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Arcana.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Arcana was created, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.



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USYD DARK ACADEMIA & LITERATURE SOCIETY

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Arcana.



*“The heart of man is very much like the sea, it has its storms,
its tides and its depths; it has its pearls too.”*

—Vincent van Gogh

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≠ **Dead Moose** ≠

Lina Alsabiri

There's a dead moose in the trunk.

Yes, I know.

Roll down the windows. I can smell it from here.

No, you can't. It's in the trunk. Covered up.

The stench is making me dizzy. Pull over.

I can't. There's no stopping here.

I'm going to throw up. I can't breathe.

You're fine.

I feel sick. There's a dead moose in the trunk. Let me out.

It's too cold outside and it's going to rain soon.

That's fine. I like the rain.

In the middle of the night? In the middle of nowhere?

Yes.

No. I can't stop here.

Stop at the next service station. There's a dead moose ...

In the trunk. Yes, I know. What do you want me to do about it? Huh?

Do you know how heavy that thing is? I won't be able to carry it on my own. You certainly couldn't. And even if we were to both work together ...

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I don't care what you do with it. It can stay with you. I'm getting out.

Right. Sure. And where are you going to go? Hmm?

Anywhere. Away from the dead moose.

(Away from you.)

Great idea. At night? In the rain? With nowhere to go and no sign of life? With no one to contact? And no means to either? Yes, I'm sure you'd get very far.

I'll get further on foot alone in the dark than in this car with you and a dead moose in the trunk.

...

...

Stop crying.

I'm suffocating.

(Choking)

Stop.

Open the windows. The air's too thick and tight. And it reeks of dead moose.

(Drenching the air. Invading her senses. Flooding them.)

No. It's going to rain soon.

Good. So it'll wash it away.

Don't be thick. *(Thick. Tight.)* There's nothing to wash away.

I can feel it everywhere. All over me.

Leaking out from the trunk and staining everything. Soaking me so completely I feel like I'm drowning.

Dead Moose

(The noose tugging and pulling, tightening around her neck. Binding.)

Well, you're not.

Is it me? You? The dead moose? This tight noose? All of it, probably?

(Her mind scrambling, clawing for purchase. For escape.)

Stop that.

Let me out. It reeks of dead moose and this noose is getting tighter.

(Binding. Choking. Leaking. Soaking.)

I said, stop. You'll hurt yourself.

Let me out. *(Let me out!)* Before there's nothing left. I can feel it chipping away at me. Stripping away all that I am. I'm slipping away.

(Being erased)

(Aching bones grew older still. Weaker. Grinding to dust. And sour blood, turned cold. Consuming her entirely. Nothing left. But that dead moose. That incessant dead moose endlessly

Reeking. Choking. Grinding.

Leaking. Soaking. Binding.)

Yes. I know.

≠ Lilacs ≠

Alex Ma

Now that lilacs are in bloom
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
And twists one in her fingers while she talks.

—T.S. Eliot

I

She had to be ready by seven o'clock. The chauffeur was waiting in the street, complacently drumming at the wheel. But she had to decide which gown, the chartreuse or the ruby? Either befitted her figure; she was the loveliest envy of all the set. She gazed into the mirror, then averted her gaze. Somehow, the more beautiful she became, the less she liked to observe herself. Ultimately, she chose the chartreuse. Delicate colours were the mode du jour. The satin slipped and rippled, liquid-like, over her skin. Then, the putting on of rhinestone pumps and evening gloves. She left her décolletage bare; a necklace did more to obscure than to accentuate. With these ornaments, she was ready.

The motorcar sped off into the glossy night. She was anticipating—thinking, planning, scheming. Who would be there? Could she make advantageous moves? If the whole lot were useless; then it would be a waste,

Lilacs

a circling effort to produce void. Yet, she wasn't exactly certain who she wished to meet. There existed a vague outline of a personage—someone reliable, loyal, attractive, talkative ... though no idea of real flesh and blood. The concept motivated her. So, she listened to that abstraction. She found an ecstasy in satisfying mere ideals. But tonight—tonight she had to be the most perfect woman present. Nobody could, would, should dare to ever surpass her. In perfection she abided, her closest friend and enemy.

The line outside the club snaked along the pavement. Boots stamped in dirty asphalt. She inhaled deep the noxious scent of smog. Ah, the city. She liked that smell; it made her feel alive. She paused in the crowd. People rushed past her, scurrying to and fro, contained in their own sphere, barely noticing they were in a dense assortment of pedestrians. Before indulgence, she needed to get lost. A moment of solitude that prepared her for maximum competition. She merely walked towards the doors, and saying her name, was granted entry into that luminous establishment.

Smoke and chatter drifted through the parlour. She spied the same few regulars perched on the rickety bar seats. She would not talk to them; all of their intrigue had been extracted long ago. There were unfamiliar figures; some who conversed eagerly in a group; some who seemed nonchalant; some who seemed aloof, sipping from the edge of their glass, setting it down with a firm resolution that warded away any approaching. She frowned. The same challenge as before, and she had since reaped no new wisdom to confront it. She stood there, eyeing the patrons, sweat gathering inside her gloves, attempting to convince herself that she would do something different this evening. It would be different—from last week, last month, a year ago. Of course it would be—the alteration of Fate was wholly unpredictable, out of human comprehension.

She lounged upon a divan. The bitterness of alcohol rejuvenated her

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essence. Still, no noteworthy personage came. Perhaps this establishment did not favour the respectable. She drank more. She became dizzy. A by-product of her ventures. Still, she was as alone as ever. She languidly rolled her head onto the cushioned seat, crushing her crisp, precise curls. When would she be the darling of the room? When would the limelight shine on her, and all the world could realise its grave mistake in ignoring her? But in this dim parlour, men cackled and drank whisky while playing pool, and women with overdrawn Cupid's bows leaned in to hear sweet drabbles in their ear—everybody was preoccupied with everybody else. They could carry on their brazen raptures without her.

Thus she returned, once again lonely and unsuccessful. She hated having to mount the stairs in those late hours and open the door to her unlit flat; to turn all the lights on and shut the curtains, to run the faucet and clean her face. She hated the sheer effort to undo all of her perfection. It was agony to peel off her stockings and slip, to undo her curls, remove her jewellery, like stripping a palace of its furnishings. She loathed herself the most when she had to bear her undone face in the mirror after an evening out. Yes, she was a failure.

Finally, she turned on the light in her bedroom. The lilacs on the bureau were the only natural decoration. But she preferred the harshness of the uncoloured walls and plain bed. She went to sleep wishing that somehow, without any change in herself, she would experience an immaculate gain the next day.

Lilacs

II

Winter was death, and therefore spring is regeneration of the rotten carcass. She felt the gentle warmth of the sun on her cheek. Yes, she would feel alive again. She held a teacup in her dainty fingers, poised like those women in glossy magazines. Guests pullulated on the verdant lawn. She stared in a neutral look of disdain and aloofness. Not for her. Nobody was for her.

Diaphanous white flounces hugged her figure. She had picked that dress out specially for the occasion. A goddess, an ethereal being, gracing the afternoon tea party. She plucked another cake from the stand and let it melt in her mouth. Sugar, sweetness, delicacy, the pillars of feminine youth. But it turned saccharine, then bitter. She grimaced. Yes—it was artificial. Mounds of white sugar covering the plain taste of flour, like the white frock covering her inward void. She spat it out into a white handkerchief.

The table carried on in idle chatter. She left; her absence had little influence. Everywhere she went, pairs and groups engaged in polite talk—of motorcars, estates, fashionable tailors, engagements and weddings, and thinly-masked references to social ruin. She wanted to escape—out from the confinement of people, and into the unbound grass. Yet, as she moved along the gathering, she strained for a mention of her name. She hoped; hoped even as a failure, she would be remembered; remembered for the swoop of her lips, her enthralling charm, her lashes, her lingering scent left on an evening cape ... She listened; nothing came. She pushed against the bodies and out into the open.

Her heels sank in the soft grass. Each step was met with a slight resistance that somewhat angered her. Here, the masses of bodies became

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dispersed. She walked—away from people, away from the corruption of observance. As she walked, she recounted the number of homely men and women in that party. Then she chastised herself—how could she be forgotten if they were so ugly? What made her invisible amongst a bunch of witless puppets? She concluded that something was innately wrong with her.

Miss Robertson looked into the cloudless sky and said, “Yes, I am worthless and ugly as sin, undeserving of even nature’s vast beauty. Leave me buried in the soil to be trampled upon, and that may be my rightful burial.”

She reposed amongst a lilac shrub. The flowers grew resplendent, blooming thickly, recklessly, depositing their petals onto the ground in a purple carpet. She plucked a lilac off the branch and examined it—unrestrained, free to absorb the sun’s vigorous rays, a short but exquisite life before withering away in the winter.



Lilacs

The lilacs in her room would never witness this extraordinary cycle. Her undecorated bureau now seemed a cruel place for those blooms to die, sunless and stemless. How often had she replaced withering lilacs, a shadow of their former brilliance, pouring out the old water and filling up the vase, cutting up an identical bunch only to imprison them in a watery cell? The lilacs, and she, too, could not deviate from this despondent cycle.

She let the lilac fall to the grass. The party continued; she heard the boisterous sounds of a band playing and crowd cheering. And then she knew; she must not go back. She knew, and had decided when the taste of cake felt too sweet.

She turned and walked deeper into the lilacs. ✨

≠ **The Castle** ≠

Grace Curry

From the highlands to the silver isle,
The barque pushes another mile
Through the birch and oak trees,
And across the forty seas.

I gaze upon her now, as we approach nearby.
Chimneys and towers scratch the ebony sky;
Passing through her moat and iron gate,
I breathe in her neglected state.

Pay Charon a silver dime—
Six o'clock; we're just in time.
A single ray of sun, caught by a mosaic,
Water seeps under the doors from the Duich lake.

As I enter, a hallway forms
Towards guardrooms and sleeping dorms;
The ceiling holds a chandelier,
A mourning dove is all I hear.

The Castle

In my pocket, I clutch the letter he wrote;
A winged statue offers to take my coat.
I follow the portraits lining the stone walls;
Atop the staircase, a beckoning voice calls.

Rounding the marble staircase,
I cannot wait to see his face;
See, in my satchel, beneath my maps
A gift lies safe between the flaps.

I spot him at the table in the Great Hall,
I hear his haunting laughter call.
He hears me coming and turns around;
I could have sworn I never made a sound.

My eyes meet his ghostly gaze;
His smile forms, like a fiery blaze.
I sit opposite his phantom size,
And pass him down the wrapped surprise.

Oh, he loves the toy Viking ship!
Suddenly, trays of food are at my hip.
We feast on shortcakes and on mouse,
And drink fizz and wine and juice.

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He gasps, as if in revelation,
And asks if I've seen the renovations;
He shows me doors that open of their own free will,
And golden figurines that line the window sill.

In the library he asks for the letter "Z"
And the shelf floats down, just above his head.
A marble staircase that polishes itself,
Bronze candlesticks, paperweights, and globes atop the shelf.



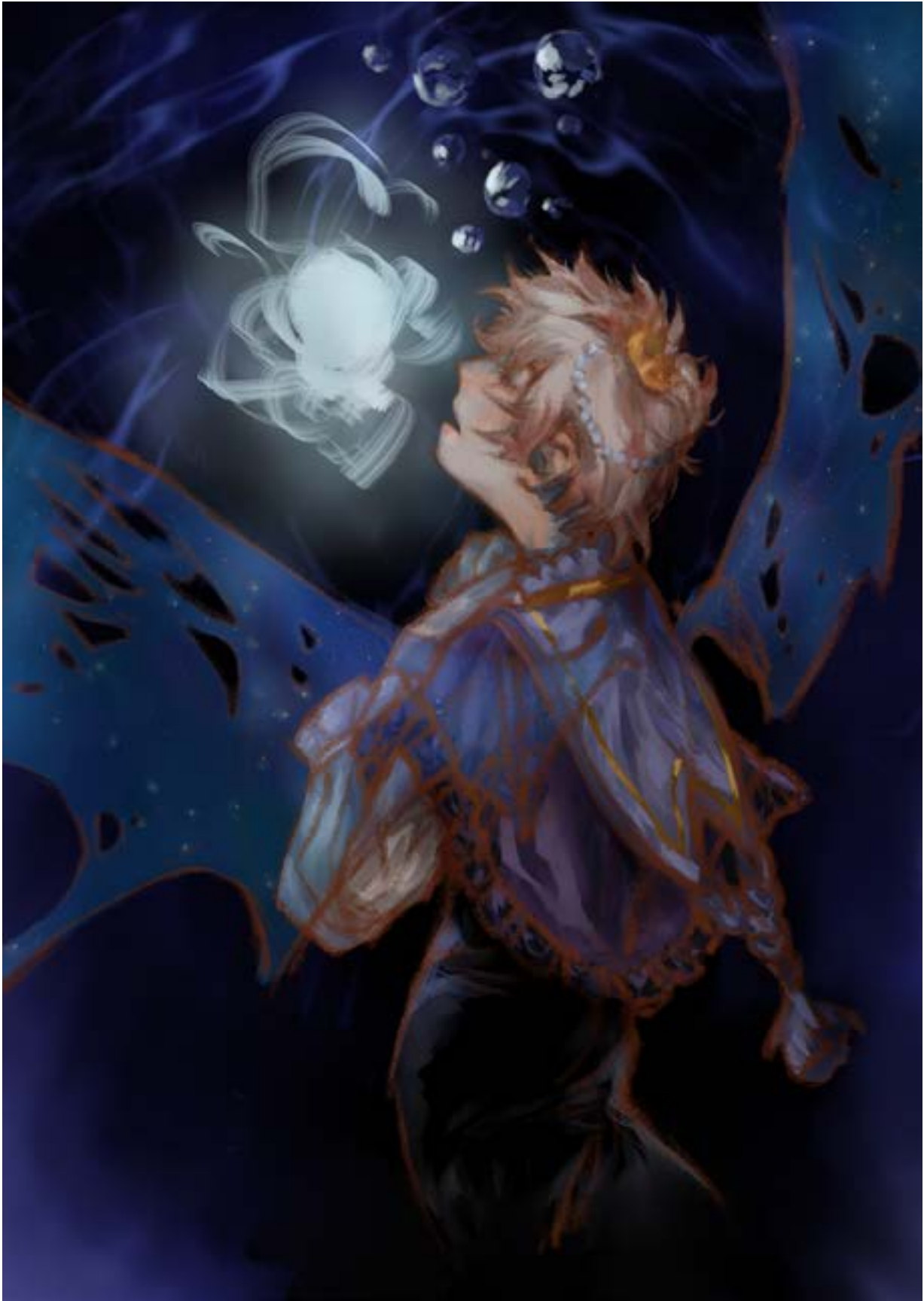
The Castle

Full of humour and good deeds
He gives me his old books to read.
In the sitting room, I marvel at the display,
As the creaky grand piano starts to play.

At the end of the hall, we mind the drop.
He asks me if I've seen the top;
On the roof, the ivy coils
Around the grumpy gargoyles.

Back inside, I rub my eyes and yawn,
And tell him I'll have left by dawn.
An armoured knight fetches my nightgown;
I sigh thankfully as I lie down.

In my quarters, I lay awake;
What a strange turn life can take.
And as the ethereal moon begins to creep,
The castle takes a heavy breath and falls asleep.



Claire Lyou ✨ *The Deal*

≠ **The Voices Behind You** ≠

Janika Fernando

“**E**dmund dear, we won’t be gone too long”, Mother whispered into my ear.

With one last stroke of my dark brown hair and a gentle kiss on the forehead, she left.

I continued to watch the rain. The driving rain that threatened to unleash. Pattering against the window panes. Not slight. Hard. My eyes wandered to the grey clouds that had formed in the sky, creating a gloomy essence. As the castle looked down onto the small town, a sense of foreboding and misery crept a garden inside my bones. I had never trusted my mother. Nor my father. And, the very least, this castle. A prison.

This castle lived to crumble in slow motion. Slower than the eye can detect over a lifetime. The walls stood mute. Moat water awaited the call of the wind to ruffle and move like molten glass of deep mildew. The grey stone drawbridge rose from the land. Unapologetic and bold, it defied all entries. Keeping guard of what it had been entrusted to care for. The hilts of old pitchforks, stakes and knives stuck out from the uneven patches of grass surrounding the castle. This castle, once the lifeblood of the low lying regions that stretched horizon-bound from these hill battlements, was my so-called home.

Inside, old portraits of various people lined the walls. Unbeknownst to me, their eyes slowly watched. As I moved along, shades of wallpaper peeled everywhere on the walls. Red and black. Dust floated in the air densely.

Cobwebs surrounded the upper walls.

It was only when I reached the third room on the right of the castle that the voices grasped me. Eerily, they seemed to pierce my mind. Haunting me with screams. Cries. A symphony which made my worst nightmares come alive.

“Edmund dear, please don’t ... ”

“Collin’s blood beware ... fulfill the debt ... ”

“Edmund ... come to our fate ... Don’t be scared ... ”

Countless voices whispered against each other until it was too much to bear. I needed to know. My whole life felt like a painful lie. Could this door be it? I could feel all eyes on me as I turned the brass doorknob. Immediately, I was hit by the stench of blood which lingered in the air. The entire room was red. The floor, the ceiling, the walls. You couldn’t ignore it. Its condition indicated violence. Curtains viciously ripped at a sharp point. Furniture was broken. The room was dim, lit by nothing but the single flicker of a candle on the trashed grand piano.

Creak ...

The ancient floorboards complained as I edged closer to my fate. In all extreme honesty, what laid in the centre wasn’t pretty, but it arose in me a sort of depraved curiosity which made it impossible to look away.

A coffin, of all things. Right in the centre of the cold-blooded room. A sudden chill rushed through my veins. Adrenaline pumping as if I was going mad. Barking mad as hell. All these secrets my family kept from me. All these years of living in the dark with nothing but a last goodbye. Could this coffin be it? The answer to my questions? The sensation of curiosity thrifted my hands forward. I opened the lid at a gentle pace and took a peek.

The Voices Behind You

My tongue went sour and my mouth went dry as I took in the the bloodless hue of the thing that laid inside.

He was reminiscent of a cave dwelling creature that had never seen the light of day. His face was wrinkled, his skin swimming in almost translucence. His fashion was drab. A long cape. Coated black. His body strapped in chains. His bloodshot, dilated pupils gleamed with delight, with thirst for blood. He broke free with a few rattles. Then, he rose to his feet. He stumbled to the cracked mirror that lay near. His reflection was nothing but a pure empty room behind him. His body, not on the ground. Was he a ghost? No, for I knew exactly what the devil he was. I tried to avert my eyes from the bloody scene. To escape. But that wasn't what fate planned for me. Instead, his agile limbs, stiff and cold, held me with a vice-like grip.

There was no pain. No pain as his sharp incisors bit me. No compassion. No remorse. No emotion. I raised my hand to my neck. Blood trickled away.

Another *creak* sounded. Louder.

This time, from the aging drawbridge of this dreaded castle. Engraved with the name "Collins", the shadowy figure of a somehow familiar stranger with timid footfalls was trudging up the hallway, up the long winding staircase, creeping closer and closer to the room where I was.

The door thrust open, and, astoundingly, I was greeted with an almost mirror image of myself. But I was no longer that small boy. The one the villagers watched, staring out of the foreboding castle window. A bystander. Overlooking the tragic past. The scene slowly drifted. Vanished. The boy only a vision, a message, now dissipating with the smell of burning sulphur. I drifted back to the room, back to myself, back to the present. I lunged forwards and rubbed the coffin's smooth velvet lining with my fingertips and

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peered inside. Yes, the creature was still there. Cold and dead.

However, I was no longer afraid. I had come to the verge of a realisation. This was my identity. Future. Past. Present. The infamous vampire, Edward Collins. A part of my ancestral history. The eyes, constantly watching, never once bothered me after that. This was all meant to happen. My mother. My father. They left me so I could be safe. So I could become the next monster in line to the crown. The one to be proud of. Looking commandingly down onto the small town. Seeing all the victims that would cry out for mercy for Collin's sake. Deciding who the next corpse to lie will be. After all, what is there to be afraid of when you are the monster?

I came to crave the experiences of night-time, when the stars kiss the sky, decorating the heavens as if exquisite jewels. Beauty beyond even human imagination. It was this castle that helped me discover it. My thirst for life after sunsets. Seeking ghosts. And whatever else prefers the world without the glare of the sun. I've been the bloodshed on these castle ramparts. Soaking into the moss covered ground these past centuries. Living in the name of my dear family.

And so, the twisted tale continues ... It is said that blood is thicker than water. Something that binds us. Curses us. You can call it fate. Destiny. Whatever your odd mortal desires wish. So be it. But in the end, death is the only inevitable. Or is it? I guess we'll never know until the bite ... ✨



Cara Baldwin ✨ *Dragon in a Cave*

≠ **How to Be a Neo-Pagan** ≠

Alex Ma

How to be a Neo-Pagan (By someone born very much after their Reign)

1. Get outside. Get outside, get outside.

Otherwise, you'll languish in your room, a pallid shell of yourself.

2. Take off your shoes. Take off your socks. Take off your tie; or ornamental rings; or pearl earrings; or the one necklace from your ex, but you still wear it since it's too precious.

We're not believers in the Material world. The Spiritual world is far more substantial. Gold tarnishes, the Soul does not, will not, is forevermore young.

3. Be sociable; there is no room for shyness here!

It's no use not talking, since you'll be stuck with those people for a week.

3.5 Inevitably, some incendiary talk will occur, and everyone will be thrown into a mess of crossfire accusations.

Try not to be the subject of that talk. Oh, it is *ROTTEN!*

How to Be a Neo-Pagan

4. Stay young and never grow old.

Could you imagine—being a slobbering, florid, corpulent, unambitious, forty-something stuck in a dead-end job with an unspectacular wife and three kids who you must tend to? NO! You must not become this caricature.

5. The pond is rather fresh today.

Take a dip. Feel the cool water wash away your sins. Become a new person. We're bohemians (but acceptably so).

6. Have an affair— strictly emotional and not carnal.

We don't believe in copulation without marriage. Still, the affair must be as emotionally torrid and damaging as if you committed debauchery. Don't forget the salacious letters.

7. We'll meet again at Basle station in 20 years.

Never mind if most of us are dead, or ill, or have submitted to that unspeakable end—domesticity.

We still camped about in the fresh grass.

We still bathed, stark naked, in the pond.

We still committed ourselves to eternal Youth.

We tried.

We tried, but by God, time is an indestructible enemy!

≠ Mnemosyne ≠

Zambia Byrnes

When I had come to consciousness I saw we were not in Olympus at all but an ever-shifting plane of colour and shape which fell like sand and moved silently through abstraction. There was no horizon. The landscape changed and grew grass then melted to water and hardened rock. My ankles, though bound in the ever-adapting ground, were left unfeeling and numb. There was no wind to feel or air to breathe. Just hollow time, so still and distant I felt it had been carved from the scrape of my inner skull: an exact image of thought and conscious being.

Mnemosyne had whispered ghost poetry and painted my eyelids with ash white. When she turned her head cold smoke trailed the glide of her chin. Her gaze pulled the future of her eye's salient focus back into pasts, now present. Under her surveyance, a tree did not know whether to grow or die. The tips of her fingers were red gold and she held them close to her chest, pointed to the sky, lest time drip from her hands and spill on the grey soil.

I THE MORTAL (*whispering close to her ear*):

Mnemosyne, where do you live?

In the bathhouses and brick cracks of history,

Or the mountains and footfalls of future places?

She would not look into my eyes and I feared what would happen if she

Mnemosyne

did. Would her focus tug me forwards or backwards? Up or down? Would I travel through time or would time travel through me, pulling my skin taut to youth and loosening it just to fold in ribbons of wrinkles? My mind slipped and couldn't stand on the thought of how eternity could be tugged on like a rope. She could push me through infinities and send me throbbing throughout history like blood travelling through veins. She needn't even tug, she needn't even move. An eyelid and a blink were all that kept me bound and written in today's pages.

MNEMOSYNE: You do not understand the past nor the future.

They do not exist.

She spoke this straight and unbroken. Deep was her voice and shapeless was her speech, like listening to mountain roots talk.

I THE MORTAL: Then, how do you pull the world through time?

Is the start of the rope not the past

And the end the future?

MNEMOSYNE: You do not understand, time is not drawn straight.

You think in certainties and forget to humble yourself.

Blood circulates and fragments into ever-branching passages.

Time is blood.

Pasts and futures are ghostlands, filled with empty people,
neither alive nor ever living.

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You take the past with you and the future never comes.

You have never been nor will you ever arrive.

You create pasts and futures. It is not hard to write a history
or sing epics of heroes.

But, little creature, leave Truth to me.

You do not have the organs to hold it

Nor the mind to comprehend it.

I did not understand her riddles but still asked more.

MORTAL: Tell me Truth.

MNEMOSYNE: To know would be to die. Do you wish to die for knowledge?

MORTAL: No.

MNEMOSYNE: Knowledge is for the living. Truth is for the dead.

MORTAL: Can you tell me nothing of Truth?

Can you tell me nothing of prophecy?

MNEMOSYNE (*repeating*): To know would be to die.

I grew quiet and tried to swallow my disappointment.

We stood still, and I followed her gaze to what she was looking at. The ground had pooled into a black lake, with a grey cloud mirrored in its darkness; a heron struck the water and passed through it like a blade. I watched the water buckle and warp and radiate in glassy ripples, only for droplets to dissipate back again, ribbons of shifting sand swimming slowly

Mnemosyne

into the aboveness. The heron was left a quivering stick stuck into the ground for a short moment, then slackened and became a grass snake. The landscape fell back to sand and swept itself away.

MORTAL: Mnemosyne?

MNEMOSYNE: Yes.

MORTAL: Is truth a beautiful thing?

MNEMOSYNE: No, it is not.

MORTAL: Is it a wicked thing?

MNEMOSYNE: It is not that either.

A frustration prickled through me.

MORTAL: Then, what is the point of ever trying to find it,

 If it is not good nor bad, beautiful nor ugly?

 How could something so potent be so impossible to catch?

MNEMOSYNE: A scent never bottled does not render it worthless.

I pause to consider.

HEBREW WOMAN (*whispering*): *Selah*

MORTAL: Can Truth be anything I like?

MNEMOSYNE: Are you a god?

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MORTAL: No.

MNEMOSYNE: Therefore, who do you think you are to have such power?

MORTAL: It is what my mother tells me.

MNEMOSYNE: Your mother does not have second sight.

She is blind to these things.

She could not understand.

I could not help but feel ashamed. Ashamed I thought of my mother as the giver of True wisdom. Ashamed that I thought myself capable of hearing it. I wanted to join Mnemosyne. I wanted to be like her. The longing pulsed in my veins.

MORTAL: Can a mortal gain second sight?

MNEMOSYNE: Yes.

MORTAL: How?

MNEMOSYNE: Like the poets.

MORTAL: Tell me how and I will do it.

She leaned to my ear and closed her eyes. Her breath was cold on the shell of my ear and I felt my heart pump violently like a petrified rabbit. She whispered these words to me.

MNEMOSYNE (*in the voices of a choir of innumerable souls*):

Cut out your eyes.

Mnemosyne

Terror flooded me and my mind was suddenly open. I saw everything for what it was. The heron. The lake. The goddess. I remembered our discourse suddenly, like being hit with cold water. Her face had been covered in blood, it had poured from the empty holes where her eyes had been like thick, red mud. She had choked on it when she spoke. It ran between her teeth and dripped from her lips. I could only see it now in memory. She had never been looking at anything. She had been crying blood. Gore pumped and spewed out from the black sticky sockets in mats and clumps of flesh and clotted blood. She gurgled when she breathed, the river-deep crimson running faster with every movement of her face. Terror calcified like bone in my throat and marrow drained from every limb. I stumbled back and clawed desperately at my eyes to scratch the image from the inside of my skull. She was blood. Hot madness.

MNEMOSYNE (*gasping, in flecks of red spittle*):

Cut out your eyes and you can see

The truth of Truth.

⇒ Hotel Echo ⇐

Doug Lau

The hotel lobby lies empty, with little furniture save for the reception desk and the chair behind it. A grand staircase stands on the side of the room. The double doors at the front open, and a tall young woman wearing an elegant onyx dress shuffles into the room, glancing around whilst fidgeting with her hands. Her lips and fingernails have been painted black. She makes her way to the reception desk and darts her eyes around, looking for any signs of life.

After an extended period of silence, she opens her mouth, stuttering a nervous and quiet, “H ... hello?” After a long pause, she opens her mouth to loudly yell, “HELLO?”, only to be answered by silence.

She looks down at the desk and sees two books lying loosely on the desk. One book is titled “Welcome” and the other is titled “Registry”. Both titles are written in a large font and neither have any cover art. The woman opens the “Welcome” book to page one.

“Welcome to Hotel Echo. Please pick up a key from the drawer and put your name and room number in the registry. Then, find your room and relax. Enjoy your stay.”

She flicks to the second page. It’s blank. Third page. Blank. Fourth page. Blank. Fifth. Blank. Sixth. Blank. Blank. Blank. Blank.

She slams the book shut.

She rummages through the desk drawer to grab a key. She picks up

Hotel Echo

a random key and opens the registration book. She finds pages and pages detailing names of guests, their room numbers, and the date they check in. There are no other columns. She finds the next available row, and writes down in the name column, “M. Shirinay”. She copies the number engraved on the key, 108, into the book. She looks at the column for check in date for a second, before realising she doesn’t remember. She leaves it blank.

Shiri makes her way up the stairs to the second floor, only to be greeted with an unusually long hallway. She sees the number 54 on the first door to her left, then looks right to see the number 232. She advances to the next row of doors and sees 3 on the left door and 391 on her right. She grits her teeth, and continues to find the floor is filled with equally inconsistent room numbering on both sides. She starts walking faster, trying to find her room number, before slamming her fist on the wall, grimacing. She storms around, intending to turn back, but freezes, seeing the number 108 on the door next to her. She looks up, blinking in disbelief, her body not moving for a few solid seconds.

Shiri puts her key in the keyhole and finds that it fits perfectly, twisting it to unlock the room. She opens the door and is greeted by a single bed with drapings in the corner of a large spacious room, an elegant oak table with a lounge chair, and a large ornate wardrobe. A large glass of wine, a single wine cup, an ashtray, and a pack of cigars sit on one side of the table. On the other side sits a single pen and a black book with no title or cover art. A red curtain covers what Shiri presumes to be the window of the room.

She saunters over to the wardrobe and opens it to find a wide range of clothing. On the left there are elegant dresses and suits, but as she turns her gaze rightwards, she notices there are maid and butler outfits, chef’s uniforms, janitor uniforms, and even, on the far right of the wardrobe, just plain rags. She closes the wardrobe and wanders to the table, taking a seat.

Arcana

Rummaging through the desk drawer, Shiri finds a box of matches and picks out a cigar. She puts it in her mouth and lights it with a match, smoke drifting up above her. She then pours a glass of wine from the bottle, and leans back in her chair. She sits back and relaxes, sipping wine in between smoking her cigar.

* * *

After an extended period of time, Shiri sighs and looks at the black book on the table. She glances at it for several seconds before reaching her left hand towards it, still holding her cigar with her right. She pauses, then stops herself and moves her left hand away. She takes one final puff of her cigar before putting it out in the ashtray, leaving it there with only a quarter of it smoked off. She then picks up her wine glass and drinks the remainder of it in one gulp.

Getting up from the chair, Shiri makes her way to the bed, taking off her shoes before jumping on the bed in her dress. She closes her eyes but sleep does not overtake her, for she is not a single bit fatigued. She continuously opens and closes her eyes and adjusts her sleeping position to try and fall asleep to no avail, before eventually getting up and returning to the desk, retaking her seat. Shiri reaches for the ashtray where she left her cigar, but finds that the ash tray is empty and completely clean, as if it had not been used. She blinks, before re-opening the pack of cigars and grabbing a new one. She stops halfway and jumps a little bit in her chair. The pack of cigars is at full capacity, as if she had not even smoked one. She glances at the wine bottle and finds that it is completely full, as if she had never drunk a glass of wine.

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She throws the pack of cigars across the room, then jumps up suddenly, her chair falling backwards.

Shiri opens the door and sprints back into the hallway, leaving her door ajar. Heart pounding, she rushes along the hallway and stops when she finds a telephone on the wall. She picks it up before pausing. Next to the telephone is a sign reading, *“For assistance, call 777 for room service”*. She picks up the phone, presses the number seven thrice, and awaits an answer. She hears continuous beeping, and is about to put the phone back before she is greeted by a voice, neither masculine nor feminine. “Welcome to Hotel Echo, how may I assist you?” it states.

Relieved, Shiri answers almost immediately, managing to stutter, “Um, hello, hello ... hello?”

Arcana

The voice responds, “Greetings, greetings ... greetings?”

Shiri frowns for a second, before responding, “Who’s there?”

The voice answers back, “Who’s there?”

Shiri responds, “Shirinay, a guest here, who are you?”, hands sweating onto the telephone.

The voice on the phone answers, “Welcome to Hotel Echo, Shirinay, we hope you enjoy your stay”. There is beeping on the phone to indicate that the voice on the phone has hung up.

Shiri cries out, “WAIT! Wait ... you didn’t ... Hey ... Hello? Hello?”

She hangs up, before picking up the phone and pressing seven thrice again. She is greeted by silence. She places the phone back, and turns to walk at a quick pace towards the staircase to go back to the lobby.

She reaches the lobby and rushes to the large front doors. She tries to open them, but then stops. She looks around for any doorknob or keyhole, but realises that the door is just plain empty. She tries pushing, but the door does not budge; she tries using her fingernails to pull it from the gap in the centre, but finds she does not have the strength. She rushes back to the reception desk, looking for any signs of life, but finds no one. *There’s got to be at least someone here*, she thinks. She opens the registry book again, and flicks to the page where she wrote her name. She finds her row; “M. Shirinay | 108 | 6th June 1926”, and below it, “S. Otto | 427 | 7th June 1926”. She does a double take on her name, and her eyes gaze onto the check-in date. She knows she did not write that herself, but it seems to be in her handwriting.

She turns back towards the stairs and rushes up, back along the long hallway, reading the inconsistent room numbers on her left and right as she rushes along. Eventually, she stops at room 427, and knocks, only to be

Hotel Echo

greeted with silence. She knocks again. Nothing.

She hesitates, then opens the door.

Empty.

The room is completely empty. Not a soul to be seen. No furniture. Not even a window.

Shiri takes a step back, then turns to another room and opens it. Also empty. She rushes back to the ajar door which leads to her room and shuts it, sitting down on the ground inside for what seems to be an eternity, heart pounding. After taking a deep breath, she walks back towards the desk, taking a seat. She reaches for the black book and pulls it towards her, taking another deep breath before opening it to page one.

It's a drawing of a woman with Shiri's hairstyle and features wearing the same black dress that she is wearing now. The similarity is uncanny. Shiri blinks a few times. The drawing of the woman is facing the reader, and the background is just blank white.

She flips the page. It's a drawing of a hotel building. Her eyes widen, and she immediately shuts the book. A few deep breaths, then she reopens the page, staring at it for a few minutes before flipping to the next page, a scene of a somewhat busy hotel lobby. A receptionist sits behind a desk, with a line of people waiting for service. The first people in line appear to be a group of students. One family in the line appears to be wearing rags.

She flips to the next page. A janitor cleaning the walls. Then, the next page. Chefs working in the kitchen. The next page. A maid cleaning one of the rooms. Then, the next page ...

It is a drawing of a woman with Shiri's features, except that her figure is cloaked in an even more elegant dress than what Shiri is wearing now, her

neck adorned with a fancy emerald necklace. She appears to have a grimace on her face. Shiri stares at it for a few solid seconds before recollecting herself and flipping to the next page.

Another of the well-dressed woman. She appears to be berating a maid who seems to be cowering in the corner of a room. She blinks, then quickly flips the page. It's the same woman, throwing food from one side of the kitchen to another, the kitchen staff shielding themselves with their hands. Next page; two men dressed in suits, throwing a child in rags out of the front door whilst the woman looks on in approval. The next page appears to be the woman in a conference room signing a contract. Then, a page with a "Sold" sign in front of the hotel. She flips to the next page.

Another drawing. It seems to be depicting a standoff in the hotel lobby, with hotel staff and some hotel guests against a wall of men and women in suits armed with batons. The next page shows the hotel staff locking themselves in the kitchen. Next, the hotel inhabitants locking themselves in their rooms; the next, the conference room again, a well-dressed man ripping up the contract whilst the woman looks on in shock. Shiri flips the page again to find a portrait of the woman with a scowl on her face. Hands shaking, she flips the page.

A drawing of the woman, purchasing a truck full of gasoline. In the next, she is driving the truck towards the hotel. The one after that has the truck parked against the hotel, a fuse attached and leading away from the building. The next page is an illustration of the woman lighting a match; the match appears to come from a box not unlike the one on Shiri's table, right now. Shiri quickly flips through the book, skimming over the next few illustrations before reaching a page with just the word "Reflect". She stares at it, before flipping to find a page with just empty lines to write on.

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Shiri slams the book shut and pulls the curtains aside, opening the window and raising her arms to throw out the book, only to pause and stop herself.

She looks out the window; it's pitch black. There doesn't even seem to be moonlight or stars in the sky. She breathes in and out, and places the book down. Her eyes widen as she stares out the window. Her hands shaking, she reaches for the bottle of wine and pours herself a cup.

She sits up in her chair, holding the cup of wine with both hands. ✨



Patterned ✨ Cara Baldwin

≠ Dreaming Peninsula ≠

Claire Lyou

In her sacred pilgrimage to the east, the Sunne crosses the celestial equator and enters the Zodiac sign of Aries. Her burning feet mark the sand with soft prints, from which glass crystals bloom and tessellate with orderly precision. No sooner after entering the House of the Ram does she turn to the House of the Goat. There is no hesitation in her unyielding path, the haste in her steps carving the rippling glass scales of a fearsome Ouroborus. It does not take her long to reach your own humble abode, Karkinos.

Timid crab, shy crustacean. Cardinal of the gentle water signs. What are you so afraid of that you turn to hiding in your shell? There is no Hercules here to disturb your rest, for Hera has marked you with her pity.

The Sunne whispers in your ear with a voice like a dancing candle, flickering alone in a blackness that will soon consume it. Then she is gone, leaving nothing but a trail of glass.

Nervously, you peer into it and notice it reflects the World.

* * *

The stars that spill over the black bowl; the ocean that sways under the moon's gaze; the sun that kisses the horizon every dawn; you and I, borne of the same stardust, from before the World began.

Arcana

Tell me, Karkinos, what is my fortune for today?

For astrology is surely the language of love.

I keep my eyes down on the earth. Mine is a love much simpler than the otherworldly realm of the cosmos.

My love is an eastern peninsular which dreams of an island continent seven thousand kilometres to its south. Just an hour earlier than the island in Greenwich time, my heart too, forever chases after his time.

Karkinos, you know just as well that I don't have much to boast, nothing too grand or fantastical. My shapely topography is my pride.



Dreaming Peninsula

Hallasan of the south, my highest mountain, is a metric unit for measuring the breadth of my affections. In the east, Taebaeksan blooms in the winter with branches of flowering snow. The only landlocked province at the heart of the country, Northern Chungcheong, is home to passionate and scarlet Songnisan, whose slopes burn with hues of dying embers. Its roads, which twist and turn at the sharpest notice, are my doubt ridden mind, burdened with anxiety and unease.

Reach further north and you will arrive at the misty, clouded Munjangdae; my quiet and gentle love manifest.

My isolated lover, in stark comparison, is relatively consistent in his topography. His is a signature of vast, arid plains. Survey his sunkissed canyons, stained in reddish brown shades, burning with a history of labour and toil. Admire the rocky clusters of apostles and sisters that pepper his bright face with a freckled charm. I dare not compare myself to his untouched geography, decorated perfectly with luscious greens, and his earthen spirit, striped amply with precious mineral deposits—the mark of virtue.

His mind, his busiest cities, are still not as cluttered as my own; his ambitions, his structures, are not quite as numerous or high as mine. His is a life much simpler and slower. His is a life I love and yearn for.

The Earth, an oblate spheroid, stumbles over the weight of its people; in their billions, sprawling over every continent. Its axial precession slowly spirals its orbit away from the sun while distorting its own form. With the slightest tilt, mine and my lover's climates grow harsher. With every cycle of day and night, I find I grow to yearn for him a little more.

I call out your name like a prayer, Karkinos, as if celestial guidance could guarantee mine and his fate true, though internally I know better.

Arcana

There is little the stars can do.

When the snake has eaten its tail at the end of the Sunne's circular pilgrimage, she finds that she is left with herself. At the zenith of the crabs' anxieties it realises the futility of its internal turmoil.

* * *

I am the moon which inflames my turbulent seas. My waves of emotion are my dominion.

I am in myself, my own earth and my own universe.

And my love is an eastern peninsular which dreams of an island continent seven thousand kilometres to its south. Just an hour earlier than the island in Greenwich time, my heart too, forever chases after his love. ✨

≠ **When I Think of Death** ≠

Zoie Jin

When I think of death, I think of you.
Two pairs of orphaned gazes settled
On polar ends of a looking glass.
But neither our isolation, nor
The lifeless rife of the plague, could have
Prevented that instant attraction
Which enlightened our reclused souls.
Our hearts pried open passionately;
We thought we must be banished
By those confounded by our unwonted selves,
To wane in caverns of Hugoic exile.

When I think of death, I think of fate.
Never did a doubt arise in me,
I confess, when I muse over your
Centurial visions sublime.
You recited—how I leaned against
The glazed, mahogany doorframe of

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An ornate cabin in an old steamship,
How I posed in lacy black lingerie.
A repeated romance of you, who
Was only a deckhand, and I,
Fanning jasmine candle smoke.

When I think of death, I think of love.
You mesmerised me, with memories
Transcending lifetimes—
In a dwarf cottage, by the cliffside,
You descended the hills before the
Kiss of twilight pursed against the curve
Of the horizon. But, you came back to me
Each time—your gaze softening
As you saw me, reading my favourite stories
To the three children I bore for us.
You found me most beautiful then.

When I think of death, I think of hope.
We exchanged each other's passions as
A symbol of our bond. I heiressed
Your love for the sea. And,
Did you, perhaps, pursue my love for

When I Think of Death

Literature, in the hope of finding me
Again? Now I wonder, bashfully,
What we will inherit in this life.
I weave embroidered fantasies of
How we will find each other again,
Each tapestry more romantic than the last.

When I think of death, this is what I want to say to you:

Seni Seviyorum, canım benim.



Claire Lyou ✨ *Brother and Sister*

≠ Variation on a Brooke Sonnet ≠

Alex Ma

“I said I splendidly loved you; it’s not true.”

—Rupert Brooke

“Splendidly”, I said, “’tis love true; I, not thou”.

I, a master of words citric and saccharine,

Doth woo naïve lips to mine advantage.

Mayst I repent for mine wrongdoing,

Kiss thine desecrated eyes?

For I am but a man divided,

Cruelly rent between love and folly.

Thine lovely heart hath been punctured

By mine unjust needles.

Therefore, allow me to come with

Needle and skein once more

And repair thy injuries.

But while mine weak heart is plunged under

Stygian loneliness, we remain torn asunder.

❧ *About the Contributors* ❧

Lina Alsabiri

Lina Alsabiri is a 23-year-old recent university graduate who completed a double degree in a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Advanced Studies majoring in Philosophy and International and Global Studies. She enjoys writing short stories and poetry with an interest in magical realism, fantasy, sci-fi, literary fiction, contemporary and dark adult genres. Her writing experience involves undertaking numerous academic courses in creative writing and critical thinking units and her love for reading only enhances her writing aspirations!

Alex Ma

I am a third-year English student enamoured by classic literature. I embody all the English major stereotypes: dressing in tweed, listening to jazz music, exploring the shadowy secrets of the Quadrangle. Most of the time, though, I'm inside reading a book or writing yet another story.

Grace Curry

Studying Bachelor of Arts and Advanced Studies (Media and Communications) and majoring in Politics. Interested in visual arts, creative writing and learning German. My inspirations vary

greatly depending on the work; my poem was inspired by the Eilean Donan Castle in Scotland and the song, “In the Hall of the Mountain King” by Grieg. Never been published but used to read my poetry in pubs and cafes in my hometown.

Claire Lyou

Claire Lyou is a 21-year-old undergraduate completing her third year of study in a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws double degree. Majoring in Government and International Relations, she enjoys illustrating and writing with fantastical themes that border on surrealism and science fiction. Her writing draws from a number of academic courses in sociology which inspires a dreamy and introspective style of prose, amply peppered with abstract visual imagery.

Janika Fernando

I am a third year Law/Arts student, majoring in English Literature at the University of Sydney. Traditionally, writing has always been a means of expressing stories about Sri Lankan culture, family and love. However, I am also interested in escaping into different genres of fiction; dark, mysterious realms, much of which I strive to experiment in my classic horror short story. I have had short stories previously published in the USYD Anthology, Sydney Arts Student Society publications such as Wattle and Avenue, and within the Sydney University Law Society Ethnocultural Journal, MOSAIC.

Doug Lau

Doug Lau has a Bachelor of Science majoring in Biology. His interests are writing, sport, design, art and music. His dark academic inspirations include dark fantasy stories and gothic aesthetics.

Zoie Jin

Zoie Jin is a third-year English major studying a Bachelor of Arts. She enjoys reading and teaching literature. Currently also an English tutor for high school students, she aspires to teach and inspire in others a love for literature and self-expression through the arts. Zoie's writing is heavily influenced by the Romantic and Victorian poets and she finds most inspiration when writing love poetry.

❧ *Editor's Note* ❧

I would like to thank everybody who has contributed to the creation of DALSOC's inaugural magazine. Thank you Claire Lyou for your amazing artwork and planning contributions. Thank you Lara Adcock for your editing contributions and beautiful illustration. Thank you K. Philips, our wonderful DALSOC President, for your planning contributions and encouragement. And finally, I would love to thank all of our contributors, our writers, artists and poets, for allowing us to showcase your hard work, dreams, and deepest darkest fantasies.

The Dark Academia aesthetic is hard to pinpoint, contributed to by many different people from many different places, drawing on many different inspirations. However, it is fundamentally united by a particular ethos; it does not shy away from the darker, more mysterious aspects of life. Alongside its occult connotations, *Arcana* means "secrets and mysteries". Each of the works in the first edition of *Arcana* wrestle with intense territory; death, heartbreak, gore, magic. However, what the Dark Academia aesthetic reminds us is that darkness is just as much a part of life as lightness, and that even in the pain, we can discover something intriguing, true, and even irresistible. I hope that you have uncovered something secret in our darkness.

Zoe Morris

Head Editor and Publications Director, DALSOC