.

I often get told I'm naive,
Maybe there is too much I believe,
You chose me to belittle,
Only because I couldn't get your riddles,
As life continues to run out of time,
I'll do my best to stay benign.



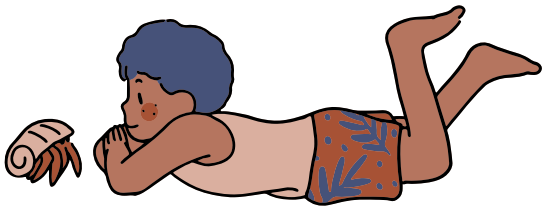
I'm the blood in my veins,
How I dance in the rains,
The air that I breathe,
And the sand I pick up from the seas,

I'm the feeling in my core,
The work I'll have to endure.



I once was told,
That I'm getting old,
Look past the mask I'm hiding,
Friends should always be abiding,
Sometimes it seems no one understands,
But I've got better plans.

I don't want to be your minion,
So I'll scream my opinion,
But yet my lips move not,
Why can't I just say my thoughts,
By now I've learned to take a chance,
The fondest memories are made when I dance.



We all have bruises we try to hide,
As so the feelings inside,
People noticeably drool,
Over the thought of being "cool",
I'm not the words in your mouth,
No I won't fall when things go south,
Because at the end of the day,
This is me and me to stay.



Faith Barnes is a 15 year old from Nevada, Missouri. She enjoys reading stories and writing poems. With her first poem published, she hopes to inspire teenagers like her to stand up for themselves. She's and advocate for selling the idea that no one is normal and we should all be confident with who we truly are.

roots - Poem
By Chloe Lin

like the sycamore
we grew
on these roots
frightful buds
that soaked the sun

we were evolution
ebbs in this river searching
for each other at the
bottom let the rays shine
through translucent skin

& in your pupils i see
the bus rides & paper straw &
chocolate milkshake &
turtle pendant caught in
your hair

but how sudden did summer turn
to fall when all you see
is red like the
spice is not just from
cinnamon nor foggy milky
breaths in the morning car

& when the dew
dribbles down the stem i remember
how you dropped into my life

fruitful fairy rosey
cheeked chestnut freckles
tiny converse on lily pads





we shared
a pair of wings

but somewhere along the way
we lost the magic
hid it in the
hollows & ran

watched our memories crumble
through a faded lens
clouded with dirtied time

time we let sail along
the chalky river
time that
bent with the wind

time knotted in
the roots shadow of
our origins fought
&forgotten



Chloe Lin is a teen writer based in Long Island, New York. She was a finalist in 1455's 3rd Annual Teen Poetry Contest, and she is currently published in Rattle, Young Writers USA, Horse Egg Literary, Ice Lolly Review, and elsewhere. She reads at the Young Writers Initiative and edits at Outlander Zine. When Chloe is not selling her soul to a Google Document, she enjoys messing up recipes and folding paper cranes.

this is a time that never was - Poem
By L.Y. Rinn



this is a time that never was –
my hands, bathed in the blood of your betrothed.
his severed head, lying in a shadowed corner,
filthy, putrid mess cooling alongside my quenched rage.
he was asking for it. he was asking for it because
he dared to. dared to seek out the ink stain motley
of bruises beneath your broken skin. dared to tear
down the sole soul in which i found solace.

this is a time that never would be –
masquerade masks, gossamer gowns, muffled murmurs
the hall below us still buzzes in celebration,
blissful in their ignorance; blinded in their indulgence.
(if only they knew i had decapitated their host)
i search your quicksilver eyes and find not
a single sliver of fear, so i take your hands
in my bloodstained ones
and run.

the sky outside is set ablaze, evening sun
burning with all its intensity before
night's abyssal maw engulfs it. the final,
futile struggle before its waning light is extinguished.
my chest heaves from catharsis, from frenzied
laughter and the pleasant burn of freedom. i wonder
why freedom tastes like the blood
of slaughtered swine. like iron chains melting away
in the kiln of my white-hot wrath. like the peony blossoms
i used to weave into the tresses of your sunkissed hair
on mild May mornings we spent lazing about in the meadow.

there is nothing left in the wake of the sun

that has been devoured by night
but you and me.
there is nothing but the pounding of our feet as
we flee towards the distant gash of twilight
seared into the skyline.
our legs give way like newborn fawns,
bodies collapsing into nothing
but stardust and ash.

and there is nothing left
but a time that never was
and never would be.



L.Y. Rinn is a Chinese-Malaysian poet and writer. Aside from being part of the poetry editing team for her university's literary magazine Particle, several of her poems have also been published in Aster Lit. She is in love with mythology, the beauty of hanfu designs, and magical realism.



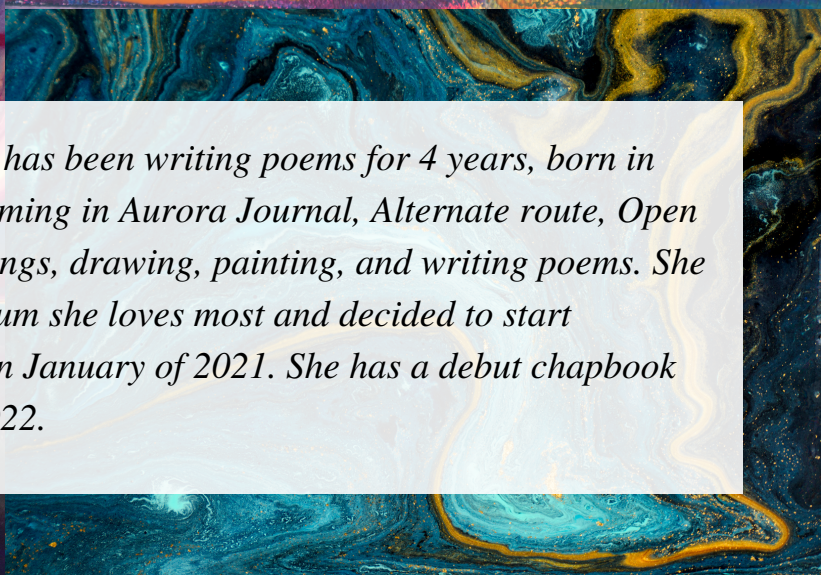
Pin wheeled // Dorothy Lune

Pin wheeled - Poem
By Dorothy Lune

To put my mind on a plate & pinwheel it until
blisters form. Like yolk I spread out all over.
Too simple— you do such things precociously.
My brain splattered you eat & eat me up until
satiated. Licked bits off the walls & gathered
the leftovers. Snipped chunks of my hair &
hid it away from me hastily. You must've
worked wizardry, bewitchment— the only sound
explanation. Watching me utilising mirrors I was
unaware I owned. Marinating my hair in a jar
of honey like an infatuated scientist or igniting
bumblebee flames on me with me sleeping on the plate.







Dorothy Lune is a 16 y/o Yorta Yorta poet who has been writing poems for 4 years, born in Australia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Aurora Journal, Alternate route, Open leaf press, and more. She started out writing songs, drawing, painting, and writing poems. She found poetry to be the type of writing and medium she loves most and decided to start submitting to literary magazines and journals in January of 2021. She has a debut chapbook entitled Heart planetary coming out in April 2022.

night train on a friday - Poem
By Mekhala Singhal

i am waiting for a train at nearly midnight on a friday and there's two people on the platform, one of them in a long skirt with large earrings and short hair and a denim jacket, holding on to someone with green-grey trousers and blue suede shoes and they kiss
through their masks.
a painful intimacy, *soft-like, love-like,* and it haunts me to watch it, and

sometimes i forget i have it.
love, i mean. i went so long without it, sometimes i forget i have been *kissed, held, loved, smiled at*. sometimes i forget i have seen *eyes change, pupils dilate*, and it takes a moment for me to believe it. like that moment of *bated breath before the train rushes in*
and you have to
step back, the fear of
maybe i could lose myself in this speed, this tonguetiedness.

i am waiting for a train at nearly midnight on a friday and a couple next to me embraces; he's lifting her up, stretching her back, asking "did it crack?", a strange intimacy, and i always want to be a part of these moments like
i'm longing for more *even though i'm not.*
sometimes, i want to ask them to
love me too, except i'll have to believe them, won't i?
it's friday and it's nearly midnight and
my hands are empty.
the trains are nearly packed full with people—they're talking and laughing and i wonder
if i could ever *love right.*



Mekhala is a twenty-four-year-old Master's student at New York University. They are an actor, activist, artist and poet, with a passion for music, books and film. Mekhala grew up in Mumbai, India, and can be found on Instagram and Twitter at @meksnosense.

A Villanelle About Love - Poem
By Cathy Shang

You do not get to pick and choose what bits of someone to love or hold.
For it is both damned and divine to waltz within your cathedral hearts;
And for your darling, beloved ghost, to attend a thousand funerals in royal gold.

Though wary experience warned bitter deception to the previous bold,
Through misunderstanding, that excuse, like ice, both fills and parts.
You do not get to pick and choose what bits of someone to love or hold.

Though early blazes may shock at first rage and call it a feeling gone cold,
Ancient pyres know not, of perfection, or of ends and starts;
And for your darling, beloved ghost, to attend a thousand funerals in royal gold.

Though the untamed ferocity of wildfire is a force to behold,
Those of battered wisdom knows gentleness and of fearing naught.
You do not get to pick and choose what bits of someone to love or hold.

Though in the quietest moments, doubt will inevitably toll,
But the neverlasting smoke, and the lovers you were of past, must depart.
And for your darling, beloved ghost, to attend a thousand funerals in royal gold.

For history, for naivety, for tenderness, for our youths still wold.
For the versions of us long faded, to rise and rise again, it too, is an art.
You do not get to pick and choose what bits of someone to love or hold.
And for your darling, beloved ghost, to attend a thousand funerals in royal gold.

Cathy Shang is a Chinese 17 year old student studying in Shanghai, China in Shanghai American School Pudong Campus. She writes poetry as a form of self expression and in hope of capturing the intensely important emotions of the human experience. Her writing focuses primarily on fleeting dreams and sentiments from stories of her life so far, as well as the weight of silence as a form of communication. In her spare time, she likes to make digital art and animation, and compete in parliamentary debate.

Unearthly - Poem
By Mahbubat Salahudeen

It often happened at dinner.
The whistling
then came the blast
followed by an expulsion of breath
and knowing that I have been spared_
but only just

While somewhere
amid cries and choking clouds of smokes
there was a scrambling
a barehanded digging
of pulling out debris
what remained of a sister,
a brother, a grandmother

I wasn't at all surprised
when father said
fate is what is beyond man's control

In every book
everyone has a chapter
we reincarnate,
we come back again
we are all characters
entertaining God

But then I wonder
if God was smiling or sobbing
when our breath
was rinsed by death

while we entertain.

Mahbubat Kanyinsola Salahudeen is an 18 year old lady, writer, spoken words artist, poet and human rights activist from South Western Nigeria. She has works featured and forthcoming with Spillwords magazine Fiery scribe review, Lolwe, Ice Flow Press and elsewhere. She is a Girl Up Scholarship Fund Recipient 2021, a Girl Up Project Award Recipient 2021 and a winner of IHRAF Creators of Literary Justice Award 2021. Besides storytelling, she is intrigued by music, sports, catering and historical movies.

why do we beam - Poem
By Avery London

well *bubalah* we beam because our light has faded
hasn't it *yéled*, hasn't it *yacchii*
hasn't it boy
when we jaunted to synagogue last saturday
and donned our inscribed yarmulkes, you haven't felt the anxiety of
the loose cap falling from your head during *haftarah* as the bar mitzvah
speaks in your unintelligible childhood tongue
moses gets old and rambles out *mitzvot*
and on the day that boys become men
you became erratum
the afterparty was congested with questions
you're getting so handsome, have you found a girlfriend yet
no no I'm in a relationship
oh
throughout the onslaught of normalities you kept up that smile
that luster of unease, that glow of cringe
when *baa-baa* told us we'd fly to okinawa
and stay with relatives in october, you haven't felt the shame of
neglecting the language she
tried to teach you once
in her old cactus garden next to the street
she's proud to this day that her baby grandson
remembered the japanese word for grandma
yet forgets you can't count past *hachi*
your *yaaninju* might not even speak english
they'll ask you in okinawan dialect
nice to meet you, have you found a girlfriend
uh... *gomennasai*… (grandma what are they saying)
you'd flash an awkward glint of teeth
idling as *baa-baa* translates a guilty absence to familiar queries
when your folks listened to a medical podcast with you

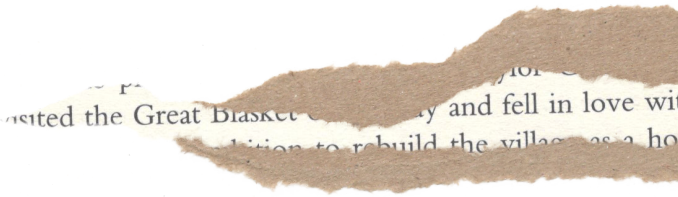


in the parking lot on your first day of highschool, you haven't felt the tension
as an orator introduced themself with they/them pronouns
and your mom asked
do you know anything about this
and you shook your head
and a semester later you dated a boy
your folks don't know what to say sometimes
are you a they, a she-he, or what
but their hearts are still replete
your grin is re-lit with a hint of cheery head-shaking
everytime they crack up to newfound lingo
or tell you anything queer they read in articles
for every phrase you've lost to the annals of time,
mom and pop have learned a new word for child
a beam is a very useful thing my friend
when we're ignorant to our spoken blood
when we're fit haphazardly into a hamper
when we're called a good boy and patted on the head
and grabbed by the cheek and someone
uninvitingly rips away our mask to get a better look at our face
because they've blotted out what we've become
you beam bright on clamped lips
you weren't always faded, Ḥayyim-gwaa, and your light will ebb before it flows



<u>Translations</u>

bubalah — sweetie
yéled/yacchii — boy
haftarah — selective readings from the Torah
mitzvot — Jewish law
baa-baa — grandmother
hachi — eight
yaaninju — family



gomennasai — informal apology
Ḥayyim — common Hebrew name for religious context
-gwaa — suffix of endearment





Avery London is a junior at Sacramento Waldorf School in Fair Oaks, CA. They've lived most of their life in the foothills of Northern California. As an Okinawan Jew, cultural and religious identity informs their fiction and nonfiction work. They're an avid queer writer in the process of authoring their first novel and chapbook. They enjoy experimental and free-verse poetry, and always love a good flash fiction piece over tea!

the mud stained my dress - Poem
By Kathryn Dew

the mud stained my dress
the white one with the flowers
that you said you loved on me

i found a kettle in a ditch
five chipped teacups and half
a pot of chewed up sugar cubes

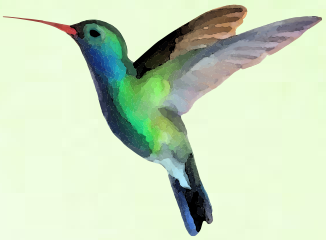
tea stained my favorite book
the love poems you bought me
that you said i reminded you of

i found half a heart in a ditch
five months together and too
many tears dried on our cheeks



Kathryn Dew is a seventeen-year-old non-binary lesbian writer from Pittsburgh, who has been published by Always Naive Zine, The WEIGHT Journal, and Noctivagant Press. They are a staff member for BatCat Press and Spillover Mag, who primarily writes poems and prose. They live with their family, two dogs, and two cats. When they're not writing, Kathryn is a self-proclaimed history buff who is interested in studying psychology.

Winding, Weaving, Whispering - Poem
By Nicole Janney



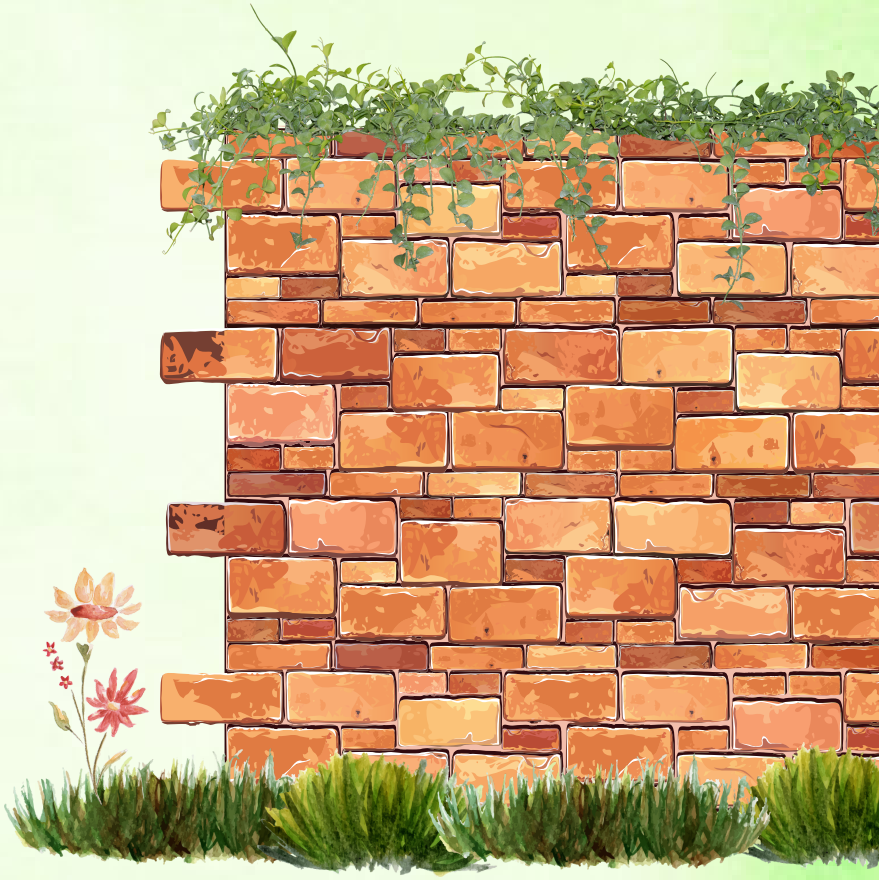
I want to draw on the walls
Watch the vines
twist and turn
climbing
up and around
the window frame.
Watch the petals breathe
as they bend and suspend
from the wall,
sighing in the waking sun.
Watch the graphite wings
join the bird's body
as it dives into the daisies
reaching from the lush meadow
along the base molding.
Watch the translucent curtains sway
over the rebellion
of drawing on the walls.

Listen to the swish of the brush
as it saturates
the ivy forest green.
Listen to the hushed imprint
of the sponge
adding texture.
Listen to the flap
of the tufted titmouse
as it soars toward
the ceiling,
begging you to play
among the twists of ivy.
Listen to the splatter of paint



with each flick of the wrist,
drying as it lands
on my skin,
echoing the rebellion
of drawing on the walls.

Breathe in the fresh air
as the breeze exhales
on the glistening acrylic.
Breathe in the beauty,
and move with the winding
rhythm of the vines.
Breathe in the joy
of the rebellion
of drawing
on the walls.



Nicole Janney is a 25-year-old undergrad at Iowa State University pursuing a degree in creative writing and technical communication. She loves to write in a variety of genres and is currently working on her debut novel, taking breaks with romance novels and crocheting stuffed koalas.

wonderful world - Poem
By Sakshi Umrotkar



when I see a cube of flesh
rip off your thigh,
I don't cry, I just ask
what's after us —
a rip in spacetime, or
a scratch on a god's cheek, perhaps.
it's painless, the process
of getting minced under air,
heavy air that curdles,
slinks under
our skin
and pulls us apart, atom by filthy atom.
what use was it to
print photos
of the feral gods
on stone slabs and holy t.v. screens.
we could've kept camera rolls
of ourselves, to remind the world
we were here
once.
we were here, and
then we were gone
in peace, not mid-leap.
better this
than neo-malthusian chaos.
this is better.





Sakshi Umrotkar is a 17 year old writer from Fremont, California. She is a 2021 California Arts Scholar and an alumna of the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program, Iowa Young Writers' Studio, and Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop. Her work has appeared in the Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine, where she is a general editor. She enjoys cooking, trying out new genres while writing, and exploring the intersection of psychology, social justice, and creative writing.

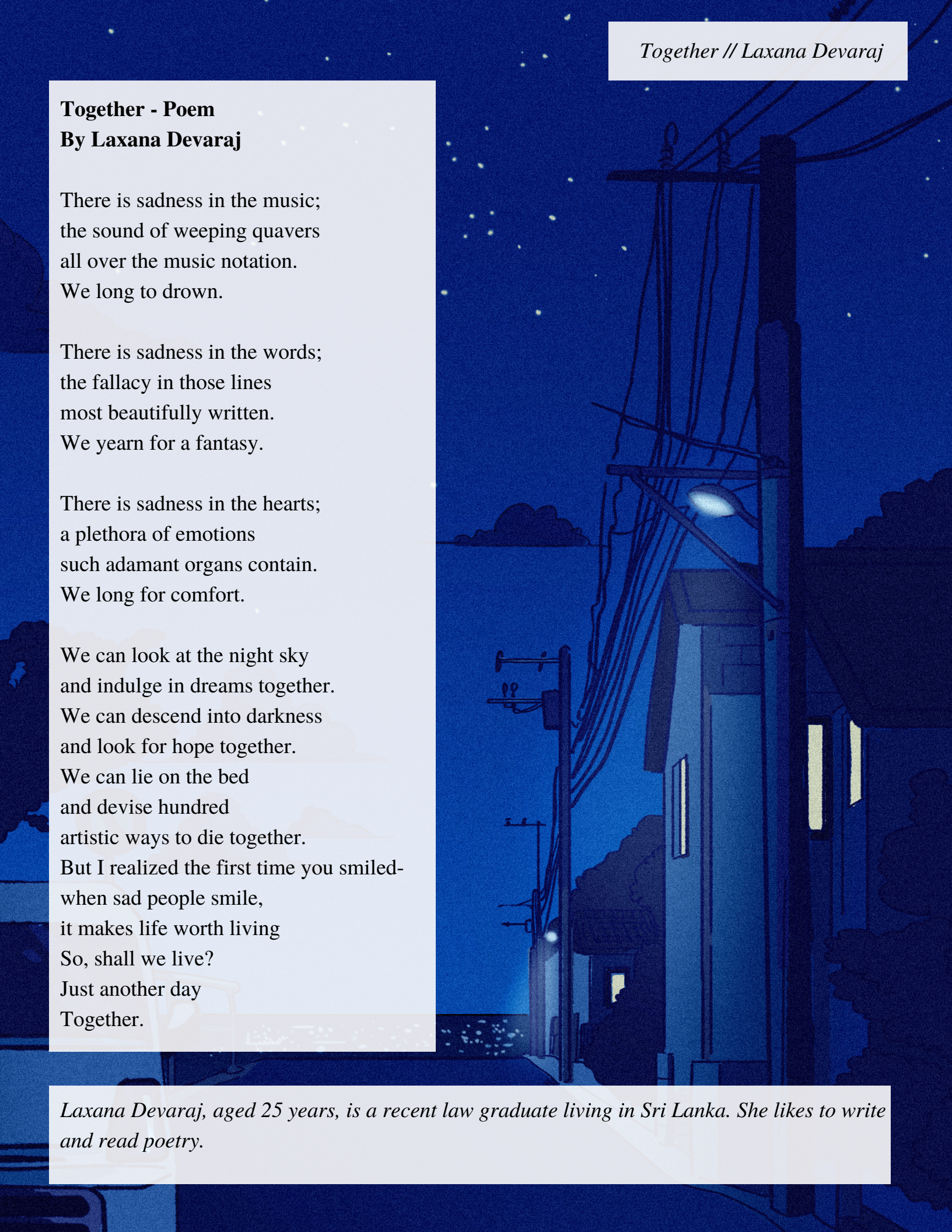
Together - Poem
By Laxana Devaraj

There is sadness in the music;
the sound of weeping quavers
all over the music notation.
We long to drown.

There is sadness in the words;
the fallacy in those lines
most beautifully written.
We yearn for a fantasy.

There is sadness in the hearts;
a plethora of emotions
such adamant organs contain.
We long for comfort.

We can look at the night sky
and indulge in dreams together.
We can descend into darkness
and look for hope together.
We can lie on the bed
and devise hundred
artistic ways to die together.
But I realized the first time you smiled-
when sad people smile,
it makes life worth living
So, shall we live?
Just another day
Together.



Laxana Devaraj, aged 25 years, is a recent law graduate living in Sri Lanka. She likes to write and read poetry.

april, from a patch of green - Poem
By Camila Hernández

the earth is hurling herself
into blurs:
landscapes shrivel into one neat fold,
elastic
pulled taught –

whipped-cream clouds whirl their whites
around blue froths, shimmering formless ivories
fraying at their uncertain edges –
this morning
is plaque-plastered, wakes up unbrushed,
swishes the mouthwash, thick and fuzzy
in the throat –
minty breeze.

April sighs
with the briefest hue which crackles
with cunning on the air – a primal warmth
tries to catch up to the light,
its collapsing vertebrae
stretches the sun long into a knot
of nerves – of a trodden-on dawn
slipping

from corduroy fences, sunburnt
and peeling,
flowers that love too wildly
strewn along
their collarbones like after-party confetti –
wine-soaked with all the trimmings,
she is spring, a recollected autumn
plucking its leaves
back on.

daffodil necks crane downwards,
no shadows that show white, that can
start over to disguise objects as they are –
as they strain to be seen,
these darker spots
are where the cold accumulates,
pulling the trees
awake,



to correct their posture
for light to take its course
and splatter its dust among the
soil like oil-paint scruff, the soft realism
of blurred impressions – white on black,
the beginning

is only shadow –
a shade on a primed canvas
that distorts and distils itself into
accidental brightness.



the incessant pulse of rain rustles
in the choir of crisp oak, their papier-mâché trunks
drool with the sap that is their glue –
and i wonder
if they ever get tired of
having to raise their bodies up
to be ours?

Camila Hernández is a 19-year-old Venezuelan-born, Yorkshire-bound poet and student journalist. Her literary, art, and film reviews have appeared in the University of York's Nouse student newspaper and on the student-run Norman Rea Gallery's online blog. Her poetry has also been featured in The Looking Glass anthology. She is interested in the cross-pollination of inner and outer landscapes of the self and nature, and how modern and postcolonial visions intersect to show us colours and contours that we'd never dreamt could define us.

bookless - Poem
By Moth Skuller

you are standing in a sea of people and all of them know where they are going
or is it just a heavily detailed and gold-rimmed facade?
do any of us actually know where we belong?
but you can't ask that question or any question ever because
the fear that seeped into your bones solidified a long time ago and has you in a chokehold you
are nothing when standing alone but when you become sparked you are
something to behold, a hated and revered god of anger

you love only one and despise the others
besides, changing your shape to please them got old fast
you don't need them, they stabbed you in the back when you were weak
the branches growing from your skull and your spine will keep you safe this time
and your lover needn't fear the dark, you're the only monster for miles around
you'll protect them, even though there is doubt and ivy vines woven into your crown
but you don't even see it, do you?

you had a book, at one point or another, a guide to show you the way
but it was lost in the confusion of growth, when your body tore itself apart
you tried so hard to find it, and yet, it was gone
and now you are bookless, alone, abandoned
but you don't need the book anymore
the pages must have absorbed into your soul
and given you a layer of armor, glistening black ink on your skin



Moth Skuller is a 15 year old poet, digital artist, and black nail polish enthusiast from Oregon. He lives in a house on a hill. He loves to paint, sculpt, and tweet blurry photos of the sky. Moth can be found on twitter @hellaabore.

Living in a Made Up World - Poem
By Alejandra Galvan



I am the pink chrysanthemum in my grandmother's garden
A piece of nature that she cut with scissors
And placed at the center of the kitchen table
The small, crowded room with beige walls
Where she would teach me how to bake
With skilled hands that worked so slowly
Humming Spanish songs while working
And telling me the secret ingredient was always love
To be patient and wait for our
Lemon cakes and walnut bread.



I am the black flats my mother wears everyday
The shoes that are starting to tear at the edges
That walk her to her office
Where she types as if she's a machine
Until her hand starts to hurt
And her eyes strain from looking at a computer screen
She sits answering phone calls
In a lonely, empty cubicle
Pondering, wishing for adventure
For a life she will never have.



I am the dirt marks on my fathers pants when he comes home from work
The dry tears of sweat that mark his face
A series of tired lines around his eyes
Whose shoulders sink farther with each step
On feet that feel like they're on fire
Callused hands that are constantly adjusting the house
Or the truck he drives everyday
Yawning as tears fill his eyes
But he blinks them away
And wonders when he will finally rest.

I am the white bookshelf
In the crowded room filled with children
The shelf that's decorated with fake orchids
That is filled with an endless amount of soft books
Stories of magic and mystic
With creased spines that bend too much
And handwritten notes in between each weak page
Read by a single pair of honey eyes
Who willingly escapes reality
Instead of facing what is true.







Alejandra Galvan is a 17 year old writer who lives in Los Angeles, California. When she learned how to read, she became obsessed with fantasy books and developed an extremely vivid imagination. She often goes hiking or on outdoor explorations and pretends she is on an extraordinary adventure. While on these quests, she found her love for the sky and the stars and spends her free time studying the universe.

The Dolly Mixture - Poem
By Perry Wyatt

I kept my hair pink for added sweetness,
Strawberry sugar lip gloss,
A sprinkling of freckles,
Matching sets with knee highs, smelling like candyfloss.

Dresses made from striped paper bags,
Weighed in pounds and ounces,
Sherbet kisses come free,
Iced sugar melting on your tongue, toffee jaw trapping your voice.

Sugar paper credit cards, candy treats galore,
A bed made of marshmallow,
Don't be fooled by peppermint breath, true cavity queen,
Perfectly bad for you.



Perry Wyatt is a twenty-four-year-old writer from Cardiff, Wales, with a love for all things strange and magical. She achieved a BA in English from the University of Exeter and a Masters in Creative Writing from Swansea University. She is a true jack-of-all-trades wordsmith with screenwriting, journalism, and two novels under her belt. Poetry is her most recent adventure and has been shared in Gaia Lit, Fahmidan Journal, and Moss Puppy Mag.

Regression - Poem
By Bethany Lyall

You were a child,
arms outstretched
at the foot of the willow
and it watches,
fronds searching in your hair
like fingers
as you bury your feet
in the soil at its roots.
If you could go back
you'd plant yourself there,
a monument in corduroy
and frilled ankle socks,
the years bleeding out of you
like sap from your mottled bark.



Bethany is a 23 year old Creative Writing Masters student living & working in Manchester. She has been writing for almost 5 years, and has developed a contemporary confessional lyric style. She explores themes of youth and relationships in her work, and the effect both have on her mental health as she attempts to navigate a world she sometimes feels she doesn't fit into. More of her work can be found on her Instagram page, at Instagram.com/boothewriter.

Guanyin in Starbucks - Poem
By Willow Kang

Arsenic in coffee cups, fresh catch off the yacht
the lagoon is an unwitting toxicologist,
molding soft tissues into unironed sacks, and sirens too
are keen to steal a slice of coconut girl's blush
Guanyin have mercy, be a good eyewitness, do
whatever it is that gods do, when the cupbearer deserts
trafficking ambrosia and nectar, quaaludes for potters
Pray with cash clasped in the prayer book, a bribe
for Guanyin's beauty shop coupons



Willow is a writer from Singapore. When she is not studying or talking, she creates impossibly silly daydreams in her head.

flaking metallic - Poem
by Caroline Hall

darling, i used to rule the world, you knew nothing of me then;
you will know nothing of me now. i was golden robes and guilted glory
encapsulated in an illustrious figure, i was burnt to a crisp
from the haunting sparks that followed me to hell and back.
light up my face and my ambitions and the marble pedestal
i stand on. watch it crack beneath my feet.

and i never did believe in hell but perhaps you spoke it into me,
grabbing ahold of my spirit just as those demons were said to do.
tear it out piece by piece and watch me weep, watch me follow
a heart perpendicular to mine, watch me as i wrap my wrist
around the last remaining shreds of living i can reach.

do you remember why we first fell in love? not *how*, dear,
we never kissed by an ivy-covered fence in the corners of italy
or reached for each other across a mahogany table so your hand
could lie in mine. we were set along this path as the sun to a comet,
awaiting the inescapable blaze that would sear us into each other's retinae.

alone i was sputtering words at a darkened abyss, yet together
we were not a mere harmony but rather dissonant, an echo so loud,
so startling, so brilliant; that the world was forced to shift its lucid gaze.

i must have spoken a word too novel, i must have adored beyond compare;
for in the aftermath i see, through my alienated eyes,
my mirror as your newest companion. my love, it was too much, too soon.
i pray i'll see you again when the sun rises.

Caroline Hall (they/she) is a sapphic writer from Connecticut. Her work has been a finalist in two New York Times poetry contests and a runner-up in Connecticut Student Writers. They enjoy journaling, drinking tea, caring for their plants, and studying biology.

Endless Garden - Prose Poem
By Alexis Crafts
First published in The Literary Canteen

Sitting on the hood of your Subaru like a hippie car ad dusted in pink mist and sparkles, you brought life back to life. Staring up through the rosy fog with our heels denting and smashing your headlights, we thought that we were on top of the world. The car ad directors shouted, yet I could only hear you whispering purple words. Could only see your hair blowing in the fake breeze created by a whirring fan, it was too hot to breathe. I could not breathe anyways, not when I'm listening to you speak of violet flowers. Not when you looked at me like an endless garden of possibilities. Like the set of seeds you planted yet never sprung in May, but decided to say hi in June. Your serendipitous roses with thorns still attached, because who could dethorn such a natural thing? When you looked at me, breathed in sparkles that made your lips glitter, how could I not imagine the endless garden behind your eyes?



Alexis Crafts (she/her) is a twenty-year-old university student from Massachusetts. She is a part of her school's literary magazine Persona as the social media manager and editor. When not writing poetry, she loves to read YA lit, blog, and indulge in hours of Youtube content of every genre. You can find her and more of her writing on Twitter @crafts_writing.

august - Poem
By Maya Walker
Previously published in Modern Renaissance Magazine



Today, it is August, and I cannot see beyond July.

It is august, the sweet sorrows of geraniums petals and leaves from your garden falling towards me, towards my faults, towards my bittersweet regret. It is a rhapsody of the stars we'd watch fall in July and the falling snowflakes of the new year. It is August, and our time is almost up, consumed by tireless longing and love, reaping and growing. It is the month of pomegranates and the underworld, of a goddess crying leaves for her estranged daughter and that daughter crying tears of joy and sadness as she asserts her power over the afterlife. It is the month of frail leaves and autumn breezes. It is the month of reaping what you grow. It is the month of us all.

Now, it is August, and leaves are not the only things falling.

Things that fall in August: leaves. Rain. Echoes of love from the past. The sorrows of the death surrounding us all - death of the summer. My tears, as they gently glisten against my cheeks. My heart, as it thumps in my chest. My lungs, and they steal the crystalline air from the sky. Last August, being peeled away like a clementine, like the goddess Clementia and her grief. My love, both for you and for no one.

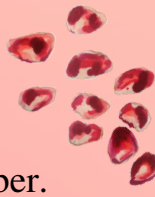
Last year, it was August, and nothing was the same.

Last August was the time that you left. The time our friendship ended. The time you said goodbye. Now, it has been a year, and August is all the same. You are gone, and it still hurts, hurts like the sorrows of Persephone's garden in the spring, now dead. Decaying as the leaves turn brown, the brown we all see as golden. But there is no going to the underworld to see you, and there is no love that crosses centuries. All there is is the honey-sweet sorrows of regret and requiem. I hope that you're alright, wherever you are. I hope you've found your love again.

Today, it is August, and the world will never be the same.

Do you remember? The sensation of rain on your fingertips as you laugh, the whole world

worried about being soaked? Do you remember, the way it felt to feel joy without sorrows attached, or the weight of a candy apple feeling heavier each time you take another bite? Do you remember how it felt to dance at eventide and to wake at aurora, to do it all alone, but know that your friends were always there with you, in the back of your mind? Do you remember?



Today, it is September, and August is forgotten.

I remember many things. The soft summer air of July. The cool falling sensation of September. The warm embrace of my mother's old winter coat in January. But, August? August is gone. August has slipped past my fingertips, escaping my grasp on it. On my memories of early fall, and of falling in love, even as pure friendship. On my memories of you.

So, today, this September, I let go. Today, I say goodbye.



Maya Walker stares at blank documents for hours before writing a word. She is a writer, a reader, a chef, an artist, a violinist, a mandolinist, a 16 year old high school student, and more things she cannot explain. You can find Maya writing on the red chair in the corner of her room or playing with her bunny, Kiki (or more specifically in the Baltimore area). She is the author of the short story collection Of Crimson Threads and Saffron Leaves, available on Amazon, as well as a poetry and prose Editor at Kalopsia Literary. You can find her work at Seaglass Literary and Modern Renaissance Magazine.

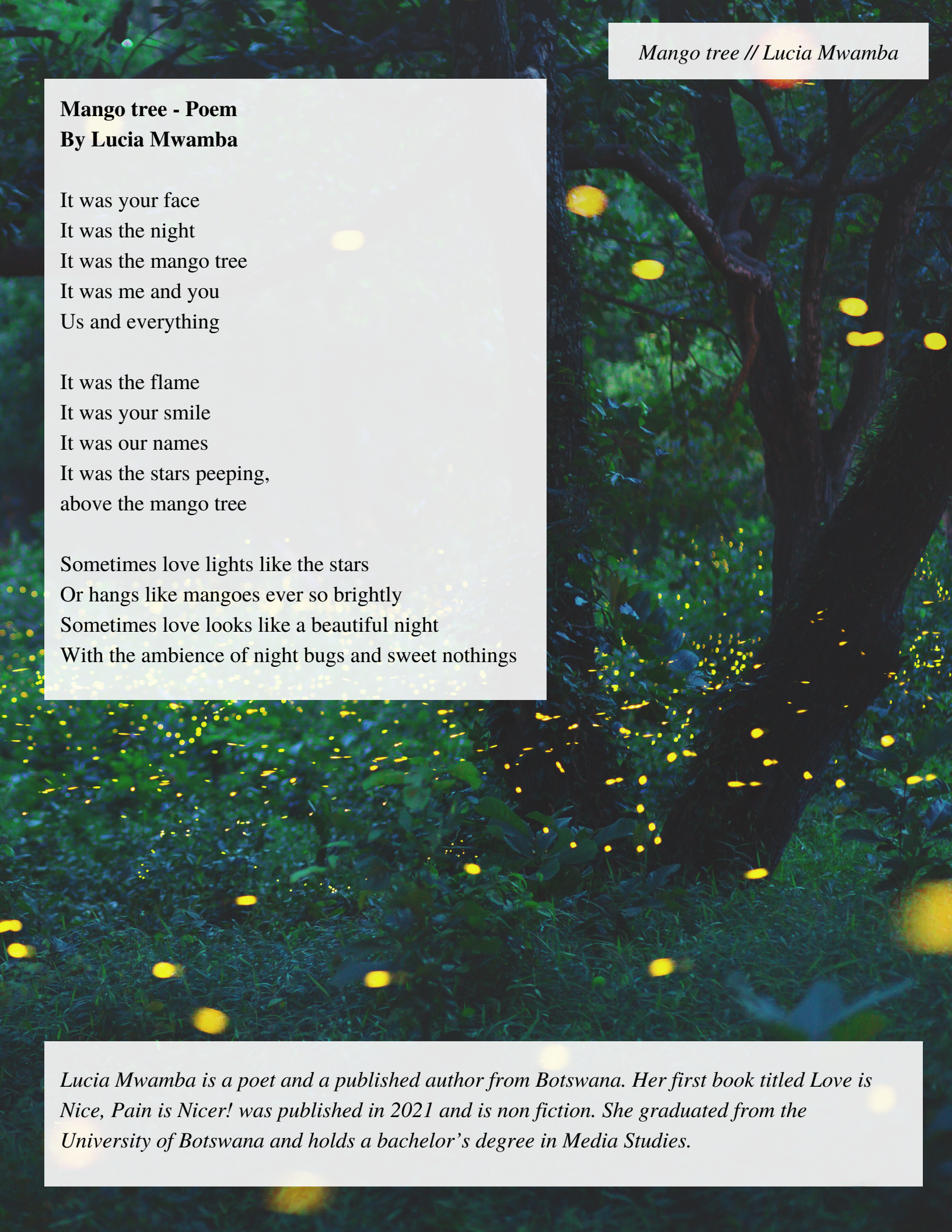
afterthought - Poem
By Shannia Bernal

while I'm washing
the dinner's dishes,
you're the afterthought;
the unexpected guest
that came to entertain
me for awhile.

like dealing with scorched
rice stuck in the pot,
i lingered for a bit,
leisurely scrubbing
with soap and sponge,
until everything
becomes squeaking clean.

then everything
is flushed down the drain.

Clueless, the twenty-three year old Shannia Bernal is still cautiously traversing this phase of life called adulthood. She always panics but she finds peace by meditating the Word and having intimate conversations with loved ones. One thing she loves about her country, the Philippines, is how the sun looks dreamy and nostalgic, inspiring her to daydream and write (although the heat can get in the way sometimes).



Mango tree // Lucia Mwamba

Mango tree - Poem
By Lucia Mwamba

It was your face
It was the night
It was the mango tree
It was me and you
Us and everything

It was the flame
It was your smile
It was our names
It was the stars peeping,
above the mango tree

Sometimes love lights like the stars
Or hangs like mangoes ever so brightly
Sometimes love looks like a beautiful night
With the ambience of night bugs and sweet nothings

Lucia Mwamba is a poet and a published author from Botswana. Her first book titled Love is Nice, Pain is Nicer! was published in 2021 and is non fiction. She graduated from the University of Botswana and holds a bachelor's degree in Media Studies.

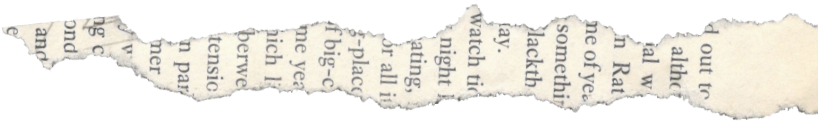
to wish - Poem
By Maia Hillock-Katz
after Pop Pop (1929 - 2020)



i. adoration between the teetotaler and a sporadic whisky sour

old French lords, latinized for the love of his life the second floor of South 9th Street is spirited, caress her hair with bartering hands in the heart of the Italian Market rip coffee beans from a ribcage, buy them at closeout, resell them at profit.

to wish for longevity is to wish for the reliving of a young boy's bar mitzvah to hold a brittle hand of the man who auctioned generosity fractal by fractal. chase, cherish and cry for the pancreas to release insulin into sugared blood to bury decayed tulips in a tree trunk only makes them rip at your soul harder turn Chanukah's stale challah into ash, sprinkle them on 600 Church Road.



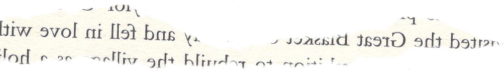
bubbe was only known after prefrontal cortexes began bursting at the frontal lobe. liberate saliva structure from glands. mucus. water. oil. an orifice for longing.

ii. the circular system of finance and commerce

in Vineland, New Jersey, milk kindred cows until blue jeans are beaten, burdensome when a flower blooms with the knowledge to grow but the resources to die, cultivate prosperity for Philadelphia pulverize strawberry pulp per stock share, market capitalization, beta, bumblebee fly

to wish to live in brick-and-mortar row homes is to wish for more dopamine between nerve cells to talk without a tremor on both sides of the telephone you're red in the face, brace for the birthday-suit-airplane ride

Montefiore Cemetery, 600 Church Road, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. February 19, 2020. to birth



bellies, life of love to trade, work, eat eclairs, sicken, die. Don't denote death to an acronym

Tremor Rigidity Akinesia Posture

acclimate us to this

new

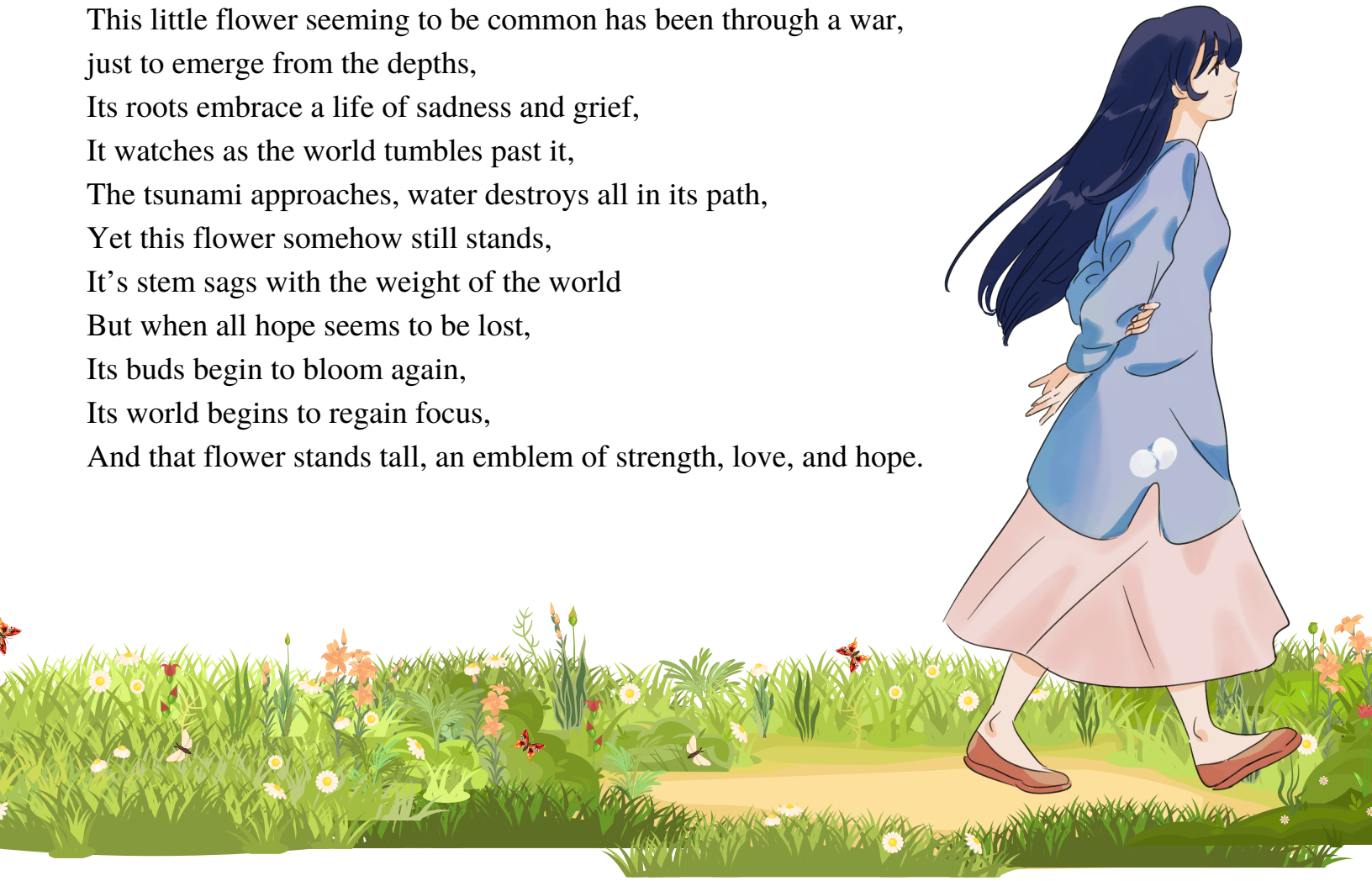
climate.



Maia was born and raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and still lives there today. She is currently a 15-year-old sophomore at New Mexico School for the Arts, where she is majoring in creative writing. Maia has been published in Dreams of Montezuma 2 and has won multiple gold and silver regional awards from the Scholastic Art and Writing program. You can find her running through arroyos, writing poetry and geeking out over compost.

Strength - Poem
By Mikaela Hoe

Just beneath the weeping willow lies a secret,
The mud is a distraction that only the strongest eye can get past,
One singular flower sprout from nature's own debris,
Flowers of leaves cascading down,
Surround a past unknown to mankind,
This little flower seeming to be common has been through a war,
just to emerge from the depths,
Its roots embrace a life of sadness and grief,
It watches as the world tumbles past it,
The tsunami approaches, water destroys all in its path,
Yet this flower somehow still stands,
It's stem sags with the weight of the world
But when all hope seems to be lost,
Its buds begin to bloom again,
Its world begins to regain focus,
And that flower stands tall, an emblem of strength, love, and hope.



Mikaela (Miki) Hoe is a biracial seventh grader from Woodinville, Washington. She typically writes in spoken word form about the BLM movement and her struggles with mental health. She mostly performs in her school district but recently competed at the "WE SPEAK" contest at the Edmonds Center For The Arts where she was an alternate. When not writing you can find her drawing eyes, doing extra school work, dancing ballet, or playing with her pets.

past & present - Poem
By M.C. Reed



do you remember that day we sat on your curb?
it was summer, hot and humid
we were dripping from the pool water and sweat
grass tickled our legs
right then i knew
i loved you

do you remember that day we sat on your curb?
we licked saccharine-sweet popsicles
giggled as they froze our words
and splashed onto the concrete
right then i knew
i loved you



do you remember that day we sat on your curb?
filling water balloons with the hose
racing down the street together
laughing
right then i knew
i loved you

…maybe i still do

M. C. Reed (13, she/xe) is a Chinese-American artist and writer from Pennsylvania. When she's not sketching or typing, xe is either lacing her combat boots, listening to indie pop, or being distracted by xyr cats.

how many colors have you taken from me? - Poem
By Richard Su

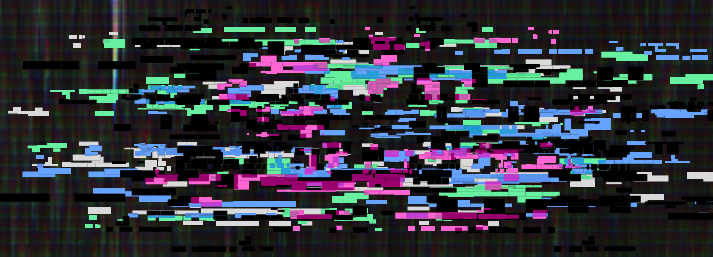






i grew up watching Cartoon Network.
the only featured children's network without requiring a subscription
a numbing sensation cleanses my soul of its impurities as i daze off
into the dancing, LED pixels
to hear the inaudible giggling whenever my parents argued,
i would crank up the TV's notch to its
furthest right.
the blanket was not enough to put out those burning screams
maybe it would be better if i covered my ears
it didn't really matter much
as long as a grin remained on their disfigured faces,
as long as vibrant blue and vibrant pink kept flashing upon
my face.

i lay amidst the monochrome alleyway as it changes color it was as if
I was a character who finished recollecting their flashback a small
cylindrical tube injects into my
blue livewire candy veins
the pixels of the world scintillate with its RGBs
the staccatos of my soul irradiates the cords of my veins
the black becomes blue
the grey becomes pink
the twirling colors were engraved into my skull
i have reincarnated with them
the colors residing in an infinite flame that
i inhale into my lung
it comforts



Richard Su is a grade 8 student from Fraser Heights Secondary School in Canada. He enjoys writing poetry and likes to code. His writing has been recognized by Surrey Libraries, Queen's Commonwealth Essay Contest, and Purpose Youth Society.

sonnet 19 - Poem
By Falon Willow

i’m tired of knowing all the ways
the world taught me to die. i’m wishing
on dandelions to trade places with
the girl whose organs rest where they’re meant
skin fresh & so loud with the gentle ways
she’s been touched. could my body be light, float
through the ephemeral? flower teeth carry
til scars unspool, diaphanous & how
just this, my gossamer ghost, meaning its
true. i can know ease untethered & come
back where i swallow the weeds whole face
yellow-bellied & rippled skin, yes, but
now i’ve seen it. that possibility.
softness waiting. i know how to take it.



Falon Willow is a 19-year-old writer from New Hampshire. She's obsessed with girlhood and analyzing everything around her. She was the co-Teen Poet Laureate of New Hampshire from 2019-2020. Her work has been featured in several online journals and she self-published her first poetry collection Sweet Dreams & Violent Ends in 2021.

parasocial - Poem
By Jillian Thomas



i am sobbing more than i need to
beneath the eyes of the beholder- i am
the beholden to be judged
the muse // model // rose through concrete
and you are still looking me in the eyes
oh how painful it is for you to see-
me manually operating my very own breath

you surely think my tears
are shed in vain for what could i have
to cry about- falling apart
before your very palms
i have only ever given you envelopes-
signed sealed delivered and sent from
you to me

[we are a dead language yet i still
attempt cpr]

we talk in singlets and rhymes
never stopping to wonder if
the prying eyes of one another
aren't prying enough and that,
my dear friend, is why you see me cry



[you see me in blooming shades
of midsummer and i let you, for who am i
to argue with your ebbing laughter]

you regale me and i, you
& persimmons on trees are
the closest we come to embrace

the willows must keep on weeping
for we will never know each other
through more than birds of paradise-
if we try to speak
i have decided that your eyes will
continue to judge



Jillian is a 15 year old poet from Pennsylvania. They write about mental health, identity, and outer space, among other things. In their free time, they compete in speech and debate, watch Euphoria, and run track. Their interest include their cat, Taylor Swift, and "If They Come For Us" by Fatimah Asghar.

Marshmallow - Poem
By Tanya Rodriguez

December nights bring the warmest mornings
with you by my side, arms encapsulating
blankets encapsulating me encapsulating
you. The White Knight of my kings.

Outside our safe & tender retreat of a home,
Neighbors surrender quickly under their ceilings
For the Winter Solstice inhabits their rooftops.
But it's in my heart where the Sun still melts me away

for, with you, the day will always overcome the night.
Your welfare fused with mine, intertwined, can never be compared
to the sharp breezes of January, the icy cries of February.
No risk of frostbite will ever exist if you hold me tight.

I watch the steamy brown liquid, mug enveloped
in my hands, embracing the plush white pillow;
sweetness that swishes kisses to my tongue and cheeks.
You turned these shocking blues on their head; you developed



a never ending Summer. Inch-deep snow
turned to sunshine rain, pouring from every inch
of my being. The fire of your eyes licks my echoeness away,
"How far can we go, Snowflake?" How far can we go…

Tanya Rodriguez (she/her) has been poet-ing for about 2 years, having cultivated her writing interests during the infamous Quarantine. As Editor in Chief and Copy Editor for her school's Yearbook, as well as Vice President of a writing club, she's had great experience composing creative writing and journalistic pieces, as well as educating and sharing her passion for syntax with others. Tanya is an 18-y.o. senior in CAMS high school, in Carson, CA; is obsessed with turtles; and enjoys long walks in the rain.



play it again - Poem
By Freedom Strange

tell it to me again / a fairy tale / sweet nothings in the dead of night / tell me lies

give me the world in two cupped palms, and pretend it will last forever.

let's pretend /shall we / that this is a game / that we're just silly girls / high schoolers flicking ash into the dark/ let's pretend / you can't hear the snap / of every bone / heart you touch / with one of those pretty smiles

game over / let's start again / let's pretend / we've never met

play it again, a broken record spiraling down into a song that never ends.

tell me your name all over again / let me take your hand / like it's the last time / like last time / i'll buy you ice cream / you'll ask how i knew your favorite flavor



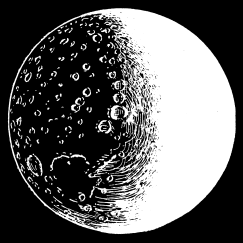
play it again. we both know how it ends.

tell me again/ your sweet little lies / this could be forever

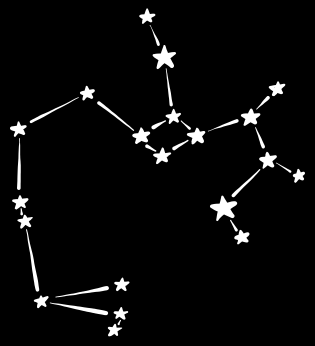
i want you to do me a favor. please break my heart again.

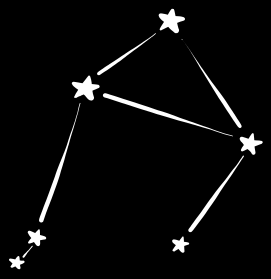
Freedom Strange (she/they/fae) is a seventeen year old writer based in Texas. They spend their free time doodling in the margins of textbooks, collecting old records, and writing queer love poems. You can find more of their poetry on Wattpad @quantumstrange or check out their zine online at thebibliopunk.wordpress.com.

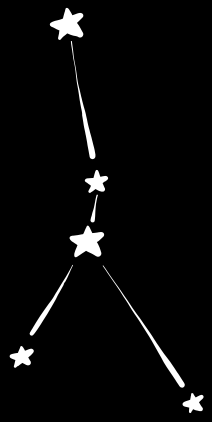
Token of Appraisal - Poem
By Natasha Bredle



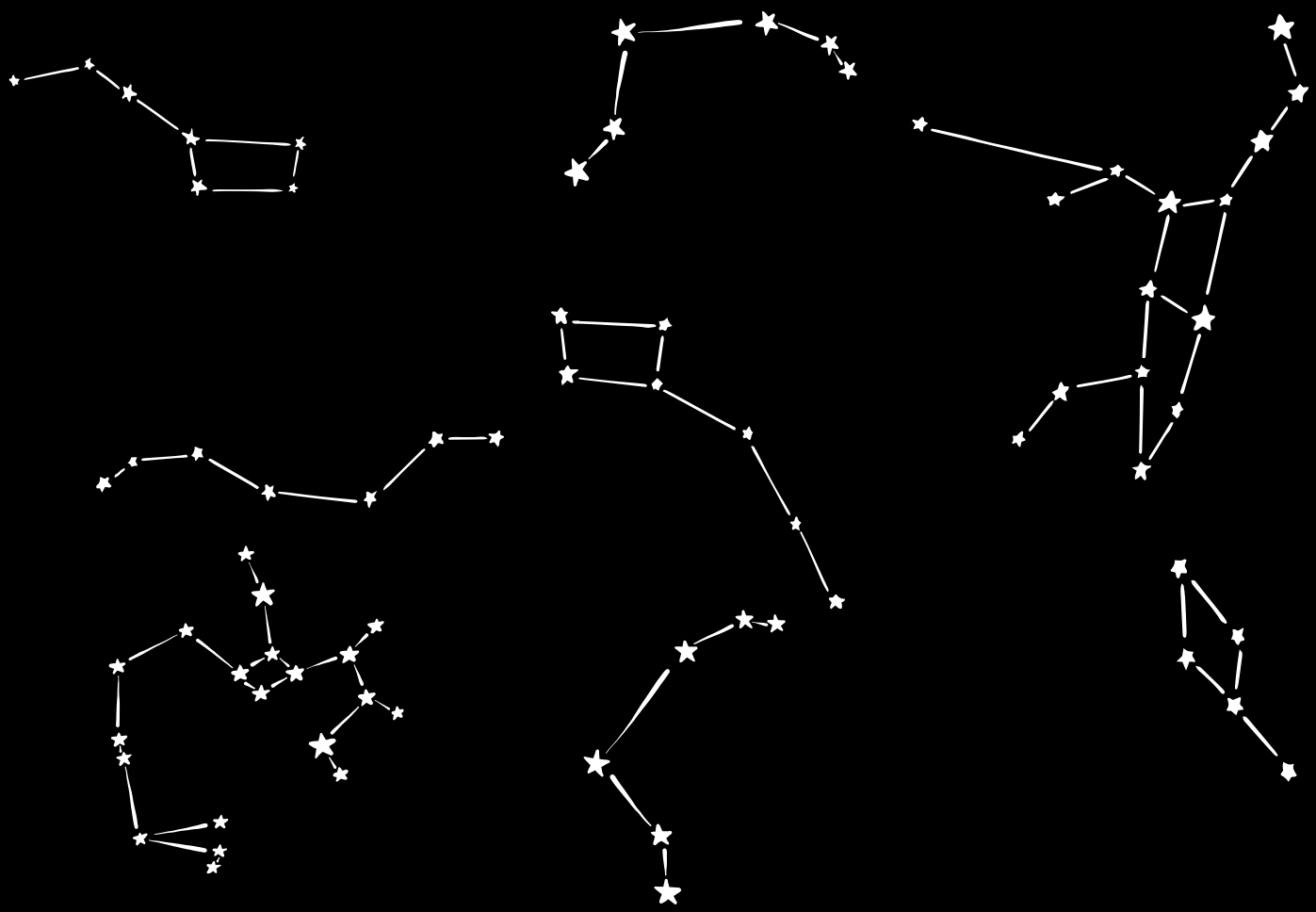
a-a-a-am I beautiful?
seems to be the question when the world
mars our mirrors
but how can I answer in yes or no
when both are vague obstructions to the truth?
h-h-h-here perhaps I can give you
a token of appraisal, some sort of sample aptitude:
so picture this
the white space between lines of poetry,
not the ink forming the letters
letters forming the words, words forming the phrases
but the phrases forming the sunlight, birdsongs
dew haze, moon glow
an excavation of laughter
a perpetual state of longing and flush
so imagine us
dancing together, sinking together
into the black into the blue,
frightened of the lonesome howls in the distance
in the vein of a sculpture constructed with
flayed fragments
of pottery and ancient molds recycled
from fathers and mothers who have raised
masterpieces from diamonds and dust,
so varnish the glint
in your eye amassed from ages of stargazing
and collecting the chirps of the late-night crickets,
cuddling and tuning in to your tempered playlists
before drifting off to sleep, aided by the warmth
of paper hands
pressed to your chest
and be still—







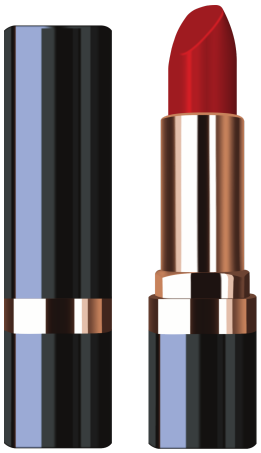
do you hear that beating?
it is the orbit of the galaxy within you,
and if I asked *i-i-i-is it beautiful?*
you would sit stunned, amazed by the truth.



Natasha Bredle is an emerging young writer from Ohio whose work is featured or is forthcoming in Up North Lit, Aster Lit, and The Aurora Journal, among others. Perspectives on mental health and ponderings about the emotional capacity of human beings tend to occupy her headspace. She posts updates of her publications on instagram @natasha_bredle

Tetherball - Poem
By Maria Gray

The Friday before she died, I talked shit
about her, because she was insufferable and cruel
in the way all teenage girls can be: she hated herself
so much, she hated us all by extension.
She was younger than me, if only by two months,
and I had no way of knowing
that was the closest we would ever be in age
again. She always seemed so old.
Knew more than me about makeup and boys
and how to smoke without coughing — the things that mattered.
Anna with her revolving door of suitors and long hair so smooth
it rivaled the tails of the horses she brushed
at the stables after school. Anna with C-cup breasts
and the right bras to show them off. She was so *good* at it —
so good at being a girl. She knew every song on the radio
that escaped me. It's been six years and still
some days I wake with that same sorrow sleeping
at the center of my chest, old friends spinning
like tetherballs behind my eyelids. We were so small
and in such a rush to grow up, amateur runners
elbowing each other at every lap as if
the world past the finish line
lacked room for all of us.



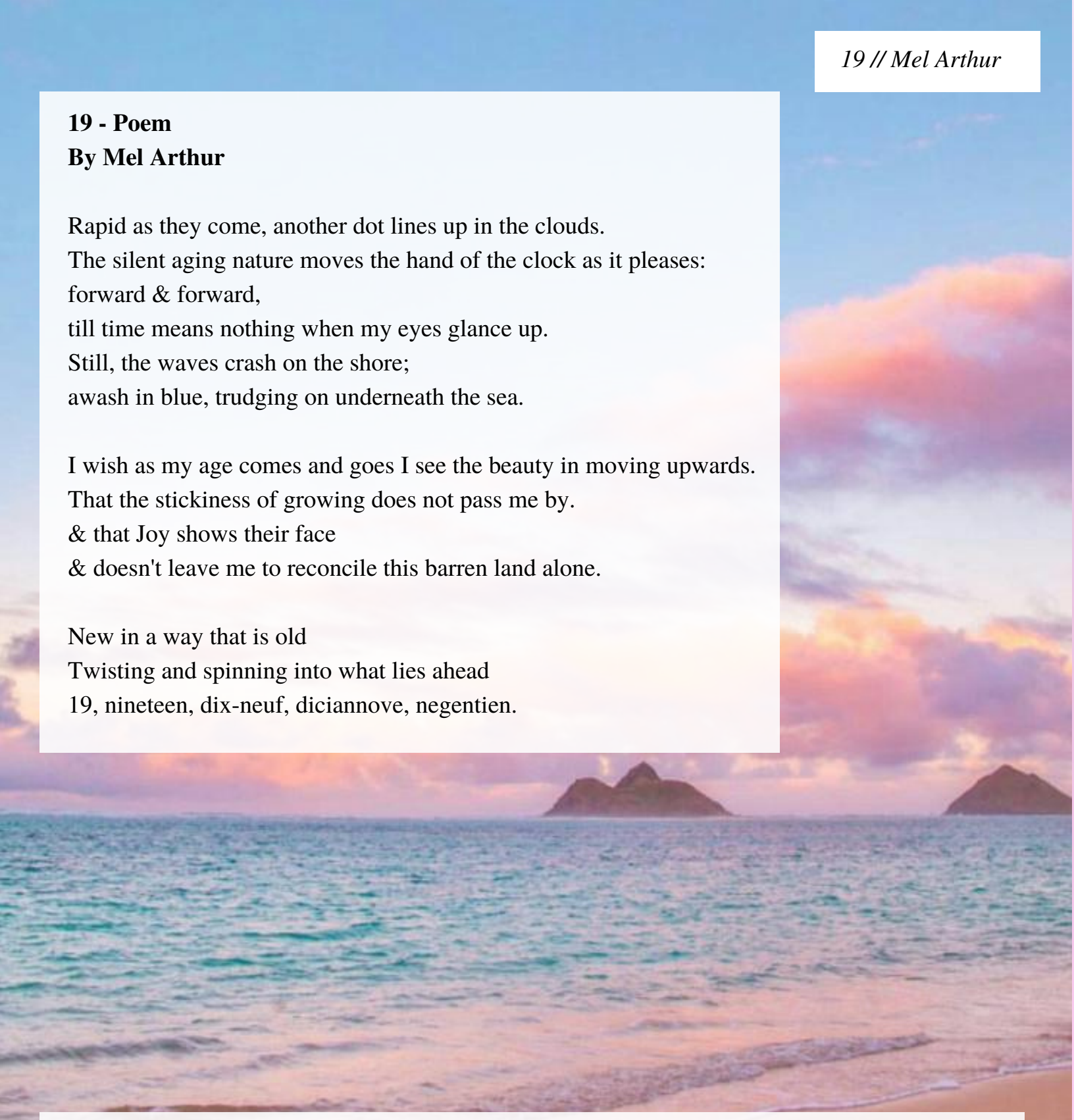
Maria Gray is a 22-year-old poet from Portland, Oregon, currently living in Maine. Her work is published in Counterclock Journal, Hominum Journal, Perhappened Magazine, The Foundationalist, and others. In 2021, she was named as an Adroit Prizes for Poetry semifinalist for her poem "Where Were You When Mac Miller Died." Find her at mariagray.carrd.co.

19 - Poem
By Mel Arthur

Rapid as they come, another dot lines up in the clouds.
The silent aging nature moves the hand of the clock as it pleases:
forward & forward,
till time means nothing when my eyes glance up.
Still, the waves crash on the shore;
awash in blue, trudging on underneath the sea.

I wish as my age comes and goes I see the beauty in moving upwards.
That the stickiness of growing does not pass me by.
& that Joy shows their face
& doesn't leave me to reconcile this barren land alone.

New in a way that is old
Twisting and spinning into what lies ahead
19, nineteen, dix-neuf, diciannove, negentien.



Mel Arthur (she/they) is a 19yr, black poet from Virginia. She has been writing for many years but only recently began to submit her work for publication. She is fascinated with the power of words & their usage and is interested in exploring all forms of poetic structures and forms. They believe poetry to be their eternal companion & hope to write works that touch the soul and paint wondrous images in the mind of anyone who reads them .

moonflower - Poem
By Adritanaya Tiwari
Previously published in jaden magazine of small leaf press



After-

sometimes the night wakes in the middle of me.
and I can do nothing but become the moon.

Nayyirah Waheed, salt



I refuse to be the moon.
Don’t you see it, Love?
You and I, we were never built for mere reflection.
Or light in darkness from a source too far to touch, to feel.

We are built for despair that
turns to beauty at midnight,
like Cinderella, but in reverse.

We bloom like moonflowers,
balancing poison in our petals
like second-skin, seducing moths
and putting the stars to shame.

I refuse to be the moon.
If I were to find the night in my being,
I will glow red hot,
with the fire of the seven-hells
and burn it all away until
there's nothing left but

the *Sun*.







Adritanaya Tiwari is a 25-year-old dentist from India. She is currently a non-fiction editor at The Giving Room Review and content writer at Ayaskala. Her work has been in Hooligan Magazine, Honey Fire Lit, Ice Lolly Review, Mark Lit Review, Wrongdoing Magazine, Royal Rose magazine, Serotonin, The Daily Drunk Magazine, and others.



The Airport - Poem
By Caroline Hsu

The airport was our home. The plane tickets were our house keys. One of my favorite things about you was that I could ask you to go anywhere in the world with me, and you'd simply ask what time we were leaving.

The last handful of times I was in an airport, you were one of the main reasons as to why I was there. I was either going somewhere with you, flying to you, or waiting you in the baggage claim with my hands all clammy, my eyes scanning to spot you - no matter when I was at the airport, I was greeting you with a "welcome back," "see you soon," or "nice to see you again," or we were hand in hand as we landed together. The airport became a way for me to remember you by.

I'd get a text saying to let you know when I'm boarding and landing. If the tables were turned, I would tell you to have a safe flight. I would speedwalk to meet you outside. You would wait for me at the baggage claim with a huge smile, and an even bigger hug that would make all of the hours on the flight worth it.

You and I have tackled five cities together, and each adventure started out with the airport. I like to think they tell our story in a chronological order. The first was Los Angeles, the second was Seattle, the third was San Francisco, then came Las Vegas and Cincinnati. Just a week before we broke up, I was asking where our next adventure would take place. You told me we'd talk about it later; and I was actually considering Denver this time around. I had already bought us tickets, and I was going to surprise you with them when we went to dinner.

Though you share tickets, seats, and adventures with someone new now, your ghost is always accompanying me on every flight I board. Your ghost is there to haunt me with the time we missed our flight back to Los Angeles from Seattle, the time we got off at the wrong bus stop and ended up walking miles back to our hotel, the time we checked into the shittiest 3 star hotel which later had spiders - because even though they seemed like small memories at the time, they're all I have left of you now. There's a list of songs I can't get myself to listen to now. Even months later, I find myself desperately trying to go back to the person I was before I met you. Your ghost is there to haunt me when I bump into you and I'm forced

to compare it to the person you are now - and these memories still linger when I visit these cities on my own.

I hope you know that I would not only fly across the country for you, but that I'd do anything for you, you once wrote in a note to me, tucked into an envelope that I almost threw away.

As I now walk through the terminals alone, I wish that I could pull that note out like a command and demand for you to come back. *Come back to me. Let's try again. I miss you more than anything. This hurts; please tell me this is a joke.*

You were the first to make the airport - a place that I associated with escaping - a place that I found comfort in. You were the first to teach me that some people simply enter your life not to stay, but to teach you a lesson before leaving. You were the love that taught me all of the good, bad, and ugly of being in love, and you were the love that left just as quickly as you came rushing in. You may not have been my first love, but you were the love that makes all of the others dampen in comparison.

You are no longer there waiting for me when I land, but I still find my eyes scanning for you in a sea of faces when I land. It's ironic; I used to count the days when the miles between us were no longer there, and here we are now - not even a half mile away from each other, but you've never felt more distant from me.



Caroline Hsu, 20, is a second year student at UCLA studying Political Science. Hailing from Las Vegas, Nevada, she has always had a passion for creative writing and prose. Some day, she hopes to finally catch up on sleep, self publish her own book or novel, and travel the world. You can find her at @carolinehsuwrites on Instagram.



cacophony - Poem
By Kenny Li



A cacophony of voices:
One calls, prouder than the rest,
tone frenzied with zealous angst,
it beckons to crimson waves, washing away freedom tithe
to unforgivable tarnishes, born by uncivil womb
to venal thirst, annexed from shore to shore
to the devil come through peril and plight.
One calls, more lecherous than the crowd,
desire tinged with banal whispers,
it hungers for foreign fruit, hanging from eager trees
for exotic strangeness, hollow in substance
for the quiet and domestic, malleable to pining hands
for porcelain dolls crafted with silk hair.
One calls, the despondent of the bunch,
caving in through broken chords,
it sorrows at disjointed souls, mind and heart being ocean flung
at lost tongues, indecipherable to untrained ears
at rejection, cast away to blurred borders
at home away from home.
A final calls, drowned by ensemble shouts,
questioning a full room, though echoes return,
do I fear?
do I lust?
do I grieve?

I live.



Kenny Li (18, he/him) is a current First-Year student studying at Yale University from Cleveland, OH. In his free time, he enjoys writing, playing tennis, stargazing, and making song mashups.

this small fantasia - Poem
By Ivi Hua



unmarred, still, the sweetwater pond stands.
no dove to split the surface,
no deer to kneel by the shore.
in the embrace of this lilting, waterstruck sky,
my hands will heal.

& yet, these ravaged palms will not touch
the sweetwater pond. there's a little girl
in my mirror. she lies all the time.
she tells me we will be okay.
& still. my hands have been split along their
lovelines. their heartlines.
i was made to sink.

this small fantasia,
living amongst the duckweed & cattails,
tangles my hair, slips into my lips,
a shattered tessellation of light. it's the last of beauty,
the last of music.

i must piece myself together. i will take the
songs of the reeds, wisps of sunlight,
elegies of the wind, use their beauty to
weave mine whole.

the demons & their lovers
sit amongst the angels, far in the heavens, waiting. watching.
eternally, i find myself afraid. i find myself this small,
angry creature, staring agape at the sky,
trying to find peace.

unmarred, still, the sweetwater pond stands,
this small fantasia
threading through my body,
lacing up my ribs,
skimming across my hands.



& here, torn apart & desecrated,
i will find the light, go towards it as a moth,
wings caught alight. the waterstruck sky will
rest upon my shoulders, softly.
i will touch the water.

amongst this sweetened,
soft world , the little girl does not lie.
in this rippling mirror, she holds out a hand.
& she tells me, as she always does,
that we will be okay.



Ivi Hua is a teen dreamer, writer, and poet based in the United States. She has a deep love for the sea and the sky, and you can find her @livia.writes.stories on Instagram. Her works have been published in Paper Crane Journal, Juven, and Outlander Zine among others.

Monsoon Dances - Flash Fiction
By Saya Shamdasani

Twenty years ago

It happened during dinner time. Amma was placing the food on the table when it began to pour. I looked at her, my eyes asking a question, and she nodded. I rushed across the hall only to find Avi out of his apartment, already waiting for me by the stairs. Together, we raced to the roof of our six-floor complex. Avi ran outside first, and I watched from inside as the rain beat down on his curls.

"Look, Alia, look!" Avi ran to the edge of the roof and stretched his arms, his palms facing the sky. "Alia, look! I'm flying like a bird," he yelled.

Giggling, I ran up to him. Hand in hand, we threw our tiny heads back and felt the rain wash over our skin.

When I told Amma the story later that night, she said that I had experienced my first monsoon dance.

◊ ◊ ◊

Eight years ago

Right before he died, my father made me promise him two things. The first was to take care of Amma, and the second was to take care of myself.

Appa was a quiet man. He was diagnosed with lung cancer when I was thirteen and died when I was eighteen. I like to think Appa's death was a silent one. I like to think that he had somehow prepared himself for it. Of course, I knew this was impossible. One could never be completely ready to die.

Still, I like to think Appa was.

It rained the day of his funeral. I held Avi's hand the entire time. Our heads were bowed down, our arms limp at our sides, and all I could think about was how different this was from a monsoon dance.

◊ ◊ ◊

Six years ago

After Appa died, I swallowed up my own sadness to take care of Amma. On most days, Amma was strong enough to live with the loss of her husband. There were other days,

when the mention of Appa brought her down to her knees, sobbing so hard that all I could do was hold her. When her body was too exhausted to shed another tear, I helped her to bed. It was in these moments—sitting in our dimly lit living room after putting Amna to bed—that I missed Appa the most. But Avi was there to hold me as I cried and to bring me to bed when I couldn't possibly shed another tear.

◊ ◊ ◊

Three years ago

After three years, when I knew Amma could stand without my support, I fulfilled the second part of Appa's wish.

I booked a flight to Mumbai.

Avi begged me to stay.

"Your life is here," he cried. "I'm here."

Avi, who gave me my first monsoon dance, who held me after my father's death, only asked for one thing in return. Stay. I left for Mumbai two days later.

◊ ◊ ◊

One month ago

Dear Avi,

I'm writing to you from somewhere in Mumbai. I miss you. I thought the endless train rides and strangers would cover you, Amma, Appa, and the pain like a fresh coat of paint. If only it were that easy. I don't know if you've already heard, but I'm coming home. For good this time.

Alia

I folded the letter in half, ran my tongue against the sticky parchment, and quickly, before I changed my mind, I mailed it.

◊ ◊ ◊

Two weeks ago

I called Amma to tell her I was coming home on a Saturday night. Rash and Rhea left an hour ago, and a calming silence filled the flat. I sat on our balcony, entrapped by concrete buildings as I dialed Amma's number. She picked up on the first ring.

"Amma, I'm coming home," I said.

"Kyon? Kya sab kuchh theek hai?" I heard the concern dripping off her voice.

"Yes, Amma. Everything is fine. I just miss you." Of course, this was only half of the reason why I was coming home.

"Acha. Aap ko kya khana chaiye?"

Giggling into the phone, I replied, "Chapatis, Amma, lots and lots of chapatis."

◊ ◊ ◊

One week ago

My flight landed an hour ago. I found Amma waiting by the pickup line with worried eyes and arms full of food.

"You look skinny."

"Are you hungry?"

"I made your favorite: chapati. Here, take."

I wrapped my arms around her and buried my face in the curve of her neck. She whispered my name and I heard her voice crack. We stayed like this for a few minutes, connected in a way we haven't been for so long, until she pulled away.

I leaned against her car, the hot Mumbai air sinking into my skin, as I finished the last piece of chapati. Amma watched me eat, her eyes warm, and I fought the urge to fling my arms around her again. I lost the fight.

◊ ◊ ◊

One day ago

I waited one week before I visited Avi. I told myself I was giving him time (as if two years wasn't enough).

I found him standing against the mango tree by our complex. His forehead was

was painted with creases from worries I no longer understood, but his curls still dangled in front of his eyes. He was still Avi. I watched as a smile crept onto his face. A smile he used to save for me. A smile that was no longer for me but for the woman and two little boys who ran into his arms. I was two years too late.

◊ ◊ ◊

Today

I'm packing my suitcase for Mumbai again. Amma stands in the doorway, confused and sad that her only daughter came home just to leave again. Before I leave for the airport, I find my letter in Avi's mailbox, knowing well it would have taken him more than a month to discover it. I tuck the letter into the front pocket of my suitcase, and on a fresh piece of paper, and I write:

Dear Avi,

I'm writing to you from my flat in Mumbai. Every time it rains here I think of you. I know I said I'd only be here for a year, but a year turned to two, and now I don't think I'm coming home. I hope you're happy.

Alia

I place the letter in his mailbox, the hot, dry Mumbai sun beating down on my skin.

Saya Shamdasani is a freshman at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. She is passionate about the written word, social justice, and education policy.

The Things We Carry - Flash Fiction
By Irina Valentine

NATASHA swore to herself many years ago that she would never cut her hair and always buy her own daffodils. But the very nature of promises, a fickle exchange of words lying forgotten like the fantasies of childhood, caused them to be broken quite often. Bread for communion, eggs for an omelet, a heart for a heart. She stared at herself in the mirror, fingers slightly brushing the tips of her nascent bob, a constant reminder of things confined now to the ghosts and crude phantoms of memory, eyes staring in eyes.

Eyes. Hers were the color of the earth awash in the otherworldly glow of the sunset, of the sand found in the heart of the ocean, of soft music on a rainy day. They seemed to sound a clarion call for the inconsolable yearning deep within every human heart for something far greater, far more grand, than life itself. Dark. Intelligent. Fathomless. Resolutely, she tore her gaze from the mirror and fastened her ebony heels onto her slender feet. Then, she crossed the threshold to the outside world without so much as a glance backward at the phantasm of words sleeping on her bed. Faster, more earnest, more rabid, than a child passing through a graveyard at night.

She took a cab to where he was waiting for her. A walk through the palaces of the past. The air was stifling, the lighting dark, the evocative scent of petrichor bathing her eyes in mist. The driver was muttering some song about the intricacies of love. Love. Isn't that the most wanted thing in the world? Don't we all, in the end, dream the same dreams? But dreams, like promises, are always broken.

The longer you stare into the darkness, letting it wash over your eyes like a rainstorm, the more you begin to see things that don't exist.

This statement, she found, held true. Slowly, agonizingly, she could feel her past self dissipating, becoming nothing. And slowly, agonizingly, she became blind.

Her steps felt heavy and slow and broken as she walked to meet fate. One step, two step, three. One step, two step, three. Each time her foot left the ground, it felt as though she was carrying the whole of the earth with her. They seemed to reverberate off of all of the immense buildings, off of the thousands of souls trapped behind the windows like jewels in a museum, off of the stars themselves. For the first time in twenty years, she felt truly small, truly infinitesimal, for the incantation, the one that began the moment she was left crying on the steps of the Teatro La Fenice, was inching ever closer toward completion.

"Do you ever wish you could be more than you are?"

Her lips fumble as dark waves in the ocean, attempting to communicate a whole

lifetime's worth of feeling.

He ran his fingers over the creased daffodil resting in his lapel, then presented it to her in his outstretched palm. Lovely. Melancholy. Another broken promise.

"Never. I want to die the same as I am today, with you. I love you, Natasha."

He said he loved her. And she almost believed it.

Take of your mascara before you cry so you don't get it all over my pillows.

You can be the smartest woman in the world, and you'd still end up just like them.

"That no life lives forever; That dead men rise up never; That even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea."

Those words, words carrying the surreality of heaven, the depth of a thousand oceans, and the light of a thousand stars, words that filled the heart up with indescribable emotion to the point of overflow, somehow managed to suck the last dregs of music from her being, leaving her emptier than ever.



Irina Valentine is a 17-year-old queer author from New York. She is incredibly passionate about Russian literature and opera, and hopes to study both in college. Through her forays into historical fiction writing, she hopes to capture the myriad of emotions coursing through the human experience. When she is not writing, she enjoys traveling, reading Tolstoy, and having existential crises.

Touch - Creative Nonfiction
By Bharti Bansal



"If only our hands could talk, touch would have been their language
Yet when I stand and look back,
I realize we were silent throughout"

The first remembrance of touch is my mother's gentle hands, holding mine as we went to school. The beautiful memory often peeks into my daily life and reminds me of its importance. My parents raised me in an environment full of love where hugs and kisses were normal. And I grew up wondering if that was the default for parenthood. If every child grew up in the same environment. Little did I know that my world was smaller and realities lived outside it. My grandmother herself has never shown physical affection, says my mother and sometimes my grandmother mocks her for kissing my cheeks too much.

I have seen some of my friends whose parents never even hugged them and I constantly wondered about my own, thinking if I was blessed or was the world too cruel to show love. I grew up where showing love was not a shameful or weak thing. So when I did the same for the world, somehow I was the one vulnerable and other people often mocked me.

I was diagnosed with depression in 2017 and later this month I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. I haven't still accepted the latter diseases as I struggle to escape from the strong clutches of identity I have made around depression. Depression is a weird mental illness. It stops everything. It stopped the earth for me. And it still hasn't gained any revolution as far as my little world is concerned. I have had countless mental breakdowns ever since and the only thing that helped me bear its brunt was my mother's comforting hug. Every time I had one, she held me tightly as I cried myself to sleep. But when it comes to touch, I am comfortable only with my mother and my partner. Every other hug makes me slightly uncomfortable and I still have no reasons to justify why.

There is a warmth when it comes to consensual touch. Like that from the person I love. It was full moon night on the day we met. We had talked endlessly on video calls but it was the first time I saw him in person. I was scared, thrilled and nervous at the same time. He could sense the awkwardness in my walk and then we hugged. While it was a clumsy one, I still

clung to him as if I was clutching for my life. As poetic as it sounds, it is true. We held our hands for the first time under the same full moon and my heart raced like never before. It was magical, to hold the hands of the one. When it comes to touch, holding hands seems to take a backseat and I still don't understand why. Once I read that one million neutrinos pass through the tip of our thumb alone. To hold hands is sharing the universe together. To hold hands is to state that our world collides and annihilates into billions of other neutrinos that bounce back to the universe carrying the warmth of our tiny hands. To hold hands is to wish together for a common world where we can walk, to find the same paths, to swim across the same rivers. Which reminds me of sea otters. They tend to hold their mate's hands to prevent them from floating away from each other. I believe consensual touch is a love language that needs no etymology. Nobody speaks a word and wounds have healed already. Which is why I once wrote a poem on hands:



"How tender are the hands which hold a promise like a newborn
How strong must they be to build an empire out of rubbles
How fragile they are to hold a body as it falls
How beautiful they seem, potter's hands, mother's hands, gardener's hands, toddler's hands
Holding a flower for the lover on the first date, the trembling hands
Helping father to stand up, the grown up hands
Putting a child to sleep, motherly hands
Saying yes to a proposal, the wedding hands
Two shy lovers gently holding each other's hands first as if to say this is how we feel each other's skins for the first time, there will be only you whose hands fit mine, only you whose touch I will remember. So take my hand and memorize me, learn my flaws.
There is sheer aesthetic in mere hand holding
A tangible bond which says, "Look I am here for you as long as you want me. I am going nowhere as long as our fingers are intertwined, a gentle touch, a lover's kiss, a wave, a goodbye, nothing but these hands marking an end to a story or beginning of one" "

I remember how my sister held me as I was having an anxiety attack as she kept soothing me, calming me and how the place of being a mother and a sister exchanged that day. But I believe I have been lucky in that sense.

Touch, a non consensual one, can create severe emotional scars forever. Touch can be non physical too. It was New Year Eve's and we all were celebrating. Women were seated in

one room and men in another. I was a teenager back then and had not known what kind of fear leering could trigger. A man sitting by the door kept looking at me constantly and I tried ignoring him but he just wouldn't stop. Fearful, I left the party and never attended another ever again in my life.

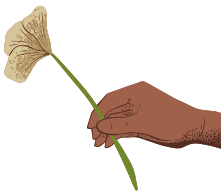
Consensual touch has meanings. It has helped the sick face their last moments bravely. It has encouraged people to live when they had wanted to end their own lives. It has made people believe more in love and share it effortlessly with each other. I believe a caress, a palm on one's head, a kiss, or a hug can heal people. And this world, I tell you, needs a lot of healing.

Touch is a memory. When I was a child, my paternal grandmother was on her deathbed, when she asked me and my sister to heal her because in India, little girls are considered as goddesses. We didn't know what to say then. What to do either. So we touched her head and she later died peacefully. We didn't know how to grieve and if to grieve at all. Until my grandfather passed away and we were made to look at his lean body one last time before he was taken for cremation. I didn't know then that we could grieve after years too. We saw my father touch his beloved father's head one last time and it was forever etched in my mind. Now my father speaks fondly of his father sahib and bravely of his mother. My grandmother was a fierce lady who sold milk to educate her children. Touch is remembering the past. She would work tirelessly. She had a heart of an ocean, said my father once, as my grandfather married her sister and brought her home. And since she was a woman, she was expected to give her acceptance because women don't rebel. Touch is asking questions. She didn't ask my grandfather about it. She let it go like letting the hand slip off when a relationship ends.

Touch, consensual, is a poem which two people compose together. It often ends with love, or leaves a sweet aftertaste in one's heart, like a story which ends happily. Touch is a memoir, a souvenir of goodness of hearts and I wonder if losing it is losing ourselves into the robotic rhythm of our lives?



Bharti is a 24 year old poet from India. She has been published in magazines like aaduna, harness magazine, Oc87recoverydiaries.org and others. She loves moon, universe, stars and cats. She can be reached at instagram @bharti_b42



The Treehouse - Fiction
By Mason Earle

The treehouse fell down on a Tuesday. It wasn't unexpected.

It had been dangling for a while, balanced precariously on two boughs of the swaying willow tree. The floor had rotted through two years ago. We had only discovered this when Charlie climbed up and nearly came back down the hard way after trying to clamber inside. The posters on the walls—Nirvana, One Direction, Katy Perry—had all faded until they were remnants of blank white smiles and some impression of color.

On Tuesday, the treehouse fell down. Charlie watched it happen, but I wasn't outside. I was indoors making mac and cheese. Charlie said it looked like a capsizing ship. When I saw its remains, shattered wood and rusty nails scattered all over our lawn, it looked to me like a broken egg. A waste.

The house had seemed so majestic when our dad had hammered the final nail in and let us climb up. I thought it strange timing, though. Not two weeks before he started the project, I had snuck downstairs and heard our parents arguing about selling the house. The treehouse became my haven, a welcome shelter from the reality that waited down on the ground.

Even though the thing had been lost to nature for years, I could still picture every intimate detail in perfect clarity. It was barely five feet tall, all rough wood and poking splinters. Its triangular roof had two beams stretching across it, one which was wrapped in colorful ribbons that I had stolen from my art classroom and the other which was covered in stickers, glitter, and glued-on feathers. My dad spent hours up there with us despite the limited height and floorspace. There were paint smears all over the floor from when he'd help us craft our art masterpieces, from when he'd craft his own. As much as the treehouse was ours, it was undeniably his.

-

One long-gone Thursday, after Charlie and I got home from school, I had to drag him by the wrist out of the house after our parents' yelling reached a fever pitch. We sat in the treehouse painting on the walls with our fingers. It took me nearly an entire bottle of paint to correctly

render all my letters onto the wall of the treehouse, but it was partly because Charlie rubbed his hands all over the first draft and forced me to join in to hide the evidence.

By the end, we were sticky with paint and glue. Charlie had decided to construct a ramshackle chair for one of my dolls with popsicle sticks and Elmer's glue. I can't remember if he succeeded or not. Those dolls had rotted away in the treehouse after too much rain clogged them up and filled them with mold.

Our dad began climbing the rope ladder about a half an hour before the sun would fully set. I could tell that dusk was falling because the sun had finally stopped blinding me from where it shone through the only window in the whole place. I could tell that my dad was climbing up because the rope ladder always creaked, and the treehouse always tilted just a degree to the left. I was never scared that he would tip the treehouse over—he was invincible, immune to any opposition the earth could present him with. If I ever needed someone to hide behind to rescue myself from sticky fingers and a blue-streaked face, I'd pick Dad.

"Whoa!" Dad yelled when he stuck his head up into the treehouse and Charlie ran at him with his bright blue hands. He might have said something like, "Did you get into the blueberry bushes, buddy?" or "Wow, you're turning into a mini Picasso already!" or something equally charming. We had cycled through this scenario so many times that it had become rote. They fought, we ran, he came up to the tree.

To fit within our routine, I probably said something like, "Charlie got into the paint again," all pouty, because I hated when Charlie got our dad's attention; maybe something like "He ruined my painting and I had to start over," because I hadn't yet gotten the memo that it wasn't always in my best interest to throw Charlie under the bus.

"Aww, did he?" Dad asked charmingly, ruffling my hair, which was also crusty with paint and God knew what else. But I remember what broke our routine here, and I think this will haunt me for the rest of my days. Dad spotted the initials that I had painted in the back wall, and even eleven-year-old me recognized some of the expressions he cycled through: surprise, joy, anger, sadness, and finally heartbreak.

"Aww, darling," he said finally. There was a lump in my throat. For the life of me, I didn't know why. "Is that all of us together?"

It was. I had painstakingly positioned my and Dad's initials right next to each other, with Charlie's right below ours. Our mom's were slightly below his, in much fainter paint—I had run out and hadn't bothered to refresh my fingers with fresh pigment.

The tension was too thick for me to break. There was a pressure in the air, pinning down my tongue, squeezing my throat. I felt like if I moved, if I breathed, the entire treehouse would crumble around us and we'd fall down and down until we reached China. Dad stared at the initials, following the progression of our names to Charlie's name to Mom's, and there was a depth to his eyes that I had never seen before.

He could have corrected me. Reminded me that we should all be on one line, in our own little group. That we were all a family, not just me and him and maybe Charlie. He could have knelt down on the ground and offered to help me fix it.

He ruffled my hair again, smiled down at me, and said, "I love it, sweetheart."

-

Maybe Dad knew something I didn't. That his time with us was limited, that our family was unfixable, that their accident was inevitable. I'd like to imagine that he would've told us if he did know. Don't shut yourself in your room to avoid me, I imagine he'd say to me when I was thirteen and angsty and too old to play with my dad anymore. You've only got a month left with me. Let me sit in this rickety little treehouse and play and paint with you and pretend that my wife won't try to kill me.

Charlie and I climbed the willow tree that evening. We had to dodge the rotten timber littering the lawn before we reached its trunk. It was scarred with notches that our dad had tried to carve into the tree to help us climb up before he gave up and installed a rope ladder instead. It was torn from its post a year ago by a hurricane. I don't know how the treehouse survived. Maybe the last of my dad's stubbornness. It was probably wood glue.

We sat in the tree's crooked branches for an hour. The treehouse had warped the tree so that half of its limbs dangled flat and low to support our play structure. To see this ancient tree crooked from our hubris seemed like a waste, now that the treehouse was gone. It seemed like a rebuke. Like failure.

You forgot, you forgot, wailed the emptiness between me and the tree trunk. I wanted to say I had to, but I knew it was a lie.

“It’s kinda funny,” Charlie said. “We haven’t come up here in so long, and it fell anyway. I forgot it could.”

I sat there. The bark of the willow tree was rough, but its leaves were wispy, and they tickled. I rapped my knuckles on the branch, and I said, “it was fifteen years old. It was only a matter of time. I’m going to make dinner.”

I made burgers and we ate leftover mac and cheese. The window in front of the stove aimed right at the remains of the treehouse. In the golden light of the sunset, I could see the initials of all of our family members that I had drawn in red paint on one of the ceiling panels, but the wood had cracked through the middle. Charlie and my name were split away from our parents’. I hadn’t seen any of the contents of the treehouse in years, not since the rope ladder was torn down and the floor grew too precarious to stand on. It was an unwelcome reminder to see them again now.

Charlie didn’t remember the night of the accident right. He insisted that our mom wasn’t the one who jerked the wheel; that it was actually our dad, spinning us into a drift to try and pitch us off a cliff. Charlie couldn’t recall the long evenings in the treehouse, just him, dad, and me, stamping our hands in paint to create little turkeys that Dad would stick googly eyes onto. He wouldn’t have steered us right into a telephone pole and left Charlie and I alone.

Neither Charlie nor I would budge on this subject. It was a point of contention, exacerbated by our residence in our childhood home. Old wounds torn open. Neither of us could afford a place of our own, but neither of us could bear to let the old one go.

-

On a dark Tuesday night, my life as I knew it was destroyed. It was ruined on a rainy road in a little compact Toyota, while I sat in the backseat with Charlie’s socked feet in my lap. I’ve forgotten more about this night than I recall, but I’ll start with what I remember before I continue with what I know.

The car seats were black fabric, not leather, because they didn't make my legs sweat when I wore shorts. I was sitting behind my mother, and she had her hair twisted into a bun at the crown of her head. My dad was wearing a blue collared shirt. The windshield wipers on our old car used to squeak whenever we turned them on high enough, so all I could hear was the spray of our tires against asphalt, the squeak of the windshield, and the patter of rain against the roof of the car.

I remember that there was a fight that afternoon, the worst fight I'd heard in a while. Maybe ever. I remember I heard the word "divorce." I know I heard the word "die."

I remember that the roads we drove on were curvy and poorly paved, because I kept hitting my head on the side of the car and Charlie's feet kept accidentally kicking me in the gut. I remember that my parents were leaning away from one another. I remember the sound of crumpling metal, the feeling of heat licking my skin, the way the fabric of Charlie's coat crumpled in my hand as I pulled him by the arm out of the car.

The police don't know what happened. I do. I know that my mom was taking an easy turn, with me dozing off in the backseat. I know that my mom, maybe shattering through some wall that she had built up in her mind, let out a mindless wail of rage and turned the steering wheel in her hands towards the guardrail. I know that my dad reached out to stop her, to try and guide us back onto the futile road of asphalt, of life. I know that he failed.

Charlie thinks he knows what happened too. He thinks he knows that our mom was taking an easy turn, with him asleep in his sister's lap. He thinks he knows that our mom continued on the easy turn until our dad reached out to turn the steering wheel towards the guardrail. He thinks he knows that our mom wailed to beg him to stop, to let her get us back onto the futile road of asphalt, of life. I know that he's wrong.

At four in the morning on Wednesday, I watched rain soak the wood and soothe the earth beneath. I was suddenly overcome with anger. How could it just fall? After the games, the toys, the initials, the only remnants of a family that I wish I could forget, it suddenly groaned and collapsed under the weight of its legacy? On a Tuesday?

I stormed out of the house. I didn't bring shoes. I wore nothing but a loose shirt and a pair of shorts. I stood in front of the wreckage, the sunken ship, the broken egg, soaked by the rain,

the wind lashing at my hair. I think I might have screamed at it, or stomped my feet, or sobbed. There was no one to hear but Charlie, but he left me to my confrontation with the monument of the memories that I had tried to leave behind.

I stared down at finger-painted turkeys, uneven gashes, Katy Perry's faded smile. They stared back at me. I wondered if they recognized me, the giggling little girl who smeared red paint on her dad's shirt and in her brother's hair. If my father's ghost was anywhere, it was here, all around: shattered wood, rotten memories, the echoes of joy and sorrow that I—that we—had to leave behind.

It wasn't unexpected, Dad whispered. His eyes twinkled. There was no one there. The accident, the fall. It was expected. We are gone. Does it matter who killed who?

The sound I made—a scream, a sob—was lost to a roll of thunder that I felt in my teeth. I drove my heel into the initials in the center of the wreckage and ground them into wood pulp and weeping paint.

The next morning, I had papers laid out in front of me. My eyes were probably red, but I doubt Charlie noticed. He came downstairs, rubbing his eyes, and blindly groped for the coffee pot.

"I was thinking about Dad last night," I said. I liked to test the waters with Charlie in the early mornings, to see what mood he was in. Sometimes, he'd get so angry—purple-faced, white-knuckled, spittle-flying angry. He got it from our dad, I think. [more]

"I want to sell the house," I said. "I can't look at that ugly tree anymore."

He stared at me, then the shattered ceiling panel seemed to catch his eye. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah." It was a Wednesday. It wasn't unexpected.

Mason Earle is a high school senior in New York City.

pieces from a dying chess prodigy - Flash Fiction
By CJ Caparros

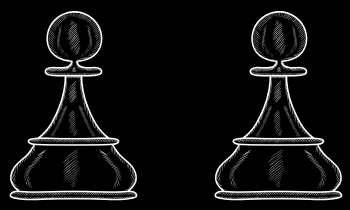
i. queen

Your life is centered around pawns, bishops, knights, queens, and kings—yet where am I?

You left me in the forest, for the wolves. I had learned to navigate through the Earth; I had felt the cool soil against my bare feet and the worms wrapping their bodies around them. You left me to rot and become one with them. And now I am lying alone in the snow-covered forest, a cold blanket for the heat that grows inside.

But most of all, I am left to pick up the pieces you left behind; the pieces that were not carved from wood—the pieces we created from dust and ashes and left sour tastes on our tongues. They only know of emptiness—for it seems that wood and games are the only things that will ever matter to you.

Where am I?



ii. bishop

Your life is centered around pawns, bishops, knights, queens, and kings—yet I cannot understand you.

I know this game more than you. It was hammered into me in the darkness of the night. I know the exact weight of the pieces in my palms. I do not know why you came to me, on your knees and asked me to stay. I do not know why I did.

I can read you—sicilian, indian, vienna, dunst—but you sit many miles away. I can trace my fingertips around your silhouette, and that’s all. You touch and hold and caress, yet I feel nothing.

iii. king

Your life is centered around pawns, bishops, knights, queens, and kings—yet no argument

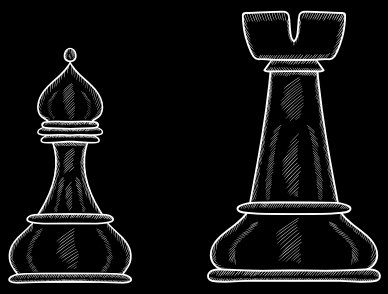
falls from my lips.

We are the same—cut from the same stone, flip a coin and I am there with you. I have lived your life and you have lived mine. Foolishly, I have put my life in your hands and watched it slip away from your grasp. Only ashes are left in its wake. (I do not have the strength to put myself back together for you.)

Maybe, this could have worked. We are melded together. I have crawled under your skin and ripped you open, piece by piece. I have made a home in you, held the bad parts and crushed them with my own hands. When we are together—the lines start to blur. We are not champions. You and I have transcended everything and nothing at once—we become Schrodinger's cat for chess champions.

But inevitably, naturally—we have reached our end. I might have loved you. You needn't have said the same. I would not have loved you less. (Perhaps, this is my biggest fault. I played a gambit and was surprised when you took it. For those moments—I forgot how hungry I was.)

You were the one to leave. I cannot blame you.



For what is life if not black and white and sixty-four squares?

iv. knight

My life is centered around pawns, bishops, knights, queens, and kings. If I imagine hard enough—I believe I have control.

CJ is a 17-year-old, Filipino-American writer from California. They enjoy writing about their passions: chess, kitchens, fruit, and fungi. They hope to move others with their writing, in any way they can.

Happytown - Fiction
By Madison Xu



Dear Mr. Tempus,

I remember what I saw earlier today on TV. The face of the lady with a face, eerily pale, over-rouged cheeks under pinched eyes and an eccentric bleached wig that talked behind the television set. Every day at exactly 5:30:00 CPT (common people time), the families of Happytown switch on their television sets to The Joy of Living, the government and Council-based morning show run by my father, and tune in to the shrill voice of some lady babble on. It's only background noise to me, but the nectar that the people fed off of. The recognition and approval from the TV screen, the only form of repayment that they expect in return for 14 hour shifts at their Assigned Obligations. I grind the peas a little harder with my spoon, green skin rupturing against the side of my bowl. Her voice trills into the microphone as her spider like fingers flutter.

"Our beloved honeybees, it is another lovely day in Happytown! You all have been busy spreading the cheer and aiding our country to become brighter, and we certainly have not forgotten about your efforts. And so many of you will be rewarded with 'honeybee' badges as your service comes to an end as the year draws to a close. In the meantime, as Cycle #107 looms near, let's finish off 3037 on a good note! That will be all. Joy will be spread." These words were ingrained into the minds of all of the people of Happytown residents. In the same way, their ever-present smiles and contentment are a repeated mantra, part of every morning, every day, every gathering, during the Working Hours, and between transitions as everyone hurries back and forth from Assigned Obligations. My obligation of the moment was school, a privilege reserved for the kids of the people in The Council, where we learned foreign things not taught in the regular schools for the other kids in Happytown, like the sciences, history, and the great authors of our past. Instead, they went to school to learn the little reading and writing and maths that they needed in order to complete their Assigned Obligation, one laid out for them on their birth certificate, randomized on a computer system before they were even born. When one baker dies, another takes his place, and another is born, and for some reason, it was the way it was. It was another one of my unanswered questions, a list I dared only keep in my mind, words that could never be spoken, written down on paper, or disturb a molecule of a perfect system designed to suffocate. I wondered what it was like to be like Alexander Hamilton and Cleopatra and Mulan, only figures of the past in storybooks, born into a place not to fill a predetermined

role, a seat that was never your choice to fill, but to pursue your own.

Best wishes,



Penelope Sprout



Dear Mr. Tempus,

I heard something that I don't think was meant for my ears yesterday night. I was restless, tossing and turning, preparing myself to suffer through another one of my sleepless nights. The door to my father's office was cracked slightly ajar, a pale-yellow light that tossed thin slivers onto the hardwood. I heard him talking to somebody, perhaps on the phone. From down the hallway, my ears perk up,

"It all needs to be ready by next week. All the other emotions are readministered, aside from Complacency and Obedience."

I pressed my ears to the door, shrinking out of the light so my shadow wouldn't give me away. The voice on the other end of the phone answered in a muffled staticky tone. My father spoke again: "The Cycle is nearly over and we have to start speeding up the process of readministration. We have thousands of people left to go, but not nearly enough time. We surely can't risk some folks starting to formulate their own bothersome ideas or start feeling distempered about their Obligations".

I felt a cold shiver, wandering fingers pressing on each vertebrae in my spine. What does he mean 'readministering emotions?' Do people not regularly think for themselves, complain about their jobs, get aggravated at small things, as nothing more than a part of our nature? Yes, perhaps we live in a country where we live brainwashed by the idea that its only acceptable to follow and be content, but do people not still feel those feelings, though not condoned by society, on their own?

The metallic twang of the clock marks 2:00:00 cpt, three and a half hours before the eyes of the people of Happytown fixate once more, entranced by the well-rehearsed performance behind the television set.

Best Wishes,



Penelope Sprout



Dear Mr. Tempus,

The words I've heard lingers on my mind still. And subconsciously, I think I've begun to notice the little things more so than before. On the way home from school, I watch the casual banter between passing ladies.

"Hello Unit Anne. How was your day?"

"Hello Unit Helen. My day was fine, thank you. How was yours?"

"Very well thank you."

And then they brushed shoulders, just barely, smiles affixed on their faces even after they turn away from each other.

I felt a rush of wind past behind me, whipping my hair about across my face and I turned only to watch in horror as a bike traversed straight towards a small boy standing next to his mother. My mouth parted slightly, a gasp tumbling out of my throat before I could stop it. The boy crumpled onto the pavement as the bike handles knocked into his chest and the rotating tires ran over the tops of his small feet. The boy blinked for a few seconds, and something within me expected to see the beginnings of a quivering lip, huffy breaths and welling eyes. But instead, he stood up on shaky legs, a slight cherubic smile glazing his lips beneath unfocused eyes. His mother stood in place staring out blankly, her face calm and at peace, a carbon copy of the faces of all the passersby, like a video on pause, as if nothing had ever happened. I wonder how I've never noticed this before. The same fixed greetings, no more no less as to not waste time in the busy schedule of Obligations. The ones with eyes rimmed with dark circles and hands with angry blisters and calluses who never make a sound, corners of lips upturned and unbudging. Teenagers who all seem to be perfectly content with dedicating their waking moments and their young lives just to work in a predetermined role for the rest of their lives. And small children, who are born uncrying into the doctor's arms. There was always been something that was not perfectly right about Happytown.

I walked past the entrance towards the government complex where my father worked. My microchip scanned automatically as I passed through spinning glass doors, and no one spared a second glance. I hurried, head down, counting the lines on the floor between each slab of stone until I reached the elevator. My father and the rest of his team were on lunch break and I had a limited time until they would come back. The door to his office lay slightly ajar, and I began to regret my impulsivity as I glanced at the rows upon rows of filing cabinets. My hands shook as I brushed it over knobs on the desk only to come up with spare staples and crumpled index cards of phone numbers. His computer sat atop his desk, a

thin sheet that hummed with energy. His password was the same as it always had been. My name and my first year of school. The clock read 1:17:36, and my teeth chattered in time with my hands that flew over the keyboard. I came across a file that read "Cycle Reports". I clicked on the first recording. Cycle 1#. The soft click of the recording button and the whirr of some old electric mechanism in the background or white noise broke the silence. The lady cleared her throat clearly slightly nervous. "Cycle 1# pt 1. Year 3014. The installment of microchips in all citizens have been a success. People are updated with their health and vital levels, along with exercise and happiness updates. We were also able to obtain all necessary information to begin the first stimulation shortly." I click to the next file.

"Cycle 1# pt 2. The first wave of Anti-Frustration and Anti-Jealousy has been administered into the microchips. Reports have been sent back to see a general decrease in those emotions in demographics.

I frantically scrolled up, clicking from one cycle after another.



"...administration of anti-boredom and anti-cynicism"

"...anti-ambition"

"...anti-disobedience"

And I return back to our cycle. Cycle #107. I hear my father's voice. The one he uses in front of the Council and the country.

"Cycle #107. Report 1#. This year's administration has been a success for the most part. Readministration of anti-disobedience have been a bit late, and there was a small risk of signs of that emotion appearing in our workforce. Emotions have been generally uniform." And just like that, I exposed myself to a hidden truth and the responsibility that I was given that came with knowing. I can still choose to believe that it is all a misunderstanding, my own curiosity connecting dots that were never there in the first place. Unlike the heroines of banned storybooks, who aren't afraid to dive into the unknown, throwing behind their villages or lives as princesses to seek for answers and so-called justice and bring light to the truth, I couldn't. I was too afraid. Not of the consequences or failure, or even disappointment that the things I heard were of me going crazy, paranoid, only a side effect of life where the deep recesses of my own mind were my only companion. Instead, I was afraid that my words will mean and do nothing. That their eyes will still remain closed, smiles still decorating pallid cheeks and my voice will be for them, nothing more than a passing breeze.

Best Wishes,

Penelope Sprout



Dear Mr. Tempus,

This morning, I figured it out. I was woken up from another night of restless sleep by the muffled sound of a voice. The Joy of Living was playing on the TV in another room. The one thing that every single person in Happytown gathers every morning to watch. Anything said and presented on that screen is one that will be seen by all the people.

I didn't turn up to school that day. Instead, I turned left on the fork on my street corner instead of right and walked towards the direction of the broadcasting center. There was hardly anyone there after morning broadcasts as I made my way towards the studio. The flip of a switch turned all the lights on, surrounding the main camera already set up for tomorrow's broadcast. My nerves were heightened as I reached for the button that starts the stream. After this moment, the entire nation will stop at a standstill. They'll see my face, one of a young girl, hear the words and the truth that had been hidden from then in a corrupt system of lies and masked smiles. They will be unprepared for the things they hear. Perhaps they'll begin to feel the emotions that have been robbed from them?

A soft beep broke the silence. The camera is rolling.

"Hi I'm Penelope Sprout and there is something that all of you must know. I don't have much time before I'll be stopped from telling you the truth. The world as you know it right now is one made up of lies by the Council. Your microchips aren't used solely for demographic and health purposes. The Council uses it as a means to distribute anti-emotions into your body. They cancel your true emotions in tandem to events in your lives that are also under their control. You are always content, happy, never complaining about your job you never chose. Without emotions you are a worker bee, a body without a soul. But what is it you are feeling now? The suppressed emotions, flooding like a broken dam caused by a chip in the wall? Without the very thing you are feeling now, there is no humanity. The Council ensures that you will never be able to think for yourselves, complain, question, cause a revolution, anything to make sure they stay on top and that your only purpose and capability is to labor beneath their feet. I only speak the truth, and if there is one emotion that I need you to feel above all right now, as long as you still have time, please…. just belie-".

The whirring machine is the sound of broken glass falling, clattering against each other, falling, falling. The room is quiet but for the muffling of emergency reports coming from every corner of the country. My vision fades in and out of focus, and my eyelids are

sluggish and heavy. Father. He is half dressed in his work uniform. His nightshirt with his favorite band, The Beatles, a leftover fragment of a different era he often told me he wished he was born into. The kind of music that he puts on instead of the Council radio on Sundays. His work suit is worn over it, slightly rumpled.

"Father. I-"

"Penelope. You didn't have to do this." He cuts me short, and inhales. He looks at the ground, his arms shaking slightly.

"You can't have expected me to not have figured out at some point. Those people are soulless, Papa. You pretend that you are such a good person when you are just as bad as all the rest of them. Consider this your own fault that you didn't make me like the other ones too, and I might have spared you this trouble." I can't keep my voice from rising, wavering, a bird's trembling wings as it tries in vain to take flight for the first time.

"If you kept silent, nothing would have happened. I've given you everything you needed, wanted. You threw away it all, you stupid, stupid…!"

His voice is raspy, desperate, filled with the kind of emotion that he so carelessly stole. "Silence. That's all you taught me. Did you think that my life was any happier or better than theirs? Did I want to be hidden away and fed lies, and trained to grow up and be like someone that I don't want to be? Someone like you? I was no better or happier than all the others Papa. I was a chess piece the whole time wasn't I? I didn't have to be controlled by those anti-emotions when my entire life was controlled by you."

I was always the backdrop to his play, and yet he expected me to never notice each act and scene. And suddenly I'm scared, and the weight of the future dawns on me.

"Something really bad is going to happen to me, right? I'm scare-. You're not going to do anything, right?"

My father tried to reply, his lips opening and wavering but no words came out. There was something he wanted to say, but his mouth made no sound, shuddering like a puppet's limp body on strings. Like the people of Happytown, and like I, we aren't free.

He steps towards me, a silver tube hitting the fluorescent lights on the ceiling, and reflecting into my eyes. My heart rate doesn't speed up. I don't know what awaits me, but I know that to them, I am only a means to an end. My father's hands linger before mine, brushing over my hands before he removes them, and as I rub my fingers between each other, they are damp.

Something enshrouds me and everything becomes dark. When it's lifted, I'm not in the same room anymore and my father is gone and I'm left to wait. I don't know what's going to happen to me, and what they would do, but I do know that in the way that they

choose, I will truly be silenced. Goodbye for now, Mr. Tempus.

Best Wishes,

Penelope Sprout.



Recording of Cycle #107. Report #2.

"Minor hiccup in the system occurred when unadministered individual Penelope Sprout, now Citizen #12304 broke into a broadcasting center and spoke badly of the Council to the public. The necessary basic anti-emotions are administered into her and the citizen is showing no signs of struggle and all is going smoothly. Small outbreaks of commotion and unrest has been reported nationwide but the Joy of Living has been on track to deliver messages to control the small damages made."

Citizen #10037 sat at the breakfast table, eyes fixated on the TV screen as the Joy of Living played, the same way he had for the last 16 years of his life. His mind drifted to the girl, who appeared suddenly on the TV screen on one of the street corners the day before in the early morning. It was a lie, said the council members on the screen. They said she was like a fluke in the system, to not put notice on her and go back to their everyday lives. But his mind refused to leave the words of the girl uttered alone, and a part of him tugged at something he couldn't quite understand or get a hold of.

His family sat, along with the rest of Happytown, transfixed at the TV screen, and the girl's face, her voice lingered on his mind. She seemed so different, much more...alive than everyone else He heard her words again.

"What is it that you are feeling now?"



Madison is a high school junior at the Horace Mann School in New York City.