

issue 01



pluto & the dwarfs

WORDS FROM OUR FOUNDERS

I am over the moon that issue 01 is finally yours! It feels surreal, like a fever dream, and if it is a dream, I don't want to wake up. I never thought in a million years that this magazine would be where it is now, and I am so grateful that you have stuck around. I hope you enjoy issue 01, PLUTO, and I hope you continue to support us and follow along on this magazines journey. Thank you, dear reader.

founder
ekunderwood

pluto & the dwarves: issue 01 is finally yours—a metamorphosis of scattered thoughts and quiet dreams, now whole, now alive. this first issue is the fragile beginning of something we've carried in our hearts for so long, a small rebellion against silence, a reminder that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. i am endlessly grateful to share this moment with you. may these pages feel like home, like hope, like the start of something bigger than all of us. thank you for believing in us and for letting us believe in you. stick around—the story is just unfolding, and all my love goes out to those still searching for their place amongst the stars and who have guided me towards mine.

co-founder
daisy pasillas

CONTRIBUTORS

prose

Evelyn Chan

K.T.

Ara Djati

Zayna Sen

Oliver Euteneuer

poetry

Linnea Throolin

Maddyline Davis

Elijah A. Colomer

Claudia Wysocky

Evelyn Chan

Teesta Roychoudhury

Chrysanne Ho

Sasi Kondru

Ara Djati

Mee

Jo Tam

visual media

Daria Militaru

Ella Kate Underwood

CONTRIBUTING STAFF

designers

Ella Kate Underwood

Daisy Pasillas

Kaitlyn de Leon

Sophia Madrid

Nevaeh Clark

Astra Varney

staff creators

Izzath Fathima

Oliver Euteneuer

Zayna Sen

Jo Tam

Mee G

Daria Militaru

editors

Tabitha Romadin

Helena Burchart

Kaia Ishizaki

Mahnoor Farooqi

Lujain Elazab

Mckenzie Gil

Alexis Manetta

Amber Montoya

Ella Schneider

Jo Reymond

Katerina Garbuglia

Avery Potter

Lujain Elazab

TABLE OF CONTENTS

poetry

ballad of the dwarfs

..... Mee

casual cruelties

Chrysanne Ho

Farewell, Mother

Jo Tam

Lacuna

Throolin

My Name Is

A. Colomer

my rock

Kondru

Orbit Teesta

Roychoudhury

Save Our (Star-Cast)

Souls Ara Djati

tender torture

Evelyn Chan

Therapeuo

Maddyline Davis

Unfinished Exit

Claudia Wysocky

Worst of Days, Worst of

People Maddyline

Davis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

visual media

Brightest or Darkest?

..... Ella Kate

Underwood

Pluto's Photos

Daria Militaru

prose

Brown Dwarf, Broken

Compass Ara Djati

Emotional Motion

Sickness K.T.

Last One, I Promise

..... Oliver Euteneuer

Muse Evelyn

Chan

You Saved Me

Zayna Sen

pluto, you whom the universe forgot
what is it like to drift in silence,
to feel the longing from the outside?
i know you ache to be part of it all,
to know the warmth of a star's embrace.
*for i, too, hover just beyond,
trying to find a place in their hearts.*

Ballad of The Dwarves

Nee

snow white's seven dwarves, golden in your care
what do you feel as she leaps through the pages,
to capture the sunlight, to shine like the stars?
i, too, feel like i am trapped in the margins
an afterthought, an echo, a sacrifice, a wish
that remains ungranted no matter how hard
i stretch out my arms to share in the light.

you're the without, you're the space between
a ghost mirroring their hopes and dreams
a wisp of nothingness in a galaxy where
to shine bright is to be everything
in vain, you grasp the tail of a shooting star
hoping to reel in their prayers, but then
find only your own desperation staring back.
and even the moon only reflects its light—
but you, unseen, drift further into the night.

do you not ever tire of carrying those dreams?
do you not feel the chasms widen with every reach?
do you not hear your heart beat louder and louder?
do you not watch them shine and wonder—
will i have to drift forever like a question mark in a bubble?
pluto, your name's whispered but seldom sung—
but how do you find solace in the role you play?
while i feel the gravity of unmet hopes anchor me to doubt,
will you teach me your ways to belong among the stars?



CASUAL CRUELITIES

I must confess
I dream of olden days and
forgiveness — when we were
young and still us, before
your glances became a
comet's pass — brief. Dazzling.
Gone before I could make any wish.
I like to say I'm over you - have been for years now - but at the
very back of my mind, I'm clinging onto the want of an
explanation. Behind all reason and
self respect, I'm begging you to
please please please say something
because I don't know how to
ask you to stay, or why you're leaving voids in the shape of you in
my life.
I had thought of it, you know.
The revenge.
The retribution.
The meteor strike I hoped would
split your world the way you upturned mine.
You don't get to say things you don't mean
then move on effortlessly and leave me
stranded in your orbit — not when I'd been
clutching onto you with numb hands like
you're my anchor / my savior.
You seemed lightyears away— even though
you were truly just an arm's length from me.
You're a casual cruelty that I will later
learn the hard way to savor on my tongue— and
every time I grieve,
I'll curse and think of you.

CHRYSANNE HO

Farewell, Mother

Jo Tam

I stumbled upon filthy trails, running from beasts after me
You'd trapped me in a forest of demons, venom dripping
from
their teeth
Shimmering was the badge of a warrior you'd placed on my
chest
My feet stomped on daffodils and irises once so fresh
Everyone knew I would walk through the deadliest forests for
you
Nonetheless, all I got are crestfallen sighs and the label of a
fool
You left me in the woods as I swallowed the foul damp dirt
Praying for encouragements but only received responses too
curt

The next winter I dived into the Pacific Ocean for you
Dancing with icy currents when you expressed your disdain
on my footwork
You turned your back on me the moment I started sinking into
the boundless blue
My bones cracked as I hit on a rock underwater
"A useless child who can't even swim"
That was your comments when the waves buried my screams
What else can I do to please you, to earn your approval?
What else can I do, with a body so fragile and a heart so
doubtful?

Years of pain and labor I ripped myself apart bit by bit
Came to live with all the monsters that once lurked in the dark
Me possessing talent is something you would never care to
admit
A decade of trying and faithfully waiting, still I could not win
a place in your heart
Mother, truth be told, will I ever be enough?
Now you look at me with loathing eyes and say you'd
preferred a child without scars
Because a girl who survived all your trials is yet far away
from your definition of 'enough'
Farewell to the mother who perceives her child's resilience as
a ridiculous farce

Lacuna

I hope our friendship is all but
ephemeral

Lacuna, lacuna is what our friendship
is

A relation of utmost quintessence

A mixture of the tenebrosity and
sparkle of the world

Lacuna is what you are to me

A missing piece

You're a person who can make me
smile

Smile with just a glance

And I hope the tenebrosity of
humanity

Will never taint your sparkling soul

For the lacuna you filled,
Shall never be hollow again

Linnea Throolin

My Name Is

Elijah A.
Colomer

My
dawdled form

My
slow resolve

My
imprint unto the frame
Passed through like mists swirled
aflame

Dispersing again, and again
What do they call me?

My Name Is “That Boy”

My
misshapen hands

My
incorrect thoughts

My
weary, empty hands
Dragging through the walls of the
self-defeating labyrinth
Accumulating again, and again
What do they call me?

My Name Is “Living”

My
heavy shoulder

My
racing mind

My
domain of absent hearts
Peforating wide across my
body

Hollowing again, and again
What do they call me?

My Name Is “Concept”

My
gnashing teeth

My
weeping eyes

My
twisted, whipping hands, the facsimile
of a soul

Laying ruin to all that is left
Then beyond, the conquest for my
agape body

Leaving everything of nothing, and
gaining nothing from everything

My Name
My Name Is

my rock

Sasi Kondru

you're my rock,
my little place to lean on.
you're the crowd for my
empty stage
a place for my happiness,
to share my rage
you're the stars, the
whole entire sky
instead of paint-by-the-
numbers
we fill it up, side by side

the
stuckest
stars
brightest
the
stars
brightest
the
stars
brightest

Orbit

Teesta Roychoudhury

I move in ellipses,
never quite close enough to burn,
never far enough to freeze.
The sun glances past me,
its golden gaze fixed on the brighter ones,
the bigger ones,
the ones that spin with purpose.

I am a distant thing,
small and quiet,
dragging a shadow behind me
that no one bothers to name.
They tell me I don't belong here,
that my path is too messy,
too tilted,
too far away to matter.

But I keep circling,
slow and steady,
watching from the edges as they
shine.
Sometimes I wonder if they even
see me,
if they feel my pull,
however faint.
Out here, the air is thin,
the silence thicker than gravity.

But I've learned to live in the
cold,
to let the frost settle on my
surface,
to spin my own way
without waiting for permission.
I know now that orbits aren't
chains—
they're choices.

And though my path may never
align
with theirs,

it is mine.

it is mine.

Save Our (star-cast) Souls

who will tell dear brutus
the fault is not in his stars?

i'm curled up in dead of night
cast my net to catch moonlight
her longing,
needing,
unbecoming.

i'm wrapped up in her sullen stun:
never the sun, never the Sun,
always reflecting pale moonlight.

glory, glory be
to thee:

stars, all-knowing fate of One
dazzling burn of bright bright Sun
and i:
my out-of-orbit destiny
shame, shame
unto me.

when i start falling, i know they'll know it:
no geminid, no halley's comet

fierce unwanted chicxulub
her burning,
crashing,
reigniting.

she brings the world into ruin.
shame, shame: my destiny.

who will tell darling brutus
that the fault is in himself?

all the poets sang of her.
she was the gleaming sun –
unfazed by the stars that burnt.

cheeks dusted
with the rose of
dawn

oh, what a sight, i'm sure,
the tenderest torment one
must endure

my heart bleeds like
spilled wine,

*i love her,
i loath her*

and muse if she'd feel the
same.

the crane of her neck as delicate
as the waning moon,
obsidian tendrils basked in a luminal glow

i sigh, my light
extinguished
for i remained the star
next to the sun
i winked out in obscurity
how i'd wish i could be
her.

but now i see
her

posture slipping
from her dancer's
frame

unravelling from her poise
and grace

but now i see *her*

awash with
agony unlike the
girl i knew

Evelyn Chan
tender
torture

THERAPEUTIC

Maddyline Davis

One of a million, the same: roundish and small.
Of 146 moons that Jupiter has, without just one,
still 145 left to revolve around it over and over.
Include the rocks and debris that form rings
How much then do you have left to offer?
Not the shiniest, not the biggest, not special at all.
Simple, plain, boring. No way could you have won
The match, if you were placed in an enclosure
to battle to the death, fight and swing
weapons with all the best warriors.
Jupiter, Jupiter, Jupiter you cry
but so do they, tears in their eyes.
Jupiter continues to circle around the sun.
The other moons didn't have a chance either
None.
No matter how resplendent, seraphic your view
It didn't matter. He doesn't care for you
The name on his heart will never erase
Dry the river streaming down your ghostly face
It's not worth disregarding your comeliness, your grace.
Spin but for only your personal gain
To keep afloat in the vacuum
Of space and not fall down to a point of no return.
Work for improvement. Make the enemies burn.
You find your place in front in the midst of glory.
Regret, regret, regret and awe
You're not the person they remember at all
Meek, shy, quiet? gone.
Paved the pathway for the
Intrepid, proud, paragon of Philautia you are.
You turn, nod your head to show
Respect for Jupiter and his noble position
at the centre of your world
Happier, brighter the features of your face.
Reminisce about the days where you thought
You weren't enough. Realise: you are.



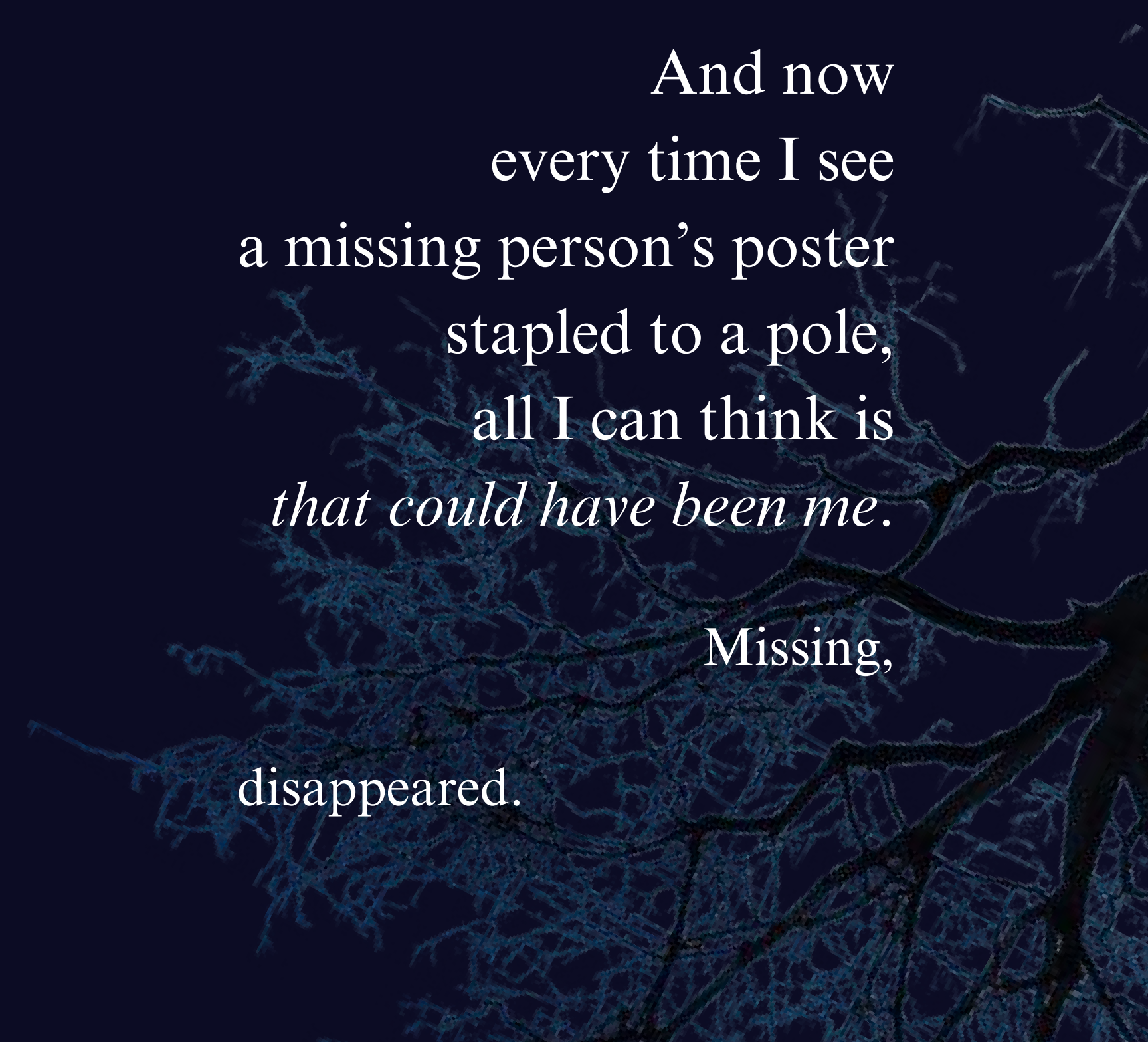
Claudia Wysocky

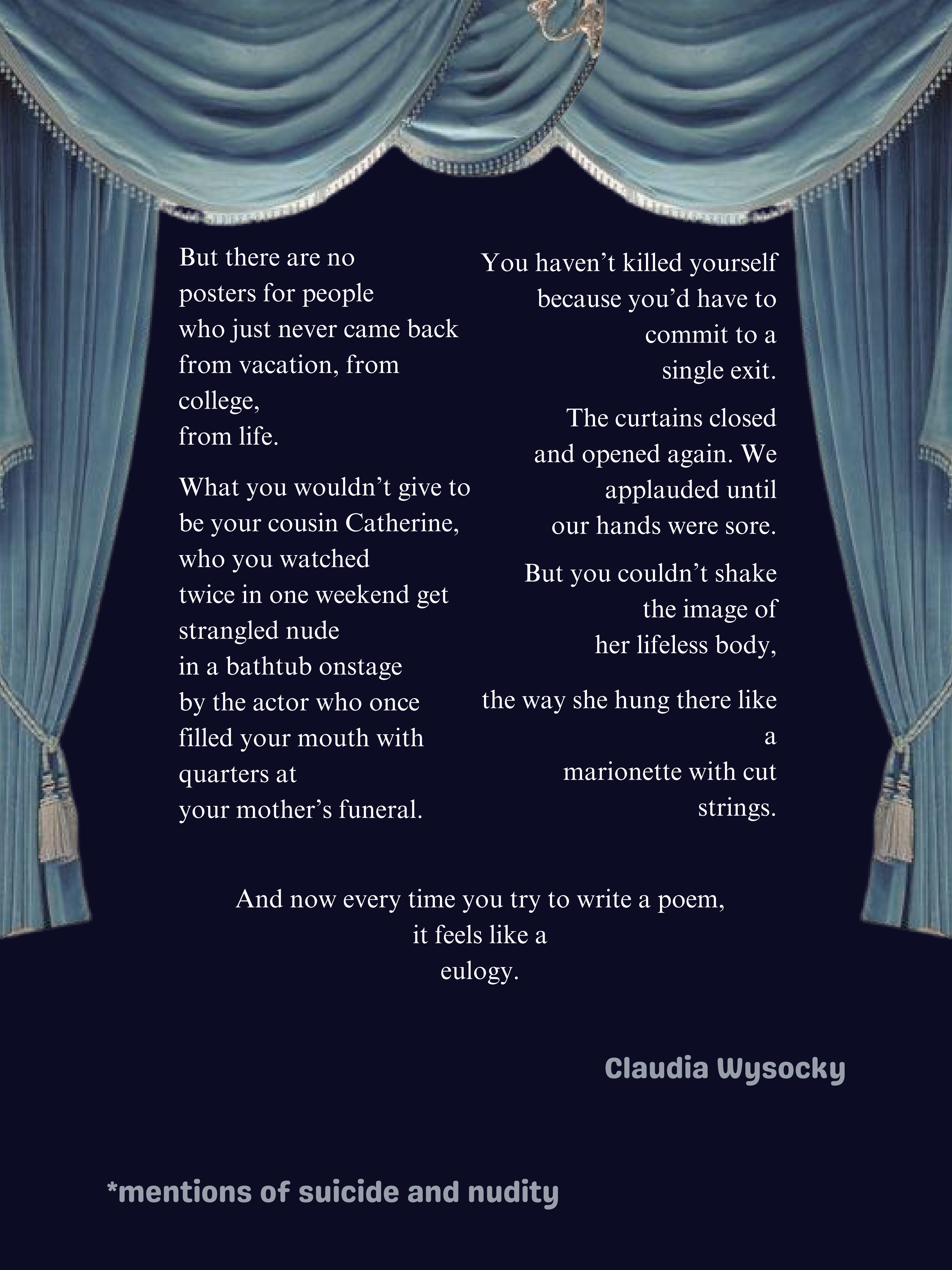
***mentions of suicide and nudity**

I keep thinking
about the time in high school
when you drew
me
a map of the city,
I still have it somewhere.
It was so easy
to get lost
in a place where all the trees
look the same.

And now
every time I see
a missing person's poster
stapled to a pole,
all I can think is
that could have been me.

Missing,
disappeared.



The image shows a stage set with blue curtains and a dark blue backdrop. The curtains are drawn back, revealing the stage. The text is written on the backdrop in white. The text is arranged in two columns, with the left column being longer than the right column. The text is in a serif font.

But there are no
posters for people
who just never came back
from vacation, from
college,
from life.

What you wouldn't give to
be your cousin Catherine,
who you watched
twice in one weekend get
strangled nude
in a bathtub onstage
by the actor who once
filled your mouth with
quarters at
your mother's funeral.

You haven't killed yourself
because you'd have to
commit to a
single exit.

The curtains closed
and opened again. We
applauded until
our hands were sore.

But you couldn't shake
the image of
her lifeless body,

the way she hung there like
a
marionette with cut
strings.

And now every time you try to write a poem,
it feels like a
eulogy.

Claudia Wysocky

***mentions of suicide and nudity**

WORST OF DAYS, WORST OF PEOPLE

By Maddyline
Davis

Friday Saturday Sunday and there it is
Struggle to get up get out for school or work
The bed beckons and calls to its service.
The end of the best beginning of the worst

Mondays, I hate, I despise
“No one likes Monday”
If they say they do, they're lying
Or trying to be different whichever it is
A Monday will never be considered a good day

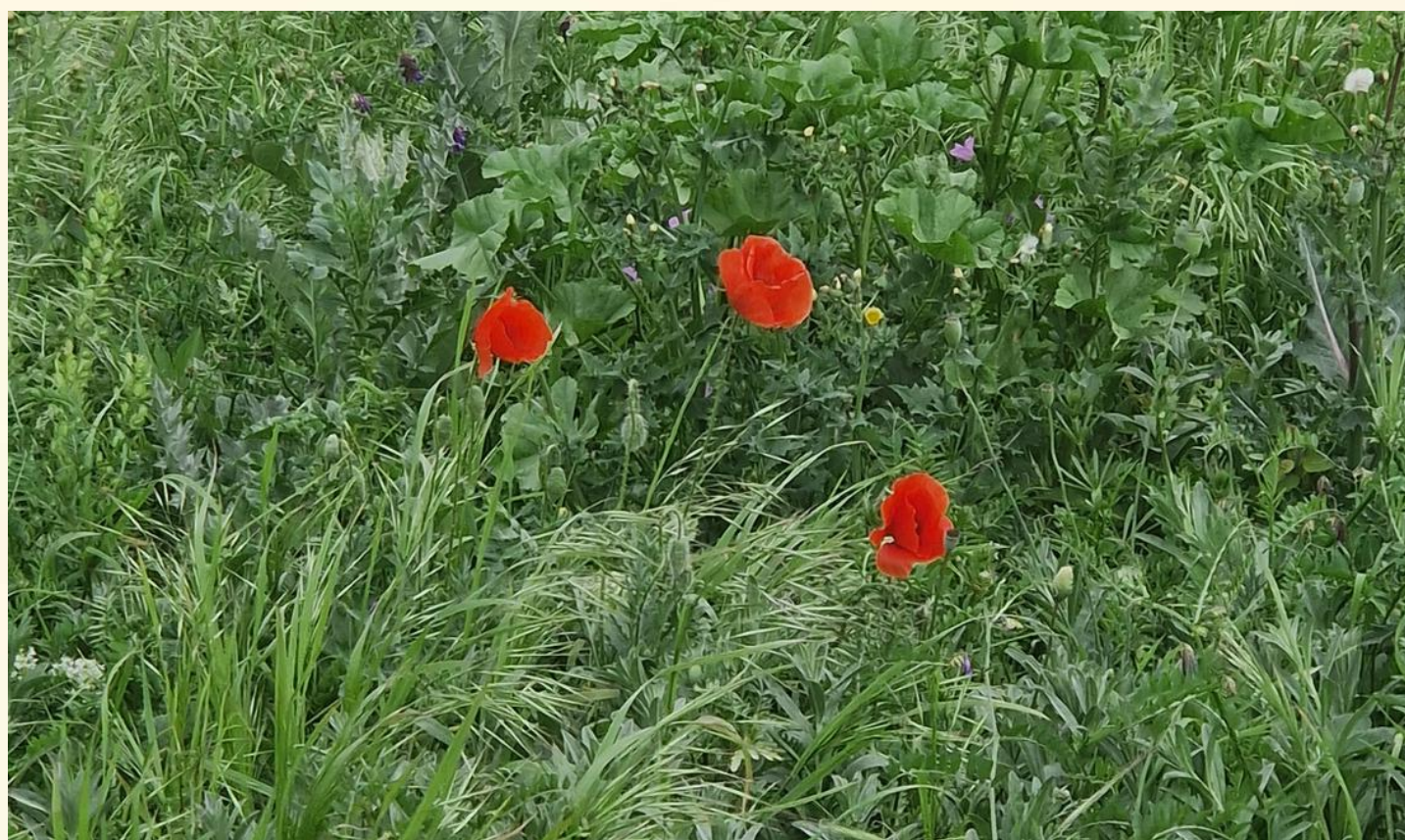
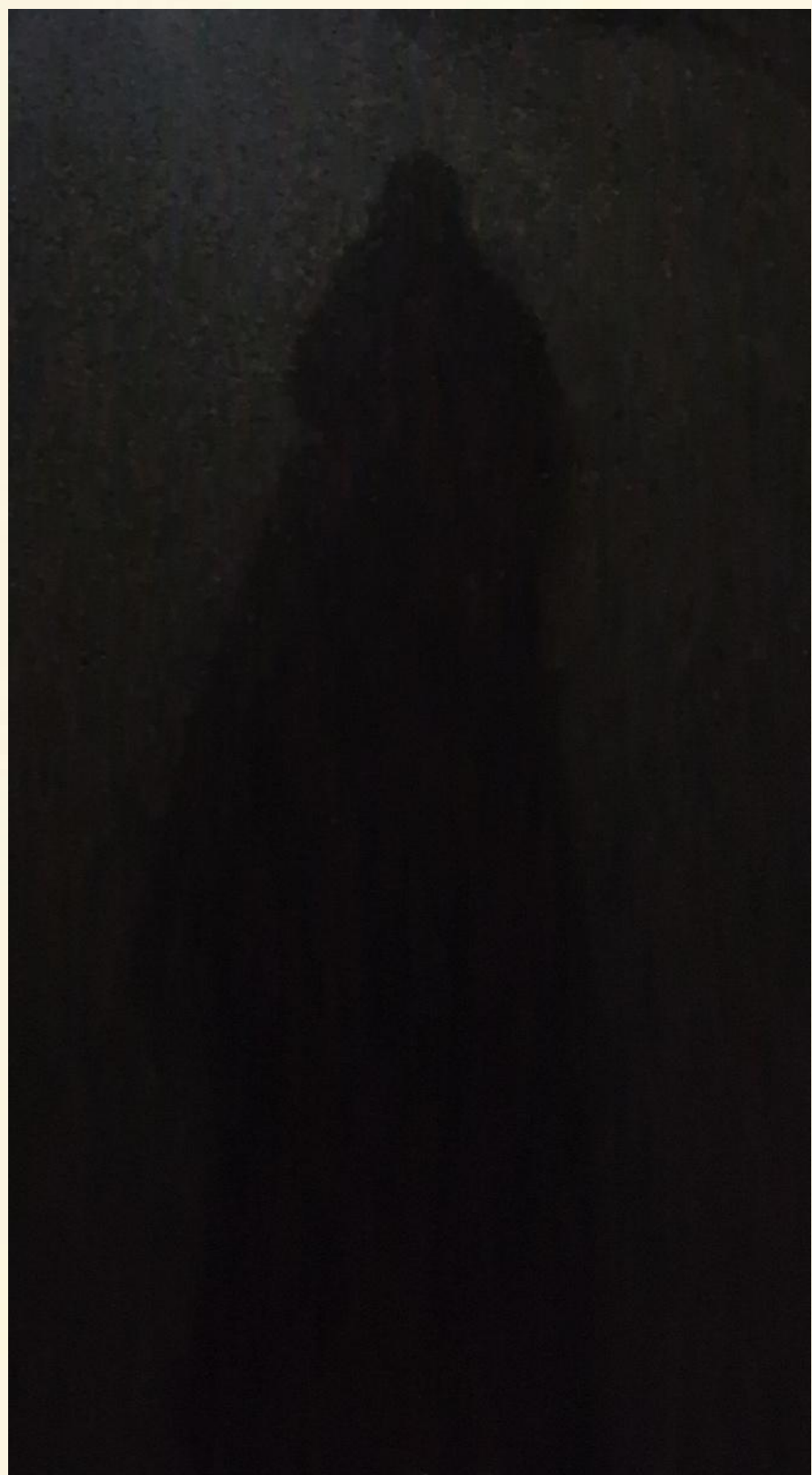
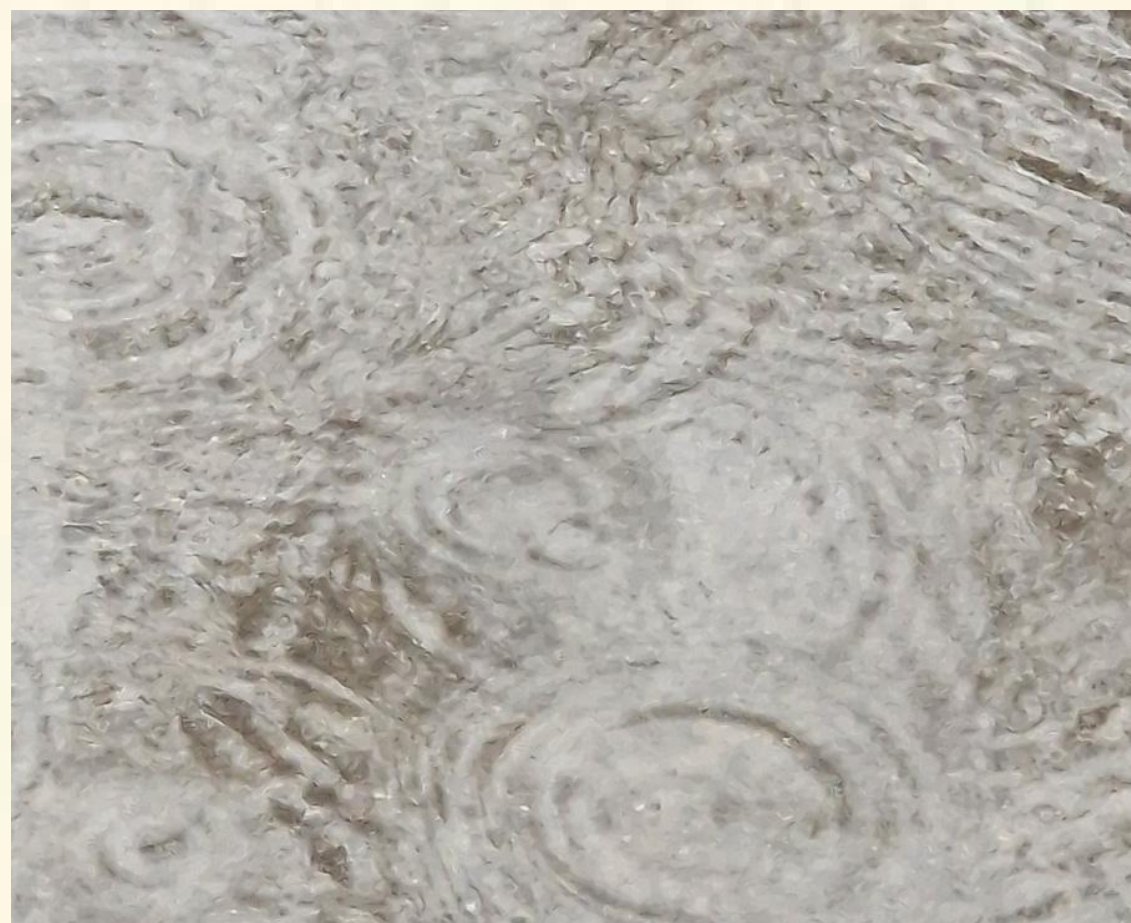
No matter how good or fun it may get
No matter if it's off or your birthday or Christmas
Monday blues are contagious
“stay away she's like the Monday of people”

No one ever talks comes up to say hi
They stare from afar
At the insect in the jar that they
found by chance one Sunday night
Work tomorrow, school tomorrow no time to enjoy

Sat in your corner you watch each week
Pass by as their reactions get more mean
Their faces are bleak
Tuesday Wednesday Thursday pass and finally Friday again at last.

Pluto's Photos

Daria Militaru



Brown Dwarf

north: tale

Sweet childhood nights,
beneath milky moonlight and frogs' mating songs,
my mother would tell me stories of the stars.
Soft silky voice, she said that,
when we are born,
the universe assigns us a star of our own.

Imagine — a star of our own!

Someday, when our time comes,
our soul flies into the star and we become one:
dancing, shimmering, eternal.
It would feel so nice to have somewhere to belong.
Somewhere tailored especially for me,
where I never needed to change and adapt.

I always wondered what my star would look like.

west: tome

It was a wet and grey November morning.
Curled up in the school library,
cradling a battered old astronomy book,
I traced my finger through the faded ink.
Scientists estimate that there are two hundred billion trillion stars in the universe,
the book said.
They are divided into many types.
Simply illustrated,
lining the side of the book:
glittering, effervescent, remnants, white dwarf.
Strong, throbbing, fading, red giant.
And dim, groaning, extinguished, brown dwarf.

The brown dwarf can be considered a failed star.
I always wondered what my star would look like.



: Broken Compass



east: tattle

Mother Moon, do you think I am loved as much as I love?
Do you think I will do as much as they do?
Do you secretly wish that I wasn't yours?
Do you hope I will grow and become just like you?
Do you wonder what my star is, my ugly destiny?

Is my map muddled?
My compass skewed?

I'm a brown dwarf, that's what you think, don't you?

south: tail

Soft rainy mornings,
messy bedroom,
dusty ceiling fan.

Every morning, my alarm rings at 4.57.
Every morning, I turn it off,
I lie in my bed for a half-hour,
wallowing in the feeling of un-belonging.

Brown dwarf,
ugly duckling,
pluto and ceres,
lonely black hole.

The half-hour passes and I remember my destined star.
Somewhere tailored especially for me.
Maybe a brown dwarf wouldn't be bad,
so long as it fit me,
so long as I fit it.

Ara Djati

Emotional Motion Sickness

Dear You (the one who never responds),

December 05, 2024.

Who will bury who first—me or my fear of failure at the tiniest aspects of life that keeps chewing on my guts, over and over again?

One freezing December morning, the clock showed it was almost seven a.m, but the darkness beyond the window of my room said otherwise. It's been twenty years since the last time I felt at home, and soon, I will turn twenty-one years old. The boiled milk rose above the rim and spilled all over the stove. I stood there and watched it happen, not bothering to turn off the heat or move the pot away. I kept thinking; does the moon ever feel forlorn up there, all alone?

In the endless sea of stars I love to watch every night, I wonder if there exists a star that thinks she doesn't shine as bright and loud as her other peers. I wonder if the thought of disappointing the moon—once it notices her lack of proficiency—troubles her. And as she approaches her final stages of life, I wonder if she holds that distressed weight in her burning core until her spark fades away, to be eternally forgotten.

In a moment of weakness, when the world falls asleep and the sombre shadows arise to possess the world, does she scream out for help? Or does she let the darkness of the sky swallow her whole, into an infinite void?

Dear You,

do you feel it too? That the sky cries whenever you ruin something—anything your hands touch? That nothing you can do will ever give your head a crown or the lashes on your eyes a kiss? Surely, there's a space for every single grain of sand in this world—a home to belong to, a small fire to warm those freezing fingertips and those trembling lips. But every time I find myself in a room full of strangers, sometimes even the people I know like the back of my hand, not a single pair of eyes recognize what it takes for me to sit still on my chair.

I would love to witness the day I wake up and choose to do the thing I yearn for the most—
not because I have to, not because I was told it is what's right for me to do, but simply because I am yet another hopeless human holding my naked, bleeding heart in the palm of my hand.

Volterra

Dear you,
the one who never ever responds to my distant pleas, I spoke to the moon last night. First, I thanked him for gracing the sky and bringing stardust and great company into my life, even when I let go of myself and surrender to the darkest pits of hell sitting at my core. And then, with a bitter scoff that grew to be a habit of mine, I told him, "I fear my brain is the one to kill me one day."
I asked, "Tell me, how painful do you think that is going to be?"
The moon said not to think too much into it. That if it is written on the floating clouds and underneath my skin, it is meant to be that way. But then again, I keep thinking about it. I always do. Because what am I, without the voices crowding my head and the stubbornly disturbing feeling that refuses to leave my guts alone?

Dear you, I wish you never feel like a stranger whenever you look into the mirror. I wish you'll have arms wrapped around you, engulfing you in a warm embrace, as you lay on your bed and take your last breaths. I wish your hand never feels cold and lonely as you walk down the path destined to be yours.

And if you don't, I wish you would look up at the sky and see how the stars are burning for you. I wish one would fall onto your lap and take away all the doubt and pain that dared to cloud your head.

Until that day crosses your path, don't you ever forget about me. Let's live for the day when we sit together and watch the world as it collapses before our eyes. Let's drink up each other's sorrows while we, too, burn and vanish into thin air.

Yours truly,

Me (the one who devotedly writes to you)

Kenza Tiguemounine

LAST ONE, I PROMISE

Oliver Euteneur

My grandfather used to tell me a story every time I would see him. He would say that when he was a little kid he could walk down the train tracks and pick up pennies for hours, until his pockets sagged with gleaming copper, then he would go home and count his newfound riches, and revel in his wealth.

“The men would march for hours, and the people would throw rocks for hours. The funny thing is no one ever gave either of them a time to stop, so the men just kept marching, and the people just kept throwing, they kept doing that forever I believe.” He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. His body was thin and frail, with eyelids that were now merely velvet film on top of ancient orbs. “Yes, I believe so. Marching forever, and throwing forever,” he repeated this about a dozen times. I sat up and prepared to leave before hearing his voice one more time. “Please stay.”

“I can't, I have to go somewhere.” I walked down the deep dark pavement roads for a long time, it felt good, it felt healthy, I don't think matching forever would be so bad.

He looked upon the dark beige gash and saw crimson goo excreting from deep within. At least that's what he told me. “How do you do that?” I asked him with a sort of awe coating my words.

He began to move those great old lips, then closed them. He pondered thousands of possible things to say, only one would be sufficient for him. “How do you not?” A smile like cracks in old porcelain defined his face.

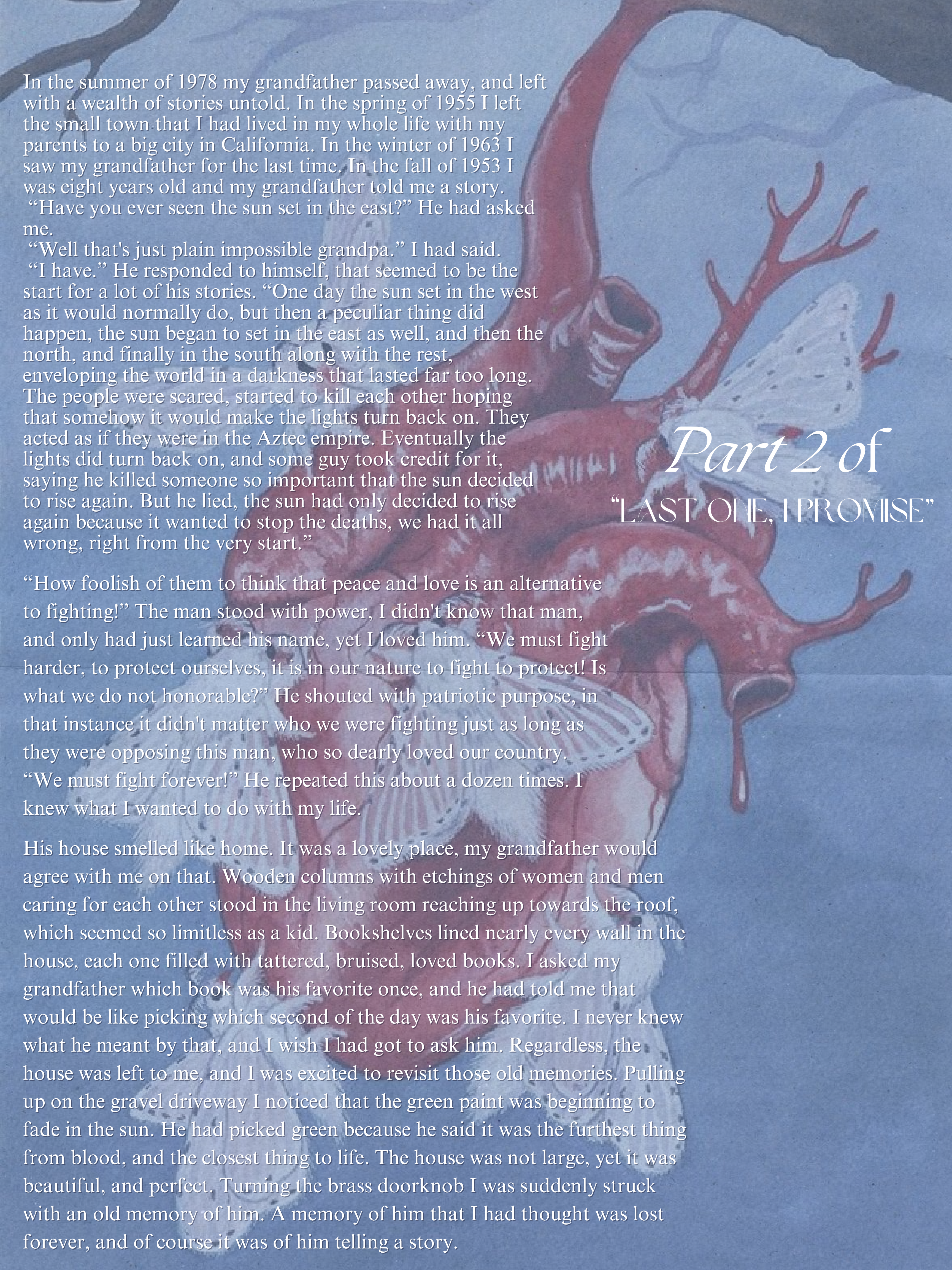
“Tell me a story.” I kindly demanded. His smile somehow grew larger as he made his way under the tree I had just gouged. He then beckoned me to join him, so I did, and I sat under the viridescent canopy with him as he began to speak.

“People used to think I was crazy. Did you know that?” I shook my head quickly, eagerly awaiting the continuation of his tale. “They thought I was crazy because I seemed to be the only one who could see all the blood pouring out of everyone's sides. Whenever I would point it out to someone I would get in trouble, they said I was inciting fear, so I stopped to tell people. Which in the end made me not see the blood anymore.” He sighed and touched my small innocent hand. “But these fellas,” he patted the tree, “they never cared when I told them.”

I was angry. “But why? Why was their blood?”

“The tree only ever bled when you cut it, but as I recall the people always bled, carnage was their lifestyle, perhaps they reaped what they sowed?”

I was even angrier. “This is not the type of story I wanted, grandpa.” I stormed away, fury flooded my veins.



In the summer of 1978 my grandfather passed away, and left with a wealth of stories untold. In the spring of 1955 I left the small town that I had lived in my whole life with my parents to a big city in California. In the winter of 1963 I saw my grandfather for the last time. In the fall of 1953 I was eight years old and my grandfather told me a story.

“Have you ever seen the sun set in the east?” He had asked me.

“Well that's just plain impossible grandpa.” I had said.

“I have.” He responded to himself, that seemed to be the start for a lot of his stories. “One day the sun set in the west as it would normally do, but then a peculiar thing did happen, the sun began to set in the east as well, and then the north, and finally in the south along with the rest, enveloping the world in a darkness that lasted far too long. The people were scared, started to kill each other hoping that somehow it would make the lights turn back on. They acted as if they were in the Aztec empire. Eventually the lights did turn back on, and some guy took credit for it, saying he killed someone so important that the sun decided to rise again. But he lied, the sun had only decided to rise again because it wanted to stop the deaths, we had it all wrong, right from the very start.”

Part 2 of “LAST ONE, I PROMISE”

“How foolish of them to think that peace and love is an alternative to fighting!” The man stood with power, I didn't know that man, and only had just learned his name, yet I loved him. “We must fight harder, to protect ourselves, it is in our nature to fight to protect! Is what we do not honorable?” He shouted with patriotic purpose, in that instance it didn't matter who we were fighting just as long as they were opposing this man, who so dearly loved our country.

“We must fight forever!” He repeated this about a dozen times. I knew what I wanted to do with my life.

His house smelled like home. It was a lovely place, my grandfather would agree with me on that. Wooden columns with etchings of women and men caring for each other stood in the living room reaching up towards the roof, which seemed so limitless as a kid. Bookshelves lined nearly every wall in the house, each one filled with tattered, bruised, loved books. I asked my grandfather which book was his favorite once, and he had told me that would be like picking which second of the day was his favorite. I never knew what he meant by that, and I wish I had got to ask him. Regardless, the house was left to me, and I was excited to revisit those old memories. Pulling up on the gravel driveway I noticed that the green paint was beginning to fade in the sun. He had picked green because he said it was the furthest thing from blood, and the closest thing to life. The house was not large, yet it was beautiful, and perfect. Turning the brass doorknob I was suddenly struck with an old memory of him. A memory of him that I had thought was lost forever, and of course it was of him telling a story.



Part 3 of

“LAST ONE, I PROMISE”

“How many times have you heard of something that ended? It could be anything, a book, a day, anything.” His wrinkles emanated comfort into my being. “Because I have heard it too much, nothing really ends, it just continues in a different way, the world will never ever run out of days, or Mondays for that matter, and people will keep on telling variations of a story, changing it and tweaking it until the original has become a faded memory.” He raised his hands to wipe the sweat off of his face.

“Don't believe it when someone tells you that something's going to end or that it's going to be over, because that person is wrong, either they're lying to you, or they just plain don't know better. But nothing ever ends, it will keep happening no matter what we want or what we believe. Although we can try to stop it, if everyone agrees to it, the only problem is that it's really hard to get everyone to agree to do something, but if we can just decide to agree, well that's one step closer to solving the problem, now we just have to help everyone else figure out what we know.”

The memory faded, and all I was left knowing was that I missed him.

I had joined the army, I was getting deployed to Vietnam soon, and there was only one person I wanted to see, my grandfather, he would be so proud of me, I know he would. This would be the first time I would see him in eight years, ever since the day I moved away. As I approached the nostalgic steps excitement washed over me as I opened the door. There he was, my favorite person in the whole world. The rest of this sad story I only remember in pieces, me telling him, then him looking shocked, and finally him whispering something in my ear that I would never ever forget.

“Did you even listen to my stories?” I left the house, stumbling out with a sad and confused heart. I was truly heartbroken, I had tried my hardest, and I had offended the only person I ever really cared about. I left America thinking I was a failure, I came back knowing I was one.

The house no longer smelled like home. It smelled stale without him living in the house. I ran my fingers over the old chestnut column, pushing my finger into the grooves that continuously wrapped around it. The kitchen was typically not a room I went into but I had noticed something sitting on the counter.



Part 4 of

“LAST ONE, I PROMISE”

It was a note written in my grandfather's handwriting: *My grandchild, do not worry my anger has ended. I don't know if that sentence has any significance for you, but it should. It can be hard to try so hard just to not be good enough for someone, and I want to tell you that it's ok, you can still try, you can still be something great, you can still make me proud. Maybe you will try really hard and fail again, but that will just be a great story to tell in the future. Now it seems that I have one final question for you. Would you like to hear a story? If you don't then you can dispose of this note, otherwise please turn me over.*

The note ended, there was clearly writing on the back, I flipped it with no hesitation. *There was a man I used to know who would come around and we would talk about things, the weather, our dreams, things such as that, he was a sad man really, no one else to talk to but me. Then one day he just disappeared, with no warning. That man would have never hurt a single creature in his life, I later learned that he died playing in the cruelest game of them all, one in which the winner loses just as much as the loser, a game in which there was no end, just breaks. Even after everything I had tried to teach you, you decided to play this game, maybe now you can see why I was disappointed in you. But please, never forget that I still love you, and I want you to try even harder to become great, I'm sure this time it will work out.* I sat down on the hard floor and tried to remember his beautiful stories, and found myself not remembering the stories but the way they made me feel, and the way they had inspired me before I had left. In that instance it didn't matter what the stories were, just that they had taught me something valuable that I had forgotten when I had left him. Finally, I knew what I didn't want to do with my life.

The End



Evelyn Chan
muse

“muse over, won’t you —
how the artist fell into art.”

Some say she is delusional, and she’d say she is madness herself. But she’s an artist, and the sheer beauty of her wretched fantasies is the only thing that could keep her going. She’s lost pieces of herself fretting over every detail long ago, yet the last sliver of sanity grasps her soul by the threshold, pushing her to finish it.

Her paintbrush glides hastily across the canvas, colors bleeding out as her hand trembles slightly. Her head reels in impatience. One misstep, one blunder, then everything will crumble underneath her fingers.

She sculps the lovelorn look on the young woman's porcelain face, quinacridone rose for her flustered blush. She adds a quiet tint of mahogany, unfurling on the woman's auburn hair. and the artist fixates her brush on the woman's gaze, depicting pain flashing across the eyes as she looks at whoever her beloved is.

Unrequited, the artist smiles ruefully, *my favorite*.

Perhaps the lucidity of her paintings ricochets the artist's own suffering, but she ignores it callously.

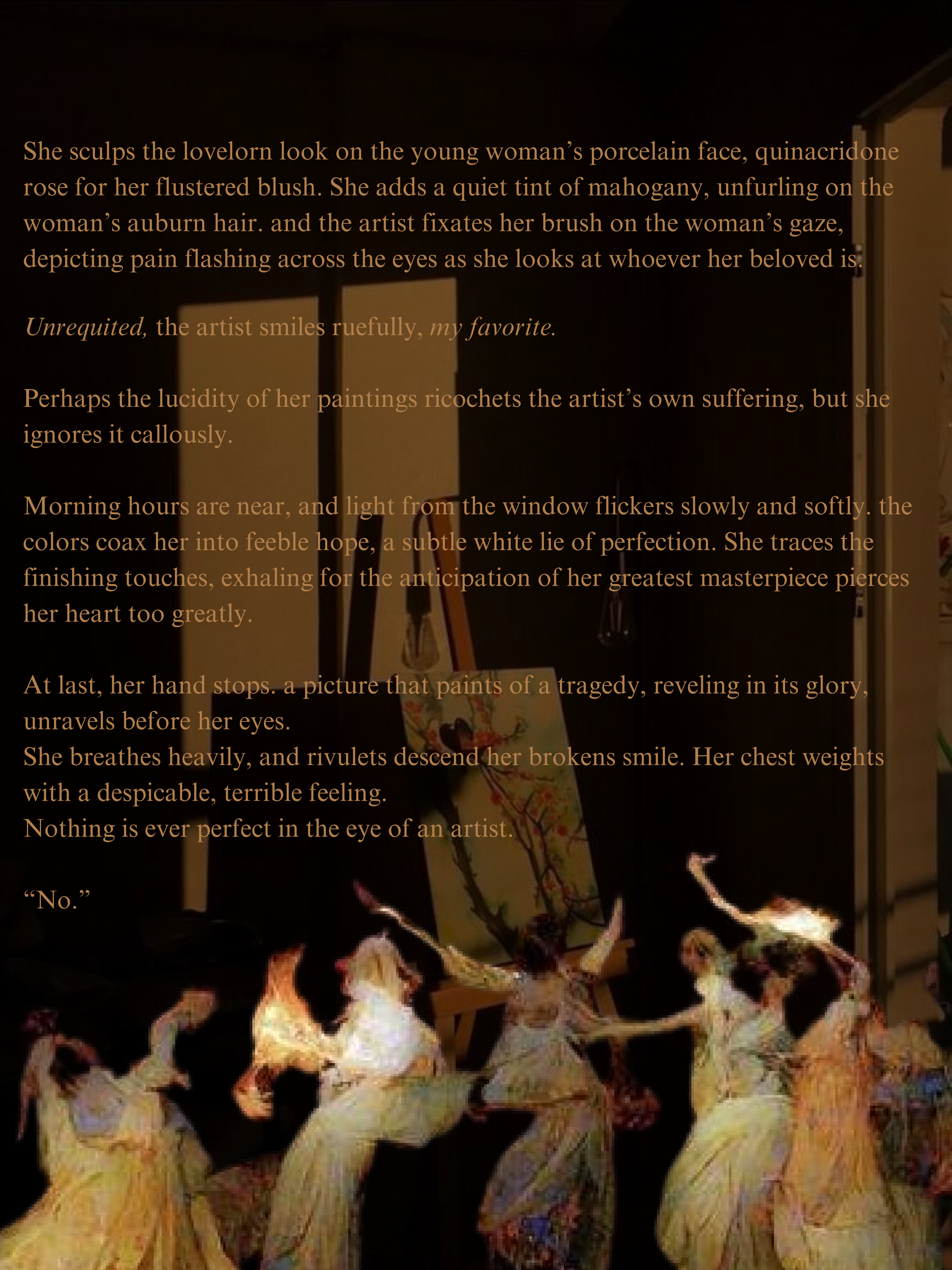
Morning hours are near, and light from the window flickers slowly and softly. the colors coax her into feeble hope, a subtle white lie of perfection. She traces the finishing touches, exhaling for the anticipation of her greatest masterpiece pierces her heart too greatly.

At last, her hand stops. a picture that paints of a tragedy, reveling in its glory, unravels before her eyes.

She breathes heavily, and rivulets descend her broken smile. Her chest weights with a despicable, terrible feeling.

Nothing is ever perfect in the eye of an artist.

“No.”



You Saved Me

Zayna Sen

Each step they climbed came with another thought. Almost like an inner monologue of negativity. *You'll never be enough. You're better off dead. No wonder your parents killed themselves; I would too.*

It wasn't anything new, just endless repetition. Getting louder and louder with each step.

Valen never thought they'd follow in their parents footsteps. But life has a way of being ironic. Everything Valen has ever done was so they wouldn't end up being their parents. They got a job, worked hard, and got good grades; and yet they still ended up the same way. Broken, tired, and so sick of life.

Finally reaching the top of the staircase, Valen pushes open the heavy door to the roof. Immediately a gust of the cool breeze blows into their face. Valen relaxes their shoulders as they step up onto the roof, this has been their favorite spot since they moved to New York. Valen remembers the day ever so clearly.

Dragging their luggage into the lobby, Valen stops to wipe the sweat off their forehead. They look up to see a large man towering over them. This must be their landlord. He looks very different from the pictures. They thought.

Where the website displayed a clean-shaven, jolly man with blonde hair and an expensive looking suit and tie, there is an obese bald man in his undergarments who looks like he hasn't showered in the last decade.

The man gave Valen a once over, grunted and dropped keys into their hand. “You’re room 210. If you need anything, that’s on you.”

Valen raised their eyebrows as the man turned-

Valen was suddenly drawn from their thoughts as a shallow “You in there?” was uttered.

Sitting on the roof’s edge was a petite girl with a cigarette in her hand. Valen had to squint to see her, with the stark moonlight shining from behind.

Hopping off the ledge, she approached Valen. As she approached she threw down her cigar and stomped on it. “You should go back down.”

Valen raised their eyebrow, “funny, I was gonna tell you the same.” They surveyed the girl. *One last conversation can’t hurt, right?* “What’s your name?”

“Feyre Dawn.” She looked at Valen expectantly.

“Valen. Valen Aventhorne.”

Feyre hummed in response, and after a long silence she sighs. Valen notices how worn down she looks. Almost like themselves. It hits Valen suddenly that maybe they weren’t the only one trying to die tonight.

It appears that the thought had also hit Feyre, because suddenly her eyes grew slightly wider, a movement not missed by Valen. “Come sit with me. We seem to be birds of a feather.” Feyre says, walking towards the edge.

Oh what the hell, if she pushes me I’ve literally achieved the goal I wanted too. Valen approaches the edge, and Feyre taps the spot beside her. They swing their legs over and settle themselves beside her.

Looking down, the view is mesmerizing. New York was truly mystical from above. The forever busy city, with all its lights, can look so amazingly small from high up. You would never have known that there were millions of people living their lives. All with different stories.

Feyre breaks the silence, and Valen is pulled out of their gawking. “So.. What was your final push? What made you want to end it all today?”

Valen glanced at her, and she was staring intently back at them. With the light of the city below them. Valen can make out her features slightly better. Her hair is multicolored, like a calico cat; and her eyes were feline-like. From what they can see, Valen deduced that she was graceful and elegant, much unlike herself.

Realizing they hadn’t answered her question, Valen spoke, swinging their legs. “It finally cracked me, I guess. What about you?”

Feyre looked away, shaking their head. “Shitty parents, you know? Beat me raw and then I decided I’d had enough.” She pulled out a bottle from under her hoodie and swung it up to her lips, downing it in large gulps.

Valen hesitated before putting their hand on her shoulder. “I’m sorry, that sounds terrible.”

Feyre looked at them with glassy eyes. “I guess.” She furiously wiped her eyes.

Valen turned and focused on the night sky above them. They sat in silence with Feyre for a little bit, until finally, Feyre spoke. “Are you going to do it?”

Valen looked at her and thought about it. “After meeting you? I’m not sure anymore.” They sighed.

Feyre locked eyes with Valen. “Same goes here.”

Valen solemnly held up their pinky finger. “Promise that no matter what we’ll stay alive together?”

Feyre stared at their finger and giggled, locking her own finger with Valen’s. “Promise.”

Valen threw their head back and laughed freely. “This is so stupid.”

Feyre giggled with them. “I mean, I don’t actually have anything to live for except this promise.”

“You know, what if you come live with me? I mean, from what you said, your parents aren’t gonna miss you.”

Feyre stopped laughing and stared at Valen, her mouth agape. “Wait, be serious. Are you serious?”

Valen smiled, “so serious.”

Feyre threw her arms around Valen’s neck. “Valen Aventhorne, you just saved me.”

Valen’s eyes widened, and they hugged Feyre back. *I saved her?*

No, Feyre Dawn. YOU saved ME.

“You and me forever.”



cover art made
by ella kate
underwood

REMEMBER
who you
are