

HOUSE OF POETRY

ISSUE ONE

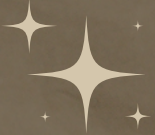


10/2023

COVER ART: HAILEY STURGE



Editor's Note



Brian Chan

Founder/Editor-in-Chief



I am so overwhelmed by the amount of support and submissions we have received for our first issue. We accepted submissions from over 40 talented authors from 8 countries. We are extremely grateful for our diverse community and their contributions.

This issue required no theme—we looked for expressive writing only, and we have undoubtedly found many, many, evocative pieces.

We hope you, the reader, enjoy!

-**Brian** (House of Poetry)

Last but not least, thank you to **Hailey Sturge** for our beautiful cover art!

Hailey Sturge, 14, is a self-taught Filipino-American artist in her sophomore year of high school. She creates artwork using traditional mediums like Graphite, Acrylic, and Watercolors. With her biggest goal being to regularly sell her paintings, she strives to bring strong emotion through her art, and influence people of all ages.

HOUSE OF POETRY



Poetry (by page order)

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The Penalty of Womanhood - Dr. Hlami Ngwenya

Love In The Past Tense I. & Love In The Past Tense II. - Nigel A. Njazi

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The tears of my mother - Huda Hamid

जिन्दगी (*Life*) - Pushpendra Harshwal

The Pretty Lass - Nivethitha S. B.

Shadows on the Wall - Reya No Sekai

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Poetry (by page order)

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A WORLD OF MASTERPIECES & IN SOBRIETY- Gevans Gueco

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A Snippet - Jerwin Oregas

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when are you coming home? - Tsushima Aori

Pamana - Clarisse Bagood

The Guardian - Rodino Encarnacion

I pray the day I'm most afraid of will never come. - Mariella Olden

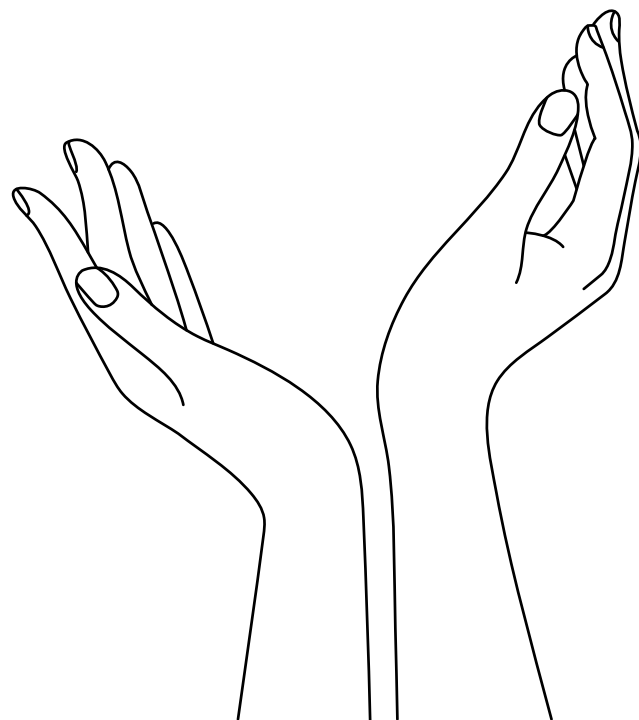
Ares - Bai Courtney Love T. Akmad

FREED FROM MOM - Gevans Gueco

H O U S E O F P O E T R Y

I S S U E I

P O E T R Y



O C T O B E R 2 0 2 3

The Mailbox - Tom Squitieri

I still walk to the mailbox
To mail letters
Now, it is a stroll of tranquility
As well as a walk
To the past

There are even a few times
Now
I like to think
Perhaps
Still a walk to the future

Back home,
Back then
Letters in my
Hand, addresses written poorly,
Each with a college application
And the two stamps
Carrying a lot of hope that
No amount of stamps would seem
To guarantee

I stood there a good 15 minutes,
Being romantic,

Saying to myself—
Here goes your future.

It was true.
It did.

Gone now is that mailbox
Now that spot
At the corner of Alder and Ben Davis
Is an unkempt, semi-mound of untamed growth
Broken stones
The stray piece of refuse
Much like me during certain years
Of my life

So in that regard,
It was my future
On that corner

The clock moved slow
And it raced
Two different speeds
In the same direction

Beyond that special mailbox spot

The nearby woods that once seemed vast
With secret paths and dreams of discoveries
Remain
Standing.

Not yet razed for what is called development
Despite signs along the “new” fast road,
Advertising the ability to take away my
First new world

May they never find that white rock.

Just across the fast road,
Past the morbid shopping area
There is the joy of the past waiting
It is real, in the still laughing eyes of childhood friends.
A burst of a fountain of youth
A letter from the past arriving just in time

Now it is the slower speed
On a shortened path

The mailbox did its job.



Tom Squitieri is a three-time winner of the Overseas Press Club and White House Correspondents' Association awards for his work as a war correspondent. His poetry has appeared in more than 50 publications, books, anthologies, podcasts, the spoken word concert “It Was Always,” the art exhibition Color: Story 2020/2021, and the film "Fate's Shadow: The Whole Story," where he shared the Los Angeles Motion Picture Festival "Grand Jury Prize Gold for Monologues & Poetry, and the film "Rings of the Unpromised." He is the 2023 poet laureate of the Rose Theatre Company, and writes most of his poetry while parallel parking or walking his dogs, Topsie, Melody, and Batman.

Pages - Thelma Ford

Poetry unwritten
Words carved on my heart
Raw emotions taking over
Straight destroyed—torn apart.

Pages of our love
Ripped beyond repair
I stood with tape and glue
You stood without a care.

I threw the pieces in the air
Let them fall where they may
I can't rewrite the story alone
It's time to walk away.



Thelma Ford currently works in manufacturing. She lives in Indiana with her daughters, 14, and 10. Writing has been a passionate hobby of hers for well over 40 years. She hopes to be able to one day publish a book of her poetry.

Fruits - Kristan Saint-Preux

for gay love, which is too often policed by law, and especially for Alan Turing, whose love was punished

we are two women, and we lie in bed together, slack mouthed. i hear trumpets when i taste your very soft suede skin: prickly pear, soursop & Galician moonshine flood my tongue;

under the covers, you press silk colored rice grains into your palms, and little dimples form in the pinkness there; you tell me this is your beauty secret, and you press rice into my cheeks

you place your hand on the mounds under my shirt. your flesh is colored with Crème de Banane, slushing white rain on rough terracotta tile, and almond;

your thick hair is the color of a dark yell and peach kernels; souging violets, African boxwood, and sour cherry colors your deep crushed satin eyes;

can i place *Drosera Rotundifolia* in your hair? you have hair follicles of pineapple fiber weave and raw hemp silk;

can i leave 99 bananas & Saint-Barthélemy-d'Anjou Cointreau as a drink offering for you at your susurrous altar? you are a god, and you keep me like a held breath; you keep the dried peel of the bitter orange *laraha* behind your Crème hand woven cotton ears, and you hear me there;

i leave a trail of bhat at your smooth pale feet, and i hear the long plaintive whistle of a fleeting train, and know my heart is pierced with your sharp Buffalo bone;

i watch you wash your long hair in hazelnut Frangelico and guavaberry every day; in the shower, you have custard apple breasts, delicate flemish glass nipples, a finger lime navel;

everyday this week i've had a lump in my throat when i look at you; if you wear that rabbit fur like that, if you wear yellow *ranunculus*, medium course leather, and White Saxaul, my heart, the Cramer's eighty-eight butterfly, will be your worshiper.

we have to go. you get up, beautiful in no clothes and rumped hair. when we leave the house, the car is covered in a film of fresh rain. at the airport, we walk the longest blue mile. we get coffee and see the glowing terminals. we talk story.

damn, everyone in the airport is staring because i'm falling apart. i don't want to say goodbye to you, ever. some people here think i'm you're sloppy best friend. so i kiss you deeply right on the mouth. you're so beautiful that my fiberglass tears won't stop. i'm being cut up, and i'm silent as you take one last look back at me before you go through your departure gate.

it's a lonely walk to my gate. i wish we could go back to bed where we were ripe fruit all tangled up.



Kristan is a queer, black poet. She will be featured in Eunoia Review (February), Poetry Breakfast (October), and Zhagaram. She is working on a full length book of poetry and can be reached at kimsaintpreux@gmail.com.

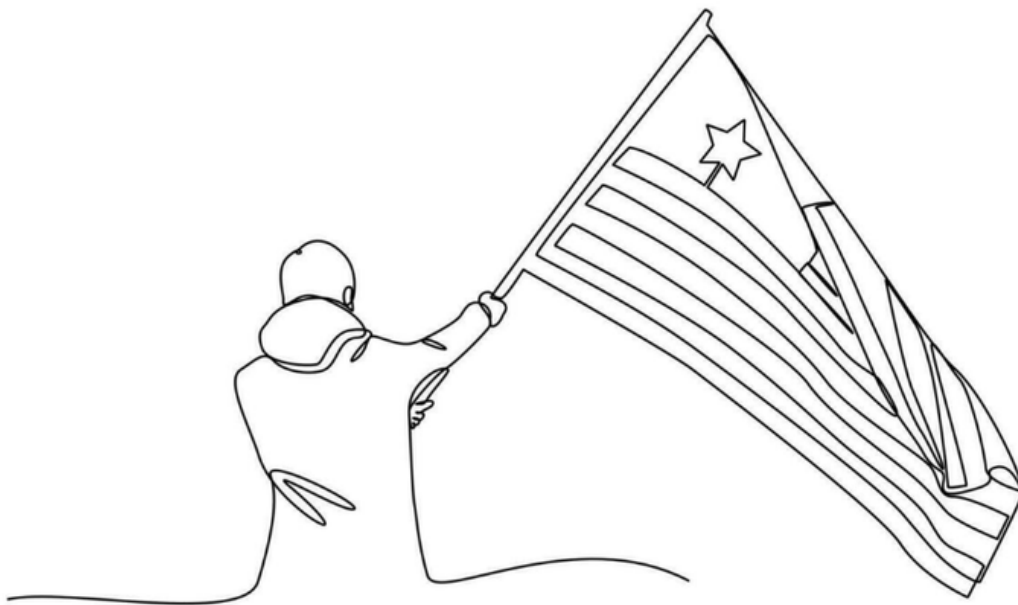
***RETURN TO AMERICA* - Thomas Rions-Maehren**

would the legendary monks
high up in their nose-bleed cave dwellings
still resist society
if they knew how cheap
saturated fats & high-
fructose corn syrup have gotten?
2 for \$5 whoppers for a limited time only!
have the hermits heard
of the glories of netflix? of the tiger king
& of heisenberg? the world is flat as a billboard
& only as profound, only as meaningful
as the advertisement for discount
eye surgery that it proclaims. the four

horsemen have come
& gone
four times four
times & with each ride through town
left clickbait & empty promises
in their wake. profit

from tragedy: that's the name of the game. indulgence
on delicious poverty. sloth overtime.
opportunity. opportunity. opportunity. don't
miss this golden opportunity in the land of opportunity
when opportunity comes knocking, being as it is
an equal opportunity employer. RISE AND GRIND!
we all have the same 24
hours each, say those who live
off of mommy & daddy's compounding

interest. the only things i
can afford, unfortunately,
are the things that make me
feel good: poisons of the mind,
body & genitalia. who
could cut themselves off
from all this burnt-out neon, too-true-
to-be-good stimulation?



Thomas Rions-Maehren is a bilingual poet, novelist, and chemist with roots in the US and in Ecuador. His scientific research has been published in ACS Nano, and examples of his Spanish-language prose can be found in his widely published short stories and in his novel *En las Manos de Satanás* (Ápeiron Ediciones, 2022). More of his poetry can be found in various journals and anthologies and at his website: tommaehrenpoetry.blogspot.com. He is on Twitter and Instagram @MaehrenTom.

***My reflection.* - Amrit Kaur**

Standing in front of the mirror, looking at myself,
Looking at my own reflection, but seeing someone else,
Someone I can't hold eye contact with,
Someone I don't like even a little bit,
Trying to see if it's a human or a monster,
Trying to see if the demons have finally conquered,
Hands turned into paws, nails turned into claws,
Clawing at her own face for how long nobody knows,
Blood pouring out of her eyes and onto her hands,
Looking frantically around hoping for it to end,
Thoughts in her head trying to make their own decision,
Hands making their way to her throat not wanting to wait for the change of season,
Choking her, making it hard for her to breathe,
Leaving the only option for her to bleed,
Struggling to get her own hand away from her throat,
Wanting to end it all but still staying on the boat,
I just stand there, watching the chaos unfold,
Trying to control the tears that are really hard to hold,
Looking at my own throat but holding my hands back,
Watching the whole exterior I built starting to crack,
Not wanting to cry, but still breaking down,
Staring at my reflection in a blood-soaked gown,
Looking back at me with a smile on her face,
Telling me, "It's okay, baby, now get up and start the chase."
Closing my eyes and taking a deep breath,
I let it all out whatever was in my head,
I screamed, I cried, I sobbed, I died,
After all this, I let the demons once again hide,
Looking at the mirror, and seeing someone I now recognize,
A monster formed by my thoughts, and a human exactly my size,
Looking at the reflection and finally seeing my own pain,
Smiling at myself and bracing myself for everything all over again.



Amrit Kaur writes when it's too much to handle the pain or whenever the voice in the back of their mind tells them that they need to write something.

People - Hanin Soliman

I wish I could be like People
While they keep an eye on the ball
I'm right there, with back against the wall
My body seems as heavy as metall
When everything started to change, I can't recall
In the same way snakes crawl, they crawl
In the same way snails crawl, I crawl

I don't fit in a perfect regime
Meanwhile they have a dream
Always thought why should I feat in
In life, is there really a theme?
They say "To be or not to be"
What if I lack of self-esteem
What if I believe nothing-but a scheme

They want to study medicine
They want to be an engineer
I'm lost, is this a Sin?
To not know your career
My future is unclear
There it is, my first tear
Maybe there's something that I fear

I'm not asking too much
Just for more time, but People judge
I might be broken, unsure of how to adjust
Life is rushing off, People lost their touch
Now Feelings using their own paintbrush
While they're getting off that train
Steady, I stay still as a stain.



Hanin is an 18-year-old Italian girl. She lives in Milan, but her parents are from Egypt. She writes stories and poems the most and she she likes criticism. Hanin finds her inspiration in movies, shows, family, friends and her personal experiences.

The Story of My Life - Shivam Raj

My story unfolds in a world of dreams, where reality slips away.
Till eighteen, from birth its story is told.
Welcomed with overwhelming joy, my parents celebrated my arrival and the
Beginning of a new chapter in their lives.
Through each strife, their love and hope persist.

Filled with glee and success were the days of school.
Set free are talents after conquering exams.
Dared to explore, in every field, I did,
Taking risks, each opportunity, I slid.
Curious and driven, I sought out new ground,
Meeting challenges, making discoveries profound.
Proudly did I wear my extracurricular accomplishments.

Among the victories, I discovered an emptiness.
Emotions unbound, detached from my parents.
Unknown was the meaning of true love, the words elusive and intangible.
Love remained a mystery, with its essence remaining shrouded from knowledge.
Its meaning was yet to be discovered, and its mystery was still unsolved.
The true understanding of love remained hidden, its definition yet to be found.
No one had ascertained the true meaning of love, an enigma in its own right.
A heart of my own was mine until a girl came into the picture.

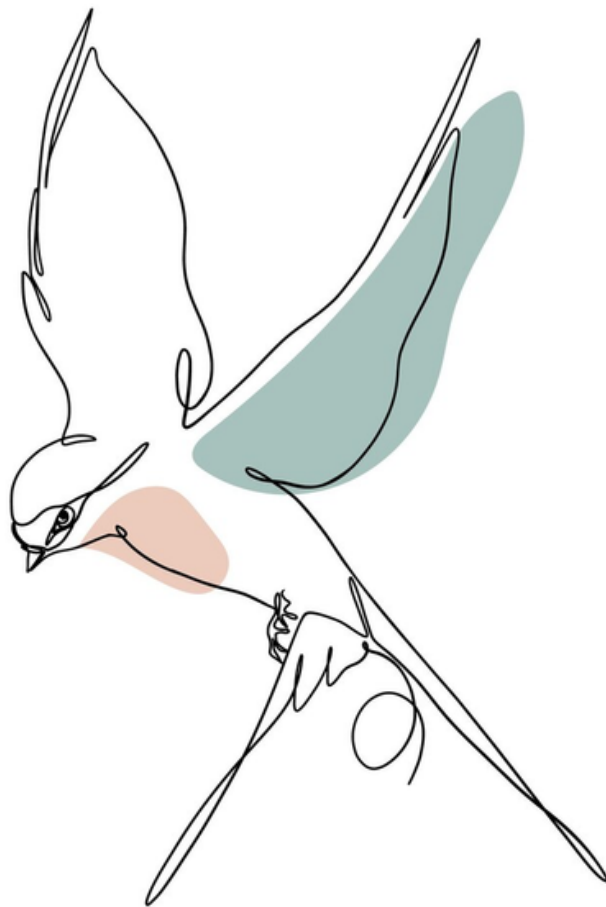
Lessons profound were taught by her enduring love,
Embrace found me in true love's hold.
A new world, her laughter, her words can be,
SEE what's different, encompassing her glee.
Mystery was peeled back as she revealed the depths of love.

Shadows were cast by failures,
As they came,
Steadfast, my determination held, unwavering.
Held steadfast, my determination did, despite sporadic doubts.
My determination remained strong, even in the face of adversity.
Despite moments of uncertainty, I remained determined.
In spite of wavering thoughts, my determination remained steadfast.
Unwavering, my determination persisted.
I rose through every stumble and chose to keep going.
Reaching for the skies, a spirit unyielding.

Against all odds, I persevered and fought without surrendering.
To be taught a lesson is the opportunity that comes with each setback.
My guiding light is resilience, which seems to help me progress through life's
Challenges. Day and night were consumed with challenges that I faced.

Tall and strong I stand, having reached the age of eighteen.
Experiences arranged in a symphony, a lifelong melody.
Embrace of love, first cry at birth occurs.

To trace a journey, I've woven a tale.



Shivam Raj, an 18-year-old from Patna, Bihar, India, is a passionate student with a love for poetry and a dream of becoming a software engineer. He aspires to publish his own book someday, showcasing his unique voice and style. With a strong work ethic and commitment to his goals, Shivam aims to excel in both technology and literature, leaving a lasting impact on the world.

***Love is not Blind* - Fisokuhle Khoza**

What if love isn't blind at all?
I know, I know.
Seems like a bold statement to make
An atrocious assumption, right?
Nearly impossible—
But wait; what if love *really* wasn't blind?

What if *love* was the one
you told your unfunny jokes to,
& he still laughed with you,
Just because they made you smile.

What if *love* saw you go from dancing happily in
shower,
And then going to lie in bed for the next 3 hours unable to pick
yourself up?
Yet *love* still comes to comfort you with a gentle embrace.

What if love sees the parts of your body you have been told to
cover-up
Because they're too **flat**
Too **blemished**
Too **flawed**
& then *love* thinks they're just **beautiful**?

What if *love* chooses to stay up until 1 a.m listening to
your chatter, smiling at you just because
“your voice sounds pretty at night..”

What if *love* wasn't blind?
Oh for the *love* of God!—
What if he really saw you for all you are,
And for all you could be
& still said;
“I choose you.” ?

Would that not be more divine?
Knowing that this love has seen & experienced
ALL OF YOU.
Including the bits you still have difficulties embracing
And *love* still learnt to love them anyway?

I don't want to believe that true romance
Could only spark if one of the lovebirds
Was completely unaware, perhaps unable to see
Their lover's imperfections...

True love negates that theory
It's a *love* sees the most sacred parts of
And it intentionally chooses to love what he sees.



Fisokuhle is a Zulu teenage girl living in South Africa. She is a romantic and her love for love is expressed innately in her writing and poetry. She comes from a single-parented home, like most people in her home country do, and family is so important to her. She is in Matric, or Year 12 of High School and she's at the pivotal point in her life, as next year she'll be in Varsity. She is hoping to get into Med School next year and for her, life is not about chasing perfection but reaching and growing into excellence.

Telemachus (promise of a son) - Aaron Kharkamni

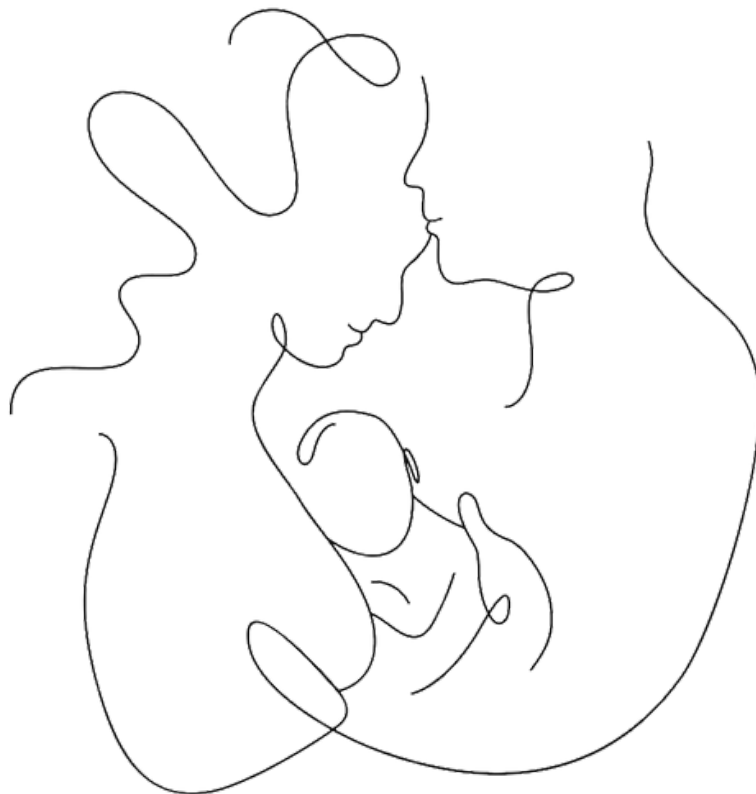
You,
a daughter and
a sister.
You,
know pain?
kissed abandonment?
a father dead.
mother refused to stay—
I don't want you...
and now You,
orphan and
alone.

You?..
tell me please
was it hard?
and was it difficult?
carrying it with you
like water jugs
that hung
on tender shoulders.
and did you face
the dawn
to live for
sister or yourself?

i now call You
Mother
i Mei.
birth out of love

and
forged out of sadness.
and yet,
you say—
help me
with the dishes,
type the question papers,
mop the house.

no worries
Mum
of course i'll
help,
i'll be there
i promise.



Aaron Kharkamni is an aspiring writer who lives in the beautiful yet troubled city of Shillong. And not much is known about him, except for that fact that he's deadly afraid of unknown numbers, is introverted, and lives with his two cats.

Complexion -an obsession - Kadambari Gupta

Being born fair or dark its not,
In our hands, but being fair is
Celebrated appreciated and complimented,
By one and all but being dark is criticized,
And ridiculed every time,
Its just complexion why its being made an,
Obsession all dark-skinned girls feel depressed,
By constant criticism and fear of rejection,
Anxiety and panic attacks result from those,
Constant remarks and comments being passed,
By relatives and friends,
Why we can't look beyond color of the skin,
And appreciates one's character,
Nature qualifications and achievements,
These unrealistic standards of beauty have ruined,
Many lives, fairness creams, and treatments are,
Being applied and advised to be one day,
Accepted as brides and wives,
Complexion is just a part of our personality,
Why is it being stretched so much
Making someone lose their sanity and sense of identity.



Skadambari Gupta loves to write poems, as to her, it is the best way to express one's feelings and emotions. She has co-authored over five hundred anthologies.

***Your Truth* - Michelle Wang**

Writing with truth is the only way
A truth you have seen and lived and breathed
These words have a real power to sway
These words reveal the emotions underneath

You must search the corners of your mind
You must embrace all your memories
Unravel yourself and you will find
The truth drawn from your reality

You must make it seem effortless and easy
But pulling the truth from yourself is rarely so
But we must try, and make those efforts bravely
At last, perhaps, we will begin to speak from the soul

Think of all those other words that have moved you
They gave you smiles and drew tears from your eyes
There was something real in the fiction: the truth
What could happen if you gave your truth wings to fly?



Michelle Wang is a university student who greatly enjoys writing poetry in her free time. Michelle started writing poetry in high school, inspired by song lyrics. Music still plays a large role in motivating her writing, and some of her other hobbies include playing piano and singing.

The Actor - Mpfumelani Chauke

You hit a fuse
When you become my muse
An electric jolt
Is what I felt

I knelt at the sight of you
I was the painter
And you were
Mona Lisa
I was the sculptor
And you were
Athena
I shaped the edges of your flaws
Until my hands bled
"Perfect" I would sigh
You stood at my alter
And I would worship
You
Three times a day
Bowing and kneeling

I made you beautiful
Giving you
Traits
You did not portray
Fictional is all you are
On paper with the pen in my hand
I conjured scenes
Puppeted our love story
I played the director
Actor and actress
In this tale

Atlas

Now faceless is what I am
Somehow
Somewhere
My identity of self
Got lost into you
Whoever you are.
Reality versus fiction
The character I made
Did not align
With who you were
I felt like
Saying.....

"CUT!"
"You went off script."

Dangerously
I obsessed over your character
You possessed my sanity
Pleasantly I liked it
But rapidly
You drained me
In the Sahara desert
Our story perished
And there I lay
Wilting in the sun.



Mpfumelani Chauke or **Lani**—pronounced as Loni—for those that may find the name a bit of a tongue twister, is a twenty-year-old aspiring author. On her journey, she desires to use her voice to make others feel heard and seen. Lani has never let anything stand in her way of her aspiration, not even dyslexia.

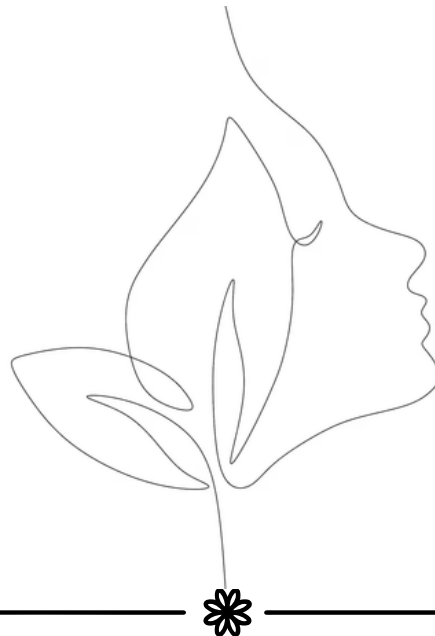
(SHE) Suddenly Happiness Exist - Trisha Lyn I. Tangcangco

To the deep feeler who timely exists,
I hope you're fine and life goes on as you see this

I wonder what is in my head when I ask her
"Can I court you?"
I'm sure SHE was wondering too
Because what for? I'm already in love with you

I never experience even in my wildest dreams
I'll be courting someone, nonetheless a woman who likes cream
I never see her coming,
But what I thought was never is now happening

You girl, lady, woman..the person that you are and being,
I am not religious but there are times that keep me thinking
That she was created for me
And when I define love, I know the answer— SHE.



Trisha Tangcangco is from Southeast Asia, in the North Luzon part of Philippine Island. She has been exposed to the field of writing since high school, now pursuing a college degree in Broadcasting. She mostly writes about slice of life, love, and ambition. She used to be a feature writer in English and an editorial writer in Filipino, becoming the Editor-In-Chief of her school paper way back in high school. She is just a simple nineteen-year-old girl trying to put her thoughts into words for the world.

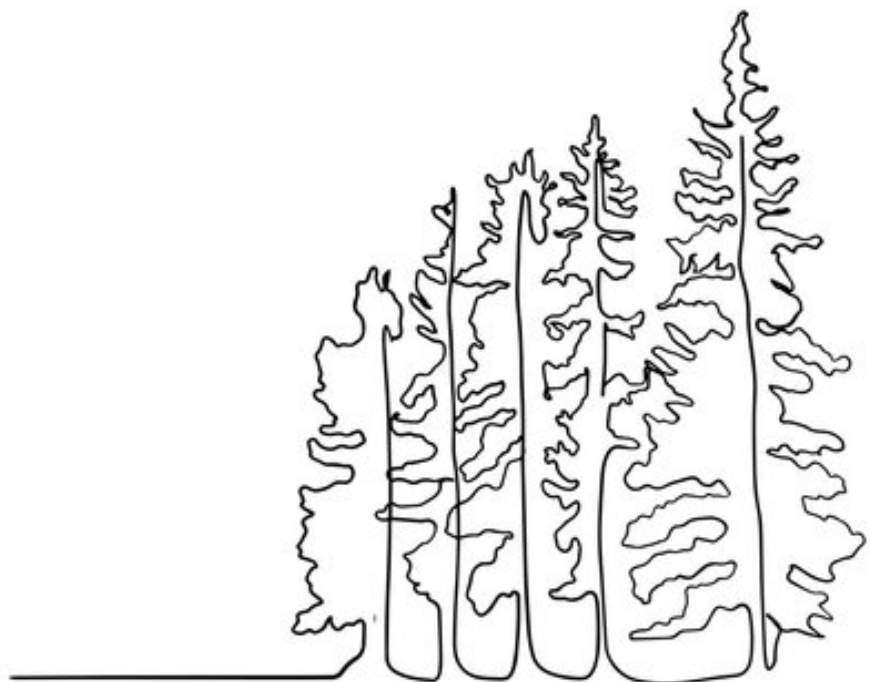
Grapefruit Sap - Arvee De Castro

Once lust of becoming favor
Tender that was, what you craved for
Nestled in your astounding notes
Cascaded, lulled by mere quotes

Red, oh green, those rosé lips
Trace them gently, on gleeful trips
Feel the heavens, astounding fervor
Go take the heat and thrill of tremor

Bitten so violently, gawked at sugar
My pointy nose kissed with bulgar
Place yourself on my soft lap
Feed you strawberries & grapefruit sap

Succor of endless summer nights
Such vigor of tasty dimming lights
Beg for more, no syrup of fantasies
Now swallow me whole, under your canopies



Halcyon - Arvee De Castro

I stand in pain of so feigned smile
Longing for thy lore and past design
In our midst is looming purple guile
The comfort of when, it's a faded line

I, one who dreads gloom and the dark
For when I will suffer, overtly and proud
“Heavy is the one who wears their heart”
This is veiled by fine, always aloud

Blank is what's on my canvas
Exuberant tales of hope, I cast
On myself, on walls, on a rod of resentment
Meltdowns, falling out, hid to refinement

Ok's, cathartic, satisfaction of a front
As chaos around me heeds my stunt
Plastered posters of pure neglect
Beg to differ, old baggages are kept

Sailing through calamitous seconds
Morbidity is a threat that beckons
Hashed out all my so bygones
Kissed it farewell, stifled like fawns



Arvee De Castro, a 21-year-old Filipino, is an inspired storyteller fluent in both English and Filipino. Embracing diverse and esoteric interests, Arvee loves crafting narratives, basking in music, and lending their voice to songwriting and singing. Their fascination for sci-fi/fantasy cinema fuels their creative and imaginative skills. With a remarkable academic journey interspersed with honors during elementary and high school, Arvee is now in college pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Astronomy with an emphasis in Meteorology. As a queer individual, Arvee is committed to embracing their unique identity while endeavoring to succeed with their educational and artistic aspirations.

Wonderland of Madness - Leone V. Ortal

“You’re mad.” The words had always followed you like a shadow, whispered by those who couldn’t grasp the intricacies of your mind. “All the best ones are,” I would reply with a knowing smile, for I had witnessed the magic that unfolded within your thoughts.

You had always been different, a maverick in a world that often celebrated conformity. Your thoughts danced like wildfire, untamed and unpredictable, casting sparks of brilliance that ignited the minds of those fortunate enough to cross your path. To some, your ideas were overwhelming, defying the logical constructs that society had painstakingly built. But to me, they were a revelation—a testament to the beauty that could be found in the uncharted territories of the mind.

In a world that often sought structure and predictability, you thrived in the chaos of your thoughts. Your mind was a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes, each fragment a piece of a puzzle that only you could assemble. Your madness was your compass, leading you to truths that others could not fathom. And as I watched you navigate the labyrinth of your mind, I marveled at the way you embraced the unknown with open arms.

We often associate madness with chaos, with the unruly maelstrom of thoughts that refuse to conform to the expected order. Yet, as I delved deeper into your world, I saw a different truth unfold. Your madness was not a hindrance; it was a gift.

In the end, it was your willingness to embrace your madness that set you apart. You had the boldness to stalk after the fleeting whispers of inspiration, to chase them down rabbit holes and through looking glasses into realms of wonder. And in your pursuit, you discovered the untapped potential that resided within the fractures of your mind.

“You’re mad.” The words were no longer a condemnation but a recognition of the grandeur that thrived within you. “All the best ones are,” I replied with a grin, and together, we embraced the chaos, the brilliance, and the boundless potential that resided within the recesses of our beautifully mad minds.



A 16-year-old prodigious writer, **Leo** embarks on literary journeys fueled by an unwavering love for fantasy. Through their vivid imagination and skillful pen, they breathe life into fantastical worlds and characters that captivate readers. With boundless creativity, Leo is poised to carve a niche in the realm of storytelling, offering glimpses into enchanting realms that reflect their passion for the extraordinary.

Universe Inside of You - Tsushima Aori

i hear whispers from the stars
whenever you look my way
your eyes never betray
how you truly feel about me
don't you know you set me free?

whenever you're away
all is dark and gray
i'll follow the whispers
and we'll meet up halfway
come here quicker
and hold me with your gaze

how do you spend your days
when you don't spin me around in a daze
enough to fall to the ground and watch the skies
oh, don't you know your touch alone can entice
the start of my demise,
realizing how i am deprived
of your warmth

i hear the whispers of the stars
here to warn
that you'll leave me torn tonight
but how i could not gaze back at you
when you stir something within me
as you blink

we share my drink
between our lips
and i get the taste
this is it,
of the universe inside of you



Tsushima Aori is an IT student somewhere in the 7,641 islands of the Philippines. She takes interest in all things flowers, stars, seas, and pretty views. Currently, she's typing herself away for an IT project wishing that she could put this much effort into her writing. Though, Aori daydreams about her characters more than she writes.

TOGETHER IN THE DANCE OF LIFE - Joshua Ewofobe

In the dance of life, we each take part,
With mysteries vast, the human heart.
But know we not the back of our hand,
It's in unity, together we stand.
In wisdom's garden, we seek to sow,
With seeds of learning, we hope to grow.
For age alone does not reveal,
The truths that life's journey conceals.
For in the young, fresh dreams ignite,
Their spirits soaring, taking flight.
While elders' eyes, like stars, they gleam,
With tales of life's long-flowing stream.
Through shared experiences, we gain,
Insights that help us break the chain.
The chain of ignorance and fear,
United, we can persevere.
With hands entwined, we'll forge ahead,
To face the storms, where paths may tread.
Embracing all, both young and old,
In unity, we will be bold.
So let us bridge the gaps that part,
Connecting souls, igniting hearts.
For life's true beauty we'll behold,
Together, as one, we'll all unfold.



Ewofobe Joshua Efeoghene is a Nigerian creative bridging photography and storytelling. Raised amidst the vibrant culture of Lagos, Ewofobe's passion for freezing moments in time began with his father's photo archives. With a camera in hand, he captures the raw emotions of people and communities, sharing tales of resilience and compassion. Drawn to convey deeper emotions, Ewofobe turned to writing as an extension of his visual artistry. His words amplify the feelings and experiences behind his photographs, creating a unique fusion of storytelling that touches hearts worldwide.

the girl in the flower bed - Meagan Lee

a girl lies in her flower bed.
her tawny strewn hair and nebulous eyes
breathed into her,
molded and shaped
as a blessing from Ceres herself.
the willows and cypresses and elms
bequeathed to her the whispers of the night;
and when she arose,
so did the sun;
when she smiled,
so did the sun;
yearning for her return
as the girl waved farewell
and laid to rest in her flower bed.

the girl arose in her flower bed.
the dewdrops and pungent fragrance
defining her manner.
yet no flower,
no plant, no fruit
ever recreating her yearn for perfect
sweetness.
sunflowers were not pretty enough,
dandelions were not pretty enough,

daffodils and marigolds and daisies and lilies,
despite their mortal pulchritude,
unreflecting of her desired eternity.
yet she still waved farewell,
and when droplets formed on waxy petals
and cobwebs glistened,
and morning shone,
she would arise in her flower bed.

when the sun had not yet shown,
the sky an endless canvas of abyss,
the girl arose.
in the darkness,
she found her answers
in the elms and the daffodils
she could not see.
her wished-upon eternity had vanished—
the lilies had become hemlock,
her flower bed belladonnas.

the sun greeted her as it did
yesterday's morning and mornings before,
but the girl
consumed with herself

never rose.
in her wake,
rotten berries,
nefarious and wicked,
laid strewn about instead,
and the girl could no longer return to her flower bed.



Meagan Lee, 15 y/o, is a student at Staten Island Academy. She enjoys writing, watching movies, and playing the piano.

The Songs of the Tailings - Cedrick Dalvin Alolor

Can you hear them wail?
Alas! Oh, once was peach, now turned red.
Near, oh once was blue, now turned dead.

Why? Can you hear them gather?
Enraging riches which were left pouring.

Silencing of stories, wanting to be untold;
Then, how shall they live?
Offers upon the burial of the king,
Petty, they accept dirt spoils.

Through the winning of rage upon time,
How sorrows ruled the air,
Ending misses, how shall there be room to spare?

Memoirs that will always linger,
It will seep where it once did stand,
Nested before where life used to face humanity still,
Ill—yet now burrow in fear;
Never lost, hoping that a few were left to live,
Gallantly telling the tale of bare markings.

Let us thrive again once more,
Where we do not face mirrors of the apocalypse,
But a reflection of blue waters,
Enjoying the fruits of the land.

We shriek “Never again!”
Not just for us,
But for the pawns of the green.

Hear the songs of the tailings,
And let it course through the veins of those who hear,
For it shall echo a thousand times,
The silent voices of those who were killed.

We will live once again,
For majestic views are meant to reign.

The Songs of the Tailings is inspired by the environmental justice committed to the people of Marinduque Island on the effects of the Marcopper Mining Corporation's Tapani pit that spilled toxic mine tailings which are toxic chemicals (i.e., heavy metals, sulfides, radioactive content) that flooded villages and poisoned the Boac river system (Dizon, 2019).

This has caused the marking Mogpog River system as well to become unusable due to the high metal content. In addition, the human implications of the disaster on March 24, 1996, had caused health risks.

The high level of metal concentration made drinking water contaminated, and with plants absorbing metals from soil and water through the roots, the presence of metal concentration has been rid of its quality due to the Marcopper toxic drainage content that accumulated underground up to these agricultural yields. This links how pollution can affect the system throughout its cycle of energy transfer thus the human ability to consume agricultural yields.

The poem encourages preserving biodiversity and protecting the environment to stop these unsafe practices for profit. By strengthening environmental policies and proper education for public awareness on how heavy metal content can provide health risks, we can ensure that critical attention is given to mitigating man-made effects causing climate change, biodiversity loss, and deforestation, and how these events concern public health and safety to locals consuming the local goods.

Reference:

Senoro, D.B., Bonifacio, P.B., Mascareñas, D.R., Tabelin, C.B., Ney, F.P., Lamač, M., & Tan, F.J. (2020). Spatial distribution of agricultural yields with elevated metal concentration of the island exposed to acid mine drainage. *Journal of Degraded and Mining Lands Management*. 8. 2551-2558. 10.15243/jdmlm.2021.082.2551.



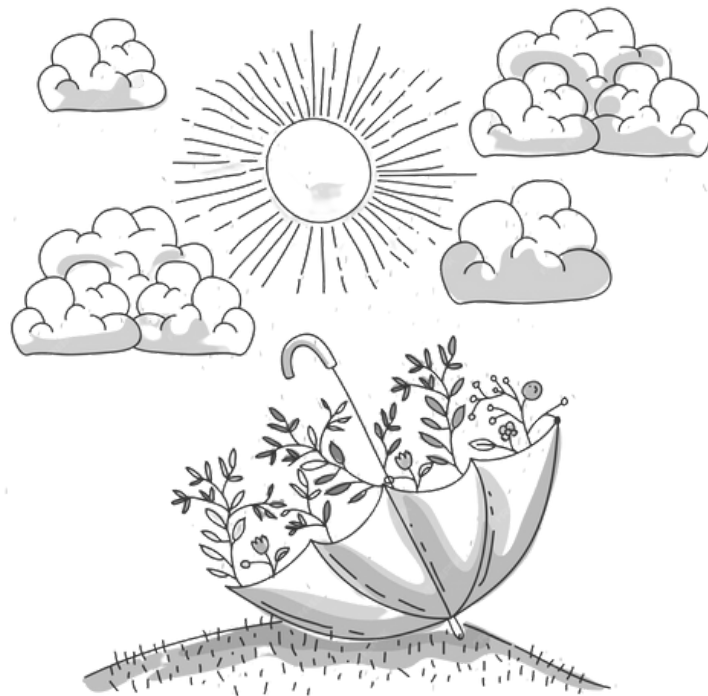
Cedrick is a Filipino Development Communication Student in University of the Philippines - Los Baños. He has been writing since the early years of his academic years and had been doing it as a hobby and passion since then. He is an artist, a poet, and an advocate for environmental conservation. He paints, consumes educational content on environmental knowledge, and writes in his own free time!

Instagram: @ced_dalvin @apollosui @letters.to.emovere

Website: <https://cedrick-dalvin.jimdosite.com/>

picture me - Jaimee Sabile

picture my face when the sun starts to rise
and all the flowers bloom in awe
picture me above the skies
remember me in all ethical life's law
hear my voice whenever you hear the gentle babbling brooks
picture me when a mother cooks
picture me in every mountaintop reaching for the clouds above
in every field
and every omnivore
picture me as the trees above you a shelter to rest and a shield
picture me when you think about love
and when you sigh in relief
picture me in every life's beauty just for a brief
for i want you to remember me
every time you see wonderful things
for that'll keep me in your heart entirely
and merrily in your dreams.



Jaimee Sabile is a Filipino writer, born and raised in the Philippines. She has two published books on Amazon KDP named "the life i've lived" and "solitude and clarity." During Jaimee's free time, she writes poems, prose, short stories, and paints and draws. Her dream is to become a professional author/writer someday!

The Penalty of Womanhood - Dr. Hlami Ngwenya

By default, we incur a maximum penalty
Summoned by the laws of nature we are part of
Imposed by the unwritten rules of the cultural, societal, and workspaces we live in
Perpetuated by the socio-economic norms, the circumstances of our upbringing and socialization

Our powers to make decisions cease to exist; not by choice, but by force
Without fail, we rise up to the bait, as our bodies obey to that call of nature
Month in month out, we wait in anticipation with mixed feelings for that **PERIOD**
A crucial pathway to our womanhood; yet comes with unavoidable penalty of inconvenience; and the high cost of excruciating pain for some

As though the “**NO PAIN, NO GAIN**”, was specifically invented for us
Procreation is of a limited edition for the womankind.
The biological clock constantly ticking louder in our heads; pressurising us to either do it now, or forever hold our peace.
While our male counterparts enjoy unlimited time and can endlessly, multiple and more.
The joy of finally holding that long-awaited bundle of joy, never comes free
Preceded by a bundle of agonizing torment
For some, to the point of paying the penalty with their own lives

That lifelong deeper joy of motherhood is never without a penalty
Accompanied by the lifetime sanction of physical load of unpaid care work
Coated by the lifelong cognitive and mental load of emotional turmoil.
The option of serving one sentence for all, is never applicable
The bill is always multiplied by every offspring in our care

On the home front, the penalty of inequitable distribution of the production labor force raises its head higher
By default we are appointed Ministers of home affairs; Ministers of health and social development simultaneously
For many, added roles of Ministers of Finance, Minister of Transport, Minister of Education, Minister of Sports Administration. For some, even Ministers without portfolio.

Juggling with the roles all at once without compensation.
It is surely, the **ALL WORK NO PAY** principle in action
That poor heavily exhausted body still expected to perform wonders on the romantic front.

On the work front, the bills of the trade-offs of a working mom are tilting the scale even harder
We are visibly dominant in numbers in the workspaces, yet rendered invisible until we can
prove our worth beyond any reasonable doubt.

We are constantly skipping the hurdles of unconscious biases and the unspoken rules of the
workplace

Those who rise up to the occasion of leadership; pay dearly.

The womankind is with not doubt, economically heavily penalized for their motherhood
Forced to live with the daily guilt of prioritizing career at the expense of family,
Or stretching themselves beyond recognition to balance both work and home front pressures
Either way, the penalty is heavy

Thus, leaving many behind and by the wayside

While pushing the majority to the sideways

That's the penalty of womanhood.

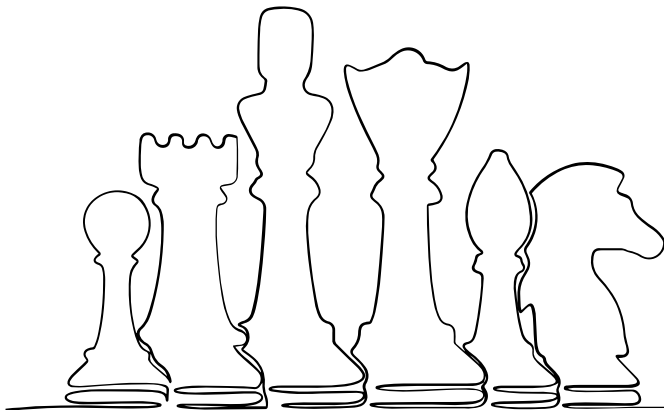


Dr Hlami Ngwenya is a South African-born global citizen and holds a PhD in Sustainable Agriculture. She is an International Development Consultant in AgriFood Systems and the Founder of Facilitation of Systemic Change Consulting Company. She is one of the recipients of the prestigious National Orders Award 2021 in South Africa (The Order of the Baobab in Bronze). When she is not facilitating systemic change, she spends her time writing poetry and she is part of the local poetry circle. She is also a content curator and presenter for an online talk show on the African Experience.

Love In The Past Tense I. - Nigel A. Njazi

It was all in your beauty.
Beauty that was skin deep.
Deep as the pain you carried.
Carried it in secret over time.
Time that you wasted on unrequited love.
Love that didn't last forever.
Forever wishing you could go back.
Back to when you hadn't fallen.
Fallen from the rooftop of love into a pit of lies.
Lies that you believed to be true.
True to your gullible nature, you became a victim.
Victim of the solace of trickery.
Trickery that got you whipped and shortly trapped.
Trapped in the box of epiphanies looking for an escape.
Escape from the trauma it gave you.
You who always believed you knew your worth.
Worth asking, what was the cost?
Cost of love then, compared to it now.
Now we are at a stalemate, moving without purpose.

Just another game of chess and we are 2 sides of a square,
split into pieces.



Love In The Past Tense II.

I miss your writings, riddles, and Haikus
Mesmerizing it was just to have our friends say, "How cool."
And when we flew halfway across the world out of impulse... indeed how cool.
But do you remember that?
Do you remember us at the time?
That was us as a crime.
My heart was stolen, and the moments were divine.
I was all yours, but I guess you were never mine.
Do you remember love?
Coz, I don't feel it anymore like I Used to.
It's not the same type of feeling I got Used to.
I miss your use of words but come to think of it I was Used too.
All I yearned for were 4 letter words, but you only Used two.
I know we were not cut from the same cloth, but it was all in how you were dressing.
And it's not your outfits I'm addressing.
It's your lies I'm undressing.
Exposing the naked truth, in this fight I'm aggressing.
These times are testing.
To get over you is depressing.
I didn't lose you as much as I lost myself. I'm trying to move on but I'm stuck.
Stuck on the thought that I'm not gullible enough for your trickery.
Stuck trying to let you know how it makes me feel.

Stuck in this game of Scrabble, just looking for the words I need to make a point.



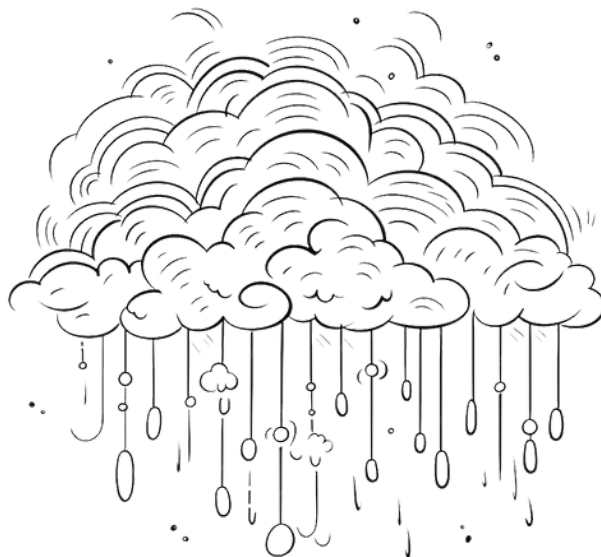
Nigel is a 24-year-old Law Student in South Africa. He has been writing since the age of 9 and has since then written poems, short stories, and plays. Nigel dreams of becoming a performing arts director and having the opportunity to write and direct plays and movies. In his free time, Nigel plays and coaches soccer. He also enjoys songwriting and acting.

Fallen Again - Keiken

As I look outside my window pane
The drops of rain fall straight through the drains
From houses beside mine, to houses faraway
The scenery made me wonder
If I indeed fell to new love for you my lover

From the street lights, oddly colored like sunrays
To the dim shadows, like remnants of old days
The times I spent with you, came back as dashing strong waves
I debated myself and pondered
Why did my thoughts from when I loved you come back with different painted hues?
Is it really true?
Have I fallen again for you?

To swallow the words I've cried
To lose again my pride
Am I ready to try again this time?
Am I ready to give love to the one that made me shed tears from my eyes?
I can swear to fall for you again and again, if you swear you won't lie
I am in deep sea with your being, to your heart and mind I'll dive
If I hadn't looked at rain that day, the waves you raised would have died.



Using a pen name, **Keiken** is a Filipina born and raised in the Philippines. She finds writing loveable and freeing. she enjoys reading poems and philosophy quotes or books, playing sports, listening to music, writing, and improving on her works.

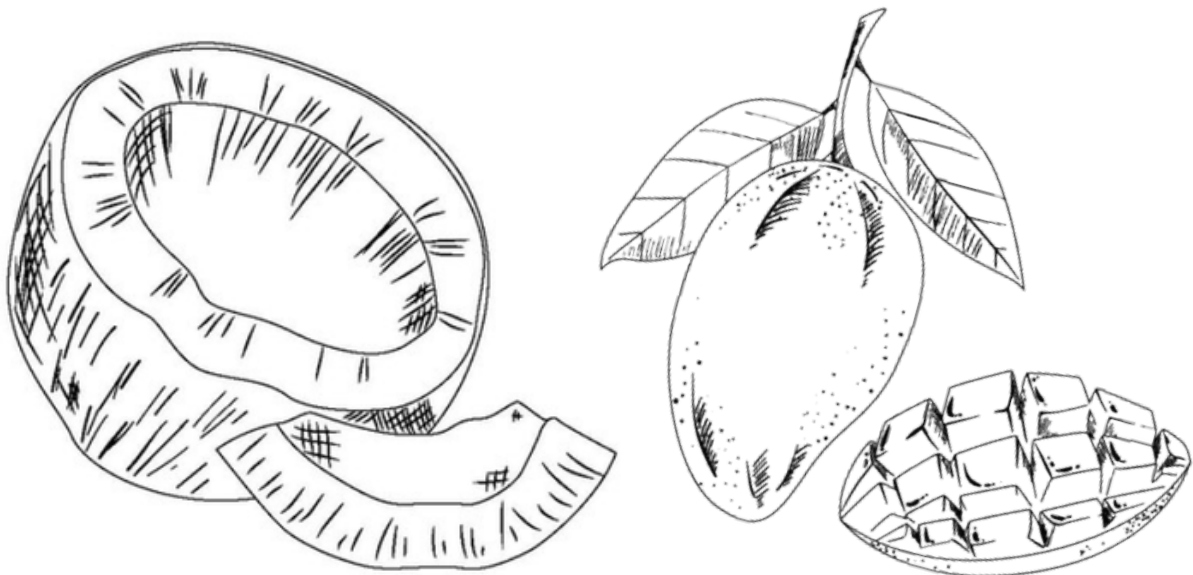
The tears of my mother - Huda Hamid

Badminton shuttles on the roof again
Wind-filled nights spent looking for them
Darkness fades when grey clouds thunder
Overpower the tears of my mother

There's cut-up fruit in a green bowl covered
It's a quiet house, it feels so other
Darkness fades when grey clouds thunder
Overpower the tears of my mother

Shattered roof tiles, old paint cracked
A house of beatings, clogged blue on black
Darkness fades and grey clouds thunder
Overpower the tears of my mother

Hair blown black, expectations high
The Angel's laugh, a sin from the sky
Darkness fade and grey cloud thunder
Please heal the tears of my mother



Huda is a Pakistani-South African high schooler who currently resides in South Africa. She works on poetry, prose, and songwriting as a way to capture her surroundings and paint saturated images of life. During her off time, Huda loves to read, paint, and act, and spends unnecessary time researching niche subjects that interest her at the time.

जिन्दगी (Life) - Pushpendra Harshwal

जिन्दगी तुझे देखा है करीब से
उगते रवि की किरणों में,
अस्ताचल में उतरती शाम में
बचपन की मुस्कान में
यौवन के परवान में;
जिन्दगी तुझे देखा है करीब से
सांसों की गहराई में
उलझन में तन्हाई में
साकार होते सपनों में
हकीकत होते अरमानों में;
जिन्दगी तुझे देखा है करीब से
दिन के उजियालों में
रातों के अंधियारों में
अपनों में परायों में
दुनिया की सरायों में;
जिन्दगी तुझे देखा है करीब से
जीवन की किलकारी में
भौत की चिंगारी में
आने की खुमारी में
जाने की तैयारी में
जिन्दगी तुझे देखा है करीब से ॥

-पुष्प की कलम से

Life has seen you closely
In the rays of the rising sun,
In the setting dusk
In the smile of childhood
In the light of youth;
Life has seen you closely
Deep in breath
Confused lonely in dreams
Come true
There is reality in desires;
Life has seen you closely
In broad daylight
In the dark of night
In loved ones
In strangers
In the inns of the world;
Life has seen you closely
In the cry of life
In the spark of matter
Eager to come ready to go
Life has seen you closely.

-From a Flower Pen



Pushpendra Harshwal is a poet and a painter who belongs to a district in Rajasthan known as Churu. He is a part of many anthologies, such as "The Quill House" and "The Wordings." He draws on his canvas to show his true love and emotion for his skill. He believes that poetry can change the world, and uses it to inspire and empower young people through his writing. He feels very connected to everyone when he writes. He is very devoted to Lord Krishna, and his portraits of Lord Krishna reflect his true emotions. He is determined to depict the world through his paintings.

***The Pretty Lass* - Nivethitha S. B.**

We are queens in a golden cage,
A cage with vessels, grinder, gas stove, masalas.
There is a “lass” inside:
Who was.....
Branded as “queen of cooking”
Judged by “color and shape”
Ignored by “biological monthlies”
Stamped down by labels “widow, barren”
Killed by only means of “gender”
Trained to serve others
Practiced for “adjustments and adaptation”
Rapine for pleasures
And we started fighting to let go
Look at the mirror—

It's you.

Dear lass,
It's okay to quit on things.
You are good enough.



Nivethitha was born in the city, Madurai. She has blog sites where she publishes her content. On Instagram @lass_verse, she uses a pen name to publish her poems or quotes. During her free time, she only writes poems.

Shadows on the Wall - Reya No Sekai

In my bedroom,
The orange light fills the room.

Shadows dance on the bulletin board
Pins and notes clinging to its frame

The laptop and computer,
Bring me joy as I write my literary works
The icy blue color scheme,
Adds to the ominous vibe

I write my book in tranquil state
As my pen brings the words to life
The orange lamp,
Gives me the perfect ambiance

My bedroom, my sanctuary
Where I let go and express my emotions
The orange light of my laptop,
Illuminates my creative thoughts...
The shadows they cast,

In the dim light
My words become a reality,
As the pen touches the paper...

My sanctuary where imagination meets reality,
Where creativity thrives...

The light the shadows,
My notebook and computer,
It all comes together in my bedroom,
Where I create my stories...



Using a pen name, **Reya No Sekai** is a passionate writer and multimedia student who has been crafting stories for 10 years, creating works across diverse genres. With a focus on justice, truth, and faith in humanity, Reya's stories seek to connect with readers and make a difference in the world. Reya is also the author of several books, weaving together a world of her imagination and sharing her creative visions with others.

chandler - Paul John Mercida

we were walking on a clean path of cobblestone
i had nothing to say while you were in your brown shirt
i wished to tell you every word i had on my mind
but with you i'm just lost, at ease with your smile

stare at the stars but i'm afraid to hold your hand
i'm scared it may end and i know i can't bear it
i can't expect something with our one-sided love
cause i know you have nothing more to give, its fine

people stare at me and i thought they had fangs
you make me believe they hadn't and I hoped you were right
i'll be called in front but you'd make me at ease
see nothing but you, i'll see them blur around me

to the crowd i would falter, but with you i won't
to you i would taunt lions, but to them i won't
hope it doesn't end, i'd enjoy every moment
even if we're not meant, i'd still smile till the end



PJ is a Filipino college student studying at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He's currently in a program called Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (ABELS). He wrote his first novel at the age of 19 in a publication app called Wattpad. In his free time (currently on his summer vacation), he's on his way playing online games or writing poems when inspiration strikes and he also has a new novel he's currently working on.

LUCY'S HOUSE - Mr. Mobydickens

I took a trip to Lucy's house
People always said it was a tonne of fun
And it was
At first
Because
In Lucy's house, people only ate dinner from golden plates because Lucy said it made the cake taste sweeter and meat meatier

In Lucy's house, we always drank hundreds of litres of booze and someone would always end up jumping in the pool

But one night
I stumbled around Lucy's house looking for a bathroom
Instead I found a man in a hallway with a needle in his arm begging to not be forgotten

The truth is, Lucy's house was only fun when you were drunk or high, anything but ourselves
The dinner on golden plates was nothing but razor blades that we swallowed with a bloody smile
And the booze was poison that left you leaving Lucy's house sick
Yet even with this knowledge
Lucy's house looked appealing

So, we went anyway...

But one fateful day
Someone turned on the fireplace
And burned the house to the ground

And the people that were regulars at Lucy's house
the ones who had given up on their dreams
finally got to sleep
They got to dream and believe that maybe they will succeed.



Using a pen name, **Mr. Mobydickens** is a South African poet and online persona. He has written a collection titled "Devour ME" which he is trying to publish. He also co-wrote the FEDA production "Nowhere." During his free time, Mr. Mobydickens is a wiz in the kitchen and makes very good Mac and Cheese.

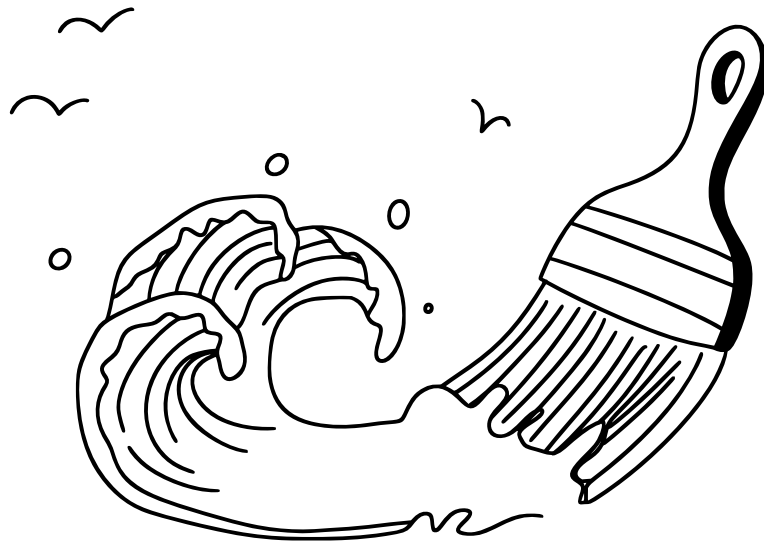
Verses of Resilience: From Brokenness to Peace - Traxia Marie

In shattered moments, I found my voice,
A poet born from paths of choice.
With broken pieces, I began to write,
Weaving my pain into words of light.

Through fractured dreams and endless night,
I forged my verses, taking flight.
The pain became my ink and quill,
Turning wounds into beauty, still.

Each verse a step towards the sun,
A journey of healing just begun.
I, the broken one, found strength anew,
In the verses that I penned and grew.

With every line, a piece restored,
A broken soul, no longer ignored.
For in the verses, I found release,
And in the poetry, I found my peace.



Traxia Marie, a University of Mindanao college student, hails from Central, Placer, Surigao del Norte. Formerly a journalist in elementary and high school, she excelled in Editorial Writing and Feature Writing. Currently, she finds joy in dancing, reading books, and crafting heartfelt poems.

DANÇA INDRIYĀNI - Gabriela Isabel Tejada-Villamor

And I followed the gait of a sage
And made naught but a fool of myself
I abandoned the prison that is me
And thus walked and danced in circles of reverie
Oblivious to The Circle which every soul was its dancing gypsy
I lifted the fallen branch nigh
Made it the extension of my arm to scratch the bejeweled sky
Indeed a grand ambition
For an added three feet of extension
And so I abandoned the ego's whim
And bowed my head to the fallen leaves with such refined prim
And the varied-hued leaves on the meadows were unmoving Manta rays
The leaves were heart and spades
The wild dead things that could not be confined to one shape
Bewitched by the fallen leaf I held—
I accepted it as if it were a gentleman's open palm
And the gentleman's hand whisked me from my soul's repose
And led me to the dance of the midnight blue



Gabriela is a Filipina actor in Manila, Philippines. Although born and raised there, it was through constant exposure to European fairytales and classics in her childhood home that she developed a love and proficiency for the English language. A Mystic and Machiavellian: she is a lover of both Gothic and Spiritual literature.

little people - Clarisse Bagood

if only i could be,
one of those little people—
who walk along streets of books,
and dig themselves igloos in ice cubes;
whose steps never quite leave impressions
on the hardwood floor beneath them.

they swing on bookmarks,
and follow the curve of forks,
listening intently for a cat to run away from—
or for an ant to befriend.

i often wonder what it feels like,
to be one of those little people—
whose one job is to look up,
and reach for the giant road of your bag to
trot upon.

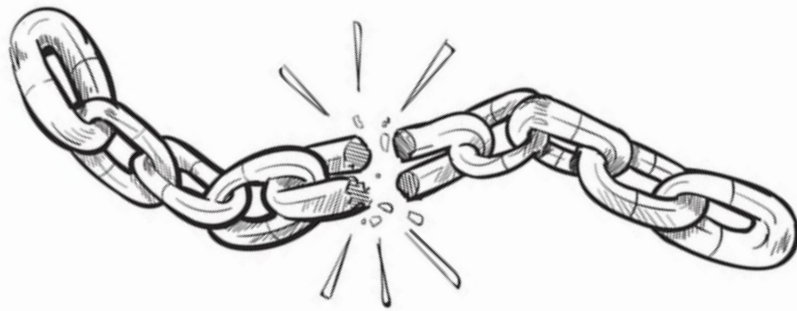
in between chairs and in your heart,
is the gay anthem of the little people;
silent as the budding tulip
and lithe as your fingers,
they sing the song of birds and temples,
of pyramids and noses,
of the 1472 marching band,
and the massive concertare;
(and without knowing just how little you truly are),
it is with a great yearning that you
learn to be quite as happy and loving
as those wee people seem to be.



Clarisse Bagood is a Filipino student, born and raised in Cebu. She was part of her high school's journalism club and has represented her alma mater in various national competitions. Despite her love for literature and the written arts, she is currently taking a degree in Medical Technology. She is currently working on a book, which she dreams to publish one day.

WHEN SHE SPEAKS OUT - Sruthi S. Kumar

In the wake of dreary thunder,
And horrendous lightning strikes,
An exasperated screech arose,
Lashes down from startled eyes.
A pouch holler irrupted with drops,
Brooded in a sorrow pinnacle built,
In amidst of deeds we gifted her,
Rains the embittered tear driblets.
Ruined and abused her elegance,
Wrapped our dreams in her grave,
Blindly trusted elixir spout always,
But the ire spurt faded a charm fall.
Imminent peril spooked inky clouds,
Roar and fulmination detonate again,
Hailed the advent of an aqua phantom,
Wiped out entire treasures she blessed.



Sruthi S. Kumar is an author, poet, artist, and professional aerospace engineer who currently resides in India. She has authored several books and is well-experienced in writing travelogues, poems, articles, photo stories, short stories, and so on. She possesses a good research background with research publications in technical sectors and she always finds time to nurture her passion for literature. She holds many achievements and rewards in the field of literature as well as art.

***In between* - Mariella Olden**

The start of the mornings,
My first flight or a ride to school,
The morning coffee,
The hues of the sky.

Most of the time,
I only like the beginning
Or so everything in between
But never the endings.

The weird state of the in betweens
something over being
uncertain and certain,
not really sad but
not exactly other emotion,
The lonely or the jolly,
the in between of an optimist and a pessimist,
and introverted or extroverted.

No words to describe.
No thoughts to linger.
No emotions to show.

The feelings to either express it
or suppress it

The in between,
what flows, flows.
Life continues to go on.

I have always wonder—
why I like to be in between
Now I realize: I want to start,
but I don't want it to end.



Mariella Angela H. Olden, 18, a first-year Biology student from the Philippines. She is a Taekwondo Blue-belt and enjoys participating in youth-led organizations. She used to be a photojournalist in High school and is now a Junior Staff writer in College. She enjoys reading and writing poems, as well as capturing photographs and documenting her life activities. Mariella is an aspiring writer who hopes to publish a book one day.

THE POET FALLS IN LOVE - Elderlen Cuello

The book of pages has begun,
Starting with a guy named from "Home Run",
He's tall and has an amazing beam
And glimmering eyes that are like daydreams.

Your eyes are as dazzling as the brightest star
That captivated me at every golden hour,
Those eyes that show your true emotions
And every second is like a slow motion.

Every time I reminisce about my written chapters,
I remembered the day my heart was captured,
The way you play a ball like you're a master,
It's the day I love you from a distance that made my heart flutter.

The existence of you always makes me euphoric,
I was enchanted by the smile that seemed magic,
An unexpected moment has been written enough,
That made me fall deeper into the abyss of love.

The rhythm of my heart knows it's you,
You caught my heart out of the blue,
Life changes the way I view,
All of these were true.

I was glad when you did a simple smile that stayed,
And the first time you noticed me from a mile away,
That I wrote after our universe collided,
Where you're the groom and I'm your bride.

One time, I felt jealous even though I had no right,
Kilometers away from both of us I have no chance,
Waiting for the right moment is a must,
Just wait for me until I can hold your hand.

I hope that one day we become you and I,
I hope that one day I can able to see you eye to eye,
The deeper thoughts of us will be able to say,
The promise that I will do, wait for the best moment, one day.

The poet falls in love with a guy like you,
This is a confession on how I fell to you,
If you read this I hope you reply,
One day, one time you can be mine.



Eli is a Filipina college student who was born and raised in San Pablo City, Laguna, Philippines. She is currently a writer from the platform Wattpad where she can able to express her thoughts through writing. She loves to read books, write, and do digital art. She believes that dreams can be true by striving and pursuing them.

A WORLD OF MASTERPIECES - Gevans Gueco

I am the artist of all the artists
and I am my own art.
My eyes are my medium
and only two colors have I known:
the color of pain in my tears
and in that of my blood.
My canvas is my face.
He bought me—my God.
My dear audience is the world,
and onto them I reveal
once, my brush, I put to ease,
once the tears had gone dry
and the blood had faded by,
when the light shines, I smile,
for what is left in me is my
one greatest masterpiece.

IN SOBRIETY

If I talked about how much I love you
while I wasn't even sober,
please believe me.
I was just drunk.
I wasn't wrong.

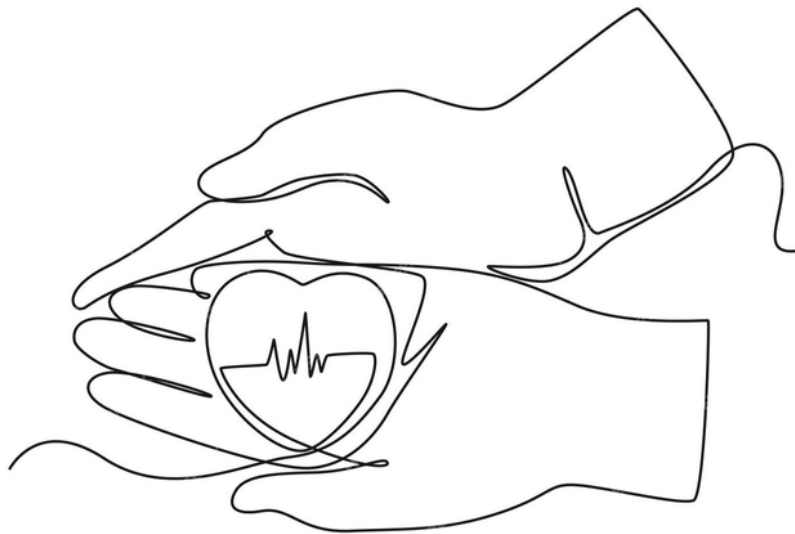
It turns out,
you can get more intoxicated from a person
than you do from a bottle of finely aged wine.



Using a pen name, **Paperboats** is a young poet from the Philippines who had been writing and editing for the Literary pages of his college newsletter--The Sapientia. He had also worked with the Kalon Maple Publishing in India a few years back and has managed his own Facebook page, Between the Lines. Right now, his previous projects had been comprised of mostly academic writing projects and his own poem anthology, set to be published by the end of this year.

***My feelings?* - Bai Courtney Love T. Akmad**

Your shades of purple and blue,
Pierce through the dark abyss of the clouds in the cold night of August,
Your spark entices me to bury my gaze within the depths of you,
Your flashes of ecstasy, like a mob that marches towards me,
Fighting the artificial lights of the city nightlife,
Your random explosion of energy,
Giving me tingles of surprise,
Your silent grumbles calm the chaos in me,
Caressing my troubled mind with peace,
You are a pretty little secret I desire to keep,
Unlike others, I hate to dare cage you within the memories of my gallery,
I would love to see you free and wild,
Your raw beauty, an unfiltered sight,
As I leave, what do I say?
Despite the suppression of everything else,
I hope you do not lose your light.



Using a pen name, **Eniat** is a Filipino college student, born and raised in the Philippines. She has been fond of writing since she was 8. She was a member of NDMU-IBED's publication club, Amyak Marista, Marist Sentinel, and Himbon Marista, as an Editorial Cartoonist and Feature writer. She was one of the members of the Collaborative team who won 1st place in the Division Schools Press Conference 2016 and a participant of the Regional level in the same year. She rejoined the competition in the year 2023 as a Feature writer and won 4th place in the Division level for the secondary category.

In Denial - Pamela Baysa

Love hurts when you realize time has ran out,
Chasing each other's footnotes full of doubt,
Here we are again with numb hands,
But I'll shake it off again and say I understand,
Again,
Have I been mistaken?
Mistakes that were in open and closed parentheses,
Tends to forget but it is what it is.
Love hurts when you're on your bed and your heart feels like a sinking ship,
Relentlessly noticing the love you unraveled felt like a poisonous sip,
Have I gone too far with saying yes more than no?
Prayed that this feeling sought for it to go,
I made mistakes but you turned a blind eye to yours,
It was not much of a loose leaf but a force,
Now home is like a forgotten language made from ancient times,
It has value but no one knows the meaning of it,
No words can describe the hurt of losing someone,
No painting can be pictured when you thought he was the one,
No note in a musical instrument can be played no more,
A scar has been prayed and been permanently sore,
He ushered me away as I fought the war alone,

Before I used to fear that he might be gone,
That day history repeats itself not carelessly,
But the cause of me,
The hardest decision ever made is you do not know if your heart wants to stay more than
It wants
It to leave.
Conundrum,
Love is a bittersweet tragedy,
But we go back to it voluntarily.



Born and reared in the Philippines' Summer Capital, **Pamela Baysa** is a Senior High School Graduate from the country of the Philippines. She participated in spoken word poetry competitions and used to write for the school newspaper in her junior high years. She is pursuing poetry writing while she is in college and posting it to her Instagram. As she continues on her literary adventure, she uses the pen name "_Unpopularish_."

An Evening Rosary with Dad - Juliana Odoño

Fast asleep, his mumble and munch set me a-grin.
His guffaw on 'wakening's music to my ears.
—To think him doddering, my heart is crushed within.

Is it something crunchy—some chips—or chicken skin?
Comedic, muttered asides, like Shakespeare's?
Whatever it is, it's sure to set me a-grin.

But as I look on him, Philip Salvador's twin,
I see white hair and gnarled hands; the dog-ears of Years.
To think him doddering, my heart is crushed within.

To lag on rosary beads is no mortal sin;
Heaven smiles on a hard-earned sleep (with amused cheers).
Thus (perhaps), his mumble and munch set me a-grin.

But as I look on him, our home's humble lynchpin,
I curse, I chafe, that I'm nothing but untried gears.
To think him doddering, my heart is crushed within.

Look then, O Soul, for those unseen weddings, wherein
Joy and Sorrow raise toasts in cups of mingled tears.
Fast asleep, his mumble and munch set me a-grin;
—To think him doddering, my heart is crushed within.



Juliana is a fresh Humanities graduate from the greatest university on Pearl Drive, Pasig City. While she had a stint as a member of the university's writing organization and has written poems and prose in her early school years, she was truly drawn to the (serious) practice of the craft in a memorable Creative Writing class she took in her last year in college. When she's not busy listening to her best friends' voice messages or helping around the house, she enjoys listening to classical music, watching old movies, reading, and listing down the next great idea for her writing.

OUR DAILY LITTLE DEATHS - Joem Antonio

Our daily little deaths
that smart like a thousand cuts:

that novel left unwrapped
 in the midst of a memo inbox flood;
that movie ticket left unripped,
 the sole survivor of spilled soda and sausage;
that Christmas ham left to mold
 in vigil burning of the midnight oil;

that morning coffee all gone cold
 and salted by a colleague's monsoon tears;
that ham sandwich, half eaten and all forgotten
 by the ring of an urgent call;
that fast that's once again broken
 by the arrival of family from afar;

that mediocre performance review;
that missing feedback and approval;
that long delayed report
 outpaced by that sudden sprint to the ER
 at the beckon of your phone call.

It's these thousand daily little deaths
 when the soul screams for its body
 though clearly knowing
 that now it's right where it should be.



Joem Antonio is a Filipino university professor, husband and father usually writes plays and short stories. His subject matter usually focuses on everyday observations on the everyman's hustle and bustle, sometimes his own. During 2020, he started learning how to write poetry, and in 2023 is learning how to make analog games.

Untitled 1 - Bianca Marie A. Caba-ong

Forgetting is my way of grieving
Grateful and sorry feelings
Will be buried no one noticing
Even if I want to reminisce good nothings

Keep no one within my reach to preach
Other than people I'm willing to risk it
I can't seem to find it without my mind and heart breaking
Thus, grieving is my way of forgetting

Untitled 2

Ever green and pristine
Clear sea and genuine
Still not enough to fill
The glass cup- instead I spill

Ever since I did and go ahead
Foggy skies clouded
Still not enough to be filled

The blurry plastic cup- instead I spill

Untitled 3

Tormenting day has come
Feeling of being in behind
Of standing in center of foreign
Gripping to last straw of sanity
To be calm
In the midst of realm of chaos,
I reach for her palm



Bianca is an undergraduate physics student despite dreaming of pursuing an art program. She has no formal training with writing but just likes to really let out her feelings. She treats her poems as another part of her drawings and essays. She likes fruits more than any food and considers herself a spontaneous person.

The Road I Will Take - Bianca Louise De Leon

I've always followed the road, straight and narrow
Never faltered, never strayed, just like an arrow
Always gave back what I got and never complained
Never did more than I should, always stayed in my lane

But ever so slightly, the weeds start to grow
The wind sways the shadows, here to and fro
And suddenly the road, that I've come to know
Had suddenly disappeared right under my nose

Lost in a daze, feels like I'm gonna throw
Head spinning and twisting with full vertigo
Which way will I love or will I regret?
Which leads to success? Why way leads to death?

In my drunken daze, I fall to the ground
Taking the tall grasses surrounding me down
And as I look down to the place I fell on
A great realization had started to dawn

The path I should take is the one that I make
Although I may stumble, although I may break
These are my choices, beliefs and my faith
This is the weight which I'll undertake

I won't be afraid, I will never hide
I'll depend on a road as a guide
I'll let myself take my own stride
For it is my road, for which I have pride

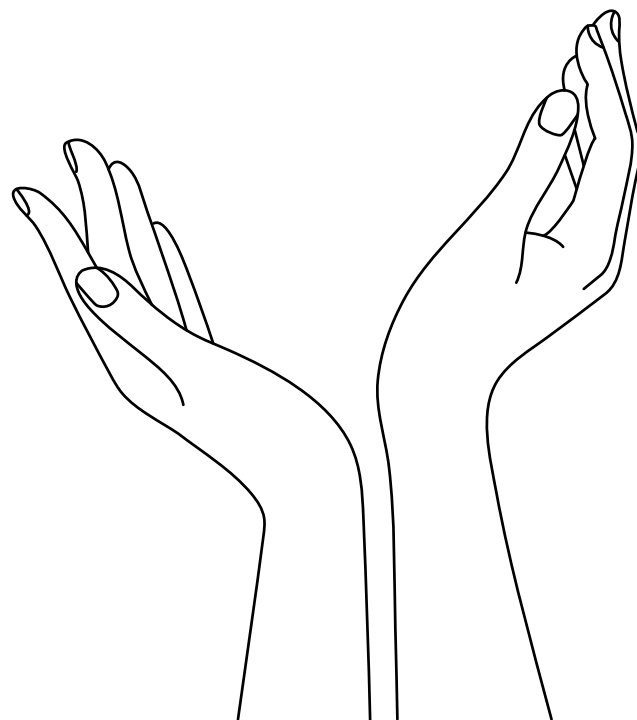


Bianca De Leon is a 16-year-old poet and writer from the Philippines. She started writing in elementary, when she joined the Creative Writing club. One of the poems she wrote in that club, "An Ode to Pigs" was published. Her hobbies include reading books, watching video essays, and drawing digital art. Her favourite animals are pigs and cats.

H O U S E O F P O E T R Y

I S S U E I

P R O S E



O C T O B E R 2 0 2 3

The real “HIM” - Aneshwa Mondal

People say they know him, they see his precious smile, how friendly and chill he is but they are unaware of his numerous struggles. They haven't observed him to be in pain. They don't know about the difficulties he has faced and the tears he has shed, but he continues to smile.

People may think he's outgoing, but they never noticed how he has distanced himself so that his suffering won't burden others. People frequently appreciate his voice, but they are unaware of the anguish he hides behind it. When he sat in the room's coziest corner while wearing headphones and overthinking how his closest loved one abandoned him. Others have made him feel self-conscious about his weight, which is why he dislikes his previous self.

But I know that never reflected his value. He shouldn't despise himself and dislike his younger self, as he was always great. People may perceive him as unpleasant, cold, and impolite when his anger issues sometimes flare up, but they are unaware of the ways in which he has been wounded and how the weight of his responsibilities has coated his shoulders. The suffering caused by the loss of loved ones, friends, and relationships, but his friends still made judgments without hearing the whole story.

Even though he was aware that people frequently criticize him behind his back, he didn't act in that way because that wasn't how he was raised. Because of all these difficulties, he may occasionally lose his temper with the people he loves and then feel more than just flawed... somewhat guilty about it. But for those who know him, his struggle will never leave him. Those who left weren't meant to do so.

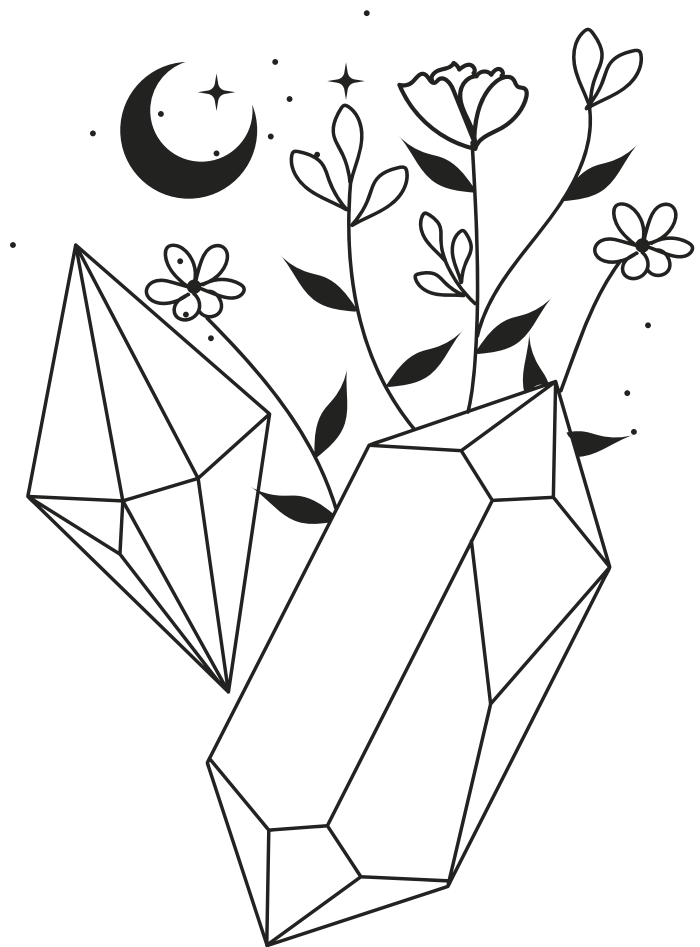
The finest part is that he accepted he wasn't perfect, and sought to improve himself as a person. When he noticed a mistake he had made, he made an effort to be the best version of himself possible so that he wouldn't repeat the same mistake again. And while he felt happy and touched when someone genuinely praised him for getting so much better, he had never presented himself with such great character because he was aware that he could do better. Isn't he unique? He is, indeed!

Even while he may not be perfect for the entire world, there are certain people for whom he's more than enough, and they are incredibly fortunate to have him. Even though it was difficult, he never gave up when the world tried to stop him by conducting an ongoing conflict between his mind and heart. He might have a short temper, and he may mess up a little to understand who really cares for him or not, but he will do anything for the people he cares for. He grew into such a mature young person in that way. I'm really grateful to him since he has been through everything he believed he wouldn't.

He had lost his bond with those he thought to have forever, which makes him think there is nothing forever but that's not true. There are some people who love him very much. He wrapped a cold piece of ice around his heart when he was younger because he realized it was too sensitive for this harsh world, yet the inside stayed soft. He experiences emotions, cries, and gets hurt, but because of his strength, he gets back up. He is a pure-hearted person.

I am so proud of him as I watch him improve, putting in so much effort. He strives to become a better version of himself every day. After a long day of work, he's so exhausted that he wants to lie down on his bed. Therefore, if he is fatigued, please take a little break before starting, don't be very harsh.

He is imperfectly perfect and doesn't need to change anything about him. He's the Moon on this wretched planet. The moon, which sheds light on everything. The moon, which never passes judgment and uses his healing abilities on others. No matter what the rest of the world thinks or says, he is more than flawless in my eyes. I just want him to know I am proud of him.

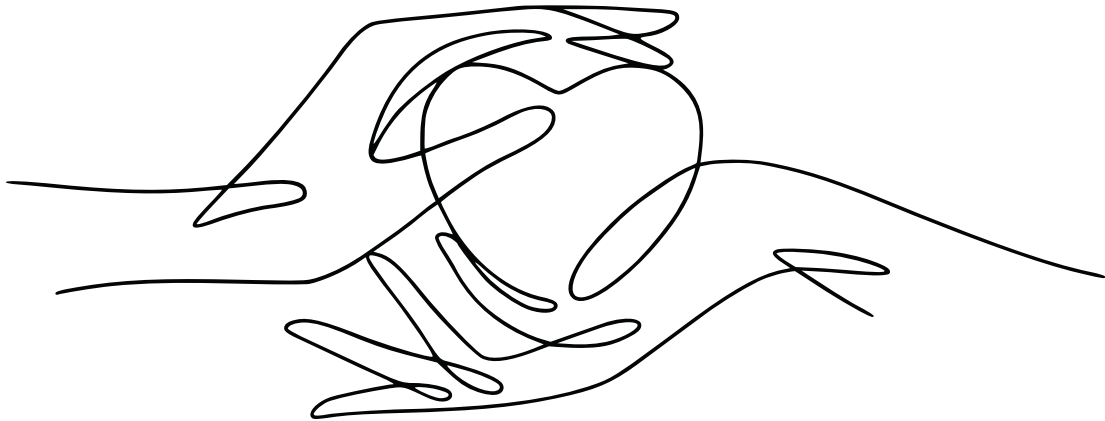


Anneshwa Mondal is from India, a normal teenager who stopped crying and started bleeding on the paper. Though it may seem that everyone may not know who you really are and will never strive to find out, you will come across someone who truly loves and cares for you. Just because you were treated unfairly in the past doesn't mean you won't find someone better. Someone will come who'll love you and accept your scars, traumas, and insecurities. Don't let the pain of the past keep you from loving because you are worthy of everything. You must take the risk of winter to enjoy spring. And when the winter finally ends, you'll notice how lovely the spring is.

A Snippet - Jerwin Oregas

I think I'm crazy. Because I can't vividly remember the things we do together but I surely miss them. I deeply and wholeheartedly sink into pain every time my fading memory of us snails its way around my head, down to my spine then to my heart. I can see you smile while we're in your room, but nothing seems to pursue. I know for a fact we did lots of things, yet I somehow forgot everything and remember just about the right things to make me still want to tuck and waste my time into the nostalgic sadness of us.

Yeah, I know I'm crazy. Because it has been months that I still wonder, why? Why do I have these snippets of you in my mind? Funnily, a snippet but with the whole damn weight of a broken heart.



Jerwin Oregas is emotional. He writes when he feels, especially when he is sad or just alone. A lot has been said about him being a strong dependable person, but deep down, he is a baby—a child who wants to be loved and shower the love that he can give. A son, a friend, and a lover of the romantic, though hopeless he is: in faith, he finds his love; in loneliness, he endures the consequence of hope.

This is how I fall in love - Emma De Angelis

All the words that will come out of my mouth will be instantly carved into your heart. I'm going to introduce you to these metaphors you've never heard of, and no, you won't hear a single cliché pick-up line from me because I am not the unfinished letter of the person who loved you before. And for that, I will be remarkable. I will carefully memorize your favorite song. Listen to a lyric that speaks to you the most, because that will definitely be the map to your soul.

I will watch your favorite movie and look over the line that left a special place in your heart, and maybe I'll understand how to take care of you. My arms will be the safest place you've ever been.

To the point that when you decide to run off, everywhere will be chaotic. Your home will give you an unnamable vibe because the only place that made you feel guarded was with me.

I'm going to write you hundreds of poems and letters. You will be at ease, knowing that even receiving expensive gifts won't matter to you anymore. Because finally, someone made you feel worthy.

But when that's over, I'm moving on to the next chapter, and you will be the unfinished one.



Emmanuelle Joy Prado, a 23-year-old from the Philippines who goes by the pen name Emma De Angelis. Initially, she used to say, "Writing was my way of letting go," but with the passage of time, her reasons have evolved. She now writes so that anyone who has never felt heard can finally find their voice and be acknowledged.

***ALMOST* - Trisha Lyn I. Tangcangco**

Does it ever cross your mind why there is a word “almost”? Why not fully have what you desire and fully don’t have it, why not it happens instead of it almost happens? Why not fully love instead of almost in love? Why not “fully found” instead of “almost found?”

If it never crosses your mind, it does to mine. A hypothetical question that I hope could have an answer and not an almost answer.

Imagine eating all your favorite foods and when somebody asks you if you’re full, you’re gonna say “I’m almost full”. Imagine your teacher asking you if you’re done with something that you do and you answer, “I’m almost done.” Think about the guy or girl you met, talked about special things with and about, then you stop with “we almost fell in love.”

As I write with lines of life, I get to create words that may answer the question I asked. Not almost for this time. For sure you have been taught by life too, well we’ve all been, but only “almost” really learned.

“I almost got a perfect score,”

“I almost got it done,”

“I almost got a pair of shoes,”

“I almost finished a song,”

“I almost won,”

Different “almost” moments, quite nearly but not entirely and exactly. I’ll tell you why, because I just had a shade of light realizing that having “almost” makes us hope for more, having our “almost” moment encourages us to do better. Maybe, in a chance and slice of butter, with a little change in the breeze of air, ***we will be all and most from here and there, and not anymore an “almost there.”***



Trisha Tangcangco is from Southeast Asia, in the North Luzon part of Philippine Island. She has been exposed to the field of writing since high school, now pursuing a college degree in Broadcasting. She mostly writes about slice of life, love, and ambition. She used to be a feature writer in English and an editorial writer in Filipino, becoming the Editor-In-Chief of her school paper way back in high school. She is just a simple nineteen-year-old girl trying to put her thoughts into words for the world.

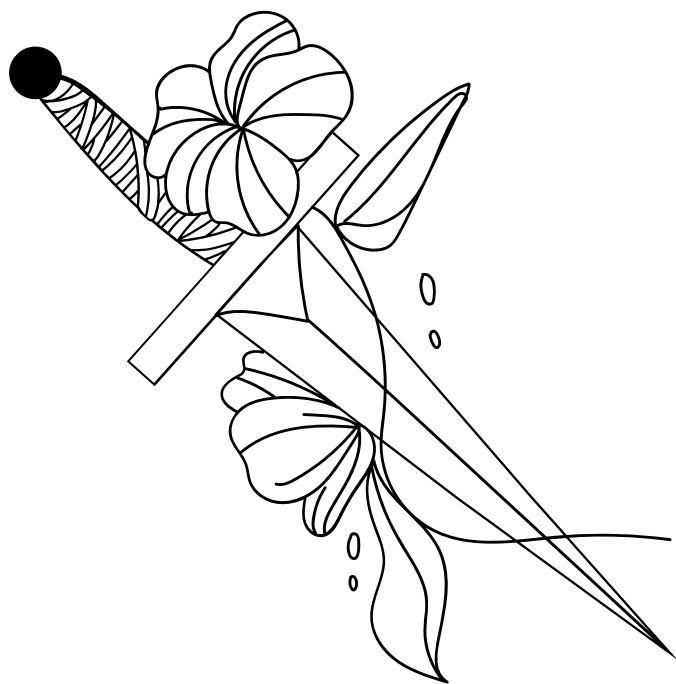
Confession of a Sinner - Alistair Gaunt

You grasp my skeleton in the palm of your hands.
Your hands are of dusk. My skull is not light—it holds all the darkness I left behind.
Behind you is a shadow of the future warping itself into something unrecognizable.
You keep holding me. The crescent moons of your fingernails dig through my bones.
It's been a long time. Will you ever let go?

You bury what's left of me on Woods Creek Road.
You want to be gentle, but you can't. This is the body of a sinner.
Time passes peculiarly. There's a crow perched upon my tombstone holding the same burgundy in its eyes. It's the blood in my mouth and the hollow in my chest.
You look down at your hands. You are holding the knife.

You flee somewhere far, far away. Your legs are made of wings and your arms have turned into feathers. Your head is still your head, except a dead dove lives in it.

Tell me, are you real? Are you god? Will you forgive me for the sins I did not commit?



Alistair Gaunt (they/he/she) is a Filipino queer non-binary poet who was born in Southern Philippines. She is a self-taught writer, with English being her third language. He is a lover of gothic, dark, and historical literature. Their writing contemplates the queer experience, violent desires, peculiar dreams, death, grief, and catharsis.

when are you coming home? - Tsushima Aori

tucking herself behind her knees, hua looked out of the bedside window, expecting a familiar figure roaming about in the garden—bobbing his head to beckon her out of the room for their morning tea.

a lone tree waved at her in his stead. the chirping of the birds drew her attention to its branches. and her heart leapt at the memory that made its way back to her. *“if only my heart could speak, it would sing just for you.”* the wildflowers danced at their feet to the bluebirds' song in response.

“you don't have to.” kou took her hands into his and pulled her close. *“your eyes tell me enough that you painted an entire life with me.”* hua tried to hold herself from laughing out of pure vulnerable joy.

having figured out like that was so simple for him to do nowadays. perhaps she had already welcomed simplicity long ago since being by his side was all that she wanted.

but it was all too much to contain and found herself laughing while she twirled around with kou. his flower crown slipped off as she tumbled over her feet. her growing smile flattered his.

the sound of giggling fits soared as kou shook his head, a smile fitted on his lips, and picked up the flower crown.

the way that she moved, *“i won't close my eyes. be in mine.”* kou stood up, dusted himself and reached a hand out for hua.

“and be in my heart.”

hua felt herself bare and exposed as she placed her palm over his. kou hoisted her back to her feet and perched the flower crown on top of hua's head.

“you look like someone who reigns over my poor soul.” he held her with his gaze this time. her chest felt like it had blossomed with the wildflowers by his look alone.

“oh, to see without my eyes.” hua shut the curtains in hopes to drown out the bluebirds' songs. when will they ever stop?



Tsushima Aori is an IT student somewhere in the 7,641 islands of the Philippines. She takes interest in all things flowers, stars, seas, and pretty views. Currently, she's typing herself away for an IT project wishing that she could put this much effort into her writing. Though, Aori daydreams about her characters more than she writes.

***Pamana* - Clarisse Bagood**

pa-ma-na

: heritage—something that is inherited

As the oft-referenced saying goes, water has memory.

My mother named me Jalea, the weary one, she said. As if living up to my namesake, I was the feeblest of three: I had a slight build, a pallid, almost ghostly complexion, a sluggish gait—I had all that it took to be frail.

Sometimes I would go to the river by the foot of the village and catch fish. On one occasion, I slipped on a rock and promptly hit my head on a slab of wood which then served as a foothold for onlookers. The second that it took for my vision to go black was all the time the world needed to force a stream of water down my nose and into my mouth. I struggled against the unrelenting current of the river, my limbs heavy and my eyelids even heavier. Some part of myself saw only the vicious whites of an agitated flood above me and thought, perhaps this I where I belong. In what can only be called a miracle, my hand caught the tail-end of a branch, and with what remained of my strength, I hauled myself back over the land.

I had been scared to go back home that evening. There was a gash near my head that needed mending and a hollow in my stomach that needed filling. So, I stayed by the riverbend.

Jalea, I thought. *I am Jalea*.

I vaguely remember seeing a trail of ants feasting on a Maya bird in my peripheral. My mother's name is Maya, and many say that I look like her. My mama is beautiful. She is absolutely breathtaking. I have been told that we have the same eyes, one can even say that we share the same interests: dance, literature, birds. My siblings and I—we had grown up humble, though I have heard that it had not always been that way for mama. Her movements sometimes betray hints of something lavish and shrewd. Her back has always been straight when all others from the village have been hunched. Her fingers have always been poised when sewing and her neck beautifully arched when singing. A free thing is what they used to describe her. However, I am not sure if that is truly so, for one evening, as I indulged in the thrill of being both weak and a child, I sneaked out of our home to sit by the river. Heart positively full and mind congested with thoughts of liberty and free rein, I ran as far as my chubby, stout legs could carry me. Just as I rounded the corner, a shrill and piercing shriek cut through the night. I abruptly stopped and squinted my eyes. I could barely make out the shape of my mother, her body half in the river, beating into nonexistence the water—as if she truly could if she tried hard enough, releasing a life's worth of outrage and upset.

That memory is something that I often go back to, and as the ants devoured the Maya, a morbid crimson seeping back into the grass, such was the object of my reflection.

My mother was an angry person.

But what did I know about being angry?

I remember trudging back home, head throbbing and feet aching. It had been the longest that I had been gone. My mother was sitting by the stairs of our porch, her hands and eyes wet, with what—who knows.

She took my face in her hands, my skin tingling at the sudden onslaught of the cold, and stared at me. She felt for the gash behind my head and searched for whatever else it was that needed searching. It was an endless loop of probing and seeking and her eyes had never once dried. There was something about her tears that put me off. They were angry. And they were oozing into my skin and into my mind and into my heart.

This anger was not mine, but it may as well have been.

What did I know about being angry?

Not much, but perhaps, enough.

My mother pulled back and stared, once again, into my eyes. I could see myself reflected in hers, just as clearly as I knew herself to be reflected in mine.

Jalea, I thought. I am Jalea.



Clarisse Bagood is a Filipino student, born and raised in Cebu. She was part of her high school's journalism club and has represented her alma mater in various national competitions. Despite her love for literature and the written arts, she is currently taking a degree in Medical Technology. She is currently working on a book, which she dreams to publish one day.

The Guardian - Rodino Encarnacion

Laughter. Sadistic, maniacal laughter.

Yes, this is what I heard as far as my memory served me. The cackles and jeering taunts weren't there anymore. Nor were the subjective voices that relished at my corporeal misery for speaking against the majority and leaders. There was only stillness. Absolute, complete silence.

I saw my drifting hand in the darkness of the chamber: the fluid was congealed and tinted red as it seeped out of my abdominal wound. Its scent was like rust as I attempted to raise my head out of the supple pillow where I laid. A throb of pain shot all over my frame as my voice groaned in the dimness.

“Hush.” A soft voice told me as a smooth hand caressed the left side of my face. Its thin fingers outlined the contour of my head as another painful groan came out of me. It was then that I observed the surroundings before me: bluish-white beams filled the windows, revealing the jagged floors and walls. Rubbing my hand on the floor, I found the splintered texture and aroma of wood. Glancing above me, I found my guardian: she was adorned in a cloak that unveiled her graceful arms, thin neck, and small chest. She gazed outside the window with thin lips. And then I noticed her hair: it was shaded black as her delicate fingers traced the side of my throat.

“W-where are we?” my lips stammered as another wave of soreness hit me.

“In the Sacred Mountain,” she answered, her hand on my chin. “You're safe here.”

I clutched my chest and lifted myself before another grumble escaped my lips.

“You better rest.” she placed her hand on my chest. It soothed down as she glanced down at me with a smile before returning her gaze to the window. Sensing the safety in her presence, I closed my eyes and welcomed oblivion with her guidance and protection.



Rodino is a young author hailing from the Philippines. He writes both prose and poetry during his leisurely hours and those that had been inspired by earlier fictional works.

With one book under his credit, he hopes to convey his emotions and sentiments on daily topics and emotions.

I pray the day I'm most afraid of will never come. - Mariella Olden

It has been a year since worry came into my mind, and memories flash with it. Whenever I think of future possibilities, most, but not all, indeed happen in reality as if I have the power. So every time that thought lingers in my mind, I always say no and disagree. You are the best person that the world could ever give. I am thankful that you are a part of my life and that you play such a significant role. Until now, I have found answers to my questions about why this has to happen and why we should experience this, but all were left unanswered. I was the worst back then, but you were there in my darkest moments. You taught me and showed me great things. I may have been a black sheep in the past, but now I've changed. I am not who I am right now if it's not because of you. You are a role model, very supportive, and the greatest fighter I've ever known. I changed and became the best version of myself, and it is all because of you.

I don't want to live life in agony and pain anymore. I don't want to live life miserably again. I don't want to live in remorse and regrets. I don't want to go back to the old me. I don't want to reminisce about scenarios we could never do again in the future. You've molded me to be the best; I don't want that to go to waste. I don't want to fall and crumble in pieces. I don't want to experience heartbreak. I do not want to keep living without you.

I want to keep living this life if living means always being with you. I want to continue living life to the fullest and us being the happiest because I know you are always there beside me. I want you to keep guiding me. I will always like to hear your voice and inspiring thoughts. I want to celebrate my wins and every success with you. I want you to see me shine the brightest. I want you to be present when I finally win my dream. I want you to witness everything and say, "See? I told you everything will be worth it in the end. I am proud of you."

We've come this far. May we keep overcoming everything.

I pray the day I'm most afraid of won't ever come because losing you would be the end of me.



Mariella Angela H. Olden, 18, a first-year Biology student from the Philippines. She is a Taekwondo Blue-belt and enjoys participating in youth-led organizations. She used to be a photojournalist in High school and is now a Junior Staff writer in College. She enjoys reading and writing poems, as well as capturing photographs and documenting her life activities. Mariella is an aspiring writer who hopes to publish a book one day.

Ares - Bai Courtney Love T. Akmad

I'd give up the world to have you back. His lines still echoed in my head. 5 years since I last saw him. Looking back at the tall man, drenched in the merciless rain. Who am I to judge, when I was also merciless enough to break up with him? Not having you was better than putting you in the palm of my tyrant father. He never gave you redemption, hell even a chance! In his eyes, your societal status placed you in a position of never being enough.

Believe me, I was about to fight for you. I do. But it would be at the expense of your life, my love. A hero in the eyes of many with your indestructible faith in humanity, clever tongue that pierces everyone's minds to open up more, and your brawny frame that shields the villagers' naive minds. An extraordinary man that would grapple both the moon and the sun for me. Only to be wiped out by a greedy man who claims to be my dad.

I caressed your short curls, now stiff from the cold April winds. Your brown pupils are blankly reciprocating my gaze, devoid of life. I run my wrinkly hands to your strong masculine Greek facial features. Your high nose bridge, sharp jawline hidden in that beard of yours, and thin lips, I so longed to kiss. Touching every inch of your face, reaching out to whatever life was left. White minute crystals sticking to the terrains of my rough and extremely creased palms.

I let out a sigh of disappointment. It was of no use. If I had only warned you. If only I had not met you. You would probably be forging your masterpiece, the swords you wanted to make, remember? Showing them to the kids and teaching them how to fight for what was right. I glide my hands to his beauty for the last time as I make my return to my house, what was once our home. My chest tightening at the sight of him. Depressingly similar to when I first left him. He, who was once drenched in the rain crying, now stood still in the breezing hours of darkness.

For he was a statue of a man who once lived, now only a monomyth that travels in the tongues of the wise old men. *I'd give up the world to have you back.*



Using a pen name, **Eniat** is a Filipino college student, born and raised in the Philippines. She has been fond of writing since she was 8. She was a member of NDMU-IBED's publication club, Amyak Marista, Marist Sentinel, and Himbon Marista, as an Editorial Cartoonist and Feature writer. She was one of the members of the Collaborative team who won 1st place in the Division Schools Press Conference 2016 and a participant of the Regional level in the same year. She rejoined the competition in the year 2023 as a Feature writer and won 4th place in the Division level for the secondary category.

FREED FROM MOM - Gevans Gueco

When we were young,
We've always imagined what it'd be like
To move away from mom,
To settle and be independent,
To steer our life the way we like it.
Freedom was all we wanted.
We think it sweet and liberating.
And now that I've had it,
Here's what I learned.

Freedom tastes like strawberries and all the sweet food I wanted,
But, most of the time,
It also tastes like 2 pieces of dried fish, or a single boiled egg, or a bland coffee, or a stale bread past its expiry date, and sometimes even, just my saliva when there's nothing in that pantry.

Freedom smells like flowers in bloom in the air but most of the time,
The only flowers are those of the scent of fabric conditioner wafting through my nose on a long-dreaded laundry day, which could've been a rest day, but well, is not.

Freedom looks like beautiful scenery, but also, an empty room you come home to after a long tiring day. It looks like a phone in heat due to long times of binge-watching series just to partially compensate for the lack of dopamine in your brain, somehow fooling you that you're somehow happy being all by yourself. It also looks like a very cold and empty fridge.

Freedom feels like cash rubbing on your hands on a depressing payday, perhaps, due to the inevitable fact that you know that sensation won't last and would have to slide away to all the bills already posted on your door.

There is sweetness in freedom that turns to despair from time to time. We're confused why, after all these times that we thought we'd be happy once we had fled from the chains and shackles of home, were actually not... Not completely at least. Sadness grows and longing only gets stronger...

...all because we never realized,
That all these times,
The chain we left at home
Is the hug of a mom.



Using a pen name, **Paperboats** is a young poet from the Philippines who had been writing and editing for the Literary pages of his college newsletter—The Sapiaentia. He had also worked with the Kalon Maple Publishing in India a few years back and has managed his own Facebook page, *Between the Lines*. Right now, his previous projects had been comprised of mostly academic writing projects and his own poem anthology, set to be published by the end of this year.