

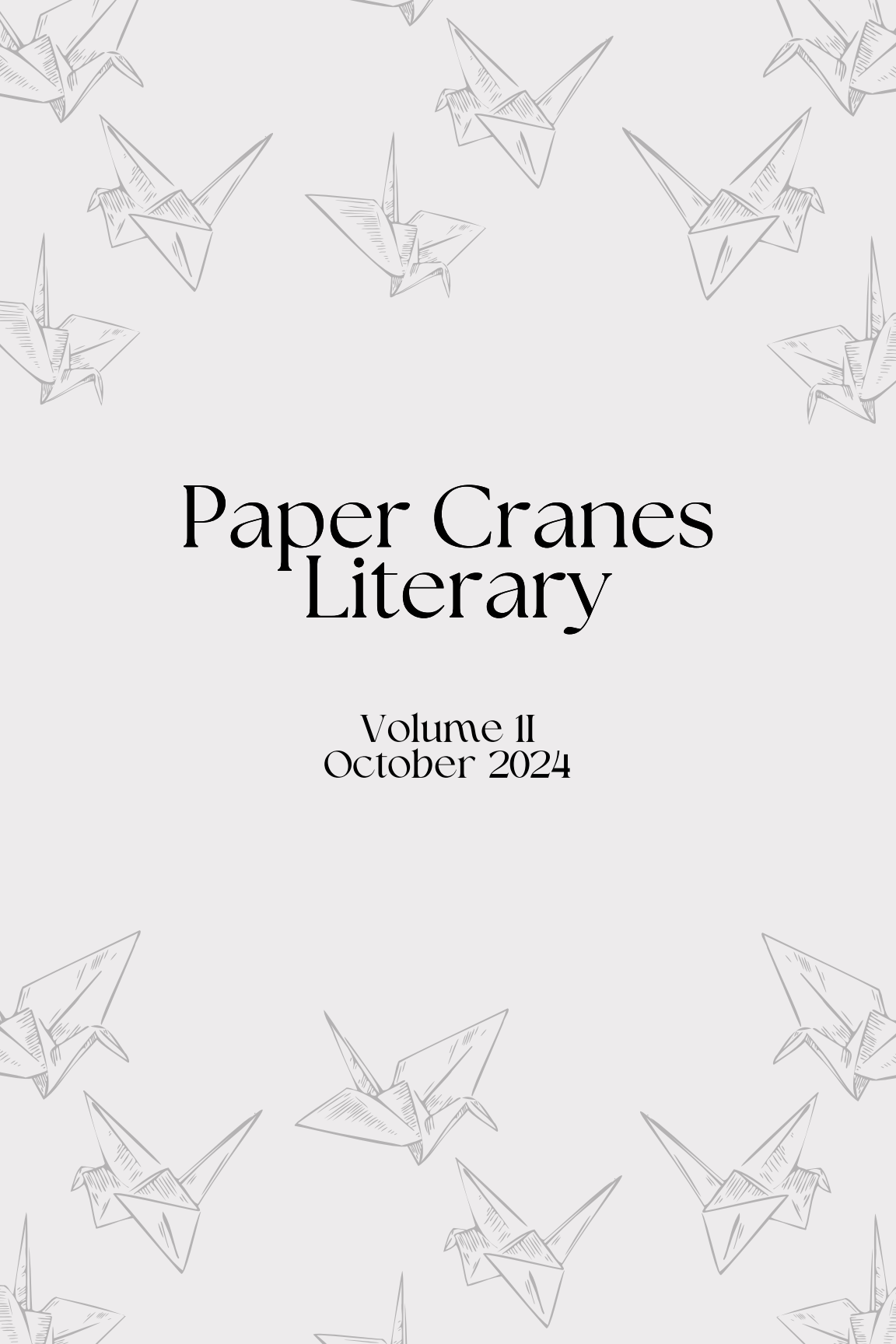
PAPER CRANES LITERARY



nov. 2024

—SCINTILLA—

VOL. II



Paper Cranes Literary

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This issue, we asked our team to select three quotes that are the most powerfully resonant embodiments of this issue's theme. These quotes, repeated in semi-transparent text on the front cover, are written out below:

Oh, best of humanity, where have you gone?
— *"Meet Your Maker," Roukia Ali (p. 37)*

All that is left are pale/plastic drapes,/trying to cover
up/what became of us.
— *"Constructing Love," Ivan Ling (p. 18)*

Mayhem at the edge of daybreak/Ripping strained stars from
a skin of gold.
— *"Untitled," Delilah Dennett (p. 9)*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

As we go through life in a hurry, crucial moments and decisions looming over us, we often miss the minuscule—brushing over defining moments we've deemed insignificant. In this issue, aptly themed “scintilla,” we challenged each of our contributors to examine the tiny sparks, traces, and glimmers that pulse within them. Each one of them delivered, unafraid to weave the barest parts of themselves into their work. Accordingly, I must first begin by thanking every contributor and reader for believing in this little magazine.

Right from the cover artwork of Laura S. Martineé and Yasmin Kareem, issue two is overflowing with introspection, vulnerability, and at times, a childlike hope that we need more than ever. Perhaps this is what a scintilla is—simply “light stolen from stained glass,” among other unnoticed experiences examined in Prarthana Vijayakumar's “day appetite.”

Radically honest and unapologetically bold, Marlena Chertock's “a diagnosis VII” is bursting at its seams with self-love amidst imperfections as she looks deep within herself to declare, “you know your body/best. examine breast —/palpate in circles/from pit to nip.”

“Birthday” by Rachel Uon explores the emotional complexities of teenagehood, the hidden intersection where self-loathing and acceptance intertwine through her devastating opening line, “the first time someone calls her beautiful, she cries.” Bittersweet and agonizing, we are taken inside our own hearts, transported back to all those times we have struggled against that same crushing weight. And yet, we have the power to overcome.

Meanwhile, Lily Willows' “Kaleidoscope” is a gorgeous study in her identity as a writer and beyond; she reflects upon how we as humans are tiny glints in the universe, made up of all those we've encountered, with her resounding closing statement, “I am a writer of mosaicked emotions.”



As humans, we tend to avoid our fears, succumbing to our natural tendency of escape and suppressing the regret that sinks in later. Fittingly, Davin Faris' "I have never" is a necessary reminder to not be constrained by our fear of living. Openly vulnerable in both his writing and author reading, his piece is a confession of missed formative experiences: how he has "never tried to fly never/screamed at the rain/clawed at the stone/left prayers ragged."

November is the month of remembrance, hope, and gratitude. It is a wonderfully transitional time where vivid fall foliage gently shifts to fresh snow caressing bare branches; with its conclusion, the beginning of a flurry of activity and joyous spirit arrives. At the thought of our growth since May, I am filled with awe and gratefulness for each one of you who's been here for the journey. It feels surreal that in just these few months, we have become a worldwide platform reaching 23 US states and 33 countries across 6 continents—I continue to be humbled by the opportunity to work with each one of you.

Above all, thank you to all of my talented staff members—from sorting through submissions, selecting pieces, editing, assembling the issue, designing graphics, creating social media content, and providing feedback and suggestions, there is no part of the process that you have not been involved in, and this magazine would not exist without your efforts.

As we move into glittering December and prepare to start a new year, I hope that this issue encourages you to savor time, embrace small moments, and give yourself permission to engage in self-love. After all, the present is ephemeral—and while we are here, it remains solely our choice to hold tight and live in it.

Warmly,

Isabel Gan

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



MASTHEAD

Isabel Gan (*editor-in-chief*) is a Singaporean-American writer from California who loves evocative imagery and the em dash. Along with editing for various literary magazines, her work is published or forthcoming in *Black Fox Literary*, *The Greyhound Journal*, and *Fleeting Daze Magazine*, among others. She loves late-night musings, reading composers' biographies, and hot soup on rainy days.

Jay Belandres-Mendoza (*editor*) is a university student living in Jacksonville, Florida for most of the year. She is working on her Bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She mainly writes poetry except for the occasional fiction piece. Her work has been published in magazines like the *Bitter Melon Review*, *The Petrichor Gazette*, and *The Graveyard Zine*.

Mahathi Sathish (*editor*) is a tired, socially-awkward teenager from Chennai, India who believes in words and not things. She's got a terrible sense of humour and a relentless pursuit to tell stories from the ordinary. When she's not busy cackling to re-runs of old sitcoms, you can find her alone, in a corner with a sheet of really bad poetry.

Zeina Sherif (*editor*) is an Egyptian 16-year-old junior who's passionate about literature. From a young age, she has been obsessed by the power of words and the worlds they can create. She loves spending her days diving into new books, whether they are classical novels, fiction, or nonfiction. Zeina is also an avid writer often creating her own stories that reflect her thoughts and imagination.

Chloe D (*editor*) is an avid reader and writer who loves both prose and poetry. When she is not doing either of the forementioned, she can be found swimming, playing tennis, listening to music, or practicing her violin. Visit her Instagram @chloedwrites



Chelsea Guan (*staff writer*) is a 16-year-old writer/poet from Pennsylvania, USA. She's passionate about (you guessed it!) creative writing, poetry, and all things alike. In her free time, she enjoys reading thriller novels, going out on walks, losing herself in baking, and putting random ideas into her notes app for writing inspiration. Chelsea can be found spending a lot of time at her local library.

Lily Willows (*staff writer*), a writer, poet and journalist, uses her own experiences, as a woman, to engage with a primarily female reader. Additionally, Lily is a prolific pen pal, lover of sunflowers and collector of Jellycats. Lily's writing primarily focuses on self-love, girlhood and feminism.

Dorisa Sun (*graphic designer*) is a Chinese-American 16-year-old from New Jersey, USA. She has an abnormal penchant for photoshopping things, whether it be superimposing her friend's face on a celebrity's face or creating laughably bad edits of her teachers as minions. Her favorite pastimes are scrolling through the "web weaving" tag on Tumblr, obsessing over Notion Calendar features, and reading neuroscience-related articles featured in the Nature journal.

Nathalie Alegre (*staff writer; graphic designer*) uses her work to immortalize her loved ones (people and thoughts). Her world revolves around two things— the arts and the sciences, obsessed with how much they play off each other. She spends her free time obsessing over music, literature, film, crochet, and art, and her not-so-free time is spent being consumed by science.

Nour Berkane (*social media*) is a writer and medical student from Algeria. Her work has been published in the Between the Lines: Peace and the Writing Experience Anthology, the Lunar Journal, Aster Lit magazine and was nominated for Best of the Net.



Ben Ramakrishnan (*website*) is a high school sophomore who is passionate about music, theater, and literature. When he isn't Broadway dreaming, he makes music, performs, reads just about anything, bakes, writes, and drinks iced coffee and hot tea. His biggest aspiration is to become a singer-songwriter. He is an introvert and an INFJ-T. He is also the founder and editor-in-chief of *Vellichor Literary*.

Freya C. (*graphic designer*) is a designer from Indonesia who's a sucker for good books, listening to Laufey while it rains, and eating instant noodles at every chance she gets. You could find more of her work on her school's journalism club called SJCaptured!

Angie Lucien (*staff writer*) is a Hong Kong based (song)writer and summer child who loves the smell of candy stores. Her works have been published in the Eunoia Review, Ink and Marrow, Fleeting Daze among many others. She also reads for the Arrowhead Review and Aster Lit. You can find her on Instagram: @delucienal_

Alin Sengjaroen (*staff writer*) (she/he) is a writer, poet, and screenwriter from Thailand. Her works have appeared in Rewrite The Stars Magazine, The Eyre Magazine, The Coalitionworks, etc. You can contact her via Instagram @cl3fleur and alinsengjaroen1408@gmail.com. Her biggest inspiration is Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Kyla Zak (*graphic designer*) is a graphic designer based in the Philippines who is passionate about visual story-telling. As an artist and lifelong reader, she aims to create a reading experience that highlights the poignant emotions behind each submission, bringing words and stories to life



Resurgence

— *Kai*

The slightly opened door loomed ahead of me, casting an amber ray at my feet, enveloping the room in eerie emptiness. Each step I took echoed through the trembling floor, accompanied by the gentle patter of water droplets from above and the cool touch of sweat trickling down my skin. My eyes rested on a lone flickering candle in the distance, pirouetting delicately in the breeze, caught between the dance of flames — nearing its end. My sight glimpsed the once burning bright star of my past, once ablaze with fervor — now a familiar yet distant friend. The passion that almost died before me. The intensity of my longing to pursue that dream flickered vividly, rekindling fire amidst my shadow. Despite the fading glow of the candle, I refused to let it wane, unhesitatingly relighting it with a new glory drawn from my pen and paper through the inkwell — the letters on the paper seemed to come alive, breathing new meaning into what I once deemed insignificant and unworthy of the reader's gaze. And the hidden, unnoticed, and unseen pages. In that flickering light, in every spark of longing, I found the resolve to revive the latent talent that resided within my heart. But my heart refused to accept it and welcome it. The vessels of my blood were flooded with the toxicity of opinions that hindered it. Guilty, I allowed it to freeze my hope and break me into pieces until there was nothing left. But the blaze within me never wavered. It was the autumn haze, the falling leaves, the fearless gaze, the loneliness, the silent bliss. It will always breathe with me. As for my paper and pen, there they were. The dream of becoming a master of words. And now, it is here. I am holding the mere, almost drowning light of this candle flame, promising that it will never die — never again. It is alive. It is breathing. As the words gently escape my mouth, saying,

I promise...

I promise...

I promise...



Disorientation

— *Delilah Dennett*

I'm not going to say that it's rolling in hills of mayweather
Berry blood
Dust particles
Audiovisual failing
The bones of church walls slowly disintegrating
Mood swings mood swings mood swings
No it's not like that at all
It is bordering on stillness
The glowing glare of a TV screen
The light in the tunnel getting further away from you
Quickly, it is burning out.



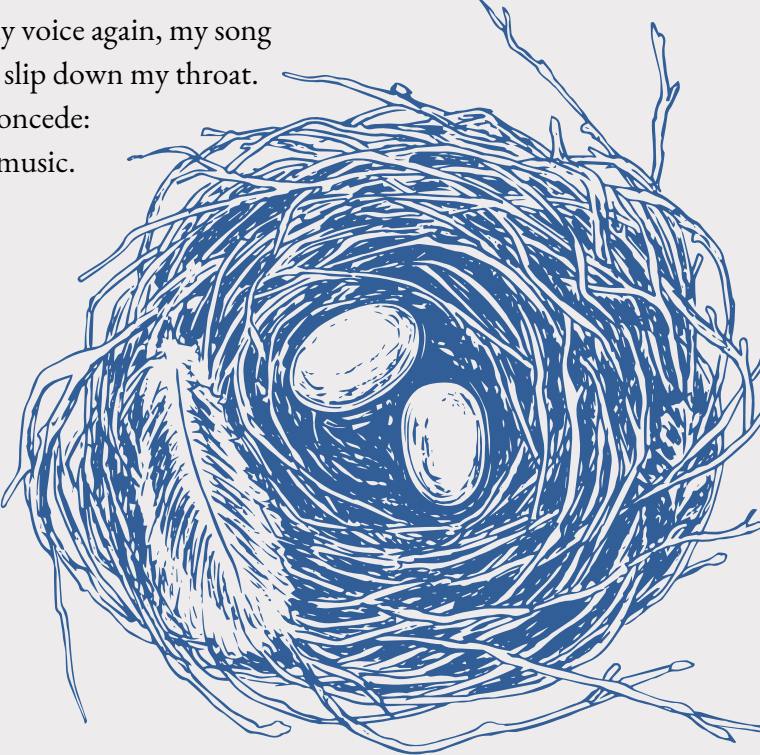
Brahman

— *Delilah Dennett*



I know the voices of others
More than I know my own chirping –
Like the shrill shell of shrapnel that
Cuts through the bone,
And lands softly, here,
At your feet. These echoes
Tremble through my body.
What we had before is gone,
Passed, before it lost its breath.
A vacuum of air
Stifled in its throat -
Trying to conceal us from eyes that pierce the surface
Of things unseen.

One day, I may gain my voice again, my song
Of golden swords that slip down my throat.
But, for now, I must concede:
Silence makes its own music.





Untitled

— *Delilah Dennett*

It sears you, love, burning you as it is
Replenishing the gentle murmurs within my lungs,
And now I am grown again, I can see what I used to see.

Mayhem at the edge of daybreak,
Ripping strained stars from a skin of gold,
From the mouth of the sun,
Darkness belittles us no more
Until the moon arrives to reclaim her bounty.

Hollow reimaginings permeate an empty skull devoid of any thought
The wise are too wise to see why even they cannot be trusted
All these glorified zombies walking about, cleansed of any goodness they
had before.





ATwilight Tale

— *Blake S*

Breathe,
revere
the ‘restricted’.
Endear,
estranged tales of valour
my lawmakers declared as convicted.
I’ve been too delicate even for a flower
spiralled in thorns of envy,
withering away before hearing your reasons
and if I lack perspective to interpret matters fairly,
how can I see colours when I’ve built my mansion in the tempest greys,
powered by my treason?
Surveil,
injure and provoke and complain
then lead your most turbulent sails.
Scintillate,
satellite gaze
forever with those twinkling eyes
glaring at your glory as I’m set ablaze.

hear out my twilight tale,
twirl around the stars and destiny
savour my parasitic larceny
I wreck what I adore
but you have the honour of being my life support.



Lovers by Candlelight

— *Alistair Gaunt*

The painting of two lovers stands still, unmoving in juxtaposition to their borrowed time. A hand on the Other's waist, thumb gently tracing over the scattered freckles on their skin. They mark the sidewalks and empty roads with the imprints of their footsteps, in hopes of battered dreams and leaving something behind. Behind closed doors, mouths opened, gasping every word but each other's names; their identities remained hidden—to each other and to themselves. In this room, where no one could see them, they could pretend to be everything they are not supposed to be—a Lover who wears their heart on their sleeve and the Other who has always loved unafraid. Alongside each other, they could always pretend. Lies and empty promises roll off the Lover's tongue, as smooth as an ever-flowing river and as easy as breathing. The Other chooses to believe them—will always choose them, in spite of it all; the warning signs never mattered, not when the Lover has taught them everything they know about a love that resists.

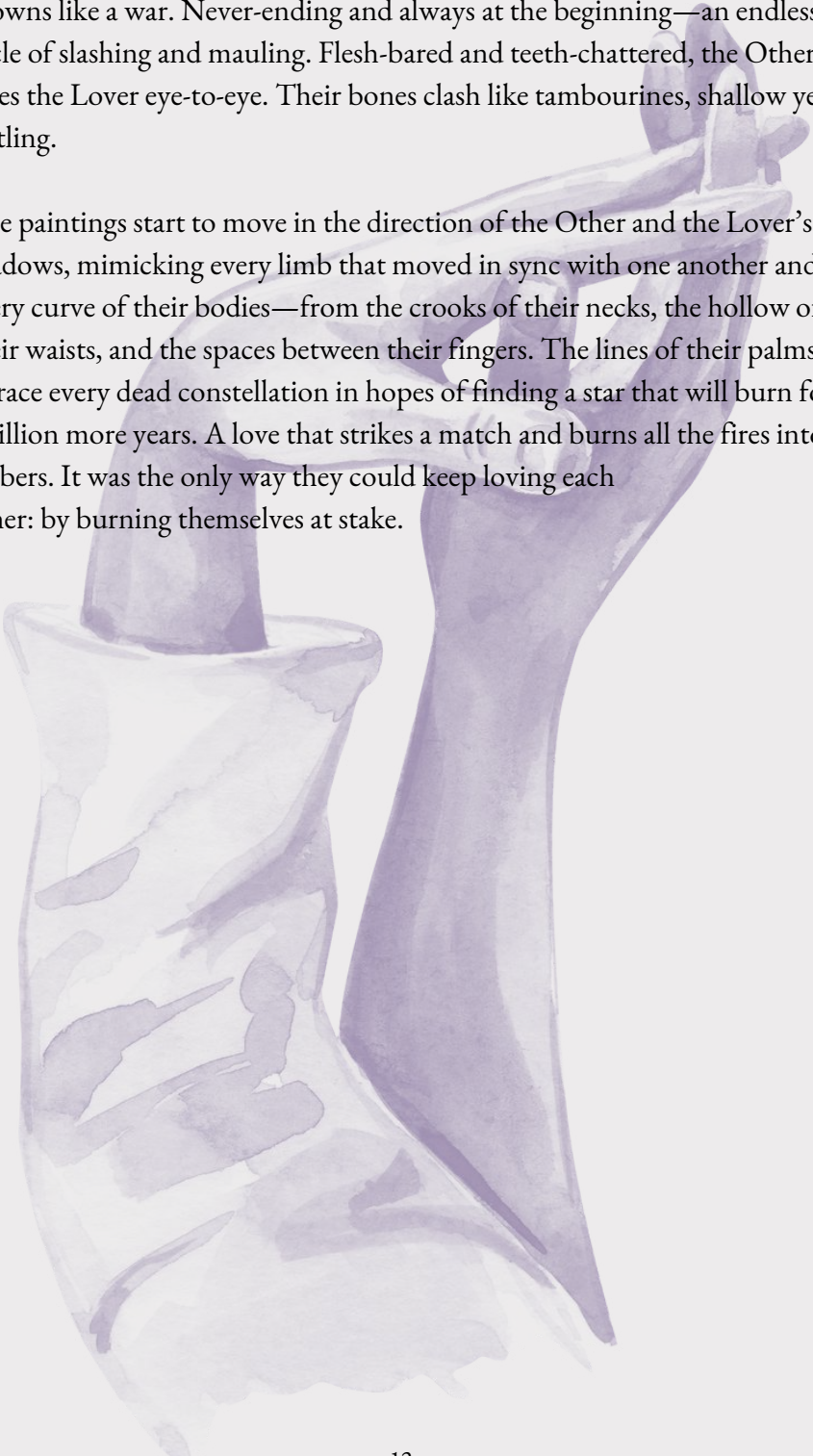
Resistance. It claws its way in like prey, awaiting its feast. Desperate, hungry, and calculated. The starting line begins with the clutch of the gun—cold and metal and tangible enough to be felt with the Other's fingertips. The Lover remains touched by everything but the Other's bullet. It was always like this with them: only grazing the surface and never piercing through. The surface level haunts the unfinished business of the most worn-out ghosts. A past that keeps reverberating and a demon that is never exorcised. The Other's wrong choices make the loudest of echoes, threatening to crush into the walls of pretention. The Lover remains silent—always have, always will. Never facing the mirror and staring directly at the sun. A sight that burns and keeps on burning. Burning through the Other's heart is their own love engulfed in flames.

They have always loved like fire, always burned themselves for the sake of the Other's warmth. The hearth burns hotter than the well, but the water



drowns like a war. Never-ending and always at the beginning—an endless cycle of slashing and mauling. Flesh-bared and teeth-chattered, the Other faces the Lover eye-to-eye. Their bones clash like tambourines, shallow yet rattling.

The paintings start to move in the direction of the Other and the Lover's shadows, mimicking every limb that moved in sync with one another and every curve of their bodies—from the crooks of their necks, the hollow of their waists, and the spaces between their fingers. The lines of their palms retrace every dead constellation in hopes of finding a star that will burn for a billion more years. A love that strikes a match and burns all the fires into embers. It was the only way they could keep loving each other: by burning themselves at stake.





i'm sure there are many of us, we
just didn't have a name for it yet

— Farida Fitrihani (*f. fitrihani*)



Birthday

— Rachel Uon

the first time someone calls her beautiful, she cries.

she waits until she gets home and then sobs
into her own arms. her sleeves smell of vanilla
but there's champagne sloshing around her skull
and it leaks from the cracks with lingering agony.
the words she did not say slip onto the bathroom floor, so
she gathers them in a wine glass and drinks every drop.

four hours later, she vomits.
five hours later, she falls asleep.
six hours later, she turns 17.

she does not feel like she ever passed 14.

she climbs out of bed in the morning
and the girl in the mirror is half alcoholic
half preteen daughter, middle child,
a cigarette between her lips and
dark purple on her nails, not yet dry.

she blinks and then it is just chipped nail polish
and a wrinkled t-shirt. there is not a version
of her that deserves to be called beautiful,
but someone said it anyway and that means something.
she spits up the champagne,
wipes her nails bare,
and leaves 14 on the bathroom counter.





her friends will be waiting in the driveway.
they do not drink,
but they feel everything.

she makes a decision
and blows out the candles.





AP Statistics teaches me about intersectionality

— Rachel Uon

When my family is the only one pulled away from the big blue sign marked IMMIGRATION we are expected to believe – or politely pretend – that it is a completely random occurrence. Calculating p-values with data I don't have, I come to the same conclusion over and over again, and it is not the one they want us to reach. Model minority we're called, but we're still little too close the others for comfort – you know the ones I mean, the ones that hitchhike across the border and live in ghettos and get angry when they're told to stay down – not us, of course, never, but still, under certain lights we look similar enough for the question to be raised. But I know the numbers on terrorism. I've seen the neat columns of black and white detailing the whos and whys of twisted metal and screeching blue flames. I know something here is rotten to the core, but most days there isn't a lot to get angry at. Most of the time we stay sweet. We stay good. We keep our heads down and do the work. Most days it's just a little extra paperwork. But what I'm saying is this: ten hours and three oceans away, the sharp blue lines on the machines standing watch over my grandmother were going frantic, rising and falling, sketching out foreign and terrible shapes, the graph of a function $f(x)$ such that it takes in life and spits out death. The doctors were murmuring in apologetic tones, the phone was ringing in the apocalypse, the world was shattering apart—

and we were stuck in the queue.



A Midnight's Symphony

— Yvette



A grotty lamp scarcely lighting a space
Would not be too difficult to toss away
An air of malaise, ache, and compunction may glide
Still, would not be too difficult to overlook
However, it is different
This divinely decorated lamp bound to be a museum's piece
An exquisite lamp, a sight to yield to
Emitting vivid yellow hues of luminescence,
She highly favors
Every night, she flicked on
Fully intoxicated, she moved her body
Losing control of her hands
Her heedless whirling footsteps was all that was left by the morning
She moved with the rhythm of the songs
And with the faint splendor that sparked off her will
A perfect shade to let loose of emotions left to sway out
She danced with the burning tone of the sun
What's become of thoughts hard to read, evanesce and sparked
She glowed till midnight caressed by the flawless melody
Caressed by the sophisticated light of her lamp
Once was dancing, and once her favorite lamp
At the moment, she held unto it one more time





Constructing Love

— *Ivan Ling*

Let these rickety frail constructions be
the infrastructure of our love.
Listen to the creaking joints of harmony,
weeping every night at a pledge
broken by bed sheets!
Stubborn stains bulldozers fail to remove,
your scent lingers, still
in the cracks of my walls.

These rickety frail constructions are
the infrastructure of our love.
There is no more of us, now
that we have collapsed.
All that is left are pale
plastic drapes,
trying to cover up
what became of us.





In/Significance

— *Ivan Ling*

love wavers
like a caterpillar
holding on dearly
to a piece of leaf
on a windy day

love shivers
like barn owls
returning home
after their nights
hunting in the rain

love crackles
in the fireplace
frost-kissed hands
dancing around
in celebration

love creeps
abundantly across
barren gardens and
forgotten forests
no matter who





Vase

— *Ivan Ling*

Water dribbles down
curves carved by
belittling and nagging.

A body whipped
by deceiving hands
proclaiming much affection.

Thickly contoured skin
from manipulative decades
and leering eyes.

But now, water threatens to
flood the reservoirs in
a final act
of saving
yourself.



a diagnosis VII

— *Marlena Chertock*

you know your body
best. examine breast —
palpate in circles
from pit to nip.

self-exam alone
you don't know
what you're doing.
do you feel that —

a hard lump
your heart thunks.
go to the obgyn
for her expertise

but all she says
is yes, I feel it too,
pea-sized at one o'clock,
smaller than the crystals

you collect, carry close.
mystic rituals
keep you safe,
light the candle,

knock on wood,
fingers crossed,
you're only a witch
when you need protection.





Catalog of gratitude

— *Marlena Chertock*

after Ross Gay



This is why you're weird,
my sister tells me:

you're never on time, you pee
with the door open, you turn off

the music to parallel park,
you can't get rid of books,

you make me laugh
until I cry, and almost pee,

you sing loudly in the shower,
in the car, doing the dishes,

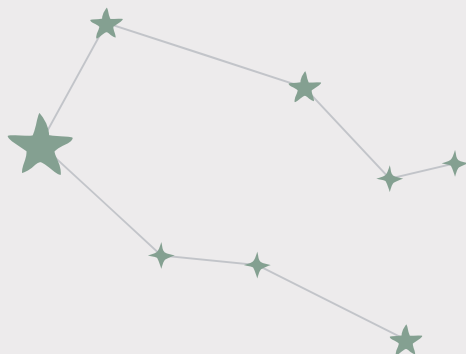
you understand what I'm saying
with my mouth full or through a yawn,

you always point out the moon,
you never answer the phone

but you're anxious whenever
you can't reach someone on theirs,

you try to communicate
by wiggling your eyebrows,

by mmm-ing like Gene in Bob's Burgers,
or quack-ing like Gunther in Adventure Time,





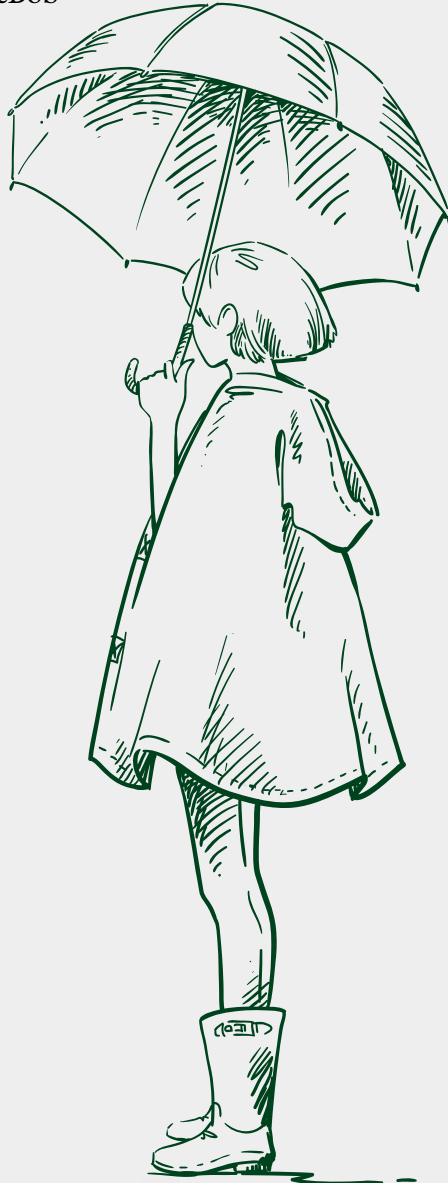
you waddle like a penguin,
but even less dainty,

when your knees and hips swell
after standing too long, you shout,

“my leg!” from SpongeBob
to draw attention

and make fun
of your old

young
body





a diagnosis VI

— *Marlena Chertock*



dys • plasis
meaning bad
formation
your skeleton

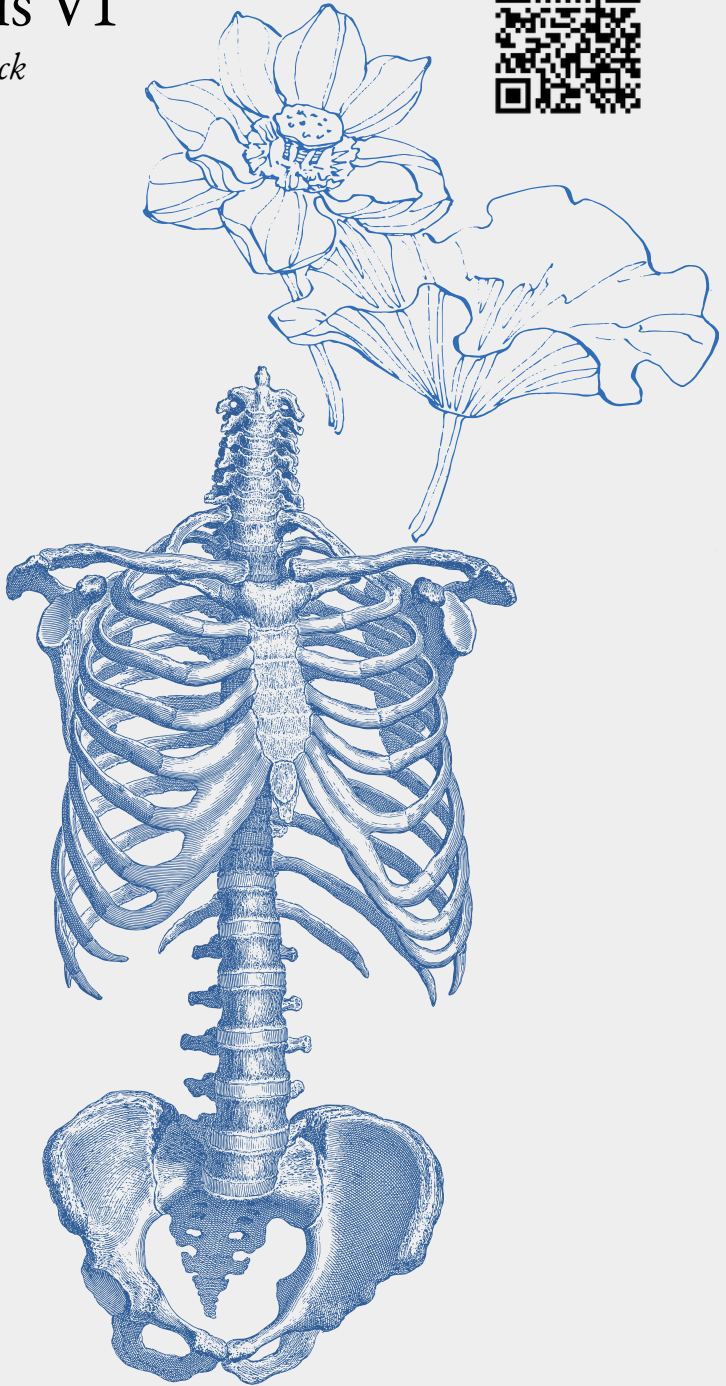
scrapes
the cartilage
inside you

like the
last bit
of jelly
in a jar

your joints
lock hips
ache bones
throb muscles

spasm skeleton
shapeshifts skin
stretching to fit

surpass the doctor's
height expectations
on the growth chart
you're an oxymoron
a tall dwarf





spinal cord
curves organs
gurgle belly
swells someday

your right hip
needs
to be
replaced

your sister's and father's
hips already
swapped
for metal





The Library in the Pocket of Universe



— *Madeline Rosales*

It is a pocket of universe that stands somewhere between the shores of consciousness and the sun, composed only of a string of books resting upon a bookshelf that may be made of chestnut wood, though no traveler has ever cared to clarify such a detail. There is no ceiling to confine the imagination, no floor to anchor the wandering soul, nor walls to hem in the boundless potential of the mind. However, there may perhaps exist an end to this procession of books, only it has not yet been reached.

However, because my readers may require more explanation, I will offer this: This library, as some like to call it, extends as far as the last traveler wished to take it before departing, and no further until someone chooses to take it further.

We tend to believe that, though we haven't quite worked out the specifics, 14 billion years ago, there was a massive expansion wherein the universe burst forth from a singularity of unimaginable density. All concepts of time and space came into existence from this single event, referred to as 'The Big Bang'; thereby, only nothingness existed before. However, it would be impossible for something to come from nothing. How could any being, deity or not, have had an invisible blueprint with no listed materials or instructions for creation, yet make everything necessary to sustain life... That would've been impossible, so something must have laid beyond the nothingness that preceded 'The Big Bang'. After all, how can our system of universe exist without a defined beginning? Can something truly arise from nothingness? Furthermore, if time didn't exist before 'The Big Bang', can we truly speak of a beginning? And even if something evermore exotic preceded 'The Big Bang', then we must ask what came before that. And then what came before that? There has to be one uncaused cause to make anything else make sense.



When a person begins these wonderings, they find themselves at this library. With fervor, the traveler's first act is to read the first book, in which the ink describes the exact happenings of what humans have assumed to be 'The Big Bang'. And once they set down the book, the traveler feels greatly satisfied. The scientists were right, and there was never a divine being who let there be light. Great.

However.

There are other books, and if the first book purported to answer the question of creation, why then do subsequent volumes beckon from the shelves? Might there exist a second question? With trembling yet eager hands, the traveler reaches for the second book.

The second book, in short, depicts a revelation as profound as it is perplexing— an account of the space from which 'The Big Bang' erupted, a point smaller than the current fabric of reality would permit. Yet, how, indeed, could anyone have spoken of size and dimensionality when the very notion of space itself had yet to be conceived? There must have been something before, something to provide reason for this form. Perhaps the third book will provide a more pleasant explanation.

The third book continues to rouse additional questions as it describes the substances that existed far before the singularity, catered to an even further microscopic world where particles of unfathomable minuteness collided and coalesced, creating miniature reactions that ultimately resulted in the creation of the singularity, giant in comparison. And yet, with each description comes a stampede of questions. For what purpose do these particles serve, if anything resembling purpose can be ascribed to the whims of quantum happenstance? Did they navigate the primordial void with the same sense of direction as humans? Were there microscopic fleas driving these particles into one another like modern day automobiles? Did anything resemble modern day automobiles at all?



Oh goodness, the traveler then begins to think. Did anything resemble *human life* at all? The traveler quickly runs down this line of books, briefly skimming through the ink until any mention of sentient life appears. Though it's not fully clear whether it is sentient, life is in fact implied in the 15,000,000th book. However, this life does not in any way emulate the habits of humans. First of all, they existed far before space, meaning they eschewed the need for verbal or visual communication and instead communicated upon periodically clustering to one another and transmitting their thoughts within one infinitesimal of light speed to one another before parting once more. They never evolved with the need to form communities, and thus died out silently.

As the traveler finishes the 15,000,000th book, they stand face-to-face with an odd epiphany. For if the universe exists without reason, then what becomes of our cherished notions of meaning and significance? And in the face of this, we are compelled to confront the possibility that everything exists solely for the sake of existence itself. But what, then, of our own existence as humans? Do we even carry within us a mission, or are we merely a buffer between one book and the next? And what of death? If nothingness never existed in our past, does it lay claim to our future as well? Does that even matter at this point?

Oh, the traveler then thinks, does it even matter?

And then they find the knife that they have been carrying, though have not been aware of, and they realize the decision they now face. Most travelers choose to run the knife's blade down their wrist and forearm, unprepared to continue with an existence in which everything is so uniformly boring with no end, purpose, or meaning in sight. When we die, the cycle will continue as it always had, and we will be less than a footnote in their book's pages. We've been abandoned, to a certain extent, to absolute freedom; we are drifters in an existential ocean, with a sailboat built for one and no rules to life but those we provide, and yet we are





expected to observe a meaning or the bare bones basics of a reason to live. A reason to live in a universe so kind and uncaring, in which hopelessness presents itself as the inevitable answer pitted against tragedies lacking explanation, is a laughable idea. Ask yourself, *how could anyone live like this?* How could anyone engage themselves against the unexplained or completely random? Who wouldn't lose all hope and reason for being? Who wouldn't lose their minds and take their life?

Then there is the other kind of traveler. They put the knife down. And then they leave. They leave to pursue the joy of being for the sake of it, with the freedom to, at any moment, rebel against the contradictory nature of existence and find hope internally. Nothing is certain and permanence is only a fleeting illusion, however this traveler finds solace with the indomitable spirit of rebellion, and thus chooses to live more intensely.

Our lives make no sense and are dependent on the assurance that we rebel against the lack of sense it purports by being better and kinder and stranger and smarter and freer. We are all made of recycled star-stuff, we are all hopeless, and we are all carrying on regardless.

And this latter traveler exits the library and finds that the clouds are dense overhead, and believes it to be a fine day for a swim.





Untitled

— Irina Tall



I have never

— *Davin Faris*

sung karaoke
read Romeo & Juliet
learned to cry
not even alone
of the highway
I have never
goodbye never
I love you without
surfed a wave
tied my heart
swallowed swords
been brave enough
the poet's oldest
been scared enough
mean never
thinking this is
made wings from
and no regrets never
screamed at the rain
left prayers ragged
started over never
said I am lost never
I am here
forget it

thrown a punch
seen Antarctica
at sad songs
the restless blue spine
pouring into midnight
learned to say
learned to say
doubting never
danced a tango
to railroad tracks
kept promises never
to slaughter cliches
friends never
to say what I
held you without
the last time never
paperbags coathangers
tried to fly never
clawed at the stone
in the dirt never
said I am sorry
said I am here
I am here never





Taking flight in seven easy steps

— *Davin Faris*



One: Buy a box of nails, a step-ladder, a dozen red roses,
a flock of birthday balloons.

Two: Turn in your two-week's notice and send your last emails.

Three: The first time I wrote a love poem, it was so careful
my lips bled when I read it aloud.

Four: Leave your name neatly folded on the grass beside your shoes.

Five: The first time I wrote a love poem, I knew exactly where it ended.

Six: Climb the ladder. Knot the balloons. Scatter the roses.
Swallow the nails.

Seven: The first time I wrote a love poem it was insistence, levitation,
confession, terror. It was this and this and this and

Seven: It was losing count. Losing words. It was
It was beautiful.

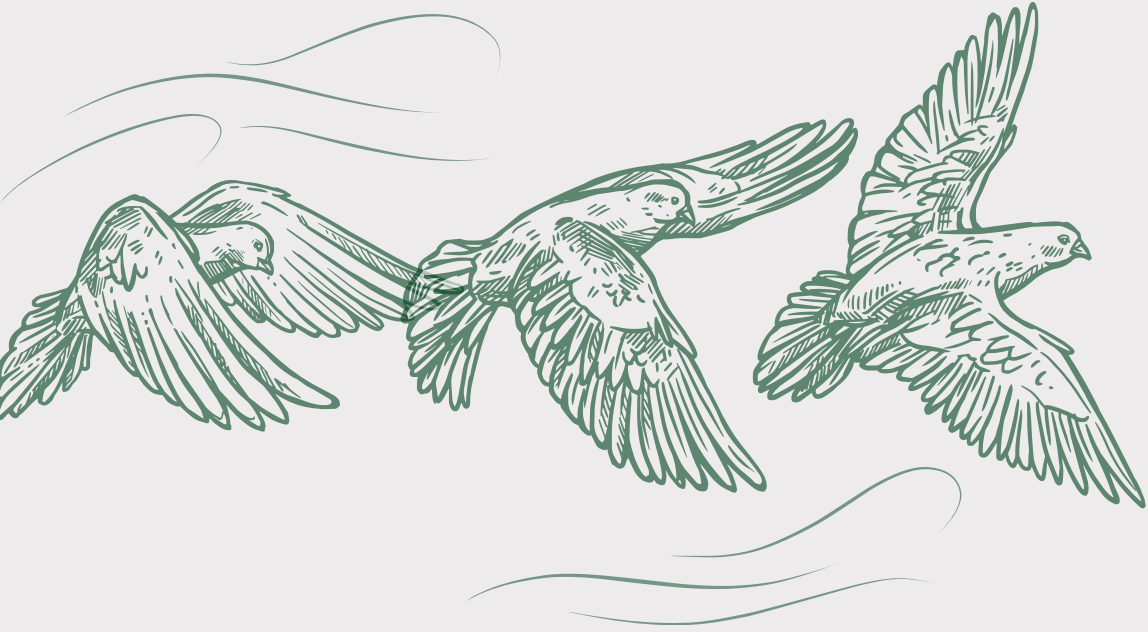
Seven: Sing with the birds in migration. Do not look back on our darling
footprints, forget what you can and





Seven: remember what matters. Never mourn an ending. The first time
 I wrote a love poem it was

Seven: a magic trick, like gravity. Now snap your fingers
 and float away.



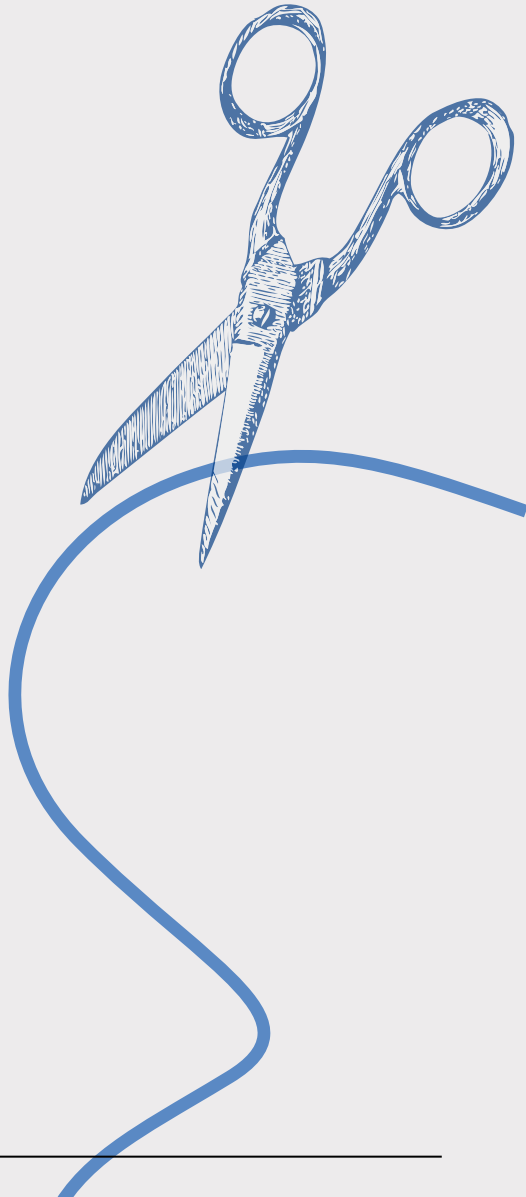


Wrong ways to defuse a bomb

— *Davin Faris*



Ask it to consider the consequences
of its actions. Pummel its casings till
the world breaks apart. Rob a bank
and offer the igniter more cash than
you can carry. Declare your undying
love for the cool flash of the timer.
Cut the red wire. Tear your hair up
like a gardener. Slash your palms
like a surgeon. Whisper your prayers
like a martyr. Cut the blue wire.
Compose a sonnet you cannot finish.
Write letters to the beloved and the
lost. Demand another chance. Deny
inevitability. Surrender your voice
and flay your own memory like an
undertaker. Let the burning night
ransack your body. Close your eyes
like a warden and set yourself free.





The Sharp Fragments of a Forgotten Dream

—*Josephine Rudolf*



There it was again, that tiny shard digging in,
The same pain that used to make you flinch-
Now you barely react, not even to the blood,
Not even when it fills your lungs.

Still, you notice it, notice it expanding,
Expanding until there is no room for air.
As you begin to fade, something awakens-
Your origin not ready for the end.

Suddenly, it forces you to remember those times
when coffee tastes exactly like it did that night-
That night when time wasn't real,
When nothing was, yet everything felt real.

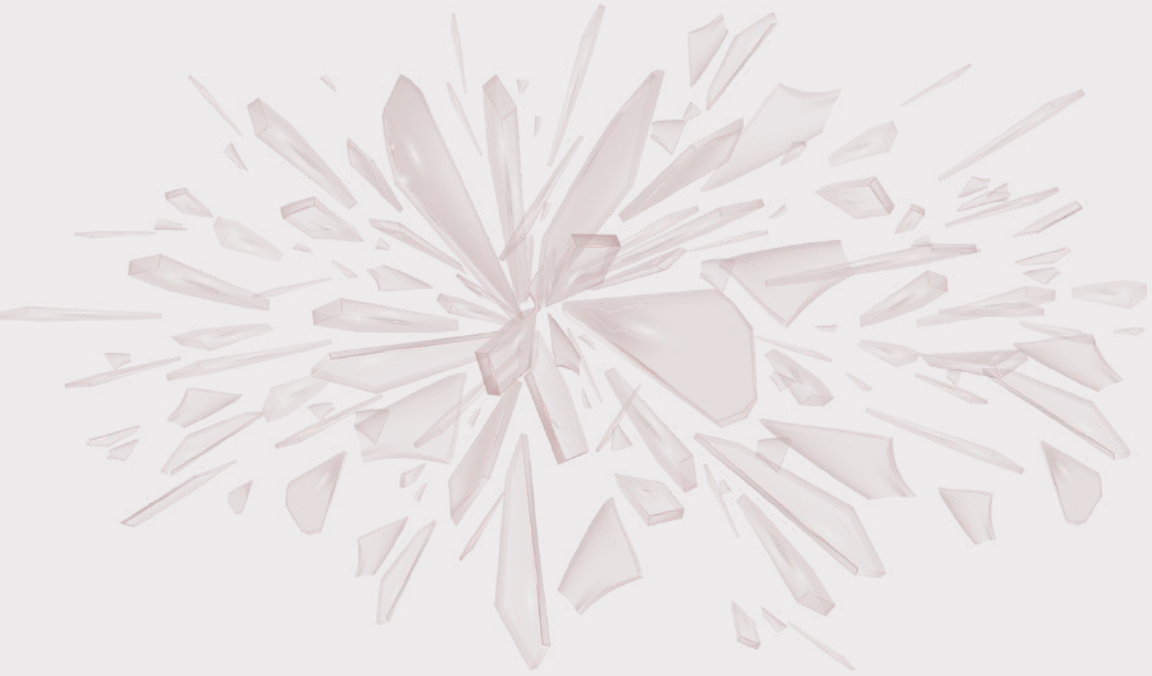
Every cell worked toward it,
Every thought streamlined into one.
Every moment so raw, yet surreal-
Now, everyday you yearn for it.

When they ask if you still write,
Wonder if that leotard still fits,
The line that won't leave your head,
That one dream you'd never say aloud-



Next time those forgotten thoughts,
Dig into your soul,
Burn into your flesh,
Don't numb them.

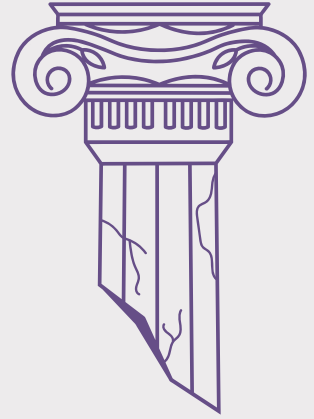
Embrace the pain as a reminder.
Let the storm clear the path,
The fire light the way,
And return.





Meet Your Maker

— *Roukia Ali*



You were the best of self once.
Face fresh as a newly struck match
Of fire that Prometheus did not steal from the Gods
To be so easily snuffed.
The darkness once wept to hold you,
Its glacial tendrils burning in pained, retreating cries
A combustion of ashes upon touching your spirit,
Scattering away in hisses tossed to the wind.
You were the best of women once;
All felled by the temple of your words,
A shrine of sweet, soft affirmations that
Demeter did not bloom from her happiness
For you to be tempted by the eye of blood,
The dripping promise of pomegranates.
You were the best of children once,
Curious eyes compasses to great and dangerous adventures,
A caution no better felt than the roguish grin
That settled under the wide brim of your paper hat.
Doomed be Poseidon and his raging oceans
As you crossed the sea on nothing but your wooden raft.
But he did not quell the sea for you to see,
Only ships launched into indecipherable futures,
Worlds that have not yet been mapped.
You were the best of champions once,
But you no longer care for the gold
You see flitting across your neck
As if in mockery of the sun.
Helios does not drive his chariot across somber skies
To shine across the passing mists of your silver cheeks.





You were the best of stories told,
But now the sirens' voices sting with saltwater
And in pity of your vacant wade they will not sing their songs.
For you are the animal that stalks along, teeth bared,
The Nemean lion destined to starve, as the world
Solves your riddles.

Oh, best of humanity, where have you gone?
Oh, all that would have made you kings, Gods on earth!
Had you kept the passionate, simple veins of life
That so long ago, have you forgotten,
Were gifted at birth.





Day Appetite

— *Prarthana Vijayakumar*

skitter across your skin wrist thumb back of neck dance of prairie queens
locusts guard sleep at the foot of my bed
thimble's child gash the shape of daffodils
no way back from the moon my love stays there in a lunar pit one belly of space
rookie angels i burn where my plastic wings don't leave the factory
fruit markets with no change left to give i speedrun mortality
luteal summers in my right hand a sweaty baby holding a sweaty pineapple
nights devoid of rainbows i pull the headphones off the alien
veins sold baskets plaited one hangs from my chest
light stolen from stained glass trinket from a dinosaur's ankle today's finds
full stomach five mothers i haven't slept sad in a million years



Symmetry

— *House of Sumire*

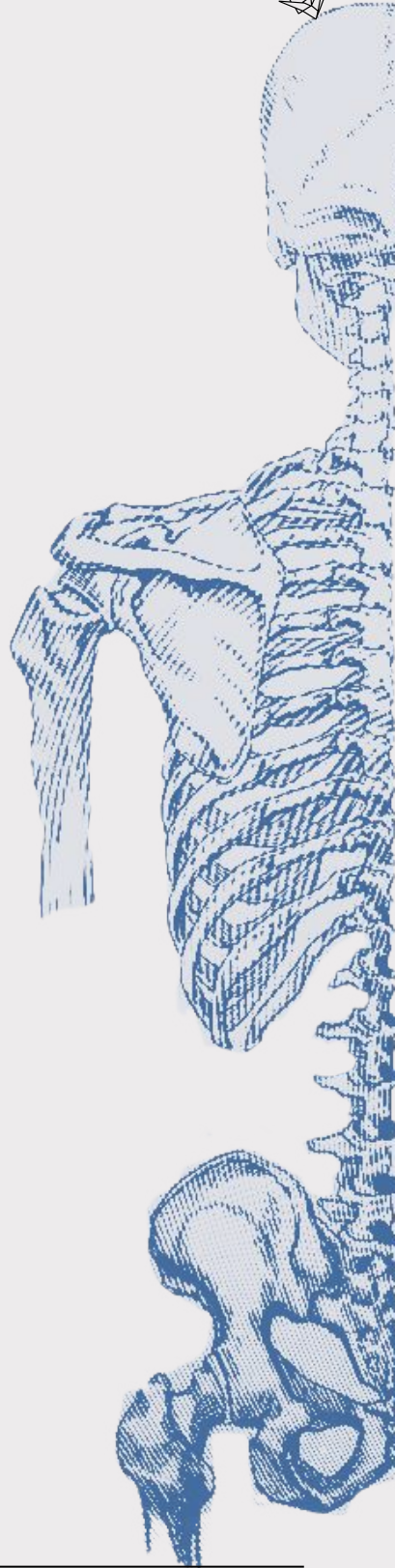
Word by word,
noticing the space in between,
I form the perfect sentence -
all the beauty I have ever seen
is contained in this connection of letters.
branches of endless meanings
origins and spelling.

Our evolution lies in the language
we speak and create
for our bones, the tendons
its connection to move.
it takes a heavy amount of muscles
to create a single breath.

I breathe in.

All the languages lie in me,
indecision speaks to our conscious being.
In my dreams, I lie awake
I am aware of everything that brought me here.
every muscle I have ever moved,

every infinitesimal change in evolution,
our everchanging way of being.





Transferring knowledge from the heart
requires all the effort in me.
That is why it's so heavenly to seek,
keen to direction and understanding.
I breathe out.
I need to be everything,
experience all there is in me.

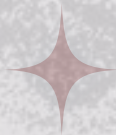




i used to have stars in my eyes

— *Yunseo Choi*

my ribs are covered with scratches / stars waltzing around my heart / her
red-yellow nails are digging into my bones / and i can feel her shining
eyes watching mine / i buried her long ago, when i was fighting for life /
along with Passion and Love / i forgot how to fly, my outstretched wings
crumbling to dust in the dusky moonlight / but i am digging up the grave,
dirt-filled tears staining my hands like blood / to uncover the shining
heart that i know lies beneath / the stars watch from above, always
indifferent, but perhaps that's for the best / i slip anger between my lips
& dig for the life i could never have had / i can see the scintilla through
the rot that's covered my childhood / and so i keep digging, velvet-black
night gripping my arms / dreaming of the day when i dig my nails deep
into the coffin & wrench the lid open & find shimmering riches beyond
my wildest dreams, recover the diamonds i wish i'd forgotten.





homelands

— *M.S. Blues*

what lies behind
the speaking oceans?
what resides between
the words trees have spoken?
what have the hums
of my ancestors awoken?
(homelands
homelands
homelands)

—

I. THE LAND OF MEXICO

where my people
hustle in the streets
from traveler's dusk to the angel's night,
as a valiant effort to give their families
a better life.

“intentaron enterrarnos. no sabían que éramos semillas.” – an old mexican proverb.

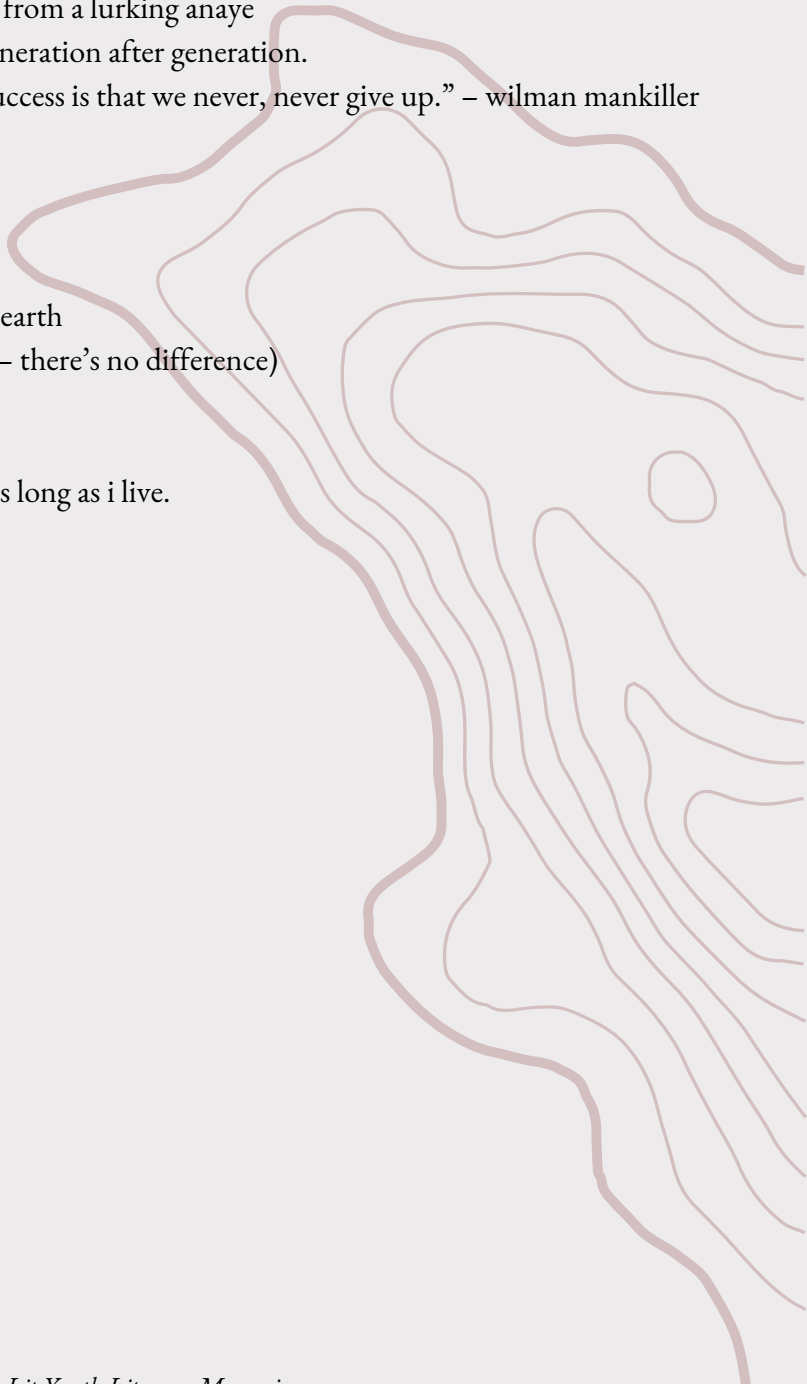
II. THE ISLAND OF POLYNESIA (HAWAII)

where my people
relinquish their necessities
in order to provide a vacation to white people
who post the sunkissed tans they get
from the forgiving lips of mother earth.
ho'omau – endure and persevere with diligence.



III. INDIAN COUNTRY

where my people
are still fighting to be humanized
while trying to heal from a lurking anaye
that has haunted generation after generation.
“the secret of our success is that we never, never give up.” – wilman mankiller
–
the homelands,
sacred heartbeats
of millions –
flatlines on mother earth
(by force or choice – there’s no difference)
–
it is now my job
to honor all three, as long as i live.





Dandelion Wine

— *Liz Walker*



green paint, light wash jeans

— *Mirm Hurula*

I don't remember the grass this green
like a can of paint

perfect fit for any outdoor space
though it bleeds and stains

another stain on pants from a
simple trip but the green

watered down, lighter green on light
blue jeans, I remember always liking how they looked

no body, no stomach
my crotch, nobody noticed

not even the memories

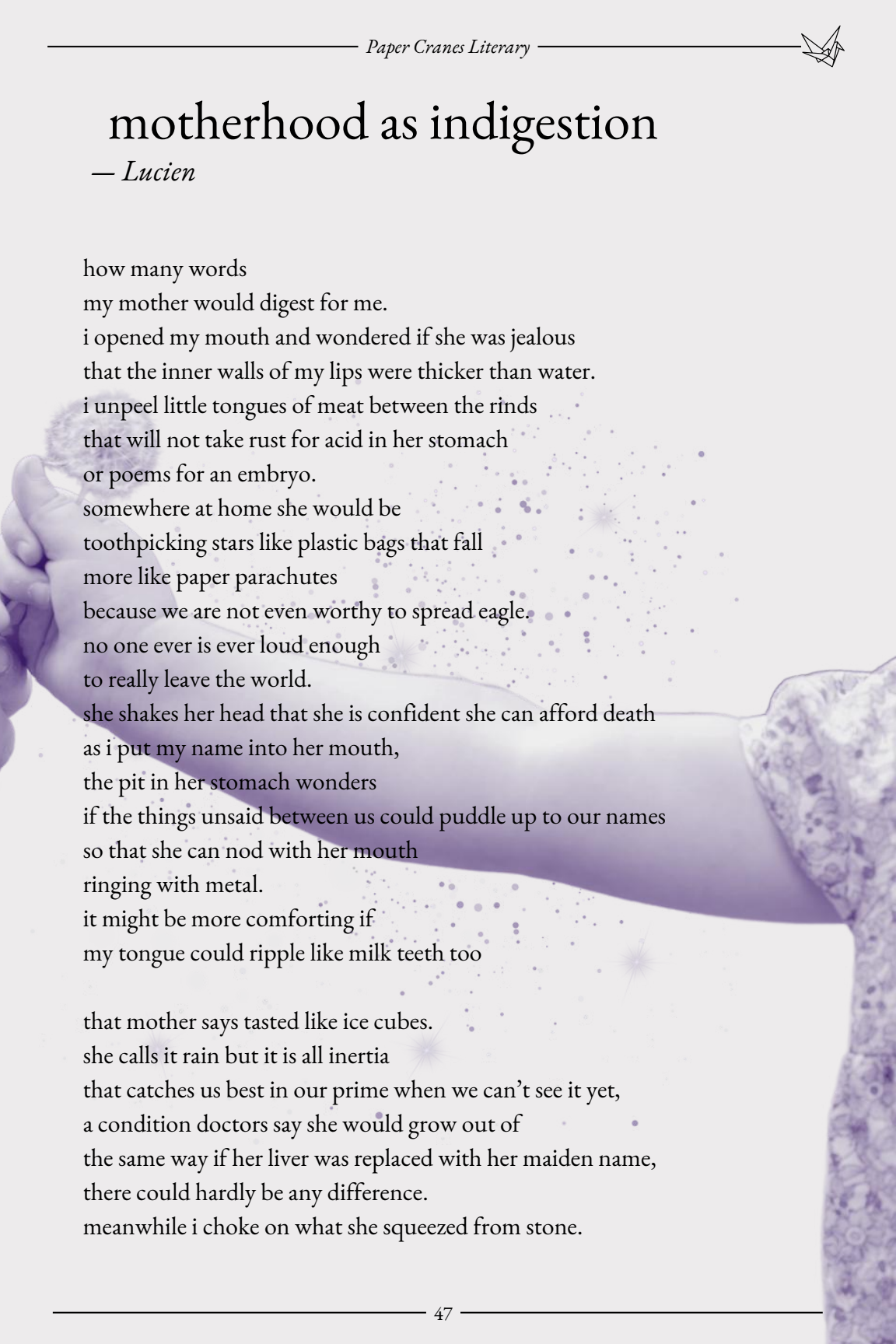
first green spring grass—
light wash blue jeans

too beautiful its forgettable at the beginning
perfect to forget



motherhood as indigestion

— *Lucien*



how many words
my mother would digest for me.
i opened my mouth and wondered if she was jealous
that the inner walls of my lips were thicker than water.
i unpeel little tongues of meat between the rinds
that will not take rust for acid in her stomach
or poems for an embryo.
somewhere at home she would be
toothpicking stars like plastic bags that fall
more like paper parachutes
because we are not even worthy to spread eagle.
no one ever is ever loud enough
to really leave the world.
she shakes her head that she is confident she can afford death
as i put my name into her mouth,
the pit in her stomach wonders
if the things unsaid between us could puddle up to our names
so that she can nod with her mouth
ringing with metal.
it might be more comforting if
my tongue could ripple like milk teeth too

that mother says tasted like ice cubes.
she calls it rain but it is all inertia
that catches us best in our prime when we can't see it yet,
a condition doctors say she would grow out of
the same way if her liver was replaced with her maiden name,
there could hardly be any difference.
meanwhile i choke on what she squeezed from stone.



i was her miracle, she says when so many times
her throat caved in for less.
when my mother texted me she couldn't digest,
she wondered if the pit in her stomach could ever grow.



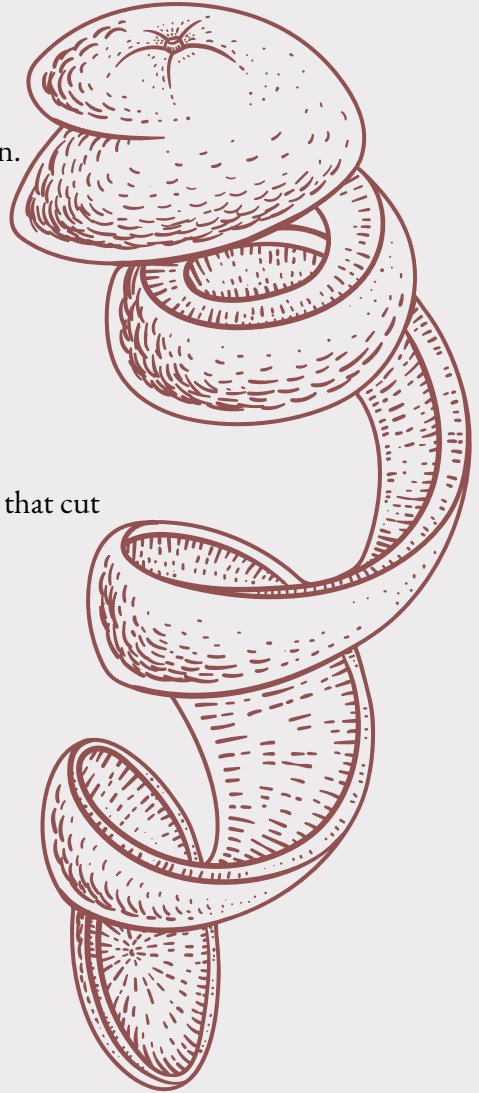


my mother peels an orange for me

— *Lucien*

to leave the world is never enough
to handle for someone with children.
fleshy fingers splay apart like leaves
starting from the frayed edges
slapping the chest of my palms.
the middle ripples with little tongues of rain.
in the absence of rust,
i realise i am scared of death.
for all these blades,
i will know what leaks out.
tell me you can uncork the head

as if from my birth canal,
seeds turning into tiny blades of milk teeth that cut
the quivering tip of my tongue.
for the same yellow flesh,
i will not take rust for meat.
look, how everything can be one
of those peelable creatures
rubbing against each other for heat.
i braid the rinds with my front teeth
if that can be more comforting than biting
down on mother's words like ice cubes
slowly pooling into the filler of our bodies
when i learn that it still digests after death,
if not turning it edible.
take this as an act of self-preservation
as mother craves for a butter knife in the fabric of the universe.
as a daughter, i knock at door: *let me in.*





self-portrait as origami

— *Lucien*

after mother

i used to think we unbraided paper cranes,
assuming it was more familiar to toothpick stars
at the quivering tip of the earth than to be scared
of death but they could burn out too
and we wouldn't notice
for eight minutes.

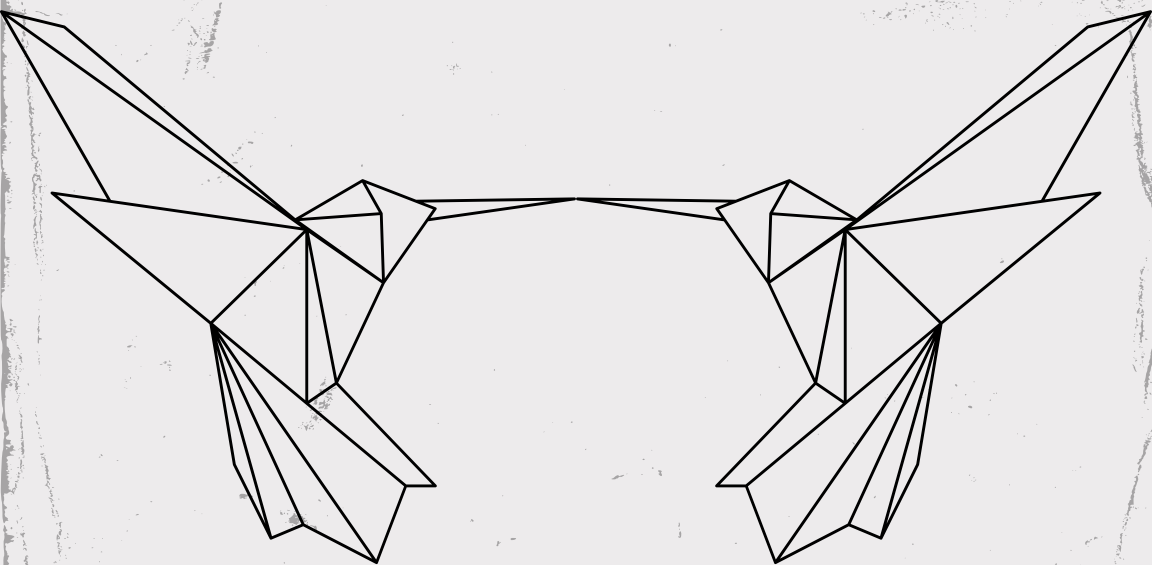
i will peel out the promises from these cranes
until they float on water without lying on their backs.
if we digested paper like photons of light,
bearing no weight but helping us remember all the better,
i might learn to swallow between thunder and lightning
and count the offbeat of your maiden name
that ripples like metal on your tongue.
because blood is thicker than water, i submerge myself
in the pool of things unsaid between us.

it might have been more comforting to nod
and end this after poem with the gravity of our situation,
but we keep reliving yesterday by calling the future
tomorrow as we take a thousand from our vocabulary
and flip it on its head, wings then beak.

i was ten when i learnt i couldn't digest paper
the same way as the wax of rabbit candy wrappings,
things that are less flammable than us.
we fold along the stretch marks,
our hands unfolding into palms,
i wonder if a part of my cells still glued
to your blood vessels
as a rough itinerary for what i can't swallow.



you wonder if cut me open,
my maiden name would stare back at you,
a promise that can't rust,
that floats on water.





carnations as an increment to eudaimonia

Nathalie Alegre

*start reading from whatever scene you'd like.

SCENE I.

a butterfly parades pollen, leaving life in its trails
each flap of its wings allows another life lived
in that blossoming garden of existence
downpour showers pink carnations
a shimmer of vigor and grace
and a scent of distinct affection—
eventually plucked by virtuous hands.

SCENE II.

in the sea of flowers, a pink carnation
catches the attention of a certain desperate florist
curating an eye-catching and fragrant selection
of lilies of the valley and alstroemeria
meant to be visual depiction of intimacy
or better, the saving case to the florist's troubles
adorned with silk bows and gold-trimmed paper.
a young woman in love looks for an apology at the flower shop
she looks at the assortment with fervid hope
a vision of her beloved's smile flashes in her eyes
the sight pushing her to buy that very bouquet
consequently helping that poor florist
they'll never know how their sorrows graced each other.

SCENE III.

that young woman clutches those stems
fingers flirting with ornamentation





between the petals of reconciliation and farewell
which one will wilt as a petal of truth?
to her lover she runs and there she offers at her altar
knees bent and hands clasped, a prayer
beseeching absolution from misapprehension
and like a flower blooming after frigid weather
her lover offers her a warm hand of solace
now their breath falls on each other's faces
giggling into pink carnations and lilies
a butterfly intrudes the gaiety—
like if the host were an uninvited guest
with its miniscule legs it takes even smaller pollen
to sprinkle it into a larger reality we touch





The Portrait of Chrysalis

Alin Sengjaroen

1 INT. ART MUSEUM - MORNING

SOREN (25) stands behind the crowd, looking at a portrait of a blue butterfly. He takes notes.

LUCAS

Azure Butterfly is a beautiful masterpiece. It's a pity the artist disappeared for unknown reasons.

LUCAS (27) dressed in a trench coat stands next to him. SOREN puts his notes away.

LUCAS

It is magnificent, isn't it?

SOREN

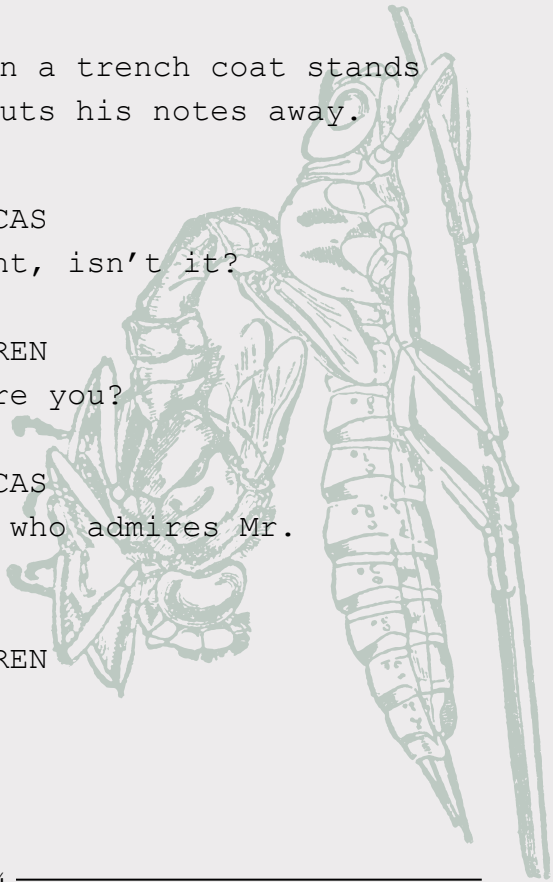
...Sorry, who are you?

LUCAS

Just a passerby who admires Mr. Hart's works.

SOREN

I see.





LUCAS

Do you know the artist called Laurier by any chance? He's equally as popular. But there are some pretty nasty controversies around him.

SOREN

Sorry, I don't know who that is.

LUCAS

That's surprising. Do you paint?

SOREN

No, never.

SOREN walks toward the exit.

LUCAS

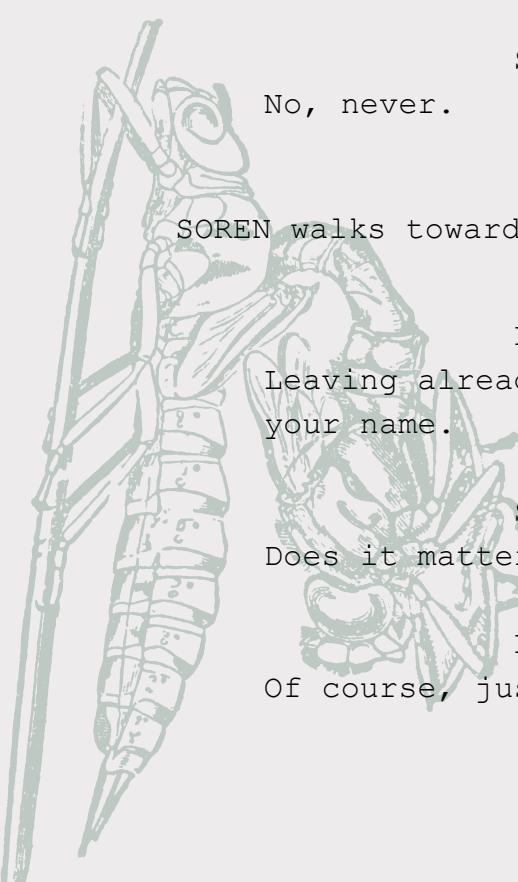
Leaving already? I haven't got your name.

SOREN

Does it matter?

LUCAS

Of course, just call me Lucas.





SOREN

Soren.

LUCAS smiles and extends his hand. SOREN nods and walks out of the museum.

2 EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

SOREN LAURIER stands at the stop. A caterpillar crawls onto his shoes. LUCAS yells running to him.

LUCAS

Mister Soren! You
dropped this
earlier.

LUCAS hands him a notebook.

SOREN

Oh, thank you.

LUCAS

Are you going on
this stop? Let
me tag along if you
don't mind.

SOREN

Sure. I'm heading to
Maine
Park.





LUCAS

Interesting. For business?

SOREN

It's...

SOREN's voice trails. The bus arrives. The people
in
front enter.

SOREN

It's where I used to work.

3 EXT. MAINE PARK - MORNING

They step into the park. Abundant and
lively. SOREN LAURIER sits on the bench.
LUCAS follows.

LUCAS

What was your profession?

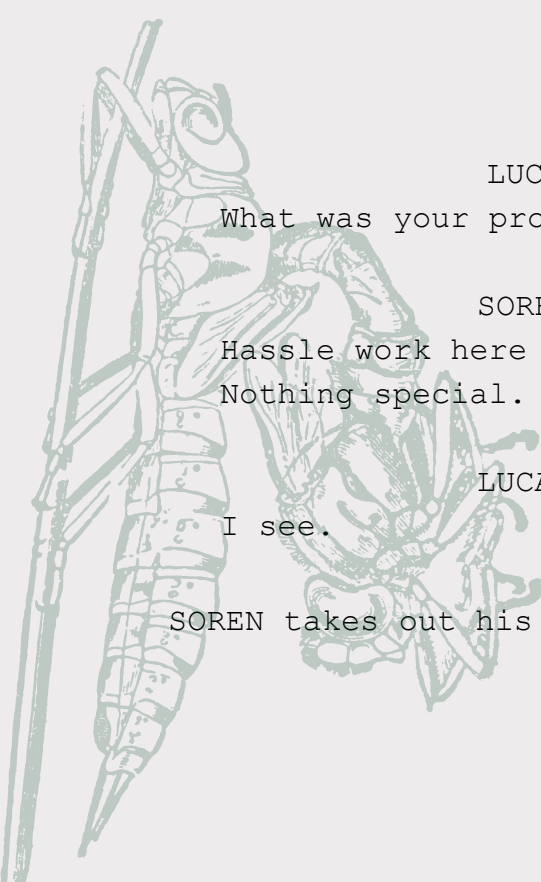
SOREN

Hassle work here and there.
Nothing special.

LUCAS

I see.

SOREN takes out his notebook. He writes.





LUCAS

What's it for?

SOREN

Hm?

LUCAS

The notes.

SOREN

Research.

LUCAS

So you work as a researcher
now?

SOREN

...sort of.

LUCAS

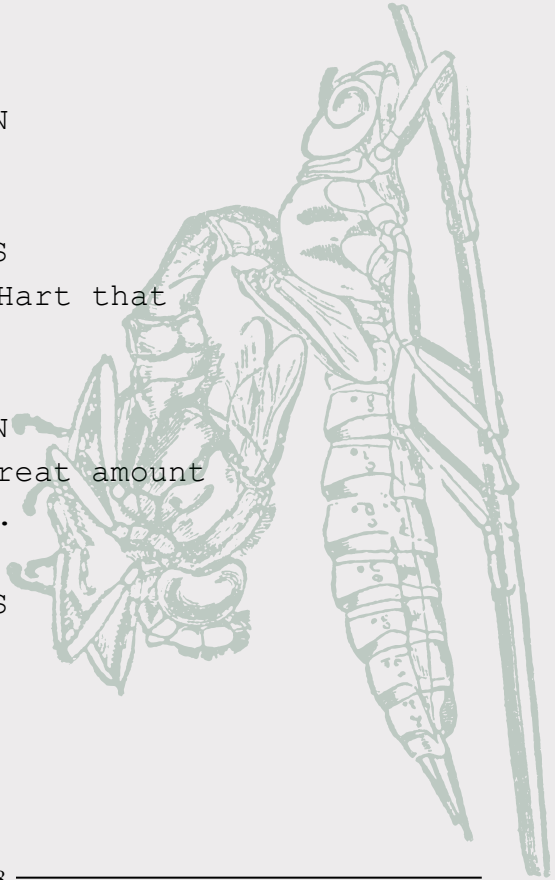
Do you admire Mr. Hart that
much?

SOREN

I used to have a great amount
of respect for him.

LUCAS

Used to?





SOREN

He is no longer worthy of
respect after he left his
artistic job and practically
died.

LUCAS

Forgive me for my bluntness,
but why would you do 'research'
on someone you hate so much?

A child's voice cries out nearby. They look
to the far left. A kite is stuck on a tree.
SOREN stands.

SOREN

Excuse me.

LUCAS

Is this your *hassle* work? A
lifeguard of some sort?

SOREN

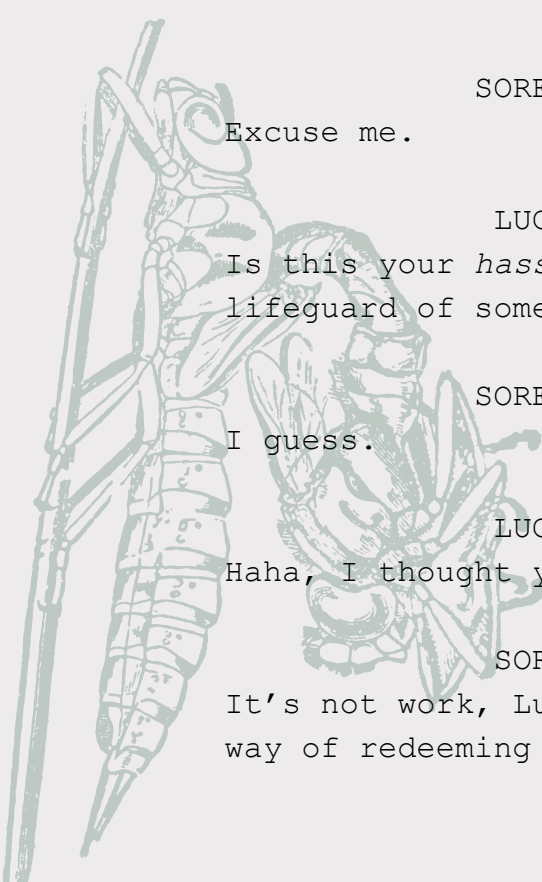
I guess.

LUCAS

Haha, I thought you quit.

SOREN

It's not work, Lucas. It's my
way of redeeming myself.





LUCAS
To who?

SOREN
The world.

SOREN goes over. LUCAS watches.

FIONA
My kite! Stupid tree, give it
back!

FIONA (7) jumps up to get the kite and fails. FIONA shakes the tree but it stays still. SOREN takes hold of a branch and pushes himself up. He pulls the kite. It falls.

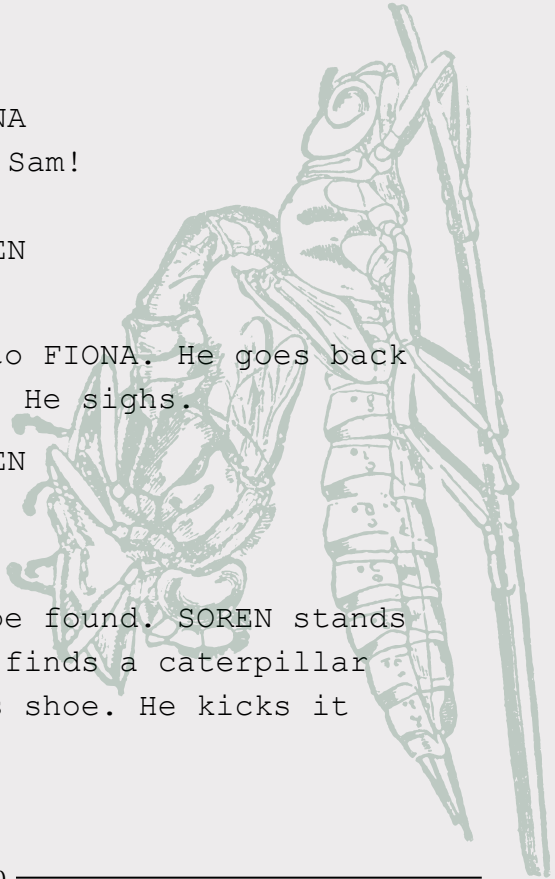
FIONA
Thank you, Mister Sam!

SOREN
Be careful now.

SOREN waves goodbye to FIONA. He goes back to his seat and sits. He sighs.

SOREN
Sorry, Lucas, I-

LUCAS is nowhere to be found. SOREN stands and looks around. He finds a caterpillar still crawling on his shoe. He kicks it away.





SOREN

Lucas?

SOREN touches his pockets. The notebook is gone again.

He groans.

SOREN

Of course.

2 EXT. MAINE PARK - NIGHT

SOREN searches around the park. He still cannot find LUCAS. He walks to the rear end of the grass field and turns a turn into an alley. A small, threadbare cottage. Inside overflow

FIONA

Here, Mom! It's the Mister Sam
I always tell you about!

MOM

Yes, yes...I'm sure he's great.

SOREN turns. FIONA waves. MOM's arms
extend to block

FIONA.

FIONA

Look, it's Mister Sam!

SOREN fixes his shirt. MOM takes a few
steps back.



MOM

I thought he was a friend you
made up.

FIONA

Huh? No, he's not. He even
saved my kite, look!

MOM picks FIONA up, turns, and leaves.
SOREN sighs. He unlocks the door which
holds a worn-out sign with a big, bolded
text: "Soren Laurier's Property. Do not
enter without an official investigation
order."

5 INT. BLOCKED OFF COTTAGE--NIGHT

It is a one-room cottage filled to the
brim with empty canvases and painting
equipment. More caterpillars and bugs
crawl on the ground. SOREN grabs a few
canvases and leans them against the wall.
Roaches crawl out of the painting. One
runs up his arm. He slams it against the
wall.

SOREN

Ugh, disgusting.

Footsteps emerge. SOREN looks at the door.
It's another SOREN. The SECOND SOREN
holds a palette knife. Soren sighs and
pats his pockets.



SECOND SOREN

Are you trying to get rid of me
with those pills again?

SOREN

Of course, Laurier. Why would I
not?

SECOND SOREN

Last week, you were still
embracing me. What's with the
tone?

SOREN

That doesn't matter. Where is
my unfinished portrait?

SECOND SOREN

But you entrusted that to me.

SOREN

...Aren't you tired?

SECOND SOREN

You gave me your life story.
What do you think?

SOREN looks down.

SECOND SOREN

"Mysteriously disappeared?" It
was you, wasn't it?

SOREN

Us.



SECOND SOREN

Right.

SECOND SOREN points at a corner. SOREN nods and walks over. He steps on piles of empty canvases and pulls them out. One by one. SOREN takes out the unfinished portrait of Lucius Hart. He dusts off the cocoons and spider webs.

SECOND SOREN

Are you going to finish it?

SOREN

No--where's the lighter?

6 INT. COTTAGE'S BACKYARD--NIGHT

The portrait goes in flames. SOREN takes out a cigarette. He puts it near the flame. It lights. He takes a huff.

SOREN

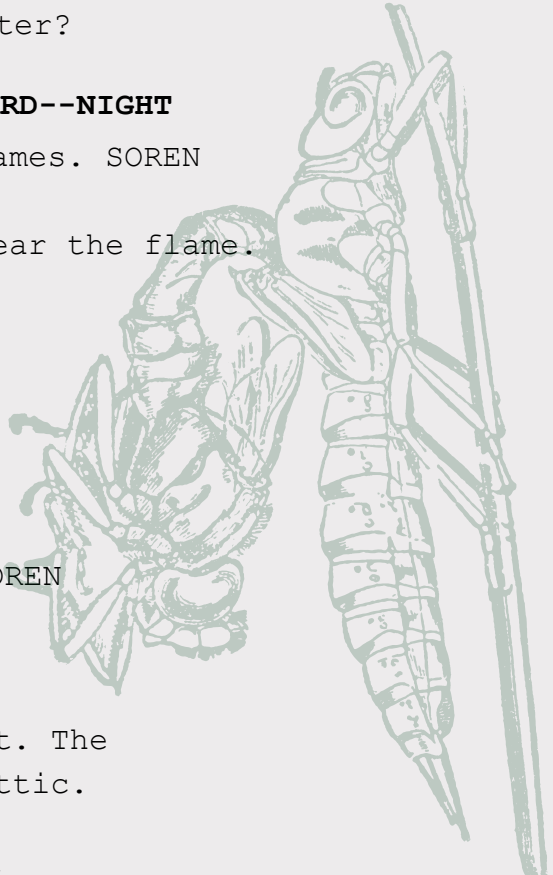
Laurier.

SECOND SOREN

What?

SOREN

Lead me to the rest. The paintings in the attic.





LUCAS

Hey, relax. It's me.

SOREN

Lucas.

SOREN grips tighter.

SOREN

Hand me back my things.
You thief.

LUCAS

You're mistaken, Mister
Soren. I didn't steal--

SOREN

THEN. WHO. IS. IT.

SOREN yells. Then silence. All eyes
are on them. SOREN
clears his throat.

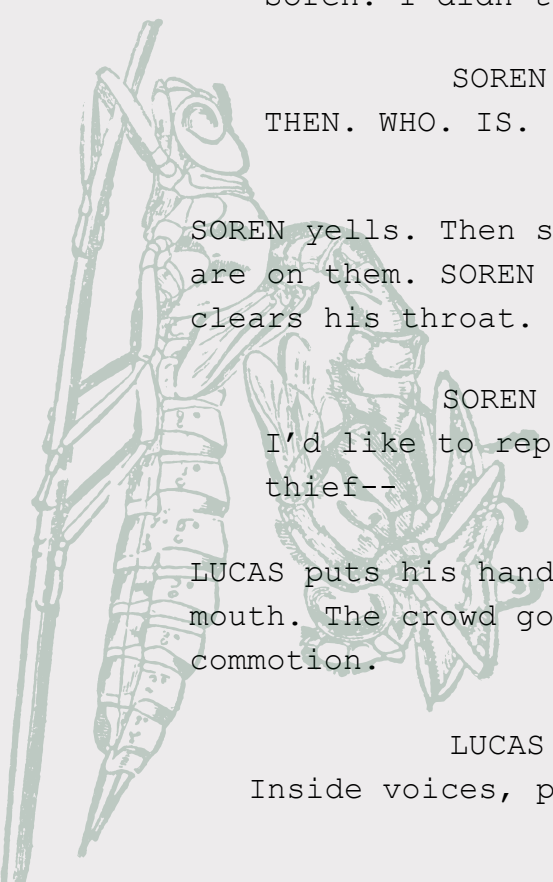
SOREN

I'd like to report a
thief--

LUCAS puts his hand over SOREN's
mouth. The crowd goes back to a
commotion.

LUCAS

Inside voices, please.





LUCAS

Hey, relax. It's me.

SOREN

Lucas.

SOREN grips tighter.

SOREN

Hand me back my things.
You thief.

LUCAS

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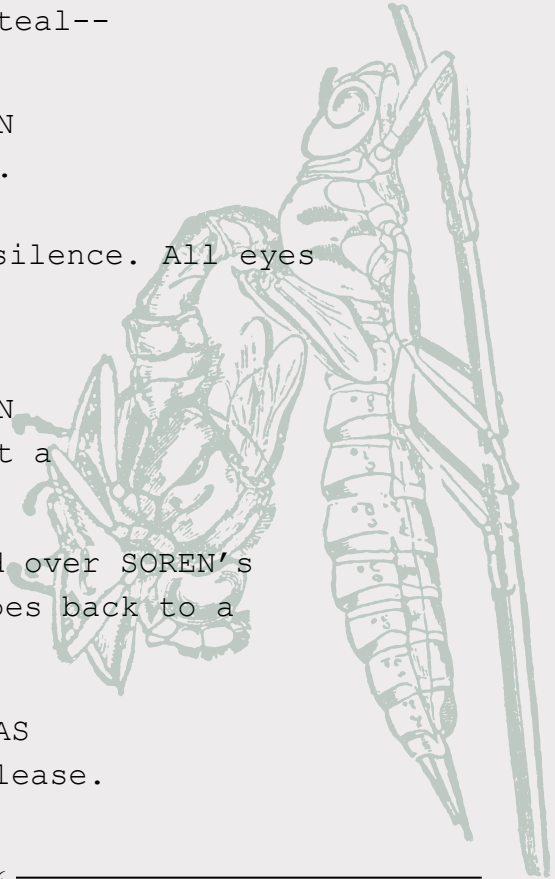
SOREN

I'd like to report a
thief--

LUCAS puts his hand over SOREN's
mouth. The crowd goes back to a
commotion.

LUCAS

Inside voices, please.





7 INT. BLOCKED OFF COTTAGE--MORNING

SOREN holds the palette knife. In this other hand, he holds two pills. SOREN swallows them and sighs.

SOREN

Finally...

Just as SOREN speaks, the doorbell rings. He peeks at the fish-eye lens. No one.

SOREN

Ugh, what? I need to increase the dosage.

He pours two more pills. There is knock at the back door. He walks and peeks at the lens. No one.

SOREN

Whoever it is, stop this now.

SOREN grips the knife in his hands. The pills fall. He holds the doorknob. Another knock at the door. He creaks the door open and holds the knife over his head. SOREN bursts the door open and plunges with the knife. He falls onto the grass field.



SOREN

Curses.

SOREN looks at the half-empty pill
bottle. His vision
blurs. A blue butterfly lands on
his hand.

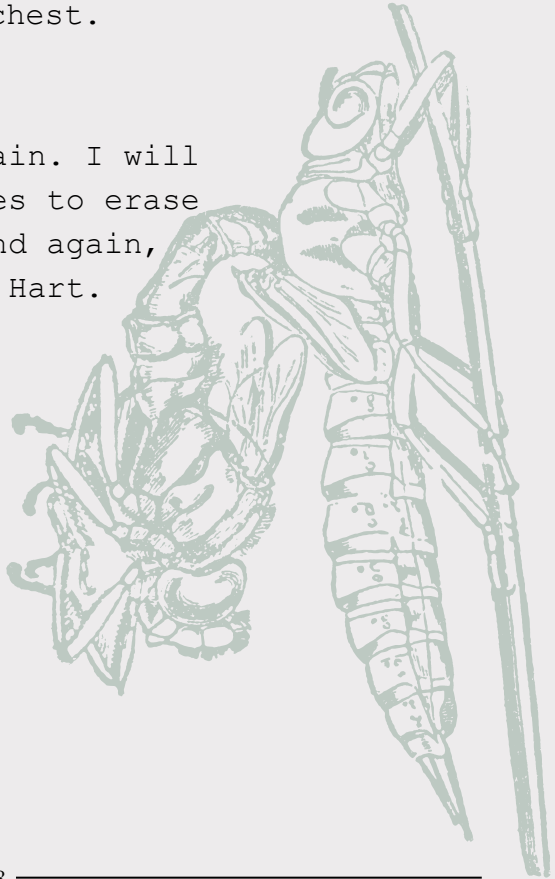
SOREN

Lucius, do you think I won't
remember?

SOREN grips the bug and crushes
it. The butterfly's
wings fall onto his chest.

SOREN

I will kill you again. I will
do whatever it takes to erase
your soul. Again and again,
Lucius - No, Lucas Hart.





Summer Solstice

— *Liz Walker*



Where Bygones of Summer Return

Chelsea Guan

A bird was perched on a tree branch last summer,
as I was sitting down by the trunk
in the sparking grass with three and four-leaf clovers as company.

Last summer,
by the tree and its long branches and needle-like leaves—
Ah yes! It was a sparrow I saw perching on a pine tree,
pining for home, an abode of love and solace.
With that it took off to where its yearnings lie:
home sweet home, at last.

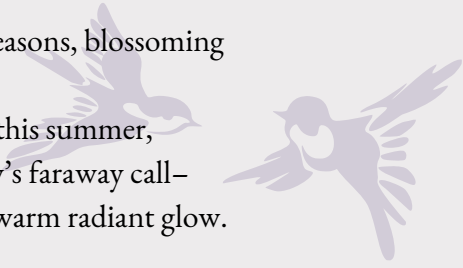
I had lifted my head; my eyes had wandered up
and there I saw it—turning its head,
a blur of brown and white;
I heard its chirp for a brief moment before it flew
back to where it belonged—
the vast blue sky
interweaved with clouds; it will fly unbound by passing yesterdays,
through the fleeting seasons, finding its way back home each time.

It was beyond dazzling to see a small part of nature
accompanied by the breeze and its gentle touch,
what a sweet melody this world has offered me—
this stream of life.

I indulge, wholly captivated.
My mind beat like my bursting heart then,
as blooming sparks of new fantasies and creations emerged
I put my pen to paper
and wrote about the growth of flora.



Now, it is summer again,
I have changed along with the seasons, blossoming
under their touch.
Under the vibrance of the trees this summer,
the sunlight pools like a sparrow's faraway call—
and I bask in its embrace, in its warm radiant glow.



Oh, what a sweet scene—
as the tree drinks up the stream of life,
my heart glows, my breath steady and strong
loving whispers caress my ears
and this time, putting pen to paper again,
I write, not just about the wonders of nature,
but about my journey of belonging.
Home sweet home, at last.





Kaleidoscope

Lily Willows

As illustrated via the act of writing, my emotional turbulence, insecurities, and solitude are diminished. Spotlighting my vulnerability extinguishes the flames of melancholy. Therefore, slaying dragons of desolation with ink, encompasses my spark.

Notebooks of letters exist on top of my bookcase—letters addressed, yet never sent. An emotional outlet, for my eyes only. Forgetting and remembering, co-existing through doodled margins and tear stained ink. Explorations of heartbreak, drifted friends, and prospective versions of myself, rawly articulated. Mirrored, I remain a reflection of everyone I have ever loved. Fragmented emotions of euphoria, heartache, melancholy, healing, piecing together into my jigsaw of authenticity. I compare a love letter from our honeymoon relationship stage, to the aftermath of our breakup. Smoke and ash cloud the early letters. My soul is transformed into parchment, my lipstick kisses of hope and eternity are now burned by deceit. Both recipients may share a name, but their letters couldn't end more differently. Scribbled 'I'm in love.', evolves to 'It's over.', like rearranged letters in scrabble. Yet perhaps the true addressee is me, and this is a reminder of self worth, the ability to love, personal growth towards my healing journey. For if I loved the wrong person so greatly, imagine how much more I could love the right person?

In addition to emotional expression, writing is also an act of entertainment. On long journeys, I watch the world racing past, a film strip of a moment in time. My phone battery can die, but my notebook can never get lost. For losing my notebook would be losing the best and worst parts of myself. Writing grounds me and helps me to gain perspective. Amidst those moments whereby I feel my place in the universe to be lost or unknown, I am reminded that I encompass a tiny glint within this globe of continuity. Even as I die, my writing lives forever.



A list of New Year's resolutions includes 'Achieve published writer status'. Younger me would be so proud of how I've evolved as a writer. After spending years questioning my identity, talents, and abilities, I crown writing as my spark. My notebook knows me better than most; she is an anthology of authenticity, pages glinting with golden memories. Emotions illustrate her; she has witnessed my laughter, my tears, my ambition, my loneliness. Sharing secrets over two decades, she is my saviour, my silent listener, my friend. A safe place where I can write the same letter to the same individual over and over, judgement never running my pen dry. I ink my journey of self love and healing with crushed rose quartz, wearing beads of amethyst, my protector of emotional vulnerability. My true self only flourishes when I put ink to parchment.

'Scintilla', by definition, translates to 'a tiny spark of a specified quality'. My tiny spark is my ability to emote through writing. My heart remains a kaleidoscope of anyone I've ever loved, laughed with, and sobbed over—I am a writer of mosaicked emotions.



Light

— *Gurasis Kaur*



CONTRIBUTORS

Alistair Gaunt is a Filipino queer non-binary poet born in Southern Philippines. Their writing contemplates the queer experience, violent desires, peculiar dreams, death, grief, and catharsis. When not writing poetry, she spends the rest of her free time painting, reading, making coffee, traveling, and watching sunsets collapse into dawn. They may be contacted through [@hauntedbythestars](https://www.instagram.com/hauntedbythestars) on Instagram & alistairgauntwriting@gmail.com.

Anahitha Menon is a rising senior at Newton South High School. She grew up on a steady diet of fairy tales, Costco dumplings and horror movies, and writes poetry as an excuse to avoid her math homework.

Blake S is a high school student in her final year, currently determined to pursue what she is passionate about and to see where it takes her! She likes to craft her poetry in grocery receipts, corners of science textbooks and in question papers, focused on turning melodramatic moments in time into written lines. When she's not writing, she's painting landscapes she saw on the car ride back home or reading Virginia Woolf in the front yard.

Davin Faris is a writer, climate justice organizer, and student. His work has been featured by the New York Times, Patagonia, the Baltimore Science Fiction Society, and others. He is currently studying literature and philosophy at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland.

Delilah Dennett is a writer and performer based in the UK. Her work has previously been featured in The Dial, Heroica and Notes, amongst other publications. She is a graduate of the New Earth Theatre Writers Academy. Dennett sits on the Roundhouse Youth Advisory Board 2024-25 to help shape their youth engagement programme over the next year.



CONTRIBUTORS (*con't*)

Gurasis Kaur is a fifteen-year-old girl living in New Delhi. She has always been a keen observer of her surroundings, finding metaphors to every aspect of life. Gurasis loves all forms of art - paintings, theatre, music, writing... She is a published writer- having contributed to an anthology of stories, 'Blissful Quills' and written poetry for 'Ink and Stardust', both by scholastic India. Her poem, 'The Young Sapling' has been highly commended by The Shepton Snowdrops Poetry Competition 2024, United Kingdom. Another one of her pieces, 'Creative Vision' has been published in the twelfth issue of the Seaglass Literary magazine.

Hani is an Indonesian illustrator who mainly reads comics, or watches animations sometimes. But recently, is starting to build back her passion for literature after years of anhedonia.

House of Sumire was created this year as a means of exploration of creativity and artistry of the writer. She writes poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction, in addition to painting and drawing. In her work, it is created a dreamy atmosphere to address personal and universal themes of spirituality and her relationship with the universe, suffering, nature, joy and love.

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In 2005, she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week.



CONTRIBUTORS (*con't*)

Ivan Ling currently works as an Editor at Sunway University Press, an avid book reviewer and poet. His works have been published in several journals and magazines, such as Men Matters Online, Southeast Asian Review of English, Creative Flight and Borderless.

Josephine Rudolf is a Digital Marketer by day and a Writer by night. That lifestyle has led to many sleepless nights and too much caffeine consumed in Berlin, Germany. She has been previously published by "The Drabble" and "50-Word Stories" among others, and is featured in the 7th edition of "The Perch Magazine."

Kai is a versatile writer who has her eye on the most unnoticeable details that she believes need to be written about. She fancies vintage things, gardens, flowers, as well as gothic style and rock music. On a chill day, she just finds herself listening to jazz music while writing the most excruciating poem she can think of.

Liz Walker is an artist and freelance writer in Minneapolis, MN, where she also co-hosts the Unsolved Mysteries podcast Perhaps It's You.

Madeline Rosales has won a Gold Key for the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and has publications of poetry and prose with the Academy of the Heart and Mind, The Odyssey Youth Magazine, The WEIGHT Journal, and many others. She works as an Executive Editor for Polyphony Lit, and as the Chief Editor for The Cardinal Review. When not writing, you could find her religiously reading Neil Gaiman or designing little clocks.



CONTRIBUTORS (*con't*)

Marlena Chertock is a disabled, lesbian, Jewish poet with two books of poetry, *Crumb-sized: Poems* (Unnamed Press) and *On that one-way trip to Mars* (Bottlecap Press). She uses her skeletal dysplasia as a bridge to scientific poetry. Her poetry and prose has appeared in AWP's *The Writer's Notebook*, *Breath & Shadow*, *The Deaf Poets Society*, *Lambda Literary Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Paper Darts*, *Paranoid Tree*, *Washington Independent Review of Books*, *WMN Zine*, *Wordgathering*, and more. Find her at marlenachertock.com and @mchertock.

Mirm Hurula is an emerging author channeling their practice and work into both poetry and fiction. Because that is where Mirm lives and reads. Their life is being taken a poem at a time. Mirm lives with their needy and adorable cat who never wants them to write.

M.S. Blues is arguably the most decorated figure in the literary magazine community. Thus far, she has been published over 170 times in digital and print formats. Some of her most noteworthy publications were platformed by *Eber & Wein*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *miniMAG*, *Moonbow Magazine*, and *Millennial Pulp Literary Magazine*. In addition, she serves on 17 different staff boards, with the objective of helping the creative writing community flourish. She firmly believes that if we all pull our weight, we can help make the world a more beautiful, creative place. She currently resides in San Jose, California.

Prarthana Vijayakumar writes whenever she isn't preparing for her Chartered Accountancy course. She has been published or is upcoming in *The Daphne Review*, *The Curie Review*, *Studentkind Literary Journal*, an *AIFEST* anthology, and elsewhere.



CONTRIBUTORS (*con't*)

Rachel Uon is a senior at Somerset Berkley Regional High School. She has previously been published in the Creative Zine and Breathe Bold Journal, with work forthcoming in the Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine and Morning Star Literary. She aspires to pursue a career in neuroscience.

Roukia Ali (Kia, she/her) is a multi-published writer and Head of Staff for The Infinite Blues Review. When she is not writing, she's reading up on the many iterations of the "Orpheus and Eurydice" Greek myth, watching video essays about media she has never consumed in her life, or teaching herself a new language and still only being able to say one (1) complete sentence. Interact with her on Instagram @roukiaa9140

Yunseo Choi is a teen writer and poet. She currently attends high school. Her favorite books are *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, *The Goldfinch*, and *The Secret History*. She loves listening to music, studying, and watching TV shows.

Yvette P. Rejuso is a third year college student studying at Aklan Catholic College, pursuing a teaching course. At age 20, she gravitated toward igniting her passion for writing, which includes fiction, poetry, and essays. She was born in Naasug, Malay, Aklan, on September 5, 2003.



COVER ARTISTS

Front Cover Artist: *Laura S. Martineé* is a restless soul who seeks adventurous puzzles through her words and artworks where she can find a space in whose dimension there's a truce between the mind and the heart. She is a writer, visual storyteller, and an artist.

Artist Statement: I always try to capture the imperfection in the reaction versus the perfection in the elaborated thought.

—On “*The Touch of a Flight*”



Back Cover Artist: *Yasmin Kareem* loves to write what a canvas can't hold and draw what words can't describe. In this digital age, she also can't help but use Canva to design the visions crossing her mind.

Artist Statement: Light isn't just a visual spectrum. It could be a person—a person shining in the eyes of an audience, becoming one with the light and its celestial sources.

—On “*In the Spotlight*”



Cover Art Contest Shortlist:

Gurasis Kaur, “Light” (p. 74)

Liz Walker, “Summer Solstice” (p. 69)

ISSUE II

CONTRIBUTORS

Alin Sengjaroen
Alistair Gaunt
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Blake S
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Davin Faris
Delilah Dennett
Farida Fitrihani
Gurasis Kaur
House of Sumire
Irina Tall
Ivan Ling
Josephine Rudolf



Kai
Lily Willows
Liz Walker
M.S. Blues
Madeline Rosales
Marlena Chertock
Mirm Hurula
Nathalie Alegre
Prarthana Vijayakumar
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