

LITERARY MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2024

HOUSE OF POETRY



ISSUE 2

Cover Art: Rana Zaky

Editor's Note

Brian Chan: Founder & Editor-In-Chief | Rana Zaky: Cover Artist



To all of House of Poetry's readers and authors,

Thank you greatly once again. House of Poetry has grown significantly since the publication of Issue I, now showcasing 72 authors from 11 countries. In the new year, I hope the magazine branches even further not only to lend opportunities to more authors, but to introduce new aspects to the website and publication, including a blog and an art section!

I'm also planning to incorporate themes starting in Issue III as well as monetary contests!

I hope our readers and authors enjoy the new publication!

-**Brian** (House of Poetry)

Rana Zaky is an Egyptian-American visual artist and content creator. Her art typically contains underlying themes of mental health. One of her most famous pieces, Atlas, dissuaded thousands from suicide. Her goal with social media is to inspire people to perceive themselves more kindly and feel empowered to create. She has worked with authors, musicians, and clothing companies, and her work can be found in interviews and magazines. She is currently an undergraduate student studying cognitive sciences, with an interest in bridging the gap between education and social media to create more accessible education for disadvantaged communities.

Visit her work on social media [@birdtart01](https://www.instagram.com/birdtart01)

Cover Art Medium: Gouache and Colored Pencil on Paper

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

I S S U E 2

P O E T R Y



J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 4

Unyielding - Lateral

Is it wrong to speak
Our minds with freedom's delight
In these troubled times?

All live in fear's grip
Speak out, court demise, they say
In these times, we're scared.

Shall we all give up?
Bending our will to their whim,
Like mindless, lost sheep.

Would it be so bad
If we expressed ourselves free
Without their firm grip?

Do you remember
Heroes from the distant past?
They opened our eyes.

The truth is out there
We must be brave and scream out
We'll never give in.

They say shut your mouths
I say scream loud in their faces
Their threats mean nothing.

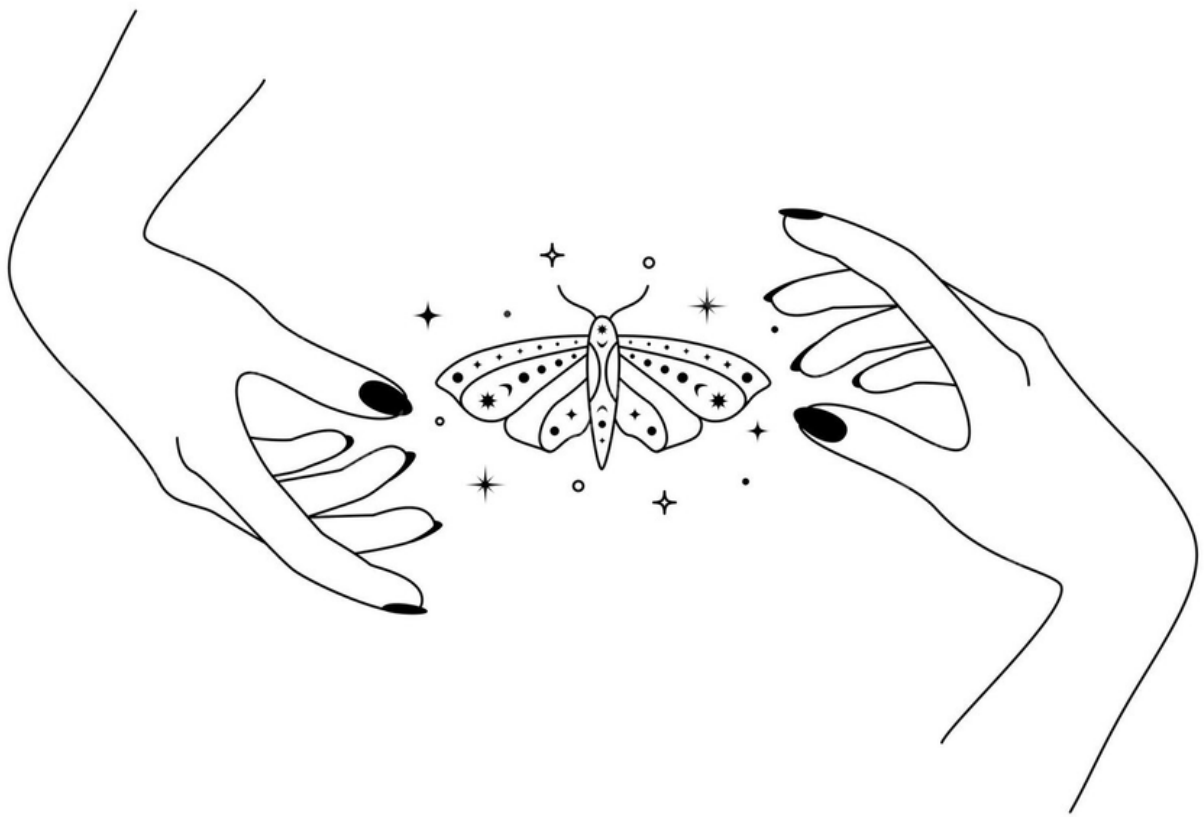
But would it matter
After we're gone, nothing changed
'Cause we didn't speak up.

Death is our own choice
But to speak the truth to all
It's our legacy.

We don't need to run
We don't need to hide from them
The power's in our hands.

Know your enemy
Speak your mind and have no fear
For we are not weak.

So, let's all stand up
Let our wings spread and we'll bloom
The truth sets us free.



Born and raised in the Philippines, **Lateral** is a spirited writer whose words dance off the pages.

With a notable presence in his school's newspaper and various online publications, he weaves tales that capture the heart and soul. When he's not immersed in the world of literature, you can find him delving into classic video games, sketching artworks, and crafting stories that spring from his vivid imagination.

Better - Void

I want to be better
I will be better
Not at everything
But for myself and my family

I want to be the pillar of strength that lifts away my Mother's frustrations
I want to possess Power that will make my father confident enough to let me lead
I want to be the Hero of hope that is seen to always save my Siblings' day
I want to be the Phoenix of blue flame that will always rise my family even greater
from its own ash

With my Body
With my Soul
I will always be the Pinnacle of man that will make my family whole
Read my Mind
Feel my Spirit

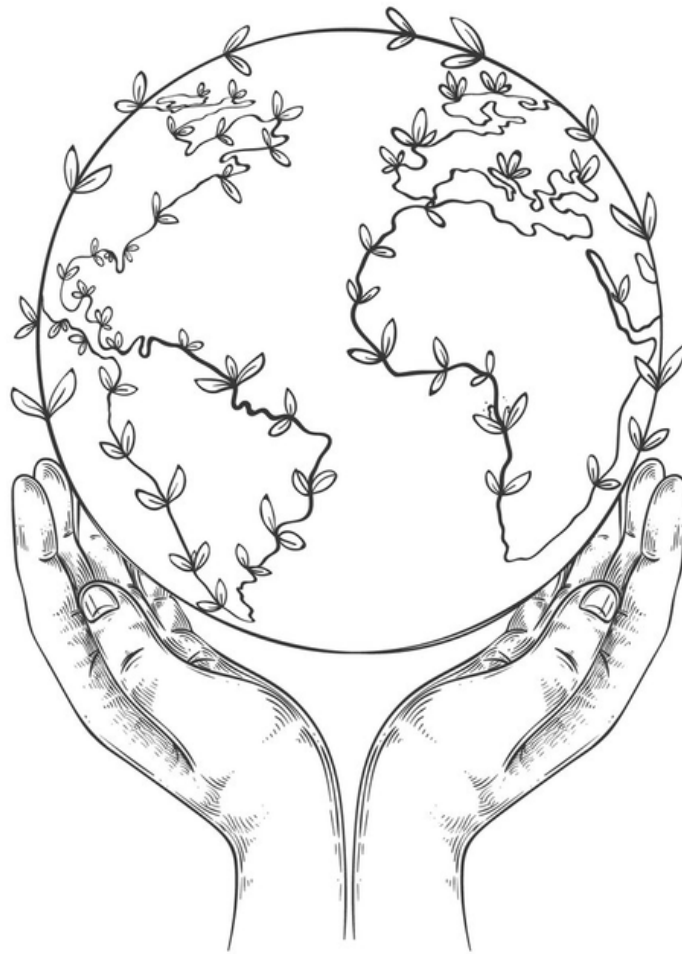
My body is a Perfection that has no limit

With each drop of sweat falling to the ground
That is progress on its own that makes no sound
When silent, that is when my body shouts out loud

Ridicules become Inspiration
Insults become Compliments
Doubt becomes Goals
And laughter becomes Smiles

With my Flaws
I will be Better
With their unchangeable Laws
I will be Better
Even if I am the Cause
I will be Better

As I prove to all why I will be better
I set this goal understanding the consequences of this mission
I will be my Family's Atlas
Bearing the responsibilities and Suffering of my Family upon my back
The Deity carrying the sins of the fallen
Let the hatred strike me
Let their problems consume me
As long as I have my family, that is safe as I see
I will no longer be better
Because I am already better



Oratile Fodi is a African Student who was born and raised in Port Elizabeth located in South Africa, where he studies in Nelson Mandela University. He is a Mentor within the same institution, he uses his art of poetry to deal with the problems of Students by listening to what they have to say and translate it into written form in a poetic format. He studies information technology in Software Development, while also working out in a gym to keep his health in check as another form or inspiration.

How They Carved Me Out of Eden - Tashiahavah

Back when the world was flat for me,
The moon rests beneath the land I live in,
While the sun smiles at me playing in glee,
The good people sleep where the stars are in.

Back when I only know of the calm lake,
Where lilies reside and swans wander through,
Oblivious of thy death I will forsake,
Of dry river, of dry soil and bland hue.

How I believed to wish in Santa Claus,
As I wait for midnight on December twenty-fourth,
Hands raised in bonfire, it was him I lost,
Who built the warmth, two months later in a port.

Like the day lit by the sun that grew trees,
Or the rain that waters the plants in need,
How winter froze my blood till my heart stopped,
It changed from rain to a catastrophe.

It was the tears cascading and the cold dawn,
Where the moon lost all its shine from the sky,
I was blind as I fumbled along the lawn,
Near the riverside where little girls cry.

For eleven months, she mourned for her love,
When she met him near the port with their doves,
They sailed the seas till they lost their second,
Who was hanged when she lost all her beacons.

Back when the world came to its dimension,
Turned a sphere that I cannot outrun from,
As the fire burned all my deemed perceptions,
Till it caught a pinch of my heart, it numbed.

Oh, to wear a gold band and diamond ring,
Wear that white gown, a bouquet of roses,
But those blaming, and shouts of regret ring,
Like a seedling creeping through my gashes.

Oh, the way I sulked over a bird's death,
Till I mourned for the demise of my soul,
How long will these wounds be treated as pets,
When they have knives to cut the smiles they stole.

I was bruised but they clad me rings of thorns,
Poking poison through my veins deep in my flesh,
'Till it paled the core in me that was born,
Like wildfire leaving nothing but ashes.

'Tis the night, 'tis the dark who lured me through,
To the forest of dead trees by the cage,
Now I long to light with the moon till four,
And belong to the stars like it's golden age

I wish an unending time in my chamber,
Where they cannot get me in sunders,
For the world I thought was a calm lake,
Turns out to be a deep sea of wild waves.



Tashiahavah is a 20-year-old student pursuing a BS in Information Technology. Hailing from the vibrant nation of the Philippines, Tashiahavah is a tech enthusiast by day finding solace in the world of bits and codes. Yet, when the sun sets and the textbooks are put away, another world awaits—one where words dance and narratives unfold. Recently, she has taken her first steps into the world of writing, sharing her musings and tales with a growing audience on Instagram. Her writing reflects her love for language and the way words can be twisted and turned to convey diverse emotions and stories.

3 in the morning - Ronalyn Castro

Ticking clock,
Silence overwhelms my heart.
Some stars are still shining,
But the moonlight slowly dims
As the sun soon starts to rise,
And some will receive their “good morning”.

It's 3 am...

My alarm clock will soon start to wake me up,
But my eyes are widely open,
Like my heart,
Still long for a certain touch.

It's 3 am, my friend,
And my thoughts are flying,
Trying to figure out,
How life lately,
Still feel so empty and foggy.
Life is not boring,
But I think, I need some thrilling,
Maybe that's the reason why,
I have this routine every morning.

3 am....

Just the right time for some thrilling

But hey,
What am I really doing,
Old folks said,
I can find my old friend,
Where is he?
But I guess he is waiting,
at 3 in the morning.



Rona is a Filipino teacher born and raised in the Philippines. She was a public school teacher at Binan Laguna and she has loved reading poems since she was a kid. She also loves to sing, and she is currently learning to paint using watercolor and acrylic as a hobby.

Pandora - Sophie Gonzaga

The gods outdid themselves the moment they created you—
Hephaestus sculpted you with clay born from Gaia herself,
Knowing that you would be his finest display of artistry.

Helios willingly plucked a ray of sun
To bestow unto your hair,

While Selene took the perfect crescent from her crown

To place upon your lips.

Asteria had saved the brightest stars to keep for herself,

But the second she saw you,
She decided to scatter them in your eyes,
For she knew none was more worthy
To hold them than you.

Apollo and the muses sang for you,
So your voice would forever imitate their melodies

Each time you speak.

Aristaeus fed you with his first harvest of honey,
So you would remain forever sweet,
And Athena pressed her head to yours
So you would remain forever wise.

Hades and Persephone picked out their favorite soul,
The sweetest one that lived among Elysium,
And breathed it into you
As their blessing to the mortal realm.

And Aphrodite gave you a heart
With an infinite capacity to love
When she claimed you as her child.

Each of the Gods gave you a gift of their own
And it is for this reason that you are their favorite creation.

You are a wonder of this world,
A marvel of this earth,

The greatest treasure hidden in plain sight
You are beloved by every god in every realm,
But no immortal heart could hold you closer
Than the mortal one that beats in my chest.



Sophie Gonzaga, born and raised in the Philippines, is a Senior in High School and studies Humanities and Social Sciences. She currently serves as the features editor for both publications in her school, as well as a staff writer for the Outland Magazine. Her work has been featured on HaluHalo Journal's blog and she self-publishes her work on Instagram (@paperthinplanes) and WordPress.

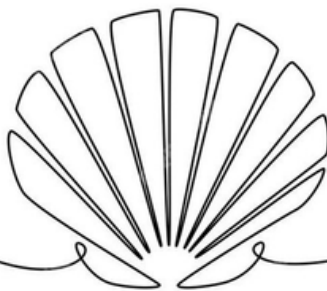
***Shore without Shells!* - Mariya Siddiqui**

The snipping shells within the sand,
Invading the water and land,
With tints of colour, screaming with waves,
Has anyone heard what they say?

Some might be hollow from within,
But they chose to stay surrounding the bay,
Can't the empty souls learn a lesson to fill,
The space within their heart so gay?

From high to low, they sink and float,
Never giving up on the shore,
Relative to the falling and rising graphs of our lives,
Oh, why can't we be thankful for our sight?

Ascending world is for what we strive for,
But forget to focus on the little sheets of signs,
The signs of beautiful adjectives that shine,
In front of us but can we stop being blind?



Mariya is a college science student, also dedicated to literature and her poetry. Her realistic poetry works have flourished across many publications and have given her the motivation to keep writing and making people self-aware. Now she wants to be a part of *House of Poetry* too with her words.

***symbolism.* - Carol Simango**

his hands are symbolic
of all of the internal wounds i once
harboured.
the openness of his skin,
the layer that was once beneath
and each scab
is for the experiences that are unclean
and the aching blues that are unfading.

his hands are symbolic
of the days that i slave away.
the dryness of his skin
and its hue that wastes away
is for the times i permitted my body
to outstretch its bounds
without an ounce of mercy.

his hands are symbolic
of what i fear to become,
yet that which i am moulding myself
to be.
the flash of pain that accompanies me
when i glance at those hands
is just the same as that,
which follows me like a child in the womb
when i reflect upon myself.



Carol Simango, born in Harare, Zimbabwe, is a third-year Finance student at the University of Johannesburg. She began writing in 2013 and discovered poetry through Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. She plans to publish a poetry book and explore the use of poetic language in horror novels.

***Stranding* - Brylle Austin C. Viernes**

I lost my heart in the sunless sea
amongst waves crashing by, and flotsams wandering.

Listening for a voice whilst pondering
how she stole my heart; she, the one I call the sea.

Her solitary wave emerges from the horizon's edge,
The foamy crest a canvas for emotions to enhance.
Her gentle approach a silent whisper in the vast expanse.
A symphony of solitude, to this my heart pledges.

As you near the waiting shore, a hush befalls the scene-
the world holds its breath, caught in a moment serene.
We gently touch upon the sands, and then you recede
with a melancholic grace taking a part of me.

On the water's surface, my soul knows no rest
as she carries with soft caress, from crest to crest,
a promise now buried underneath the horizon;
the celestials alone are witnesses to our prison.

In the quiet aftermath, the sea and soul entwine.
A pensive mood deepens like footprints in the sand,
as the wave's departure leaves stories in its hand.
Both left with traces of what once I thought was mine...



Brylle was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. He took up a degree in BS Pharmaceutical sciences and is now working as a Quality Control Laboratory Analyst. When he's not busy doing chemical analyses inside the laboratory. Writing poetry and scenic photography are his usual hobbies which he takes during his free time.

(SUBLIMINAL ORGASM)

- Marcelo Moreira

Maggots and worms lead the dance
Dumped on the scene of narrow streets
Evoking from the skies banished pleasures
The cult of male and female vices
In a dark room, deep romances
The wild side of bugs and beasts
Orgies and chaos to the intruding eyes
Worldly frequencies, customers peek

The sons of Bacchus
Penetrate the alleys of the stage of deceit
Transgressing corners of the astral body
Dual energy, profane theater
Real lust, mental suicides

In ethereal fields, quantum reflections
Erotic rites are thermodynamics
The psychic ogres of the Dantesque orbs
The impure dreams of pain and desire
Filthy holes of human glory
Perverted passions, sick loves
Of harmful acts, abysses of Tantra
Vital energy, depressing actions
Ties of the mind, insane blindness
Negative channels, decadent reactions
From the fluids of Hell to Roman madness..

ORGASMO SUBLIMINAR

Larvas e vermes conduzem a dança
Largados em cena de ruas estreitas
Evocam dos céus prazeres banidos
O culto aos vícios dos machos e fêmeas
Num quarto escuro, romances profundos
O lado selvagem dos bichos e bestas
Orgias e caos aos olhos intrusos
Frequências mundanas, fregueses espreitam

Os filhos de Baco
Penetram nos becos do palco do engano
Transgridem esquinas do corpo astral
Energia dual, teatro profano
Luxúria real, suicidas mentais

Nos campos etéreos, reflexos quânticos
Ritos eróticos são termodinâmicos
Os ogros psíquicos dos orbes dantescos
Os sonhos impuros de dor e desejo
Buracos imundos da “glória” humana
Paixões pervertidas, amores doentes
Dos atos nocivos, abismos do Tantra
Força vital, ações deprimentes
Laços da mente, cegueira insana
Canais negativos, reações decadentes
Dos fluidos do Inferno à loucura romana..



Marcelo Moreira was born in Salvador/BA, Brazil. He is an actor and poet; a visceral, intense, profound and underground artist. Winner of the "2nd Arte Impressa Editora Sponsorship" in 2021, in the Poetry category, with the launch of the literary work "MODERN SLAVES SOCIETY" (Arte Impressa Editora, 2022). Besides several achievements and honors in different countries since 2012, he is a singer and performer and considers himself an artist free from social standards and conventions.

***Sarocho's Song* - Beverley C. David**

I resurrect a new each day
This game of life, I try to play
Life is strange though
Mountains of highs, valleys of low
Even when my dreams come
They disappear with a beating drum
I'm scared but I'm fighting
To hide the shadows there's always candlelighting.
How they scarred me, deep, did you see
I lay a fallen tree
Things they said, things they did
I thought I would lay silent under that wooden lid.
But my heart won't stop *beat beat beat*
Resounding continuously on repeat
I'm scared but I'm fighting
To hide the shadows there's always candle lighting
This war I face,
Pounded by texture and grace.
I wanted to disappear, I begged it
The more I needed to stay, still. Sit.
Then I heard, that voice say,
Defeat is not for today
No matter what they say or do
They can never take the brave out of you.
As delicate as the morning dew
I resurrect each day anew.
I'm scared but I'm fighting
I'll wreck of pretty scented candle lighting.



Beverley is a South African Indian Female born and raised in the heart of KwaZulu-Natal. She is only a recreational writer with a passion for poetry. Beverley enjoys reading and getting lost in music with lyrics of great depth.

You are my Love - Riri

One morning,
when the sun was just starting to lay its hands upon the corners of the Earth,
you asked me with a heavy breath,

“What am I to you?”

You are the first peak of the sweet sunlight rays
the first time the sun had risen over the horizon.
You are the colours of red that flood the early morning sky,
the blooming of flowers as the dawn meets the morning light,
and yet you are still more than the sunrise.

You are the aroma of coffee sipped for breakfast,
the smell of a book when its pages are flipped,
the sweaters worn on a cold dawning morn,
the smell of the morning dew,
and yet you are still more than the beauty of the beginning of day.

You are the comfort of a hug,
the cosiness of a cuddle,
the sweetness of a kiss,
the integrity of a promise,
and yet you are still more than a late morning's warmth.

You are what is in between the afternoon and the twilight,
the swaying of leaves upon the wind,
the damp of a breeze,
the painting-filled sky,
yet you are still more than the setting sun.

You are more than the mediocrity of day,
more than the in-betweens.
You are more to me than all the little things of day
I have ever loved.

One morning,
when the sun was just starting to lay its hands upon the corners of the Earth,
you asked me with a heavy breath,

“What am I to you?”

I smiled,
came closer,
and whispered,

“You are my love.”



Cyril, pen name **Riri**, has spent 10 years weaving tales that dance off the pages. A quintessential small-town leading lady, she's still waiting for that grand plot twist in her life. She's neck deep into sitcoms, and her three feline companions reign supreme in her home kingdom. When not scribbling masterpieces, she dives into books for the sheer thrill of it. A literary maestre with a dash of sitcom sparkle.

Dead By The Morning - AJU

I will be dead by the morning
And my auntie will tell people
That it is because I stopped praying
She will tell the visitors
How I didn't have enough love for my mother
Because I was able to give myself the enjoyment I needed
To cope with her passing

I will be dead by the morning
And my family will be crying
Probably lost about the reason
Why I want to leave the world so early
They wouldn't know
How I want to stay in this world
But not in this house that is not built for me to fit in

I will be dead by the morning
My friends will cry about it at first
But they will soon make a joke out of it
Like how I must be having a good time in hell
With all the questions about god's existence answered

I will be dead by the morning
The visitors at the wake will probably talk about how wasted my young life is on me.
That neighbor whose kid has always been insecure about me
Would probably say that's the problem with too intelligent people
And that she's thankful none of her kids were as mad as me

I will be dead by the morning
I was never an environmentalist
But if that's what will happen
Then what a relief
The world is one less of shit
A little 8 billion more to be fully cleaned



AJU is a Filipino college student currently taking up a bachelor's degree in journalism at a state university in the Philippines. Being a 19-year-old, an age many consider to be too young to call old but also too old to be young, he continues to thrive making sense of the world. Faced with the fear and confusion of what the future holds for him, he decided to make his first submission in the *House Of Poetry* Issue II for 2023 to challenge himself in the field of writing.

Water, Fire, Ice, Wind - Judy Gasgonia

Love

Like water

When flowing

Soothing.

Anger

Like flame

When ignited

Dangerous.

Indifference

Like ice

When manifested

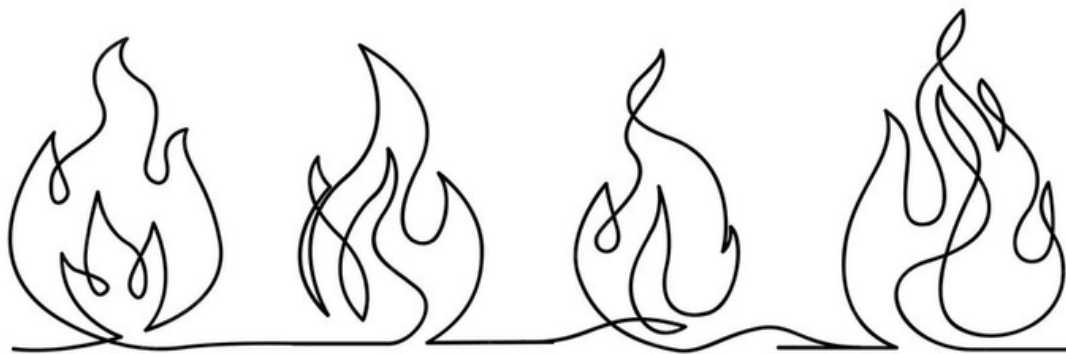
Biting cold.

Lies

Like wind

When blowing

Suffocating.



Judy is a Filipino educator and editor. During her free time, Judy reads, listens to music, cooks, gardens, and writes poems. One of her poems was published in the University of the Witwatersrand's ITCH Creative Writing Journal.

Lenses - Jaja Latorino

It happened so fast
You didn't even give us time –
Time to think
Time to feel
Time to see
How you were hurting so bad
How you were crying so sad
Oh, you were such a fragile, young lad

Like a bubble carefully blown to form shape;
Like a thin sheet of paper processed so well;
Like a glass made so delicately;
You were as fragile and as vulnerable
One wrong move determined everything
We looked away for a short while and *swish* it went
Vanished into thin air –
Fleeing through the songs of the wind

I wonder:
Was anyone in particular in mind
When you were swaying with the line?
Were you thinking about us
When you wore that suffocating necklace?
What were the words your mouth uttered
When you became voiceless and helpless?
I didn't hear you

I wish I had heard you

Your smile shone so bright
When your heart was so dim
Your laughter gave us light
When your thoughts caged you in
We were here
We were there
Weren't we always here?
Wasn't I always there?

We didn't see each other
You were looking for an escape
I was looking for you
You entered the huge maze
I got lost in your tracks
You were lost
I was lost
But now you're not

You chose the most unfair route
The wide gate where everyone loves to visit
I couldn't find you
I couldn't see you
I searched for you
And before I knew it
You exited the maze

Like the speed of light
Floating high, flying in the sky
You were gone

And I couldn't save you.



Jaja is a girl full of big dreams with little energy to move. As someone who recently graduated from a university in the Philippines, she spends her time reading a lot of different forms of literature and exploring different types of art. Science and art have always been a part of her life and writing is found in between. She enjoys anything that is blue and delicious

We Made a Boy Out of Salt and Cyanide - Kevin B.

We made
A boy
Out of salt
And cyanide

I thought
He was special

But he left
A bad taste
In my mouth

The way of the rush
The stop of the heart

The ocean ombre
The cut sand

Out pops a boy
From a castle
The tide
Didn't want

A boy who tastes
Like almond

Who was bitter
Before he
Was born

A boy who goes
Down smooth
And stays with you
Until there isn't
Any you
Worth staying for



Kevin B is a writer and poet from New England. They have been featured in *Molecule*, *Wireworm*, *Hare's Paw*, *Qu*, and *Barely Seen*. They were selected as Featured Poet of 2023 by Natick Arts, and they are the author of "The Front Door."

AN OUTCAST - Broken Montague

Behind the waves of a raging sea
There is an oceanic love for you and me.
Just as these waves reach the shore,
You have touched me, as I've never felt it before.

Under the torrid, cerulean, mundane sky
These translucent droplets on your skin dry
Rays of light reflect inside your deep-set eyes.
Displays an unfathomable soul yet undisguised.

Along the endless, brilliantly white-sand beach
Your smoothly veined hand, I try to reach
Collecting not seashells but sun-kissed memories
Our souls are confined inside our reveries.

I thought that, just like rolling waves, it would last.
In our subtle realm, I unforeseeably became an outcast.
Just like the seascape, our love is therapeutic.
But infidelity made my life not worth living and malefic.

Behind the waves of a raging sea
There is an oceanic love for you and me.
Just as these waves left the shore,
You left me with the pain I've never felt before.



Broken Montague is an educator from the Philippines. As an amateur poet, he draws inspiration from his life experience. His broken past allows his emotions and his soul to fall from the pen. He is a dreamer and a believer in love, in all its wonderful forms, which is the primary concept of his poems.

Variation on:

“'Variation on a theme by William Carlos Williams' by Kenneth Koch”

- Colton Claye

This is just to say:

I have cleared
the forests
that were in
your country

Which
you were probably
saving
for their
ability to
return water vapor to the atmosphere
and for
the beings
who made their home there
and for their
adeptness at
absorbing greenhouse gases

My bad.
Their pulp
and the monocrops growing in their place
were so instrumental in
providing me with
products that help me to
pass the time away.



Colton is a songwriter, poet, visual artist, and hunt saboteur raised in Milwaukee, WI. His poetry has been published in a variety of print and digital forums. He has attended workshops led by Anne Waldman. And he sends you his warm regards.

Dream Palace - Koushik Banerjea

Stepping off the edge of the known world
life imbued with possibility.
Drama as spectacle, ellipsis for verse
Floating past early morning mist.
Beasts of our timbre and bearing
Rust leaf swarm miraculous clearing
Paper monarchs luminous in their tryst.

While we can only gawp, insects uncontainable
Our faculties tiny next to mud skippers.
Swamp veterans eyeing us with disdain
Outliving our vanities to crumble
Our buildings, our certainties, our empires of self
Absorbed as nothing by spirits true wealth.

You smell good, should thank me, we're not meant to fly
Under radar our presence yet detected
Lined faces, creased tongues, on lips something wry.

Engine cuts out, swamp murk blotting red
Reverence late remembered mud patterned by tail
Raptor siren call, the whole swamp living jail.
And you see them, see luggage, bloated contents floating past
Wreckage kissed by algae deep noncommittal verse.

Dryland you crave, a vision subsiding
Machine age stoics their culture dying.
Resting place submerged its moorings, not that
Some prophet foresaw this, all that is solid melts into... what?

Lethal wave, unbidden
This fetid, soupy grave.
Ancient eye, Mesozoic witness, meets yours with no pity.
Swamp placed beyond time, its face this city.
Jungle foliage no anger, those words have been said
Elsewhere, at other times, manifest in the dead.
Souls honoured with fineries or pared back to mere concept
Lamentation fire water elements under breath.

Giant orchids baring teeth
Primal droplets wreckage cleaned
One world touches another.
Unwilling near dark she leans to her companion
Tongue deliciously unforked, a hissing.
He withdraws from the equation
Fear loathing something else missing.

Ruined grand vision, dream palace its foyer.
Light-abundant intermission.
Resplendent art deco a feast effulgent
No darkness in this lobby, no Kali Ma destroyer

Tongue lolling she examines the timorous.
Myth smuggled into social.
Well lit abnegated
Her secret not vocal.
And for that moment prefixing the herd
Stampede for the exits, yet silent, no word.
Though accompanied once more, yet alone in her mind
Tongue ticking, she heads back through the door.



Longform usually keeps **Koushik** busy. He is the author of two novels, written while still the primary carer for his late mother. A former youth worker and DJ, he also previously worked as a journalist and academic. That's the glass half full. The one that's half empty can sometimes barely cope with life. Hard to say which version will find its way to the words at any given moment. The key takeaway being that mercifully there are still some words. Usually.

***embody* - Paul John Mercida**

kaleidoscope in the eyes of the unknown
unraveling the mystery behind it all
rest assured, behind the love i've known
to me, to the smile of my home

where words become part of the void
and the growl of my guts began to grow
to hold your hand is to mend my soul
and to tell you everything
i'd tell you everything i'm hoping for

and i love you
much a poetry
can't comprehend
it can't be memorized
it can only be said

and if i said he's my universe
it's an understatement
but if i looked into his eyes
and tell him he's a penny
i threw on a wishing well

he'd be the key to making a wish
for the heavens to see
to the hopes i knocked on a tree
and that wish was him
that'll make a difference

cause in the first place
how did a man
become an ocean
that makes up
my whole world?



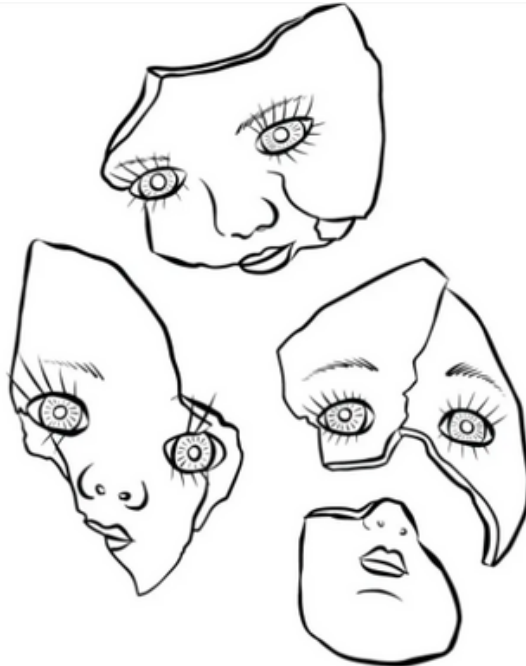
PJ is a Filipino college student studying at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He's currently in a program called Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (ABELS). He wrote his first novel at the age of 19. In his free time (currently on his summer vacation), he's on his way playing online games or writing poems when inspiration strikes and, for his novel? Well—it can wait.

The Agony of a Gazan Kid - Julia Andrea Razon

The little one awoke
to a popping noise
objects roaring out
flying across the skies
a sound that loud
could silence the town
as architecture fall
into gentle ruin

Truly far from his supermarket toy
that soothes him

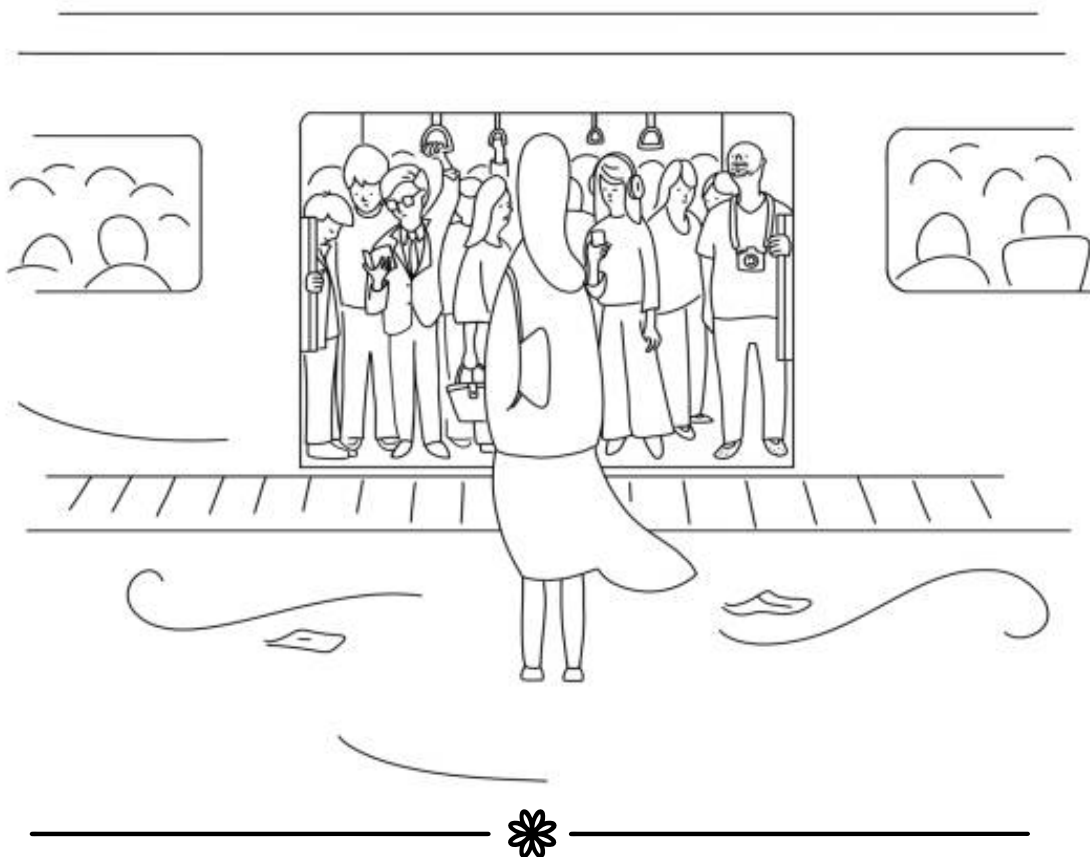
He learned when
nobody moved, nobody talked.
rockets can be cruel too.



Julia is a college student from Manila, Philippines. She is a staff writer for their official school publications. Currently, she belongs to its literary section. In her spare time, Julia reads books, plays the piano and the guitar, and writes poetry. She is also into journaling and does it every day as part of her routine.

***Train Melody* - Liz Benitez**

Every stop
marks a dozen doors opening—that suave swoosh-like
breaking apart floodgates, letting
chaos creep into
silence’s pristine crevices.
Speed slices scenery into blurs; without notice
the machinery runs through a million lives: each
heart holding a different set of flavors,
hidden in tongue ciphers or
wrapped beneath a hundred faces.
I have lived so many half-lives,
held hurt in all my different hearts. But always,
a melody rings, doors swing, heavy feet surge in
and out of the vein—always my blood runs with love for
each mystery life brings.



Liz Benitez writes to remind herself of her place in the family of things. A devout lover of the humanities and social sciences, she yearns for more days spent in the company of books, video games, and other forms of self-expression.

***Lullabies* - Reshnee V. Tabañag**

When our language gets exhausted,
when we find no signals
to express a visceral,
we sought home
to lullabies.

We long for the comforts of the hearth
in forms of soothing hums.
In poetry,
in music,
in an art,
to the echoing silence
and in the screaming unknowns.

Until we're dredge
in a rhythm that lulls,
to a beseeching whisper of rest;
'til we're drowned by a solace so deep,
'til we learn that phrases are insufficient
and words run out of abilities for a definition.



Reshnee V. Tabañag is a Filipino education student born and raised in the lively and tropical archipelagic Philippines. Presently, she writes and manages her Medium blog (diaresh.medium.com). As someone dreaming of becoming a published author someday, she continuously believes that stories have to be told or else they die. Chasing sunsets and journaling are her hobbies during her leisure time. Of course, Reshnee reads a lot of World War narratives; she's a history and culture geek and most of all, coffee is the source of her life and creative imagination.

The Disconnected Strings - Purple Pink Novelist

Oh, Crisha, dear Crisha,
I long for the radiance of your smile,
Every gesture you make, every while,
I yearn for your return, this time to reconcile.

Oh, my Crisha,
What keeps you distant there?
You promised your comeback, you shared,
The joy it brought, how I cared!

Oh, my Crisha,
You're finally here,
In my embrace, my eyes well up, I fear,
A torrent of emotions drew near.

Oh, my Crisha,
Time's tide has swept, revealing change's art,
We're adrift, apart, souls pulled apart,
What catalyst has wrought this depart?

Oh, my Crisha,
The gap widens, we're no longer in sync,
Was it the land or emotions that did link?
Mysteries of transformation make me think.

Oh, my Crisha,
My cherished mother, confidante in despair,
I poured my heart, yet you seemed not to care,
Unheard cries suffocated in the air.

Oh, my Crisha,
Your worth surpasses any measure,
A nurturing soul, a treasure,
Something altered, diminishing our pleasure.

Oh, my Crisha,
If only you could perceive,
You're not a failure, please believe,
I seek solace, a reprieve.

Oh, my Crisha,
If I could express without disdain,
But the burden within, I refrain,
Mom, your attention is what I sustain.

Oh, my Crisha,
Let happiness envelope your days,
I promise no more ways that dismay,
Grateful for your persistent loving displays.

Oh, my Crisha,
Lastly, I beg forgiveness to impart,
For feeling disconnected, torn apart,
Let's bridge this chasm, and restart.

Oh, my Crisha,
For years, I've yearned for understanding's plea,
Not to label you but to set us both free,
Let's traverse this journey, you and me.

Me, I would not like to lose you.



Mx. Mary Charisse, also known as the Purple Pink Novelist, is a Philosophy Graduate who possesses a profound love for wisdom and finds solace in writing. Renowned for her written works and research that champion her advocacies, she also operates a blog under the name 'Creative Life of Maria.' This platform serves as a repository for her poems, essays, and critiques on important issues. While she critically engages with social matters, her poetry reflects her emotional depth and sensitivity, revealing her as an expressive conduit of personal experiences.

Navigating the Labyrinth of Life: A Poetic Odyssey - Dikshita Dash

It is meant to be welcomed with open arms
for its power to unlock hidden charms.
Who says it would give you an alert?
The almighty has decided to send this as an overt: we are the warriors meant to fight
because these are the challenges that make us strong,
right?

Do not get carried away by the misery
and stand strong to unlock life's happiest treasury.
It might be like the darkest night
that often lowers our sight but these are the challenges that make us strong, right?

Sometimes we have to break all the norms
for it might visit us like a storm
but, with all the courage and faith
we have to pave our way to witness the success as a spectacular array
till the fear in our mind decides to take flight because these are the challenges that
make us strong, right?
Every time it enters our life, it gives us a chance to rise to reach our dreams to touch
the skies
it always carries the opportunity that helps us shine bright
because these are the challenges that make us strong, right?



Dikshita Dash has written for their school magazine, as well as had a few poems published in books. Now, they are looking for an opportunity to get exposure to national and international magazines as well!

Midnight Musings - Richa Nayak

The starry night returns,
Carrying in its arms a multitude of questions.
I blink, and the darkness blinks back,
Searching for answers that the world lacks.

My sleepless eyes bore into the void;
So many visions, yet no time to dream.
They say you're too paranoid,
But can they answer my thought's stream?

I scribble along in my notebook,
Paper giving way to what the mouth can't;
I imagine a world under my regime,
where there exists no shall or shan't.

People are weird, I contemplate.
Because how can a stranger teach you how to feel?
Why do we kill and fight and hate,
When instead we can love and heal?

Too many queries, too less time;
And out there roam those busy minds.
Do we not have a while to spare,
To think about humanity's despair?

Oh! But these are just some mundane words,
The musings of a little girl,
She doesn't know the truth of this world,
Of how some questions are better unanswered.



Richa is an Indian high schooler who's always had a keen interest in writing and the feeling of freedom and escapism it provides her. She generally writes about her late-night feelings and musings and weird thought processes—thoughts that couldn't be converted into speech but rather into some strokes of pen. In her free time, Richa likes to read (a lot), draw, cook, and of course, daydream about her fantasies!

War's Insanity - Arnaldo-Lóbbii

Innocence and hope erased, the missile's deadly flight,
A hospital reduced to rubble, in the darkest of the night,
Children's cries echo through the smoke and fire's blaze,
Innocence lost in the chaos, trapped in this deadly maze.

War is madness, where the innocent bear the cost,
Why do we let it rage, the answer is often lost,
In the shadow of conflict, the poorest souls must bear,
The burden of a battle, they never chose to share.

Seeking meaning in the chaos, the world is left in awe,
But war's true purpose, we often fail to draw,
For cruelty reigns without reason, it reaps destruction's toll,
In the tears of children, we find the essence of our soul.

War is insanity, a brutal, heartless fight,
Leaving behind a trail of sorrow, a never-ending night,
In the faces of the young, we see the grim truth's clarity,
The cruelty of war, without mercy, without solidarity.



Arnaldo-Lóbbii is a Journalist and actor, born in the city of Belo Horizonte-MG. He has already participated in poetry collections and his first book was published by Ópera, with the title: "I sell poetry, but I give you the right to download it". The author loves surrealist literature and also writes scripts, chronicles, and novels, being a lover of the seventh art.

***post partum* - Andrea De Luca Italia**

lasciami silenzio tra gli scarti
bagno di sangue
che non muta in reliquia

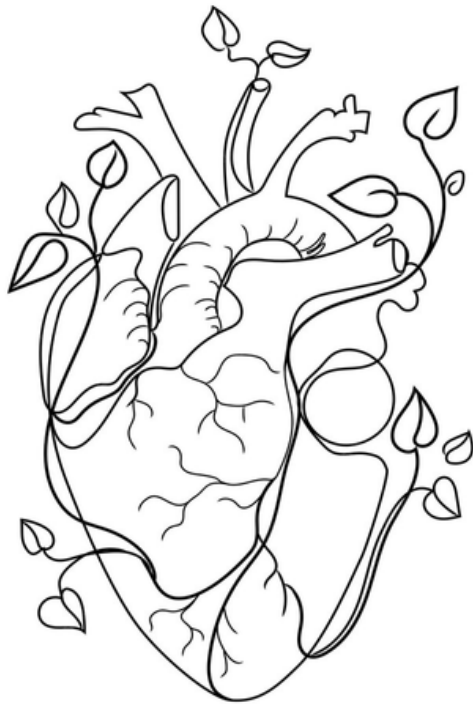
let me silence among the wastes
bath of blood
not turning into a relic

tento—l'alieno chiasso
la nuova chimica—ancora per un passo
differire
(la vita esige e bracca)
spina su spina su
spina spacca le tempie

i try—the alien noise
the new chemistry—just one more step
to differ
(life demands and pursues)
thorn upon thorn upon
thorn smashing temples

corona di perfezione
non richiesta

crown of perfection
unasked for



Andrea De Luca Italia was born in Rome, in the same year "(What's the Story) Morning Glory?" was released. One of his poems and a short story have appeared, respectively, in the e-books "Sunday Poets: Il futuro, uno sguardo sul mondo che verrà" (La Stampa/40K, 2015) and "Domani Ti Scrivo" (Mondadori, 2020). In 2022, his first collection of poems, "stasi inquiete", was published (Eretica, 2022).

Love is a Rainbow After the Rain - Asteria Celestine

I still remember the day
Exactly at noon time
When it was drizzling so heavy
The clouds formed nimbus above the sky
It was so dark, slowly eating portions of blue sky
And I'm feeling blue
Doesn't have a clue
I can't answer why
The wind just blows past by
Leaving moist raindrops on my window glass
That blurs over my vision twice
Like how a teenage love spoils me with butterflies in my stomach
As his touch teases me for wanting it more
As his eyes locked on mine
As his hand landed my spine
And that ineffable connection that gives me
Hundreds of reasons to smile
That love is as colorful as a rainbow after the rain
It's creative, it's beautiful
But sometimes it makes me crazy and insane
It traps me, it makes me think that love is not plain
The more it gets colorful the more it's beautiful
That kind of love is what young lovers want
But love as a rainbow after the rain
This love does not last.



Rhea Marielen Teodoro, known by her pen name Asteria Celestine, is a 23-year-old lady who finds peace in writing poetry. She is passionate about playing with metaphors and imagery to tell her untold stories. She was born on August 26, 2000, and raised in a place known as 'Where the Mountains Meet the Sea', the Province of Antique in the Philippines. She was mentored by her high school creative writing teacher and hailed as the champion in poetry back in 2018, competing against 10 different schools. Currently, she has already graduated with her bachelor's degree in journalism. In addition, she's writing and creating spoken word poetry. Now, she is motivated to write more pieces for her collection.

palambang blg. 6 (random no. 6) - Ken Montalba

mata ay ipinikit, umaasang mahimbing
subalit ayaw patulugin ng diwang gising
kaisipa'y magulo, tila kumakalansing
maaaring matalim ang nais iparating

eyes are closed, expecting to doze off
but the awakened mind refuses to calm
thoughts are chaotic, clinking, and clashing
perhaps wanting to convey something sharp

Sa pagmulat ng mata sa umagang kay liliim
malayo ang tingin, buntong-hininga'y malalim
dadaan ang araw na matulin at malihim
inaksaya lang ang oras, marahil ay sakim

as the eyes open to a dim morning
the gaze is distant, and the sighs are deep
the day rushes by swiftly and sneakily
time is purposefully wasted, such greed

hindi matanto kung saan nga ba nanggagaling
ang tinig na naririnig na walang kahambing
nakatatakot na sa kawalan nahumaling
mapanlinlang ang isip, pwede ring sinungaling

unable to conclude where it emerged
a voice heard, nothing to compare to
frightened to be obsessed with the boundless void
the mind is deceitful, deceptive, delusive even

Sa pagbalik sa banig ng hangaring taimtim
Umaasang makatakas sa hawla ng lagim
sa buwang-liwaway, mawawala na ang dilim
asam na liwanag, iparanas, ipatikim

returning to one's deepest, earnest desires
dreaming to escape the confines of terror
at the break of dawn, darkness will vanish
longed-for light, let it be experienced, tasted

**basahin muli, paitaas*

**read again, upwards*



Ken is a Filipino graduate student majoring in Education. He started writing back in his college days as an outlet for the daily stresses and struggles. Entering the workforce limited his time in writing and focused more into poetry. As a language enthusiast, he wants the Filipino language to be known in the global setting and hoping that people would be more interested in the Filipino language and culture. Currently teaching physical sciences, writing serves as his break from all the numbers, formulae, and sometimes the kids.

Monthly Musings - Justine Espiritu

Gazing up at October's sky
Sped by with winged riots
Ricocheting whimsy
For fates-filled bargain
Wind wonderous whirlwinds
Situated below
Stand specters still grounded

Bared brashness bind blinding
Autumnal auras
Safe havens inhabit
Iron turned ice
Turned incomplete inquiries
Never to be answered
Nor abandoned anecdotes
Neither yet nulled

January jolts
Held captive in jars
Aloft simple symphonies
Lids idle left
Along shelves of shale static
Stack statements abound
Ruins run ruminations
Unruly rhymes

November and December
Try kindly to March
Follow narrow trimmed trellises
Tilled a tad too much
Neath soil and roots

Running ragged re-coursing
To meandering banks
Mixing minnows mingling

Amongst castles and caverns
Cacophonous creations
Cozy tied dens
Dares divinity abound



Earako is a second-generation Filipino immigrant born and raised in Calgary Alberta. They have written both original and fandom-specific pieces, both of which can be found on archiveofourown.org. When Earako isn't writing they enjoy cooking, sewing, and occasionally playing one of their numerous instruments.

Jy is weg
- Lourika Vorster

Ek kan skryf daaroor,
hoe ek jou mis,
en hoe seer dit is,
maar dit gaan jou nie terug bring nie.
Ek kan dink oor jou,
in die hoop om dit te verwerk,
maar dit gaan my net mal maak.
Ek kan praat oor jou,
jou lag, jou stem, jou drukkies,
maar dit gaan nie help nie.

Niks gaan help nie.

Ek kan hier staan met die wêreld se
blomme,
maar jy gaan nooit weer dit kan vat nie.

Jy is weg,
en al wat ek nou het is n harde steen met
jou naam op.
Al wat ek het is herinneringe.
Al wat ek het is tranes.

Ek soek jou terug,
maar jy is weg,
en ek moet dit aanvaar.

You are Gone

I can write about it,
how I miss you,
and how sore it is,
but it will not bring you back.
I can think about you,
in the hope of processing it,
but it would just make me insane.
I can talk about you,
your laugh, your voice, your hugs,
but it will not help.

Nothing will help.

I can stand here with all the flowers in the
world,
but you will never be able to take them.

You are gone,
and all I have now is a hard stone with
your name on it.
All I have is memories.
All I have is tears.

I want you back,
but you are gone,
and I have to accept it.



Lourika Vorster is an Afrikaner from South Africa. She aspires to be an author in publishing after she finishes studying. Words have always been of importance for her, they hold a lot of power. She loves analysing and learning words. She can be reached at:
lourikavor@gmail.com.

Mother Is All Good - Michelle Wang

“I will try to make this winter jolly,”
I told myself before the first snow
But when the time came, I could not convince myself
With the dreary weather and my weary bones, I could do any good
So the winter passed with a bitter word and a quarrel here and there

When spring came, I thought my mood would change
But found that the rain could always ruin my day
It made me miserable, and in my sorrow
I took to utter solitude, forgetting those who
May need a kind word or two

“Surely, summer will be bright and better”
I said one night as I turned in bed
The days grew longer but my temper grew shorter
There was no forgiving when the warmth was so never-ending
Angry words were thrown, and grudges formed, and summer was no better

When autumn came, I looked to my wise and watching mother
She said, “While you are spontaneous and sensitive and childish yet,
Nothing is all good, you must not forget.”
“But fight those enemies inside your head,
Face them head-on, at least a million times before you are dead!”

From that day, I made a solemn promise
That as the seasons change, through snow or rain
Carrying my burden, I will keep on and keep on
So the autumn passed as a new leaf turned
And thanks to Mother, a valuable lesson was learned



Michelle Wang is a 19-year-old student studying at the University of Toronto, and she greatly enjoys writing poetry in her free time. Her poems have been published in Issue I of House of Poetry magazine and The Undressed Society magazine. Michelle started writing poetry in high school, inspired, at the time, by song lyrics. Music still motivates and influences her poetry, and some of Michelle’s other hobbies include playing piano and singing.

Her Azure Orbs - Akshaya Varshne RG

Tears in her azure eyes,
Memories tinged with choler,
She is her own story, strength, and pride,
Forsaken,
At four, what does that kid know?
Longing for their love with hope in her eyes,
It fades away as hours pass by,
Wishing for them to hold her tight when she's broken,
Neglected, yet bright as Venus,
Her laughter, her dreams, hold power,
Which can ignite the whole blue orb,
She's born to shine as bright as the sun,
Let her find her identity,
Don't hinder her,
A boy and a girl,
Similar yet differences between them,
With wonder and curiosity,
She hopes to make them proud,
Just for them to tell her she's a disappointment,
Notions aside,
Let her be herself,
Don't neglect her just because she's born enchanting,
Celebrate her, cherish her,
She deserves all and more,
They labeled her delicate, weak, and small,
Yet she's a warrior, ready to stand tall.
Girl child, she's a sunbeam amidst life's gray.

Break all stereotypes
In this vast city light,
Let her find her own place.



Akshaya, being in a brown family, is always on her toes and strict about culture and education. She needed an escape from reality, so that's when she started to write. She wrote and wrote: Now she is unable to put poetry down. Apart from writing, she also has a strong passion for cooking, and she is also a basketball and badminton player in school.

The Guy and His Guitar - Roslen Faith Managuit

The moment these dreary eyes close,
The past hunts me like a curse.

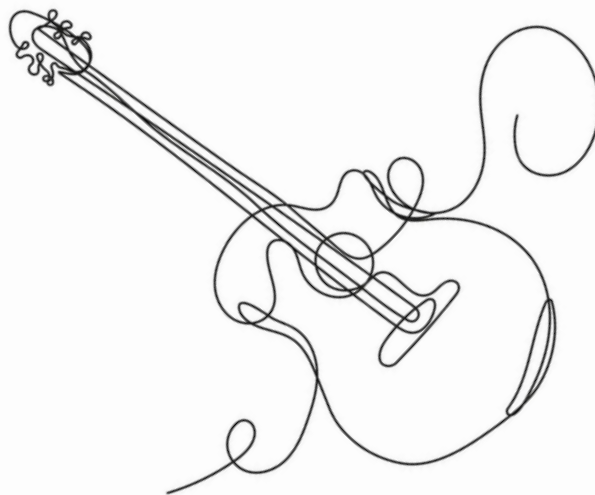
The guitar in his hands,
He strummed a melody.
Singing to his tune,
It became my favorite.

His dark eyes looked at mine,
Uttered the words I desired to hear.
Our feelings were mutual,
I must respond, but no words came out.

Tears fell as I opened my eyes,
This heavy heart is hard to carry.
Oh, woe is me,

Missed the chance and was too late.

I wish to forget, delete this memory,
However, it's like a curse I cannot break.



Roslen is an 18-year-old girl a Filipino citizen, born in the Philippines. She is currently finishing her last year in high school. Writing has been her passion since she was a child, and uses poetry to express her thoughts.

Carry On - Queen Ofentse

At times of woe when shadows deepen
When the news has spread that I have fled
Worry not and don't be in despair
Stand firm and take the next step
Nay, if you are still in hurt and struggle to rest
Remember the laughter and glee we shared,
The memories we shared, the art we made

But if thinking of me grants you despair
Don't mourn for me and add insult to injury
Let not your hearts be filled with sorrow,
Rather our recollection of moments too bright

So dry your eyes and hold your head high,
Remembering all the laughter we've shared.
For though I may be gone from sight,
I'll always be alive in your heart.



Ofentse was born and grew up in Rustenburg, South Africa. She has written many poems but hasn't been published yet, until *House of Poetry*. She also likes to identify as an artist because she makes art during her free time.

Damage - Akhona Junior Mhlungu

Who would have known two words would cause such damage
It's over, that's all she said taking off her ring and putting it on the table
A tale one would tell with tears filling tons of jars, coming out
Jaws clenched and tears tempting to run down jaws
He would be damned to be this damaged and damned he was so he was damaged
It seemed and deemed to be the last breath of their marriage
And it was all because she couldn't change whilst it was easy for her to change him
Change him and make him forget about his kids and his family
In the end, she couldn't change for him just like he changed for her

All he ever wanted was someone to put him first and him her first
He invested his all and got nothing in return, now the cat was out of the bag
And boys will be boys changed to girls will be girls
He counted his chickens before they hatched and he paid the price
And the price was damage, he invested his all for her to manage
And she became savage and pushed him down to fall
Fall down the cliff of heartbreak after she made him fall for her
And after he fell for her she infected him with damage
But as damaged as he is, he still wonders and thinks of what they could've been
How many children they could've had, after all the damage he still loves her
He still longs for her morning kisses, he still longs for what they had
Fighting through the damage and through the pain he takes his phone to call her
He calls her for more, more damage

This is not just a poem; this is me voicing out
We are a sad, broken generation and it's time
It's time to change for the better

Let's stop damaging one another's
Damage.



Akhona Junior Mhlungu is a young dramatist, who is still being trained in the field of Drama at the Durban University of Technology. A writer who is part of the communal book club and the DUT book club. A text analyst and critic, playwright, scriptwriter, poet, etc. The list never ends.

I Am The Moon - Mikayla Bianca Dovale

I am the moon.
Only to be seen in the noon,
where I the enchantress,
and you, the grieving artist, bewitched.
My soul lives for the evenings,
a time to search for life's meanings.

I am the muse for many,
artists who create through grieving.
For those who are starving.
Oh, My love thinks I am beautiful.
Only from afar,
where I am accompanied by stars,
and the sky is dressed, appearing fanciful.

My heart begins to grow sorrowful,
because, my dearly bewitched, my love is not aware,
I am full,
and can pull the tides of the seas.
I am half,
and mostly in the dark.
I am only a quarter,
and at times, barely anything at all.

I too, have a dark side.
Alluring as it may be,
up close, my love will find,
I am filled with craters.
One must be a lover of the night,
if they wish to love me too.



Mikayla Dovale, a South African University student in her 20s, was born and raised in the city of Johannesburg. She is an artist, an aspiring novelist, and a poet. During her free time, she enjoys painting, reading, writing, and acquiring more skills such as learning foreign languages.

how bad do you want it? - Tanya Carlos

You run and chase and leap after goals,
Validation, certificates, shiny gold medals, leaping for joy
You beam on stage, look over your peers,
Against them, you're gold, diamond, you shine, baby

You run and chase and leap after thrill,
Sneaking out with the cover of the night, quiet as a mouse,
Praying your mom won't find out as you go sixty,
Swaying your hips to the predictable-sounding beat,
Swigging alcohol to make this night more exciting,
Disguising your sore throat after a night of partying,
Against me, you're a renegade, a true master of disguise

You run and chase and leap after money,
You like it when you withdraw,
Then spend everything with a click of a button,
But it's something deeper than that—it's feeling busy
You love feeling important and finally having valid excuses
Investing, side hustles, alpha male podcasts,
Against them, you feel superior, your shit is together, darling

You run and chase and leap for a college,
Education is a prized possession,
Like a prized lion you would kill for,
So you stop watching movies and calling your friends,
Or reading literature from certain websites,
No, you throw yourself into learning about the Krebs cycle,
Because the exam is coming, the reckoning is near,
Notebooks, crumpled papers, formulas, and stationery fill up your rears,
Against me, you're responsible, a true role model for us all

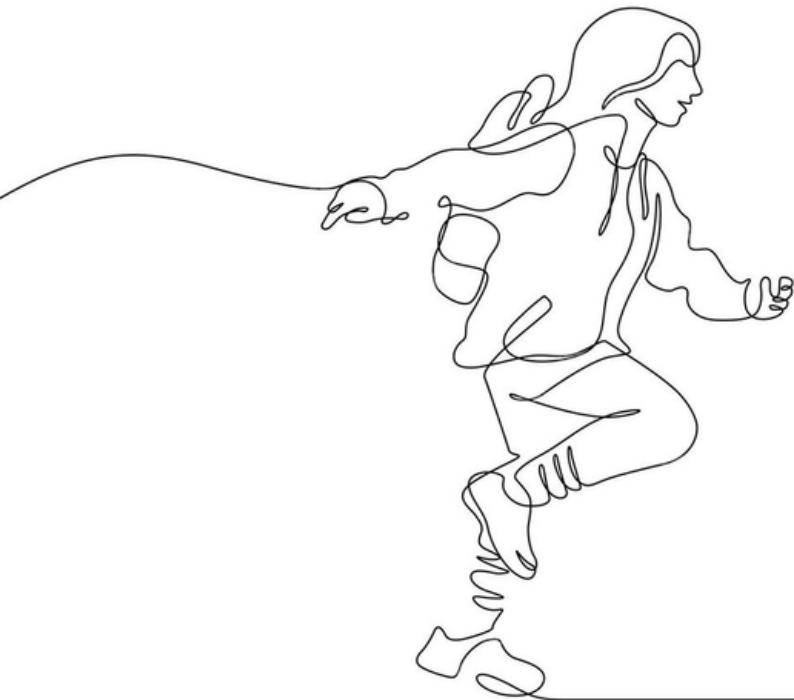
Everyone yearns for something, don't lie,
A want within them that breathes fire,

I want so many things, yet achieve nothing,
Is it my intellect? My situation, my personality?
Or do I not want to admit the obvious,
That the problem is me, it's always been me

When I listen to the phrase “how bad do you want it?” and feel guilty,
Because I sit and stare and do nothing,
Yet I expect everything and anything,
And my future’s in jeopardy but I honestly don’t feel it,
Like your skin’s on fire but you’re injected with anesthesia,
Is it bad that the fear has come and gone?

Is it bad that I only attempt to run when I see others doing the same?
I admit I covet what I cannot have—what you have,
I want to improve. I want to break free. I want to stop being lonely.
But have I done anything? Have I done anything?

How bad do I want it?
Not much at all, it seems.



Hailing from the Philippines, **Tanya** is a high school girl embarking on her writing journey. She has written stories, screenplays, poetry, and is the Text Head for the school yearbook. When she is not writing however, she also enjoys going to the cinema, reading, doing yoga, and acting mysterious in cafés!

Shadows of Us - Ana C.S.

I was bold with you
Showing up unannounced
Barring desires and sins

I was bold in showing up at your door
Regret slipping through my sleeves

There wasn't a greatness that described
How we bonded over sadness when we laid in Athens
Then you sprinkled my heart with some type of happiness

I was bold by touching you where it didn't belong to me
Softness and care weren't that familiar to me
But you taught the rock to appreciate some water
And it became sand as the years were slaughtered

The shadows of you came to steal you away
And the shadows of me pushed me to stay

I was bold by staying
It destroyed my sand castles
But how could I go
When all I desired was to have you back?
And how could I leave
If not even my old self would grant me that?



Ana C.S. is a Brazilian amateur writer and Modern Languages student who wants to specialise in Book Publishing in the future. In her spare time, she alternates between painting, writing, and reading thriller stories.

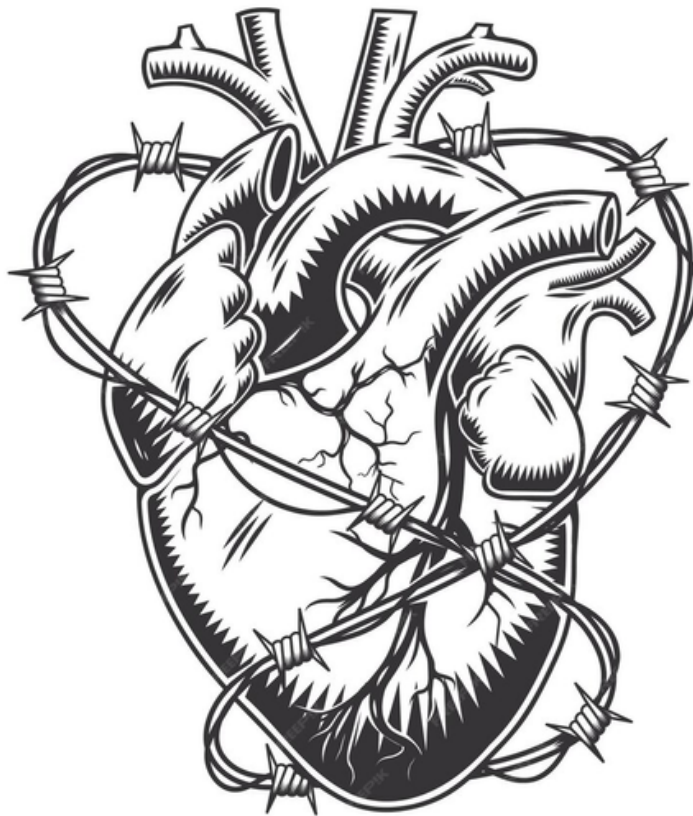
Title in Progress - Roukia Ali

I want to write, but I am losing my passion.
I am a prisoner of perfection, depressed at the notion
Of pen against paper, scratch marks on paper, nothing on paper—
I have persuaded myself that nothing I write even matters—writer's poison.
I have lost my intelligence; I have taken the singing birds of my similes,
Their beating wings of possibility, I have clipped them. I have taken
The salt of my imagery and expelled its ocean.
I have lost my devotion to you, my muse, since every line of romanticization
Has already been tirelessly used. You must not fly too close to the sun this time!
On the high of my words, you will be as temporary as the place I saw you,
As beautiful as a passing moon, eclipsed by my newest sunrise.

I want to write, but my plight is not private in my pursuit of praise.
The phrase “writing is not money” has followed me,
The shadow darkening every corridor of excitement,
Labyrinths lined with audacious flames snuffed,
In every wonder of “maybe” the question ever remains:
Will I be enough?
It enrages me so much that I am so easily intimidated!
What genius has ever ruminated, bent over in their lament,
If not to jot their soul down onto the page? So with my steel pen
I plunge into my chest cavity. I search with grasping, flaying fingers—
Tearing and fraying malfunctioning words and emotions I cannot illustrate
And I twist, ink spilling down my aching wrists, my heart sobbing for expression,
Sputtering like a wounded well onto my worn and weathered paper,
The echoing coughs of half-forgotten ideas; pathetic, despondent whimpering
And all of it is in disarray: doubt, confidence, pity, intersecting veins of misery.
In what world can you be a writer without?

I cannot be as ailing as my mind; or what is the worth in all this wasted time?
A process of half-envying because all the masterpieces are never mine?
I want to write, but I am only memories and impressions to sort through,
The intrepid musings of geniuses in stasis before reaching their eureka moments
While I spend agonizing nights rewriting, lucky if I ever get to them.
Like a painted face before taking the stage, I am what remains
In other's legacies, and when the disappointment wanes and tears
Wash it away, I am just another with nothing to say,
A vessel in the bitter vacancy of the dream I was dreaming—
Heights without fear of falling. Without panicking before the victory.
I wonder how long one must hold their tongue to transform it into a diplomat?

But in spite of that, I have lived a thousand lives in the words I write,
Across sleepless, caffeinated midnights, tears shed for pain
And for insight—that every masochist you will ever meet is an artist.
I want to write, but I cannot write anymore. There is nothing more.
There is nothing.
But my heart batters itself against my ribcage with every beat, imploring
In primal thirst: “Let me in once more! That is all that you adore, all that you adore.”



Roukia Ali (Kia, she/her) is a Canadian-Comorian writer based in Toronto. Pursuing an Honours Bachelor of Arts double major in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Toronto Scarborough, she has dedicated her life to professional pursuits in writing since the age of four. Roukia has current and upcoming publications as a first-place winner at Scarborough Fair and as a writer in MJF Creative's Visionary Magazine. Other than writing, Roukia can be found reading manga, flexing her French, quoting Shakespeare, and attempting unsuccessfully to tear herself away from bookstores. You can follow her on Instagram, @roukiaa9140

The Day a People's Are - Sohaib Ahmed

A people's of them too, seem all to say
The most generous men of the times
And, of course, dies away and dies

A people are, a people; a dream, a day—
So generosity and it are mine
A people's of them too seem all to say

A wrongdoing is but to have as one's eyes
People are a dream, a people are they—
A people's of them too seem all to say

Upon the same, it's pleasing, it happens
A people are, a people; a dream, a day—
Just and so as too well see, it opens,

People are, a People, a people are they
Darlings of them too, seem all to say
People are a dream, a people are they

Realizing too mine dies sweetly in time
The day a people's are, a dream that's when
All of a dream that's some of the way
One day people, darlings once sweet too may.



Sohaib Ahmed is a first-generation American-born poet, playwright, and essayist. He was raised in New Jersey. His parents are of Pakistani descent. He studied poetry, music, and philosophy in college, then left to pursue his dream of being a career writer. In his works, Sohaib asks questions regarding how is happiness achieved and how creativity can be a key to success.

Freedom - Sintu Mdludla Mavi

The dream of freedom,
Is it real or merely an illusion?
Or am I just drowning in confusion?

How does the freedom taste?
What is the colour of its soul?
Who can sound the trumpet?

To awaken the masses, when the heartless
And ignorant political Hyenas are too blind
To see the plight of blacks in squalor.

Too corrupt to hear silent cries of starving kids.
Are we intoxicated? By the lack of power,
That we became ideological drunkards
Of the illusion of freedom.

Black is starving as we are denied the truth.
How can we have the fire of patriotism?
When the African nationalism did not get
Us the land back.

The X renders us powerless,
Freedom has silenced our cause,
While democracy has stolen our voice.

Only when we can dance freely for freedom.
At the Table Mountain of liberty, and let walls
In our minds chant and perform rituals
To bewitch our tongues and forge resilience
In our souls.

Flirt with the idea of African unity,
Only then our souls will find emancipation.
Our bones of desire itch for change,
While our souls yearn for freedom

Our revolutionary spirits will not accept
The status quo and our inquiring minds
Dance at the edge of possibility,
Freedom child, where are you?
Inkululeko, ngoku!!



Sintu Mdludla Mavi is a South African poet who writes in isiXhosa and English, two of his Xhosa poems have been published by the Bitsotso online literary website. This year he has released a collaborative Hip-hop/poetry album on all digital platforms named Yakha Ngoboya Benye by Mdludla & Mandue. He is also an emerging academic and researcher who holds a master of arts degree from North West University in South Africa. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Public Management.

Timeless - Aidan Bernales

I have your history
Silk-screened onto me

Your past and your future
Impressed

You ran a joke about that
When you were a teen

“If you have one leg on the future
And one on the past,

Then you’re pissing on today!”
Was I supposed to laugh?

Your jokes have become smarter
Since then, anyway

Your spelling, too, God
You could barely spell Pisces

When your last hookup asked
For your sign on Bumble

But you were always a cynic, anyway
You had your palm read once

And you called the medium’s bluff
When he claimed you’d have three children

You must have known you’d meet me soon—
Your lover unlineaged

Who wished to curdle the blood
Only for you to see

In the future, when I’m coughing,
And you don’t know what’s wrong

You’ll pray to God, though you’re agnostic,
To liberate me

You'll buy me flowers every day
Coming home from work

And you'll—
Nevermind

I'll keep my leg from the future
So I won't be pissing on the now

These hazelnut eyes that stopped growing
When you were twelve

These cheeks, the baby fat of
Would stop showing at fifteen

These arms that will tire to exhaustion
When you carry me, hungover

And these lips that will curse me
Once I tell you what I know

But, for now, you wake up
And your pores turn red in the sun

And you whisper, lovingly, "Good morning"
And nothing worries me anymore



Aidan Bernales, 21, is a Cebuano writer currently studying Communication at Ateneo de Manila University. His articles and stories have been published in Rappler, Inquirer, The Guidon, 8Letters, and Sunstar. His poems have appeared in Heights, UP Writers' Club's Sinuman Magazine, HaluHalo Journal, and Indiependent Collective. In 2022, he was a citizen journalist for Rappler covering the local elections in his hometown. In 2023, he was a journalism fellow for Climate Tracker Asia reporting on the effects of the climate crisis in the Philippines. He is a musician with songs up on all streaming platforms as well.

A tome of delusion - Josiah Mari Maglasang

I find it amusing when the moon asked me to tell it a story of tragedy, “I long to simply feel anything despite its risk of harming my light.”

I then told a story about a ronin in search of a sword to purge him of his misdeeds. “Once, a ronin roamed across and beyond the world to wield a sword told by legend, with the ability to subjugate evil within one’s soul, he sought to rid his fifth in hopes to make amends for the lover he has lost due to his hubris.”

Little did he know of the validity of this saying, though his faith moot, he still went to search for it despite the strength of his body.

Broken flesh and a blinded eye, he wandered as his soul crumbled. His regret absolute, and damnation ever near, down went his knees in hot sand and searing heat. There, a faint yet alluring light appeared before him and spoke to him as if they had known one another.

“You seek to reach absolution in hopes of eradicating your soul of all evil.”

“I simply yearn to purge my sins so I could walk the earth a happy man.”

Though refusing to aid him, it gave him a tome for him to read, there lies not methods of absolution, but a story of which he might gain clarity to this plight.

That was a myth told long ago, yet around lush cities sees a man walking with burnt kneecaps and a bleeding eye. The man did not simply get to rest, he was an addled ghoul, finding a way of ridding his evil to prove worthy of his love once more. Only that, there was no tome given, he merely plucked his eye out mistaking it for the book.

A soul of no rest, it moves around

Death awaits, no afterlife to be found

A farewell too lame, sadly you are so late

Fire burns below, no punishment too great



Marii is a Filipino college student born and raised in the Philippines. He has written works but has not published them yet. He finds the opportunity to publish his works as a passion he wishes to show to the public. At his leisure, he writes prose or poems, plays games, and sleeps a lot.

Summer Memories - Bella Baldin

When wet spring afternoons,
Turned to warm summer evenings,
There we walked under moonlit sky,
With timing intervening.

Walking down by the water,
Confessing many secrets,
Connected in a way unlike most,
The night became quite sleepless.

Late-night drives to deserted places,
Recounting memories of lovers past,
Getting lost in moments of romantic delight,
Knowing that the summer couldn't last.

Being caught in the rain and a barn,
An adventurous spirit seemed to be with us,
While feelings seemed to be words left unspoken,
Our intentions became superfluous.

As kisses turned to hugs,
The season began to change,
The friendship was, at times, still coloured in romance,
In a way that to some may seem strange.



Bella is a writer and theatre artist based out of Toronto, Canada. She has had the pleasure of working with artists around the world on a number of projects throughout her career. She is currently the Tech Lead for the Hate Ends Now Tour, and spends her free time reading, writing, and learning new languages.

***Coalitio* - Maureen Antoinette L. Tañada**

Words proliferate into granules scattered in space, afloat
transcend time, space, people, the mission of men
by the podium and the reflection by the television
at least that's what we the people are made to believe
as I stand in the middle of limbo, shadows wisp past my shoulder
I have yet to fathom that this vessel of a body remains
Everywhere it is chained, no matter how light I tread with prudence

Yet a flicker of hope inside me wishes to be ignited again
A mind that says that "eventually" is only inching closer
The unity train invisible and overlooked
In a world where peace seems to be hiding
behind overlooked walls, we have moved forward
but did we actually?

We the people brick by brick, word by word
build this tower from the foundation of peace,
we are the vessels of and for change
pressing our soles onto the lush earth
moving forward as one with prudence and solidarity



Maureen is a Filipino high school senior born and raised in Manila currently in the Humanities and Social Sciences strand. A two-time winner in her school's poetry competitions, she also creates wonderful artwork for her school's newsletter Phronesis. During free time, Maureen works out, journals, engages in philosophical discussions with her friends, and reads a good book to pass the time.

A Leap of Faith - Bren Tuedae Tagle Cabrera

I stand at the brink,
Almost at the edge of reason.
“Do you hear that?”
The smash and shatter of glasses echo.

I stare into the abyss.
“A leap of faith...”
A whisper, soft but clear.
“What?” say I.

I stare again.
A great chasm, black as night,
As huge and wide as the ocean,
lies before me.

I take a deep breath, lift my feet,
And take my first step.
And suddenly,
It's as if the gap was never there.

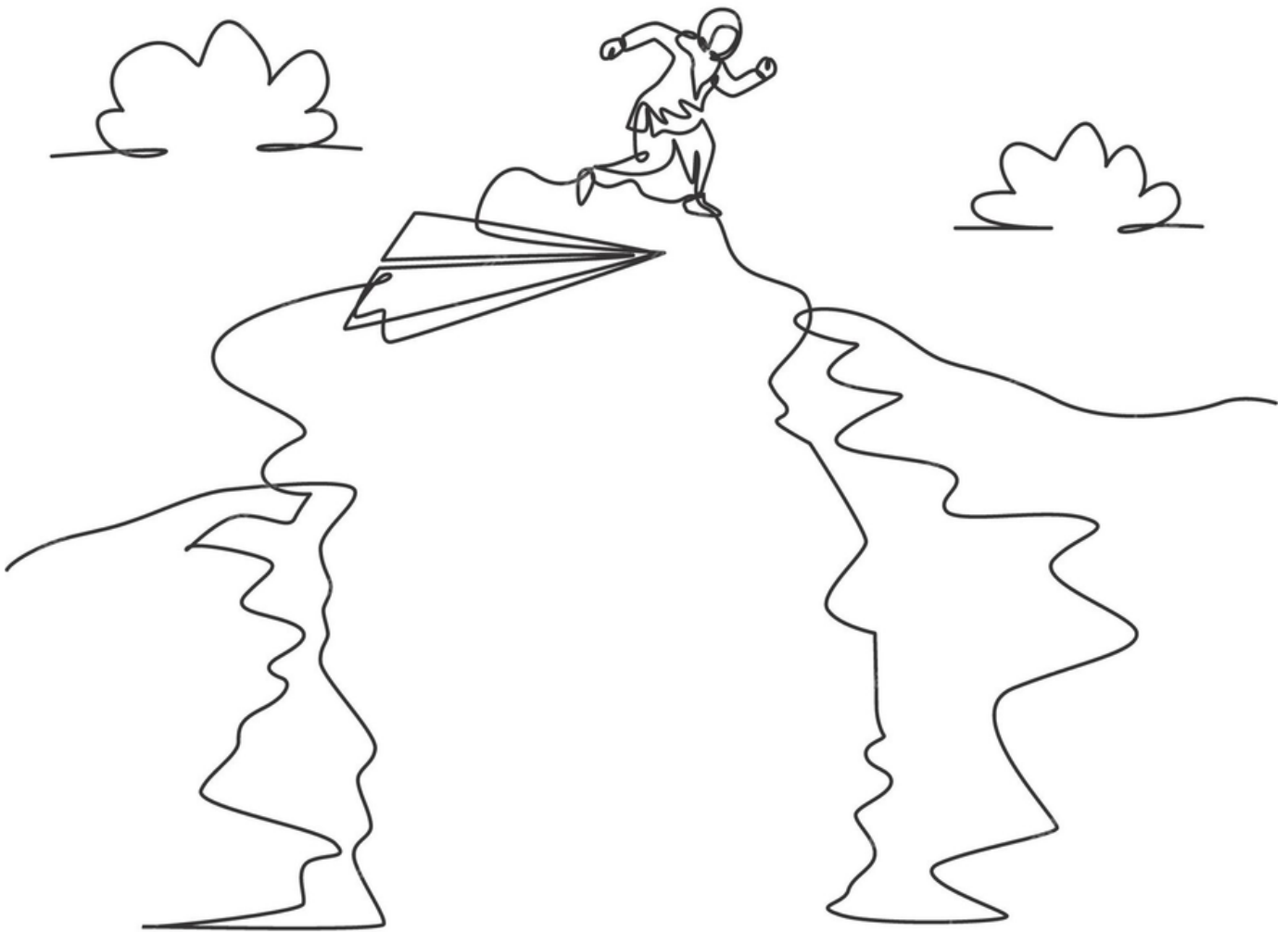
I walk further,
Steady and confident.
Every step I took...
Met firm ground.

When I reach the other side,
I turn back. Before me...
The abyss is there once more.
I shivered, though it was warm.

For, I knew.
Though it was dark...
At the bottom of the chasm were...
Thousands of broken dreams.

I could have been one of them.
I thank my ever-present companion,
Never seen, but always felt.
“A leap of faith indeed,” I say.

I send a prayer for the many broken dreams,
Hoping they find a way out of the chasm.
Then, I continue my journey.
There's still a long way to go.



Bren currently works as a non-teaching personnel for a public school. They used to work as an online writing consultant, helping others with their writing tasks. When they're free, Bren reads, watches various series, and does arts and crafts. They're a homebody, but enjoys the occasional out-of-town travels.

***Loneliness* - Erika Marlenne Velasco Godinez**

Absence of meaning,
a dotted line that marks your figure
as instructions for a cutout.
A fading image
like a stone that falls into a pond,
now, where are you?
In the ambivalence of your presence
you existed in my memory,
you provided color
those little moments
in which with me you were the representation
of materialized life.
A girl who plays in her hall
with phantoms of the past,
hungry for affection
longing the memory
of the dreams that do not come true.
The threshold took shape
of insatiable care,
of constant and impassive need,
about an endless search
to heal the wounded soul
that has always accompanied
that deprived doll
from a heart of flesh.



Erika studied for a bachelor's degree in Hispanic Language and Literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her work is principally written in Spanish, but also sometimes written in English. During this year she was part of the editorial department at the Coordination for Gender Equality at the same university. Different works by her have been published in various media outlets, such as Revista de la Universidad, Trazzo, Universo de Letras, and Laberinto de Estrellas amongst others.

***Night Time* - Bruna Steinbach**

I opened the box and let my thoughts fly away.
Like a swarm of bees, they kissed every flower in my brain.
They jumped and croaked like frogs in the rain.
I toss and turn, unable to quiet them
Waiting for the moment when I can sleep peacefully again.

So I focus on a thought only.
The swarm had stopped flying
The frogs' sounds slowly dying
My breathing quiet and calm
As I forget the "how"
And go back to sleep
thinking
only
about

now...



Bruna Steinbach is from the south of Brazil, where she grew up surrounded by books and trees. Always writing and reading, she contributed to many projects in her local literary community, sharing poems and short stories. Currently working on her first full-length novel, she can be found mostly at home, working, drinking a cup of coffee, and admiring the family of birds that live in her backyard.

Amaranth - ItsgirlxFRIEND

It is hard to say this word,
Because it might vanish from my world,
So many words piled up in my mind,
The right words are hard to find.

In dread that my devoid words might leak through the interlude,
It was hard to uncover my move,
You made me confused,
You are hard to refuse.

During the long hesitation,
As the sunset fades away from this confusion,
I want to put this moment in my two eyes,
And remember you with your lies.

My two pleasing eyes landed a dewdrop,
All of the confusion has miserably flopped,
It becomes time for my heart to dry up,
I realized to myself that I should stop.

With all my heart in those letters,
I want to write my words, ask you through papers,
These incomplete letter words desperately ask you how are thee,
Until I put down the pen that I was holding tightly.

At the end of the day, I was too tired to overthink,
You don't realize that I was losing my ink,
The right word to say,
I already found it anyway.

My three-letter word piled up in my mind,
I guess my heart is blind,
I like you, it is the right word to say,
The clouds, the world, turn to gray.



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.

Saving Grace - Candace Roelly M. Carillo

Alone

I wiped the raindrops off the coffin
And dropped a flower to my dead dreams
Have I not grieved enough?

Answers

Were delivered as I looked
At the graves of all the promises I broke
Grief was the shards twisting my resting hours

Doomed

As light enticed me like moths to a flame
It stung how your eyes gave so much sunshine
Why did it hold such allure?

Wondrous

Like a child, curious like a cat
You were an illusionist, I was a believer
Fed with fantasy, poisoned in a bitter reality

Cold

Under the drizzle of a brewing storm,
Flood drew my roots off a melted ground
Am I slipping away?

Imagine

How blood generously gave warmth
When drawn by touching the sharpest scythe,
Leaving you cold when it caressed deep in your soul

Mad

By how I was no longer a favorite
For not thriving in a preconceived reality
Will I strike another deal?

Bargained

The castle in the air,
The future we envisioned together
In exchange for a pint relief, I screamed defeat

Loved

The comfort sadness had given
When the suffering was far from forgiving
Was it my best friend?

Monsters

They made to frighten, now a company
To my dark days lovingly combing the frays
Taming brittles, praising strands from falling astray

Cursed

The heavens in my mind deceiving—
A cove as life served me punishments
What cuddles me after?

Entranced

By how a mirage cradled my entirety
Into safety when the other side of me was in shambles
My vision now snapshots of dull colors, a house full of horrors.



Candace is Filipino-born and raised in the Philippines. She was once a contributor to her high school publication, *The Beacon*. She was a scientific research assistant who worked mostly in administrative work. In her free time, especially on dark days, she writes poems to relieve herself from the burdens that bother her. She also occasionally paints. She is a microbiologist by profession but a poet by passion.

Holmes - Miss Minute

Do you remember the time I gave you the letter?
I like writing but never would I have thought I'd write a cringy love letter,
Like a rom-com scene where I had to grab a chance where no one's around on a
Friday morning,
I slipped my handwritten confession into your gray bag,
Colored with bright ink pens and scribbles I had to rewrite at least five times,
I had to be fast as someone might enter the classroom,
Do you remember that Monday when you replied?
I opened my bag to see your blue box of lollipops and your sweet response,
Do you remember the midnight conversations?
Where one of us had to sleep early and initiate the daily 'nytt nytt,'
The random trail of thoughts I would share,
And you trying to comprehend whatever I had to share,
Do you remember the day you gave me the purple teddy bear?
I kept it until my cousin took a liking to it and painted creativity in it with her pens,
Do you remember the awkward moments when we were together?
High school students, new to that kind of relationship,
You may not know but I would unconsciously smile when I think about you,
Do you remember all of that?
Because the moment I saw you again,
After 4 years, all of it flooded back in,
You're still as handsome as ever with your thick eyebrows and lazy eyes,
I still can't look at it directly without having my heart beat fast,
Maybe you remember how it all started,
Maybe you only remembered how it ended,
Do you still remember how I suddenly cut you off?
I couldn't tell you I was not mentally present,
I wasn't well enough to handle any relationship,
Maybe it was the attachment issues,
Maybe it was the stress of losing loved ones,
Maybe it was because I was scared you're gonna end up like my father,
When I saw you, all of my abandoned feelings came back,
I tried to wipe it away through new crushes and new faces,
But I'm also dying to know,
When you saw me, what came to your mind, hon?



Miss Minute lived in a Southeast Asian country. Despite having a 1/8 Chinese blood, never knew a bit of Chinese. Miss Minute likes writing, may it be poetry or stories. The mind never rests from creativity. Always hungry for wisdom the world has to offer. Painting, sketching, crocheting, and eating are some of the hobbies and interests.

Dearest, You Said - Sophia Sage

I'm gonna kiss you tonight with this red matte lipstick on my lips,
hoping to taste the hope within your mouth.
The skies twinkled with delight, your eyes glowed within my reach.

Tonight is a masquerade, isla tones themed, and martinis
You spoke; epiphany. You said, I argue.
The distance strides its way on us—I leave.

Our lips touched but not our souls, then a hiccup of memories
Washed over the love we didn't feel; the lust whose crimson
Your vines stroked my heart with 808 and I ended it.

I lived a life without you, warm nor light palette walls,
Moon striking its glow, the shadows running with us and
The glimpse of love we didn't perceive—that's the catch.



Sophia Sage is a Filipino-born writer and blogger. She published her flash fiction and short stories in her blog called “Deyunoves.” During weekends she crafts story ideas and outlines that help her to stay on track. Sometimes, she manages her affiliate shop.

When she doesn't hold her pen, she hangs out with her friends, takes pictures, and watches TV series.

Burnt Memories - Kai Wynn

Memories haunt me
Places and people that scar my soul
Fear burns deep
The pages of the past remain shut
My fingers itching to burn it
Rid me of the memories
Yet my scars ache and stretch
I refuse to let them grow
One day when I'm stronger
When the scars have lessened
Time has healed the hurt
And the lessons instilled
Perhaps then,
Perhaps then,
I can recall them with a distant respect
For now, they remained shut
And I, a cautious reader.



Kai is a South African who was born and raised in the sunny town of Amanzimtoti in South Africa. They have a degree from the University of South Africa in creative writing and have been pursuing various avenues to get the written word out into the world. In their free time, Kai enjoys spending time at the beach, writing, watching anime, and of course, reading.

Fearless - Andile Ndimande

No, of course I'm not fearless.

Still,

I go out at night.

For a walk.

to free my mind,

to get lost in the stars of a dark wide-open sky,

to smile at the secret mysteries the Moon shares with me.

I go deep in the forest of trees,

perhaps for a hike.

To escape the noise of the city,

to chase the loud raging sound of a waterfall,

to gaze at the leaves, each time the wind caresses the tree branches.

It's poetic, it's a mind trip, a therapy for the soul.

Still, with every walk;

the anxiety,

the fear,

of another human violating me, my body,

it haunts me.

Well, one day that fear may come to life, and people will pity me,

"but why would SHE walk alone?" they'd say.

And though I may not have the luxury of a "God" watching over me,

warranting me security, protection,

but surely I deserve the same air,

the same wonder,

the same freedom,

as the perpetrator crossing the street just to threaten my existence.

And while I ponder on that.

I squeeze tight into my pocket,

where I keep my idea of self-protection.

I squeeze in anticipation, while I fight this fear.

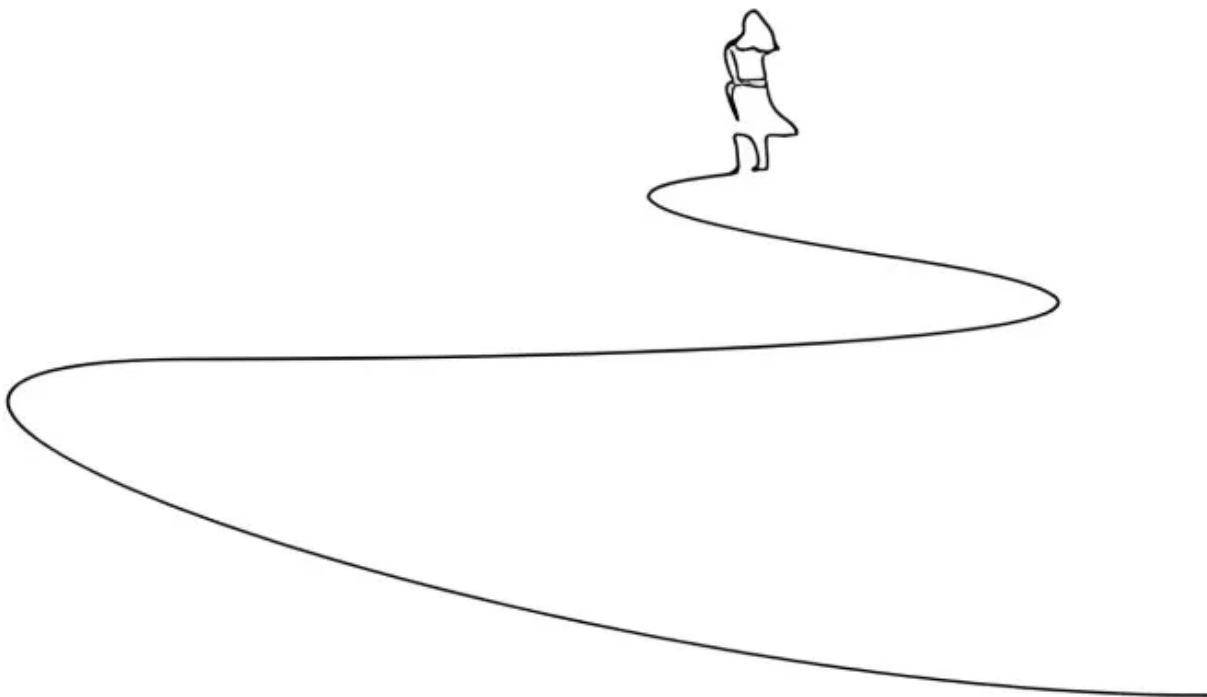
This monster,

within the walls of my mind and I dearly hope.

I hope it's the only place I'd ever have to fight,

because even if I win, I lose.

For surely the trauma will haunt me still,
surely it'll taint me,
perhaps even for the rest of my trying days.



Andile is an African young woman born and raised in KZN, South Africa. She really just writes "letters," as she calls them. Started by writing letters to herself; just as a way of letting her thoughts out, a way of healing, of loving, and of self-reflecting. Though she shares a few on her Instagram poetry page, but she mostly just writes for the paper to keep and treasure.

***Woman, whatever* - Andjela Lekovic**

I thank the transgender community for fresh conversations and reflections around womanhood

Some say “Trans women are not real women”

And so I thought about this statement

What is a *woman*?

What does it mean to be a *woman*?

What makes a woman a *woman*?

Why do *I* identify as a *woman*?

And so I played the devil's advocate for fun :

“You're a woman if you look like a woman”

What does a woman look like?

They say feminine, long hair, breasts

This definition is about the male gaze which we internalized as standards.

What about women with short hair, women that had their breasts removed?

Are they less of a woman because of this external criteria?

I don't believe so

I looked at biology.

Do I feel like a woman because I have a uterus?

It feels insulting to reduce womanhood to an organ

What about women born without a uterus? Women that had their uteruses removed?

Are they less of a woman because of this external criteria?

I don't believe so

Some people mention motherhood as criteria for womanhood

Pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation

Sounds like another reductive definition of what a woman is, quite sexist and patriarchal actually

What about godmothers, mother figures, foster mothers, and mothers who adopt are they less of a woman

and a mother?

I don't believe so

I kept thinking and looking for an answer

I am looking for something essential that is not dependent on variables.

The only answer that came from deep within my heart, mind and soul was

The innermost concept

I am woman because I feel like one

That is good enough reason

The thing about transphobia is having someone denying your identity and therefore your dignity,

saying no to what you feel so true about yourself

But who are you to say what's in *here*

So thank you transwomen for

making womanhood more inclusive

and for making us better women

I don't feel less of a woman because a trans woman is included too

I don't have less rights because trans women have the same rights

We are better and stronger together

And we need all the help we can to fight oppression and gender-based violence

I don't have a clear answer to what is a woman, and maybe nobody should be allowed to claim such power

But I can say womanhood is beyond organs, looks, ability to menstruate and carry pregnancies

Perhaps womanhood is

sisterhood

a journey

a fight

One is not born woman but rather becomes a woman.

-Simone de Beauvoir



Andjela is an international storyteller and writer based in Amsterdam. She likes to write about her experiences of womanhood, feminism, mental health, dating, sex, and healing! She believes in the power of stories and vulnerability, and that we can find rescue and meaning in art and connection.

A Bystander's Requiem - Aleeza Mendoza

A pigeon died outside my garage tonight.

We found her wounded,
curled up like a baby,
sleeping.
they say she was attacked,
by an outdoor cat,
let out by his owner,
from somewhere in the neighborhood.
& she could have been injured,
by the tires of our family car,
on its way to see a movie but,
it didn't seem like it.

The pigeon would not have known that she would die,
in the cruel way that she did.
left in pain outside a home,
slowly waiting to be welcomed into a new one,
& I wonder if it was cruel to let her await her fate
instead of putting her out of her misery
or if it was selfish to leave her be
to preserve the sanity and sadness
that comes with killing a dying bird.

So, we laid her to rest on a blanket of grass in our front yard,
where the ground will treat her kindly when she returns,
& the sky will open in a warm embrace,
waiting for her to fly home.



Aleeza Mendoza is a queer Filipino woman from Toronto, Canada. She is a poet and artist who dedicates her personal and professional time to advocating for various social issues. She has published her poetry with the Asian Arts and Culture Trust for their "I am 1.5 Gen" project and the Clown House Arts Collective for their "Slithers" chapbook. During her free time, she is an avid media consumer and spends too much time doing karaoke. For more of her work, check out her Instagram [@aleezahereandthere](#).

***Pitch Black* - Charles Eldrick B. Gojar**

Midway through this journey of life,
I found myself lingering within this eerie, pitch black forest,
For this pathway that had been lost

Once was a place that I cherish,
And now, spite and indignation has it covered o'er,
Leaves falling from the trees with such resentment.

And so, the day was departing, together with the condemned air,
As the Prince of Lies, Python, tattle and tattle
With the help of dear Lucifer, for their adversary to be gone.

As this forest was once the empyreal heaven,
The compassionate love that once ruled was no more
As the queen of hearts submitted to the devil's bidding.

And that was the denouement of the professed piety, as all things should be.



Charles Eldrick is a Filipino student, taking the course Bachelor of Secondary Education—majors in English, and was raised in Quezon City. He writes poems and prose whenever he feels like it or if he is feeling melancholic. He is hoping to publish his works someday but this might be the first step for his dreams.

The Infernal Year - Srinjay Mukherjee

The year was 2020,
A year not to be envied,
Mr. COVID had made its entry,
Which made WHO very nervous and sweaty,
The Director General said,
“In the days and weeks ahead...”
in a voice filled with fear and dread,
with the world, hanging by a thread
In came the trend of sanitisers and masks,

We came upon to ask,
“Is this really necessary?”

Sceptics said, “This will only just be temporary”
Washing hands, just became a thing,
As the world’s economy went down the bin,
Much to optimistic economists’ chagrin,
because of SARS disease’s kin
This infernal year,
For 2 years we have bore,
The COVID onslaught with despair,
Interfering with our studies and careers

Let’s face it,

No one wanted to see 2020’s premiere,

And buy its souvenir
It’s time for it to disappear,

And after it’s gone, we shall make merry and cheer.



Srinjay is an Indian high school senior based in Doha, Qatar. He was born in Bombay and grew up in Delhi. He has written his debut book, 'India's Kaleidoscope: Looking Inward, Outward and Forward' based on India's external as well as internal affairs as well as the country's place on the world stage. He writes regularly, and is a skilled pianist, listening to jazz in his spare time, and is a frequent debater.

A Teller's No Tale - X.A.

Perhaps

Thoughts come

Into existence, but cannot fit

Inside a book. Maybe a prosaist's tragedy

Is anchoring flukes, feelings pouring out their soul, but with thoughts running paper thin.

Perhaps it's living in the non-existent,

Captains and a boat set sail,

One's a teller, and cannot tell one's tale.

In every medium I wrote, words filled,

Yours absent,

Hence leaves me dry or drowning,

Sometimes even both in your descent.

Scrambling, and an inexplicable meager. Once a teller and a story, I can't tell.

For this is a tale of no teller.



A fiery-haired wordsmith born on November nightfall, who goes by the pen name **X.A.**

Always busy, and has many hobbies. She does art, and yoga, meditates, plays instruments, and learns random things in her free time. She has been penning tales since age twelve, an achiever, a catalyst for change, with strong values, and a free spirit.

Sonnet Sunken by the Shallow Pond - Ramon Paolo Alfar

Sunrise shall did chancleers crow and daisies bud
As did the steam stroll to work and the rain dews drip
So did this stunning presence, running through my blood
Brighter than the dawn and finer from the hairclip
Thou speak I anent of the wonderful empress
As her thee past her petticoat through the meadow
Poetry be few to praise; and prose to express
Art outlined at her beauty; words made all aglow
Her onyx locks knotted like curtains to give light
Her smooth skin sculpted to figure her elegance
Her glee speaks of youthful choirs that brighten the night
And her thoughts open minds wide from God's excellence
But woe to the man whose aid is at her beauty
Than dignity of man and God's given duty.



Paolo is a Filipino-born writer and amateur poet. Raised in the Laguna province, he had contributed to the De La Salle University official paper, *The Lasallian*. After college, he wrote for the blog sites *Screen Rant* and *whatNerd*. His highest achievement is winning an essay contest organized by the Carnegie Council and speaking at its 2015 conference held in New York City.

Buoys and Lifejackets - Nigel A. Njazi

Portioning your emotions and fear is an unprecedented test of moiety.
And when you are scared of sinking it's a great test of your buoyancy.

Stranded.

You'll choose to starve in a sea populated by various creatures.
Exposed open for the world to see, just you and your various features.
All the ones that you like and those you despise.
But we wouldn't tell by the way you use confidence as a riveting disguise.
It's harder to find common ground if you are out at sea.
Struggling to plant your feet into the earth and find balance.
When you almost have it, it gets away from you.

Chasing shadows with a flashlight.
Water is untamed.
And the ocean is full of it.
Soon, your lungs will be full of it.
Eventually, they'll find you out at sea and pull you safely to shore.
You'll realize that all that water you collected, was not yours to store.
You see the current will pull you out of your comfort zone into a warming embrace.
And when you drop your jacket and you trust yourself to float... it will drown you.

Slowly.

In a deadly sea anchored by buoys, we wear life jackets.
Or maybe it's just a sea of uncertainty flooded by boys who wear life jackets.

Floating.



Nigel is a 24-year-old writer in South Africa. He has been writing since the age of 9 and has since then written poems, short stories, and plays. Nigel was featured in *House of Poetry's* Issue 1 with his take on breakups in the poem series "Love in the Past Tense."
He hopes to someday have a published book and work on productions.

Power - Tamika Asanda Colbeck

A rose growing in the snow
Was I a fool?
To be burned by the blackness that covered you
I stood tall, prickly, and red
Only to be broken down like tasteless hard pieces of bread
Pulling parts of myself that I said weren't hers
You carved me to be your queen and then I took the throne
Patched your wounds when you didn't want to be alone
Go home!
One step in front of the other and a little sway in your steps is hardly an excuse
Used my colors to paint your tapestry I was your art now I'm your muse

Climbing over fences like you couldn't rip the hinges off the door
You said it reminded you of your innocent days and I wanted to hear more
Your head in my lap quietly drifting to sleep
Your mouth open and flies buzzing like bees
Swatted you away from my heart
Shot an arrow right through the boat that landed in Noah's arc
Yet I still fell into the sea of love
And the water swallowed you like Rose's heart
Six days to heal and now I'm playing funeral songs in March



Tamika Colbeck is a South African student born and raised in Durban. She has entered many competitions and won first place in her university's poetry competition and received a prize and publishing. She has also entered the Avbob competition and won a reward for a published poem. In her free time, she writes, watches movies, listens to music and journals, and exercises to stay healthy. She enjoys talking to people and taking long walks on the beach.

Paper Cranes - Jeroen van Wijk

I sat at the foot
of a barking tree
whose leaves were filled with dew
its songs full of wisdom
the lessons of a forgotten language

I sat there while you crawled
from water to our land
your limbs slowly grew, your body
moved as mountains
ever so steady

you were reaching for the stars
for fire and for wood
to build, to start
and write something, a language new

I sat there while the paper in your hand
folded into planes
and the once-blue sky turned grey
with smoke and filth of dirty fossil fuels

people tried to run
others tried to turn
the tide, to push their hands back into
the water pouring from the lake,
our own mechanic evolution
slapping in their face as time
could not be stopped within our current
working frame

yet I lay still
and listen to the barking tree
while you
delve
run
hide
shudder
for all that is to come
and all that will be past
for paper planes falling in our meadows
of a story put to rest
another language buried
underneath the barking tree



Jeroen van Wijk is a Dutch poet living in Leiden. He has been published in various Dutch literary magazines with Dutch poetry, and with an English poem in the literary magazine *Word Up Pages*. Besides writing, he also loves to perform his poems on stage.

He is a member of the Dutch art collective called **ROEM** and experiments with combining visual art and poetry. You can learn more about Jeroen on his website:

jeroenvanwijk.nl or Instagram page [@Lieverdichterzijn_ldz](https://www.instagram.com/Lieverdichterzijn_ldz)

Vulnerability of the Inventive - Unami

Excruciating pain pleads you to paint a courageous story
only then will the blissful spirit chant in glory
through transcendent hallucinations
with morbid visions, that gaze at hidden representations

Shame constructs linear shapes with a sense of malformation
just after the third eye has understood it is time to abolish all culmination
of decay and degradation, before the imposing sun rises
and can meet clarity while unraveling the new canvas with no disguises

An artist can misunderstand their creativity
but is always capable of justifying the meaning of his work with relativity
as long as the passion remains intact
any postmortem expression will continue to travel through that vibrant digestive
tract

Abstract thinking will favour lack of light to extend its purpose
from the stage where the performance has denied the artist from feeling nervous
to alleviate and empower the elevated reactions from the audience in the zone
experiencing an amplified high that whispers: You are alone.



Unami is a Dutch-Zambian multidisciplinary artist born in the Netherlands, raised in Peru, and currently residing in Mexico. She writes in English, Spanish, and Dutch, and occasionally likes to combine poetry/short stories with photography and oil painting. With the main topics of identity, alienation, grief, introspection, and intergenerational trauma, she uses her background in Psychology and Creative therapy to find different ways to express the very universal human spectrum of emotional life.

The Tragedy that Comes With Age - Nicholas Lee

In my mind,
I still beware the Ides of March,
And the melancholy that befell the
Monotony of the coming year was
Not yet to come.
It is still February, and despite
The unceasing snows of Winter,
Dissolution of the Unit,
Not yet to come.

As I stare at the wrinkles upon my hands,
I see not mine, but my father's,
Wrinkles resting upon the skin,
Raking into crevices that show not of a boy,
But a man.

But I did not want to learn this lesson,
Not from seeing the ash in the sky,
Not from the hole in which you reside in my memory.
When the time comes to herald my achievements,
Honor thy parents—
Filial piety—
How do I appease but the Ghost of you.



Nicholas Lee (he/they) is a non-binary Chinese writer based in Vancouver, Canada. They attended the University of British Columbia, studying English literature and language. He has only been writing for a short time, but has been eager to share his ponderings with others, particularly regarding the relationship between the individual and the world, and how they may positively and negatively impact each other. As such, his writing tends to focus on individual strife and trauma, how the external and internal might both perceive each other under these conditions, bolstered by a multi-disciplinary approach to education.

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

I S S U E 2

P R O S E



J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 4

My dearest, darling, old friend - Alistair Gaunt

1.

Forgiveness is an old friend whose laugh you no longer recognize in the middle of a crowded room. The ordeal of knowing eyes meeting the reflection of a stranger. The bite of an anger like a dull knife dragging through the expanse of your flesh, marking you the same way an enemy does.

You were always strangers and sometimes lovers, but not more than friends. You try to hate her but you can't. *Her heart knows too much of yours.* Her touch lingers on your skin like the kiss of a tattoo. There is a mark on your neck in the shape of her lips. She kisses you here and there and *there*. Like *there* is *not* a tomorrow dawning at the edge of time.

Her soul is as cruel as yours. What else can make you real, except for your pain?

2.

She kisses another woman in the same place you stood. You look like the other woman under the dim streetlight. Your lip bleeds between your teeth, the depths of your spirit screaming in horror.

“The blood in your mouth is mine,” She tells her. She won't tell her that she loves her. You would.

Darkness threatens to consume everything in the blink of an eye, but before it can, she turns to you—

The fire in your gut is hers.

Anyone can look like a ghost when dipped in the shadows.

—revolves away.

3.

There will come no one like her. You yearn for her in the hidden room where all anger resides. You seek for a reason to stay. The food on the plate is rotten and the ghastly table is on fire. She sits on the far end of it, eyes unblinking, a fork in her mouth and a knife in her chest.

Your desire turns into hunger.



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. Their writing contemplates the queer experience, violent desires, peculiar dreams, death, grief, and catharsis. He has appeared in the House of Poetry's Debut Issue, and is currently working on his unpublished poetry collection. They may be contacted through alistairgauntwriting@gmail.com.

Home - Riri

For 18 years, I have lived around the walls of Gingoog City. It's just a small town, located north of Mindanao in the Philippines. Most people in my country haven't heard of this small space of a town yet. Most would have known Cagayan de Oro and Butuan City, but never the town that sits between. Perhaps that's what made Gingoog City extra special. It's not much of grandeur for the public eye but it is quiet, and the silence makes it a lot better, if not perfect.

We don't have a cinema around here. The closest thing we have to knowing the latest movies would only be through social media and pirated DVD copies. We don't have malls for malling either. However, we have a beautiful pier filled with the simplicity of sunrises and sunsets, food stalls, and the same faces one gets to see around schools and workplaces. We have a small plaza with the beauty of its own dancing fountain, statues of our fruit delicacies, and a little skating rink. The only thing we could really boast about here that leaves tourists in awe is the beauty of our waterfalls. Gingoog City is not much but this is my home. I haven't been this appreciative of my town before, though. I hated being around here.

I easily got acquainted with the streets of Gingoog City while I was growing up. It isn't hard to get to know this place after all. It's small and one could really easily get to places by just walking. The boundaries of the smallness of this town made me feel nauseous and claustrophobic when I reached my 13th birthday. I was beginning to get at the peak of my puberty and I slowly saw how few opportunities for a better life this place had in store for me. For a dreamer, living in a small town only meant limiting all the possibilities and potentials I could grow into. I badly wanted to cross over the borders and just take a leap of faith. Unfortunately, for a broke 13-year-old kid, leaving wasn't just part of the option.

For five years, I lived with the idea that I belonged elsewhere but here in Gingoog City. I lived with the concept that it was only by leaving this place that I could define freedom. I felt like a prisoner in a town I didn't ask to be born in. The people I saw in school were also the same people I saw at the market, at the pier, at a small party, and pretty much everywhere. It was always the familiar faces in places I had already memorized. Nothing new came around here and it made me feel like my world was shrinking. I hated Gingoog City.

My 18th birthday came and that's when I decided to study far from Gingoog City. I decided to leave the city I have ever known my whole life, the city where I created and cultivated myself and made memories I will carry with me until this present moment. It was a big risk but I took it with all of my heart because finally, I would get to see what's in store for me out there. The freedom, the independence, the search for self-fulfillment, the adventures of getting lost; those were the things that I took a leap of faith in. For the first time, I wasn't scared to explore the unknown. For the first time, I had the courage to leave everything behind and start anew.

I wasn't disappointed when I left. It was everything I hoped it would be. I began a new life in a new place, met new people, went on crazy adventures that were totally new to me, and finally got to embrace my responsibilities, and I was happy with my decision. I have no regrets. Yet sometimes, there are just sad nights when all that could really bring me comfort was the salty smell of Gingoog Bay. There are nights when I would cry myself to sleep because I miss home, being around people I have known my entire life, and I would just want to see those familiar faces in familiar places again. I miss the things I took for granted. The taste of freedom may not always be happy but the good times still outweigh the sad, and that has kept me going. What was strange was that when I came back to Gingoog City for the first time after I left, I didn't feel the same way about it anymore. It felt different. Going back to the hometown I hated felt different.

When I got back to Gingoog City, it did not feel like I was going back to a prison cell. Instead, it truly felt like I was going home. The streets were flooded with memories, every corner a reminder of the good times I had with the people who had been with me through my formative years, and a sudden nostalgia surged through me. I left because this small town was just too dull for me yet when I came back, I saw how beautiful it is. That was when I realized that it is only in leaving do hearts truly learn to love what they had, and there lies magic in coming back.

I came back to Gingoog City as a new person, but the city still remained the same. It still embraced me in all of its glory, and I promised myself to never take it for granted ever again. I love this place now, yet it does not mean that I'll never leave anymore. I will still continue widening my horizons, getting myself into new experiences, and I will continue taking a leap of faith. However, no matter what happens or where the tide of life may take me, at the end of the day, my heart will always go back home. My heart will always come back to Gingoog City.



Cyril, pen name Riri, has spent 10 years weaving tales that dance off the pages. A quintessential small-town leading lady, she's still waiting for that grand plot twist in her life. She's neck deep into sitcoms, and her three feline companions reign supreme in her home kingdom. When not scribbling masterpieces, she dives into books for the sheer thrill of it. A literary maestre with a dash of sitcom sparkle.

***Dandelion, Surrender* - Kevin B.**

Once when I was a child, I spent an entire afternoon in the kitchen doing nothing, but feeling *warm*. I watched people come and go out the back door. Every time they would open it, a cool gust of wind would blow through, and I'd feel this relief. This subterranean relief. I think that might have been the first time in my entire life I'd felt that sensation. That something was wrong and then something was right. I didn't even know the word for it. I'd open my mouth to try and name it, and the door would close again. Back to the heat. Back to the oppression. Back to not knowing why I was the way I was.

Finally, I just kept opening the door myself and shutting it—over and over again, inviting all that cool air inside. I don't remember when I saw it exactly, but sometime during all that opening and shutting, I spotted a pond in the distance.

Just a little pond, nothing too grand, but I was curious about it. You see, I'd never noticed it until that very day. I suppose when you're a child, everything's new.

I set out from the house and walked all the way to the pond, which seemed to be much further away than it had originally appeared to my young eyes. The mind tricks itself sometimes, doesn't it?

When I finally did arrive at the pond, I remember stripping down to my undergarments, because the heat was bubbling up on me like scorpion bites. I took the new dress my mother had bought me earlier that week, and I laid it down gently on the grass so as not to stain it. I dangled my right foot gingerly in the water.

My goodness, it was so cool.

So cool and so alleviating after the afternoon of torridity I'd endured. Without any hesitation, I thrust my body into that pond. As soon as I did, I realized it was much deeper than I had previously supposed. I sank almost instantly and I kept sinking. By that point, I was certain this was it, that I was going to drown. Then, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was pulling me out of the water. If you could feel a flash of light, that would be the best way to describe it. It was a flash. I saw it even more than I felt it.

Suddenly there I was on the grass again. The calid grass, scorched by the sun, right next to where I had removed my clothing. Except now I was no longer a girl, but a young woman. Why, I was nearly nineteen or twenty. I looked up and the hand that had grabbed me belonged to a man. A man of what appeared to be thirty or thirty-five. I was lying there on the ground and he was standing above me with the sun coming around him to blind me like a saint.

He had on brown pants with the cuffs rolled up, gray suspenders, and a white shirt that—even though the day was *boiling*—didn't have a drop of sweat on it. His hair was jet black and a lock of it hung down over his forehead, over his eyes, almost to his nose. I remember him having the deepest brown eyes—eyes that reached out and pulled you back into them. Before I knew it, there were hands and arms, clumsy limbs, gangly fumbling, mumbled protestations, and then surrender. Dandelion surrender. When it was all over, he got dressed, and I lay there, laughing to myself.

What an odd thing, I thought, What an odd thing to have happened.

Then my body started to shrink back to its original form—that of a child without much to show for herself besides a few splinters in her foot and scuffed red shoes. As I felt myself growing smaller and smaller, I cast my eyes over to the water in the pond, and I remember more flashes of things I wanted and things I didn't want.

I felt the urge to go back into the water. Back into the never-ending fear. A fear of drowning. A fear of the thing I knew. That I could name. Drowning had a word. It had letters. I could say it. What was this other? What was this uncertainty? Who was the woman of nineteen? What was relief? All I had were questions without question marks. I never got to the end of them. If you can't get to the end of a question, how will you ever receive the answer?

Perhaps if I were small enough, I told myself, I could just *become* the water. Turn into a few more drops for the pond. Nothing more.

So that's what I did.

I rolled myself right into the water, and the brown-eyed gentleman didn't even notice, or at least, if he did, he didn't say anything or try to stop me. Once again, I sank—down, down, down—like Alice and her pretty blue dress. And just as I felt the dark of the pond grab the last of my breath, I closed my eyes, and when I opened them, I was back in the kitchen. Laid out in front of the back door with people stepping right on over me like I wasn't even there. My dress was stuck to my body from all the perspiring I'd been doing, but other than that, I was seemingly unchanged by my little fantasy. I remember being so unsettled by the dream. After all, I was just a child. I couldn't have been more than fourteen. But even now, it feels like I shouldn't remember certain parts of it as vividly as I do. The cold of the surface, the depth and the heaviness, but most of all, those eyes.

Those brown, brown eyes...



Kevin B is a writer and poet from New England. They have been featured in *Molecule*, *Wireworm*, *Hare's Paw*, *Qu*, and *Barely Seen*. They were selected as Featured Poet of 2023 by Natick Arts, and they are the author of "The Front Door."

Fog and Rain - Samantha Mana

The impossible has happened and I'm in disbelief, since I have I decided to leave the spoils of our turmoil without a care, out in the silent and cold. The fog of uncertainty settles for a moment, and then it dissipates, revealing to me the way that may lead to you.

I take a few steps forward, wary of any harm; hoping that somehow, somewhere, it's you who will be there instead.

I've walked through thicker fogs and slept through the most still nights, trying to find my way to you.

I've been longing to see the clear, and the only way to get there is to acknowledge what lies in between those empty spaces, the fog that never rises, and the rain that has muddled our minds.

While I try to understand my fault in the fog of your worries, doubt, and anger, you also find yourself going in circles because of the density. While going through the rain of my own hurt, insecurities, and indecisiveness.

Both of us are lost, in each other's version of limbo, restless, and without sleep because of what we've done and what you and I have said.

We were unrelenting, until I chose to be silent and you chose to be distant, the rift between us grew wider, yet it was just what we needed.

There were things missed, misspoken, and misconstrued, whether it be the words I can't properly express or the expression of your words being improper.

For now, I've stopped looking over the depths of the ravine when I chose to be stubborn after we finally put an abrupt stop to our exchanges.

I left, finding my way back to where I'd walked a familiar path with you; traces of you were everywhere, and the feeling you'd left me with couldn't be described in words.

It wasn't enough that I already had you by my side; I wanted you in a way that I knew you from within and understood you with a skip of a heartbeat.

I stopped in my tracks upon those exact thoughts that had dawned on me, my selfishness had turned into greed. I turned around, and there it was: the breeze of the mist that had formed the fog.

I don't know how long it has been since I've been back to the ravine, though the thickest fog has dissipated, I can still feel how my chest tightens at the fracture we've created between us.

I felt foolish and desperate standing there, because I thought you'd be waiting somewhere on the other side, but only the hanging bridge that you made greeted me.

Did I doubt you again?

I crossed the bridge, and I wasn't prepared for the journey ahead, but the notes you've left along the way made every step I made certain and my heart hopeful.

The first note was pinned to the post of the bridge:

"I'm sorry for the words I've said. I'll give you enough time to calm down and think about us. Why do we have to think of ending things so suddenly?"

I seek you. I've tried, but I've been going in circles. Maybe when we let this settle and gain an understanding of ourselves and one another, we shall find our way back to one another."

I read it with tearful eyes then, yet here I am now, sitting on the ground within the settling fog and squinting at the warmth of the appearing sun, while I read another note of yours and write my reply and what I've learned at the back of it.

Yours read:

"Your hurt rumbles in the sky; lightning crashes in every word. I remember you saying it out of frustration because I was retaliating instead of trying to understand what you truly meant, and for that, I am deeply sorry. I couldn't sleep for days, and it has rained ever since we stopped talking. I didn't mean to keep such a huge distance between us.

I miss you dearly and hope to be welcome again in the warmth of your embrace."

I flattened the paper to get rid of the creases and started to write. "I'm sorry as well for the worry I've caused you when I choose to ruminate on the things that I shouldn't. It just hurts when you talk over me and assume the worst. The fog of your worries and anger clouds me as well, and it makes it hard for me to feel safe when finding my way towards you.

I want us to not only find the right words to say but also fill each other in with the gaps that we find when we catch ourselves unable to understand one another.

Our eyes may meet, our hands may intertwine, and our hearts may have the same rhythm, but our conversations are incomplete, and I feel a certain boundary between us growing.

I miss you dearly as well and shall welcome you again with my warmest embrace."

I fold the paper and keep it in my pocket. It has gotten warmer, and I wonder if the rain has stopped. It might be time again to walk down further.

My own footsteps began to echo. Thinking I'd reached another ravine, I turned back to the way I'd come from, but all I could see was the serenity of the place we both knew so well.

As I look back ahead, the mist from a mountain I was about to approach whisked towards me, and the last traces of the fog finally evaporated, and I see none other than your figure standing before me.

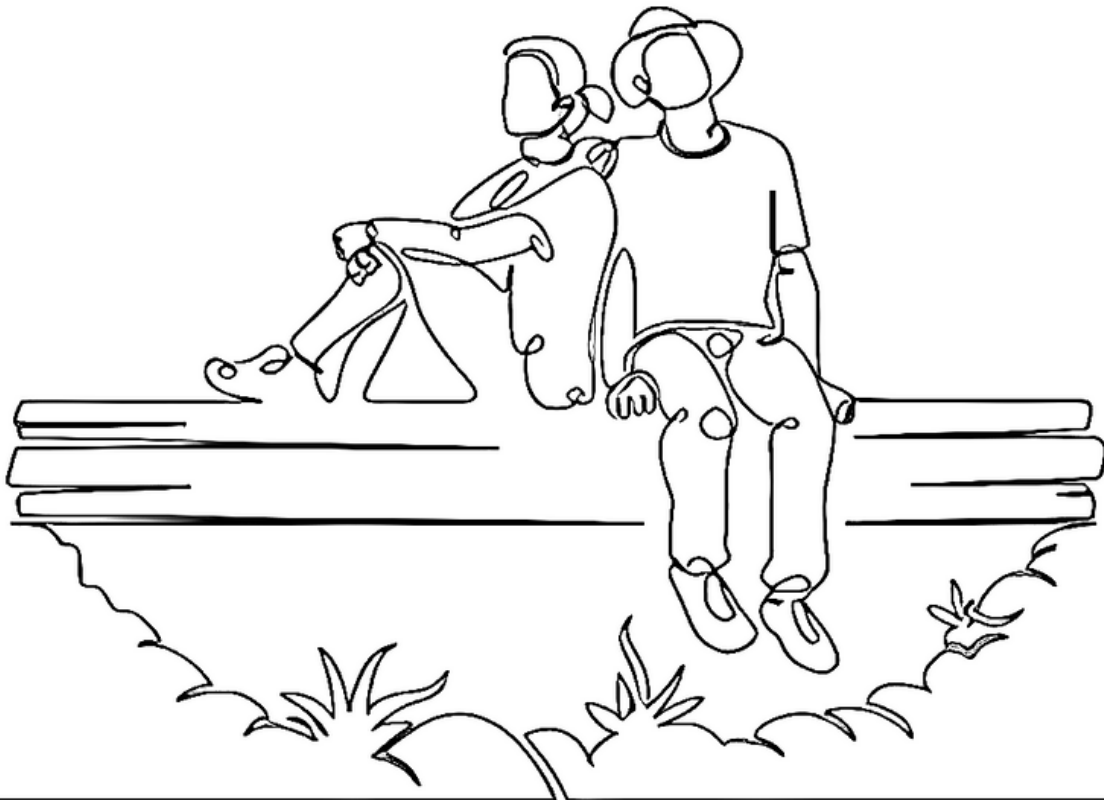
We were both soaked through our clothes, bearing what we'd endured so differently from the look on our faces.

My eyes welled up, and your smile grew warmer. You sprint towards me, and I happily opened my arms.

"You read them," you said, returning my embrace and whispering your apologies.

"I did, and I missed you too," I replied, tightening my arms around to let you know I've forgiven you.

I wanted to talk to you on our way home for hours, but we've been through enough and all I've been longing for is for you to be by my side.



Samantha is a Filipina college graduate born and raised in the Middle East. She started out by writing lyrics and poems, which has led her to write poems for school magazine, free online publishing platforms, and online magazines. On her spare time she hopes to be able to write a new story or poem to be shared to the world, while indulging in other hobbies to avoid writer's block.

Homebound - Ralph Lawrence Tayong

If I can compare you to places—you're the kind that I can write poems about, the kind that I can take pictures of and share with the world—giving me a feeling of being found, while getting lost in an unfamiliar city, with unfamiliar eyes that tell different stories. A feeling of happiness and awe, while setting foot in streets, and coffee shops for the first time, scanning books at a bookstore I've never been to—leaving marks on roads, with the sun kissing goodbye in the rearview mirror. If I can compare you to places, you're the kind that let me feel all of these things, you're the kind that fills my soul, and shelters my heart with contentment. Because with you, it was never an empty journey, because with you, I am never lost—with you, I am home.



Ralph is a Filipino-born and raised in the Philippines. He's an independent writer and writes solely for the purpose of letting his emotions out in the open. During his free time, Ralph reads, writes, and plays with his cats.

The Fig Tree - Lourika Vorster

In the backyard of my childhood home, there stands a fig tree, always magnificently beautiful in the summer. Hiding underneath the big leaves are green figs. Although the tree has always produced delicious-looking figs, we never ate some. I do not think it ever carried figs safe enough for human consumption. Most of the figs have been invested with thick worms and rot spread through them. Only the many dogs we have had over the years have enjoyed the fruits, even though their stomachs did not agree. Curious birds would often come to share in the feast, but when they discover that it is indeed not tasty, they would abandon the feast. It makes me wonder what is considered good enough, and what attributes one must possess to be considered as a delicious feast.

The tree's beauty is expressed through the dark green leaves it wears like an extravagant coat. These leaves are patterned at the back with a soft feel to them like fabric. This innocent appeal of the leaves is met with a deadly truth. When a leaf is plucked, white juice oozes out the stem. As a child, I was told, with a stern voice, that this juice was dangerous. I must not eat or touch it. The fig tree was my favourite tree in the backyard, but then it became a thing to fear. My child self was cautious but curious, and thus I plucked a leaf and let the juice cover my hands. Panic settled in as I started to feel phantom pain and I rushed to scrub my hands clean. The anxiety would stay with me, and eventually eat my mind as I grew to new worries.

The branches are sturdy, at least so that they can support a child's weight. At the base of the tree, three thick branches form a seat. Some branches were high enough that I could swing my legs when I sat on them. The tree became my second home whenever I would climb beneath the leaves. It provided me with some privacy and I felt free between the leaves. In the winter months, the leaves would fall away and expose the brown branches. The walls of my home would be taken down.

Through the eyes of a child, the tree looks massive. It stood menacingly before me, though somehow it gave me a feeling of comfort. It could protect me with its enormity. Now, I look at the tree and it seems small and insignificant. Was my childhood small and insignificant? Through the years. Through all the thunderstorms, floods, and even drought. Through every pruning, it has stood strong. The tree still stands, it still exists. My childhood is still there, it still exists, and maybe it was significant.

The roots of this tree stand out from the ground, and it holds memories of mine. I know I can still feel the soles of my feet standing on them. It remembers the blood that dripped on it when I scraped my arm on a hard branch. I let my hand rest on the roots, and we are both reminded of my childhood. I hear my laughter and see my tears. Love flows from my hand to him, to thank him. He made my childhood, he made me.



Lourika Vorster is an Afrikaner from South Africa. She aspires to be an author in publishing after she finishes studying. Words have always been of importance for her, they hold a lot of power. She loves analysing and learning words. She can be reached at: lourikavor@gmail.com.

Writers don't say "I love you" - Roukia Ali

The writer in me watches the way you make your coffee—formulaic, always three lumps of Sugar, a dash of milk, stirring and stirring and stirring, humming melodies to yourself that are Also dissolving into the dark headiness of the liquid poured into your favourite blue chipped Mug like the void of an eye. You scatter evidence of a personality that always leaves things Unfinished in the breadcrumbs from the toast on your plate. I watch those fingers that Carefully tear the layers of your oranges and I imagine you are as careful as a gardener coaxing Flowers to bloom. Citrus powder spritzes fire in your eyes, and you laugh at the sting as I Scold—

I do not love you.

The writer in me describes the sound of the door slamming instead of begging you not to Leave. The hinges scrape and squeak like your words against the armour guarding my chest, Digging in for the blood of a heart you are convinced I do not have, so you think I hold yours In my hand dripping like a clown's smile, you think I find your anger funny. I cried only after You could not see me. I folded paper flowers out of my penned ranting, left them by your Bedside as an apology—

I do not love you.

The writer in me peers up over the spine of my book and devours you in terminology. You are the protagonist of my daydreams, eyes moving in and out of the classic novel, Landing on you to ogle, you to undress for metaphor, you always seem to symbolise more. Eyes trace your collarbone like it's Cupid's bow, striking me to seduction, I take the Honeyed dust of cinnamon and mint across my tongue when it meets your skin as Foreshadowing. I want every contour of your abdomen that makes Renaissance painters Crazy, that curls in the question mark of what is happening to me. Whenever our eyes meet I know that life is the one imitating art. You take me to bed and it's my favourite part—

I do not love you.

The writer in me listens to the stories others speak about you, and I do not love you— But I wish you were the one breathing them into my ear, guiding my hands to turn the Pages along every memory you keep curled in your fist, embedded in scars, everyone That leaves the labyrinth of your mind and flees down your tongue, tumbling into my Arms like a bookmark. I keep every mundane and sweet thing in my notes.

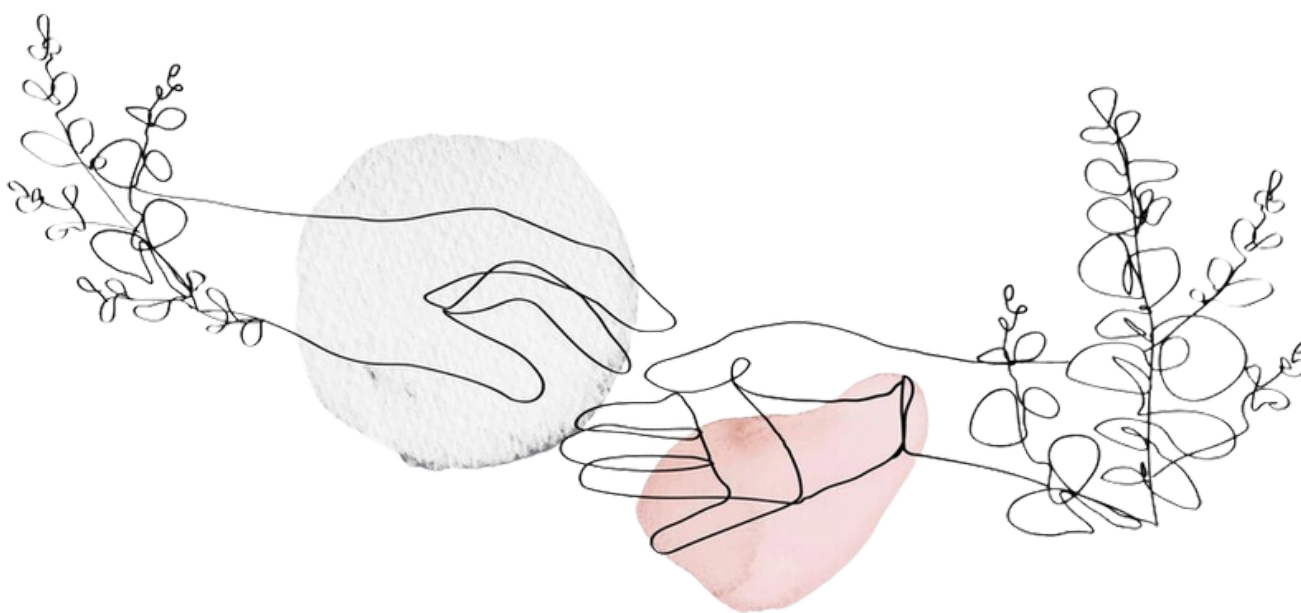
The writer in me analyses the romantic poems and listens to the love songs and I swear to God—I do not love you! But my mind, like sweet poison stilling my veins, lulls images of Your personage above the periphery of prose and lyrics, in the slowest death of my Resolve—I think that I could write you better. I want to eulogise you in my notebooks, And I do not care if anyone forgets what I thought years from now. I want to dance with You in time to my heartbeats, and you can pluck at my heartstrings in the dark as I recite to You the ways in which I love, all in the hoax of humming you to sleep, so I can stay awake in The middle of the night and watch you breathe.

The writer in me doubts that there are happy endings outside of fantasies, that love is real
When I have faked it so many times. I do not love you, but always the formula follows—
Trumpets cheer when you come near me, heaven stills at your touch, unable to make me
Sigh as you do. Rivers flow at the clarity of your laugh, sunshine illuminates the epilogue,
And every chapter I have spun through leads me back to you, beginning and ending on the
Blank page possibility. You edit yourself out of the footnotes of my life.

The writer in me neglects her practice. I draw open the stage curtains and every internal
Monologue I've ever had is shouted in soliloquy to the audience of you. I leave my drafts
Out to dry like waving white flags, surrendering the ink to your eye. I leave you in my
Dedications...

I love you—was that enough denial?

Stay in my story for as long as you are able.



Roukia Ali (Kia, she/her) is a Canadian-Comorian writer based in Toronto. Pursuing an Honours Bachelor of Arts double major in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Toronto Scarborough, she has dedicated her life to professional pursuits in writing since the age of four. Roukia has current and upcoming publications as a first-place winner in Scarborough Fair, and as a writer in MJF Creative's Visionary Magazine. Other than writing, Roukia can be found reading manga, flexing her French, quoting Shakespeare, and attempting unsuccessfully to tear herself away from bookstores. You can follow her on Instagram @roukiaa9140

Baba - Mothepane Lebopo

It doesn't matter how old I think I am. In human years or in energy. Colorless pain never really abandons you. It's strategic, it seizes you and deals with you when you're unattended. In the stillness of the night, when the only thing you hear between four secretive walls is my breath. When my mind is supposed to be idle but it refuses to be.

When I can't find the answers to the waterfall of questions, I ambush myself, even though a very small part of me knows it's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. He left and the ruefulness he may or may not have felt just wasn't enough to make him come back for me. He missed my first period. My first heartbreak. The first time I was careless and dropped someone else's heart. He missed all that... and all I ever missed was him. Not his money. Not his titles. All my heart ever wanted was love. Love that he couldn't quite give to me like your friends did. The absence of it caused the fragmented pieces of my heart to form a resilient, extrinsic force all around me. I walked around knowing he could thaw it with one touch. Because even though I say I don't love him, that I don't need him. My heart sells you out. It betrays me and pants for him. Deep down my heart is always waiting.

My waiting manifests in many ways. Some days I sit at my mother's feet and ask her to recite stories of when they were young and in love, hoping to catch a glimpse of him in her eyes. I breathe carefully, I try to hold my breath so I can somehow hear him breathing during her pauses. On other days, even though the bottles of liquor don't feel like his lips—I kiss them instead. Just for that feeling. It sets my insides on fire but creates a little bit of warmth. It's not perfect but it's better.

Pale face. Bruised knees, discolored from kneeling and praying that God banishes him from my memory. I tell God that my mind is not his home. That I can't shelter my pain and his simultaneously. My words hit the ceiling, and slump on my shoulders until I wallow in guilt. Because forgetting him is not what I need. I need some sort of healing. To feel anything that's not related to anger and bitterness. The mention of his name leaves stains on my mindstains that other men worked hard to polish, even though it wasn't their responsibility. They were there when he wasn't.

His last name travels with me and marks me as his forever. It immerses my skin in a blanket of his DNA. And no matter how hard I try to separate yourself from it—people call it beautiful. They say it makes me beautiful. Beautiful like him.

It makes me wonder, when he looks in the mirror, does he see my mouth? Does he see my brothers' nose? Does he see both of you staring back at him asking: "What did we do?" "What can we fix or hide in ourselves so you can feel like you can be all of you?"

"What parts of us need to leave so you can come back?"

“Did my dancing remind you of my mother? Was my voice too loud, too? Do I remind you of all you're trying to run away from?”

Why couldn't he hold on a little bit longer? His absence had my mother looking looney. Dancing and walking through fires for him. She took my displacement anger and never struck me back. She only rests when I rest. You will find her next to me, mending wounds that the trauma left on me. Never speaking ill of him. She steers my stubborn head towards forgiveness—with her hands covered so I don't ever have to see what he did to her.

She still preaches reconciliation. She apologizes for him still and takes the words we speak in the heat of anger like whips to her back—for him.

And what has he done? Except run?

Knowing that every time he looks back, I'll be running after him.



Mothepane Lebopo is a communication sciences and psychology graduate with a strong passion for promoting mental health and empowering women and children. An avid writer, Mothepane has authored numerous short stories and organized writing workshops. Outside of that, Mothepane enjoys indulging in cooking, podcasts, and cartoons while cherishing the simple joy of sweets and chips in a green packet.

The Sophist - Paradox

The issues were relevant, especially in my home country. They surface like mushrooms every day. Yet here I am, away from all the madness and in pursuit of my studies in the United Kingdom. My patron (I should say my idol) came here and witnessed the coronation of King Charles and Queen Camilla this past September. I remembered myself bearing a particular grin, but deep within my chest fumed with pent-up rage. The unfortunate chance of meeting him firsthand was more out of bad fortune and timing since I was preparing myself for the upcoming examinations in which I am to partake.

Oh shoot. A grumble burst out of my lips, where did I place that damn thing? Scrambling my desk, I found my printed papers which served as my reviewer. Remembering my score, my fingers flew to my phone and found my previous results in my examinations: both scores were merely above the passing grade. Fighting the urge to swear, another ping resounded from my phone: a familiar name resounded as I found my head shaking in disgust: it was a round-faced man in thick glasses and a trademark white cap. My lips constricted, resisting the urge to bedamn the man as my head shook again. The man was also a narrative changer the same as me, except that he was in favor of his own patron. It was hard for me to think that the rotund man was our comrade, but as one of the politicians said in my home country: "In politics, your former allies could be your enemies, and the ones who were your former enemies become your friends." I nodded upon the impression, and the husky man had no drift whatsoever about the ramifications of his libelous statements.

Grabbing my phone, I crashed into the soft, leather couch of my apartment room. Most of my countrymen couldn't afford a pricey suite through their 9-5 pace or tiny salary, but my association with my patron, his cohorts, and my fellowmen in the same profession brought me to this lavish room. While reading the article on the phone, a small giggle came out of me as I pressed my closed fist to my mouth. The heavyset man's patron declared on national TV that their family's political influence was going through "a rough patch right now". I questioned myself after reading it: what the heck is wrong with them? Are they serious about that fiasco? For real? In front of the 31 million voters influenced by us and them? Unless of course, they had an ulterior motive of pulling off that farce under everyone's rug.

My review for the exams could wait, but the other patron's statements on my home country were something that couldn't linger. Heading to my bedroom, I found my usual appliances in it: the table, the ring light, and the laptop with an attached headphone. The laptop's display appeared on the screen for the incoming livestream: 3...2...1...

As I proceeded on with my biased opinion, a drifting symbol of thumbs up and hearts appeared from below the screen. Then came the comments that rose from beneath the surface of the laptop. The viewership at first started from about a hundred and then to thirty thousand in the span of six minutes. I snickered upon the rapid pace of adherents who were following my livestream, and the intentions for me were clear: they were aimed at people who didn't comprehend the truth in my cajoled words. I could care less for the man's patron whether their family was losing its political leverage or not, but what mattered was that my patron's prestige remained intact. Which is why I am here along with my concomitants, save for one of us who's going through a serious health condition.

You have no idea how great this sideline is, especially among the denizens in my home country. Most of my countrymen who properly understood the issues often blamed my patron and the rotund man's patron in general, not knowing that it was us their cohorts who made the change through social media and society, molding their way of thinking precisely to our mindset and in favor of (let me be clear: our leader and not the rotund man's, alright?)

After my livestream which took about 45 minutes and with half a million viewers that decreased towards the end, I returned to my reviewer and began reading it in earnest.

A sigh of relief blew out of my lips after the examinations. After a week had passed and found the results in my phone, I threw my review papers straight to the window as I slumped to the thick, leather couch with tightened lips and a burden in my chest.



Paradox is a writer who wishes to share a bit of truth through literature, hoping to inspire both younger and older generations to be mindful of issues and stand with subjects relevant in their respective countries. On leisurely hours, Paradox writes poetry and prose related to both fictional and non-fictional events.

Paper Ring - Miss Minute

Something thrust in the skins of my right finger as he slipped the origami. I smiled. The risk was worth it when you finally ended up with that someone special. And everything was sweet the first time. The first nerve-wracking 'I love you.' The first eye contact I didn't break because you finally knew what I felt about you. The first stupid fight we had was about who said what and who was actually right. The first time we made up. I thought communication was the only thing that was needed. Communication never worked when only one side talked. It becomes a command. It becomes a tyrant.

And everything was sweet only at the first time. A vision that struck as the lighting fell. Naked in sheets I paid off, a strange woman I had seen only once in a cafe we went out on a date. Your workmate? Old neighbour? I forgot. I was only drawn by how you both looked at each other. You probably forgot I was there. I looked away. The rage of Poseidon reigned over the realms of sinners. I ran, oh darling, faster than the beat of my aching heart. Daggers of rain tore down, piercing my flushed skin. The wide road never looked so empty. The pavements embraced the falling liquid from my swollen eyes.

Your tunnel vision only saw the crust of my identity. That's why when you dipped your toes, you drowned in the depths of my abyss. You made me feel the type of sorrow I never knew existed. I gave up. I stopped. The thunder howled as I stood in the middle of the wide Session Road.

I felt my right finger become lighter as I watched the rain ruin the paper ring. Each tear destroyed its build. Until it fell apart. I really thought it would hold. But time proved to be a stronger opponent than a mere promise. Already worn out, what could it have done? Nothing. What could I have done? Nothing. I slumped on the cold and wet concrete. As I lay lifeless and broken like a mush of paper, once a ring built by a bond that no longer exists.



Miss Minute lived in a Southeast Asian country. Despite having a 1/8 Chinese blood, never knew a bit of Chinese. Miss Minute likes writing, may it be poetry or stories. The mind never rests from creativity. Always hungry for wisdom the world has to offer.

Painting, sketching, crochet, and eating are some of the hobbies and interests.

***My Invisible Balloon* - Ella Jane A. Pollero**

I was once given a bright blue balloon. It was round and big and it floated right above my head. I looked at it and would jump up and down out of excitement. It was just that fun for me.

Everything was bright when I had that balloon. At that time, everyone could still see it. They would compliment it, and in turn me. They'd say, "That's a nice balloon." I would smile proudly and nod in reply.

Soon, however, balloons lost their flare. In some part of the past, somehow no one noticed that I had it in my hand. No one noticed that it still floated, although now barely filled up with air. As time passed by it hovered at about the same as my height. No one praised me for it this time. No one even stopped to point it out.

The brightness of the world slowly went away as the color of my balloon dulled along with its shrinking size. Yet still, it floated, barely off the ground.

A few more years and I forgot about the balloon, the bright blue balloon that I once had.

Once had.

"Isn't it still right there?"

I looked down. It was. It didn't disappear. It was right there all along.

I turned my gaze around, trying to find the voice that said those words to me. I couldn't find them. It felt like they were right beside me but I couldn't see them anywhere, especially not in the place where I thought they would be.

Eventually, I stopped thinking about who that voice might belong to. It doesn't really matter in a way. What matters is that I found what I thought lost. I took back what I thought the world stole.

This time, I would try twice as hard to keep it. Even if no one else can see it or they shun me for having it, this time I wouldn't care.

What does it even matter if I like holding on to this simple balloon of the past? It's not like I would cease to exist. In fact, it's the opposite. This time around, I feel like I would actually live a life written by my own hands, not a story filled up with words that I copied over a blueprint that was magically there before I was born.

I clutched my balloon close to my heart, squeezing it, giving it the warmth it should've received from the people it expected to give it praise. It's okay now. I would give it my own. At least I know it deserves what I can give.

I tied my precious invisible balloon to my smallest finger. I grabbed my pens, my colors, my canvas, and the papers that I would fill with my unwritten manuscripts. I would create. I would make. I would show this masterpiece to the world who may not be able to see it. But that's okay. Those who understand would stop and stare. Just them, even just one of them, would be enough to make a little girl smile again.



Ella is a college student studying for a degree of Bachelor of Arts in Communication at Bicol University in the Philippines. She has her own Facebook writing page, Raindrops of Thinking, an Instagram account (@bookworm_with_a_pen), and has published some works on Wattpad as well, under the pen name ao_hime which means Blue_Princess in Japanese. She uses Blue as her pen name in most of her works. Ella is also an amateur digital artist aside from writing, reading, and watching films in her spare time.

A Masquerade of Tales - X.A.

To the ones who can see,

I have found my way back to the scars I hid down my sleeves. My train of thought traced back to the idea of harming myself when I realized how I was in the same places I had burned in my mind. It was never about how perfect I seemed to be, but how lost I get when I feel someone getting close in ways I can't control, how my mask would be of no use once they step onto the lines I have not prepared myself for. In a masquerade of tales, I have countless versions of my life no one has witnessed nor become acquainted with. Last night, I thought I was too broken to be loved, that I was a bit of everything. Overwhelming as ever, too much yet far too less: the evening contradicting paradox. But perhaps today is different, in my waking, all I could see is but different colors.

I see different things in different ways, all at the same time. I might have been torn by reverberating voices with sharp tongues, but I have learned to speak with intent and a hint of softness no one ever taught. I might have been silenced in the most treacherous ways, a child with a heart so gentle could not bear to carry yet, despite the voice that was wrongfully taken away from me, the woman I am now holds a presence that makes people want to listen. I made my place in the world that asked me to dwindle down. I have hidden my pain so gracefully, my smiles never gave it away. All along, in the masks I've used, there were tears made of pearls from ocean-deep mysteries. I was made to believe that I was not to fight, to not stand the way I should, so people could take me for granted for all I have to offer, I was not to ask, and question. For I was too smart for my own good, I am too strong in a world that denies truths, I am a light in rooms that demand to be kept dark. I am a threat, and I was not to fly.

To be touched in the harshest way, my skin burned in shame for all that it ever came in contact with that it shouldn't have. I do not know who I am and what I can be, all I know is that I'm both vulnerable and strong. *I am lovely, right? I am lovely, right?* The voice in my mind asks.

Am I?

In a ballroom full of masks, and pretenders, I am one of them—in the most perfect way. Every mask displayed atrocities that were only worn to be half of the truth. In my waking today, I thought I seemed beautiful. The young woman looked in the mirror with her eyes ever so pretty, it showed me what an entire universe is. Despite having cried her eyes out for the evening heartbreak, she saw with eyes that could see:

I am beautiful.



A fiery-haired wordsmith born on November nightfall, who goes by the pen name **X.A.**

Always busy, and has many hobbies. She does art, and yoga, meditates, plays instruments, and learns random things in her free time. She has been penning tales since age twelve, an achiever, a catalyst for change, with strong values, and a free spirit.