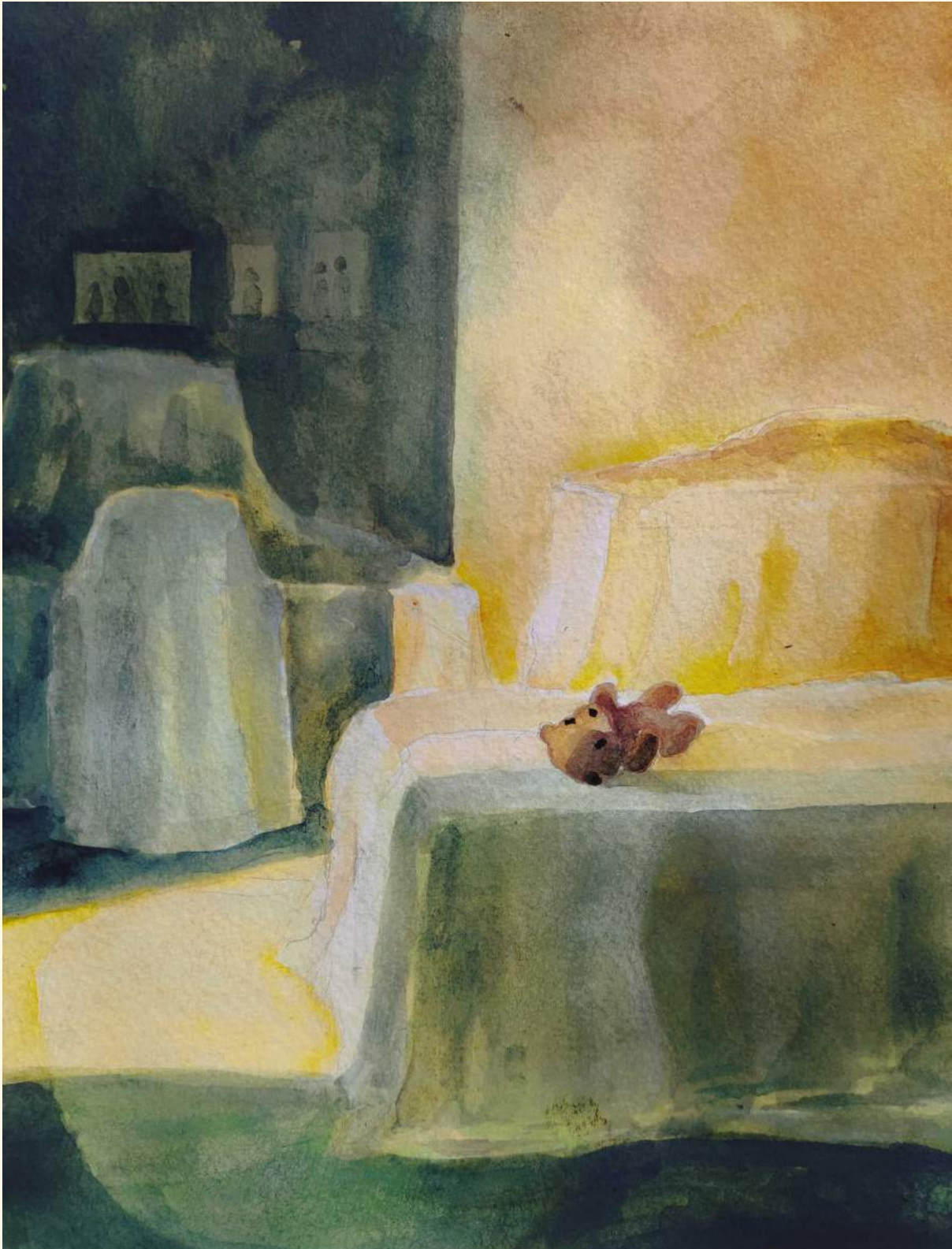


# K A L O P S I A

POETRY | PROSE | VISUAL ART



ISSUE VI | SEPTEMBER 2021



# Masthead

## EDITOR IN CHIEF:

Katie Li

## MANAGING EDITOR:

Jenny Zhan

## ART DIRECTOR:

Peter Donley

## STAFF ARTISTS:

Kinnereth Din  
Elwing Gao  
Luana Góes

## POETRY AND PROSE EDITORS:

Courtney Chen  
Eunice Chi  
Kaia Gelatt  
Isabella Melians  
Adya Mohapatra  
Rhys Pearce  
Pernille Petersen  
Gabriela Pletosu  
Trini Rogando  
Morgan Ryan  
Trisha Santanam  
Avantika Singh  
Madison Smith  
Alex Sosebee  
Cindy Tran  
Alyssa Ukani  
Sunny Vuong  
Fifi Wang  
Alisha Wong  
Melody Xu  
Hye-won Yoo  
Danae Younge  
Ysabella Zuniga Aviles

# Table of Contents

## Poetry

of voids and my mother's radio	2
Obasan	8
reverence	10
Seasons	19
Paradoxical Prayers	21
Homecoming	31
erosion	37
The Tree With No Name	39
Anatomy of the Starry Night	47
blind faith in a flightless bird	49
[wholeness isn't really health]	51
[a raspberry cannot lie in my]	51
Again	60
Alive	61
Opalescence	65
fireworks	

## Prose

Sacrifice	5
Snakeskin	12
Ephemeron	24
Attacus Atlas (F)	34
Museum of Forgotten Love	41
Reacting to Our Present	45
Second Skin	52
Recipes From Ama	62
Gifts	68
Winter in Glasnevin	70

## Visual Art

Bountiful	4
green	7
1980 Gwangju	9
Orchard in Hindsight	18
In Paradise	20
Incongruent	23
The Silenced	30
Monumental	33
Cooper's Crest	38
Lucent	40
Rhythm of the rain	44
Sea of Clouds	50
Shelter in Fear	59
Six Feet Apart	64
nomad	67
Gift	72



# of voids and my mother's radio

By: Taiwo Hassan

i've never gotten used to the gritty cries of my mother's radio.  
shoves dissolve into pushes—calculated movements—silence breaks & with

each split second, she becomes a familiar channel, switching,  
in between short breaths of relief and another feeling, one

i never seem to dissect,  
i never seem to release from the many cadavers  
i carry, unnamed.

i catch a whiff of another color on her skin, a shade  
different from the almost coffee-like one she carries

& for a moment, weightless isn't what her eyes hold.  
i'm thrown into an abyss, with walls that scream nothing but silence.

i dive but those echoes become chains & this vessel,  
far from being a wrecking ball.

hit pause, rewind. perhaps  
nostalgia can be a balm for these burns.

my head hits the past, windows become a door, it's morning  
& the sun doesn't knock before replacing the color of these walls.

this time, i remember the cocktail of a cuckoo's chirps  
& a familiar song on her radio, the honey, the power it balanced.

blue replaces the taste of blood my lips carry—sweet—  
heavy enough to morph this tongue into a scale.

i forgot to ask, can her song on this radio try to fill a void without turning  
into one itself?

how long will my mother shed these colors,  
how long till her teabag oozes its last juice?

i'm trying to be a locked box, to hold these silent noises in,  
to stop this calm ocean from running a race of chaos.

i can't stop thinking about those eyes, i can't,  
what do you do when your body hums the blade's song?

do you let each pore on your skin sing back & struggle to find  
a key, wondering what miracle lives in the depths of harmony?

or do you bring its tip to teach you the art of spilling? of melting  
all that's left in this vessel of blood and bones, of tears and fears, of

everything you see in your mother eyes, into dust  
& watch yourself be a songbird, in the skies of oblivion.

perhaps one day, you would journey into those eyes  
again and arrive as a testament to hope, to healing.

### **About the Author:**

Taiwo Hassan is a student of Yorùbá descent, a poet and writer. His works have been published in several print and online publications, including *Liminal Transit Review*, *Praxis Magazine*, *Ice Floe Press*, and *Dust Poetry Magazine*, to mention a few. When he's not writing, he's either listening to music, singing or watching TV series. His social media handles include @iamtsoul on Instagram and @symplytaiwo on Twitter.





Kinnereth Din  
Bountiful  
2160 x 1620 px  
Digital

# Sacrifice

By: Luiza Louback Fontes

*“Maria.”*

In my mama’s swollen mouth, my name sounded like hardened calluses, an unpronounced threat in every punctured syllable. I felt her circling fingers on my wrist, burning embers demanding that I stop staring at the ruby red apples in the market’s baskets.

Finitudes crossed my mind as I pictured aching knots in my stomach and started walking again, leaving all the heresies behind. My mama grabbed the heartwood of the shiny cross of Christ on her covered chest, her mumbling voice a devoid prayer filled with broken words under crowded voices.

She took my hand, our calcified fingers stuck to one another, wet palms pressed together. At home, our eyes would speak undistinguishable languages as she pressed advice into my fingertips like silver coins, an unasked gift. Her eyes always darted to the heavy-aged book centered in our house, its words echoing through my skin like a burdened pendulum.

*Only through labor one can be utterly free*—she murmurs just to make sure I remember that being a woman means cloaking my body in submission and sacrifice. My mama wipes the sweat off her face, blending into the burning drop of light. I dissect my memory to remember the way her rhythmic movements caused the watery orange juice to pour out of its home, its bittersweetness coating the air.

The orange required effort; there was no simple way to conquer its substance—the intricate peeling, the vicious cycle of squeezing every bit of juice until the skin was a mere remnant. One orange can satiate dozens of famished mouths, its citric taste eternally circling our tongues.

Orange is a deed of God to feed its sons.

I pretend I’m not betraying mama when I let my hands explore apples on

sporadic markets, begging to be savored—the ripe, the sweet, the sour—a cider full of words. The apples hunt my dreams with images of open hinterlands, pulsing valleys, anywhere but here. I crave to feel my teeth biting into the sanguine flesh of an apple, to fully relish the knowledge of good and evil lingering on my lips. I want absolution, I want to taste blessing and sin as one—to feel life in its absurdity.

My mama saves touch like thirst as she waits for God’s mouth to drink from. Meanwhile, I am gasping for a love left behind somewhere between heaven and hell; raging for a kind of life in which the only thing I can hold is the orange juice sputtering out of the glass.

Even God's holiest water runs out.

In the middle of artificial lights in multi-colored aisles, my hands precipitate into the apple basket. I stare into my mama’s glazed eyes as I bite into the seed-bearing fruit, following the thread of a blade.

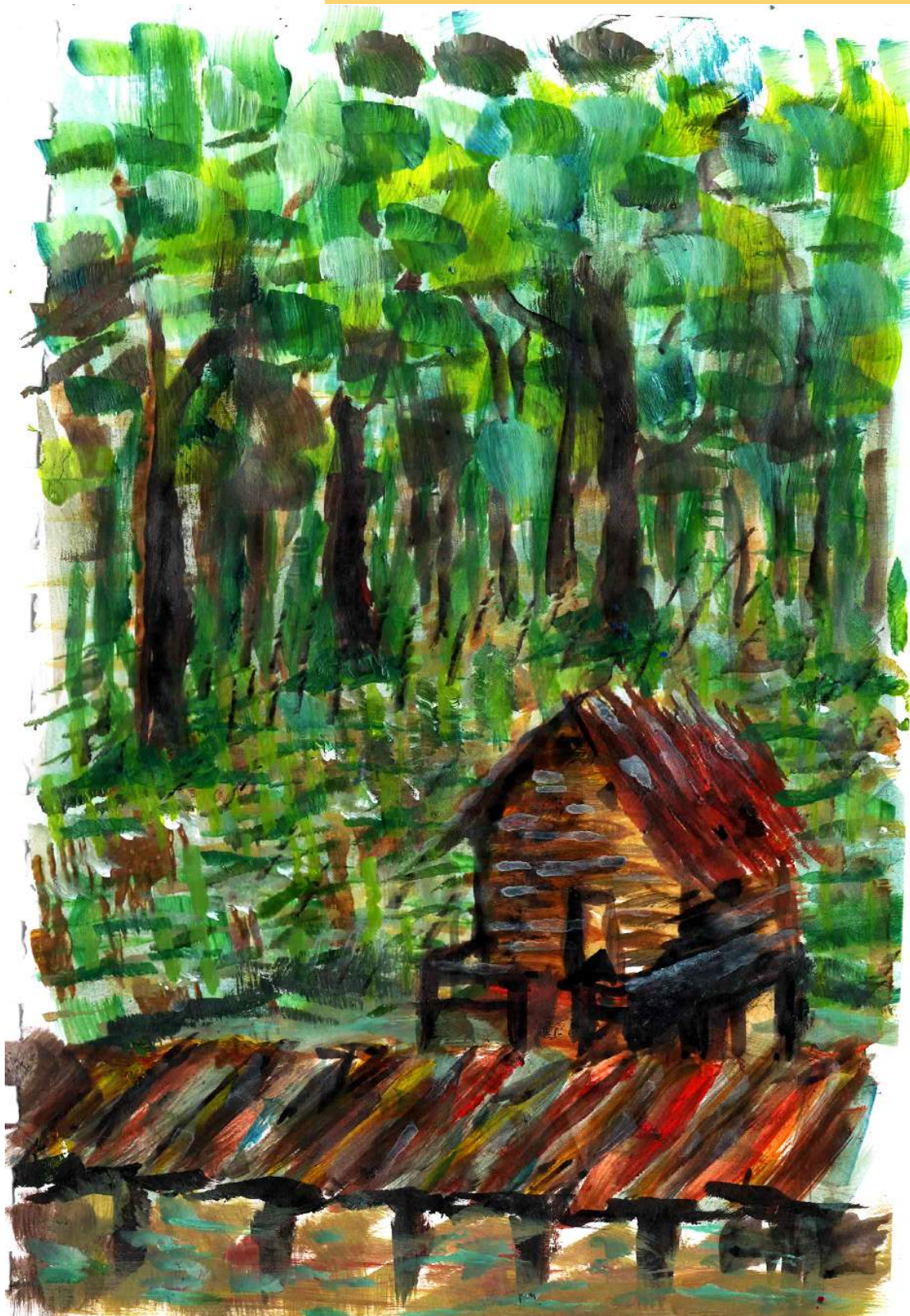
All I can see is the dusty cage of definition dissipating like smoke lifting in a soft prayer. I am a fallen angel, ready to explore the heavy scent of the sky, embrace the colors of earth, and wander free.



### About the Author:

Luiza Louback is a Latin-American, Brazilian emerging writer and high schooler. Her work has appeared in national anthologies, *Parallax Review*, and *Rising Phoenix Review*. When she is not writing, she teaches English to low-income students and advocates for literary accessibility in Latin America.





Luana Góes  
green  
21 x 30 cm  
Acrylic on paper

# Obasan

By: Maxwell Suzuki

(Originally Published in *The Racket Journal*)

I offered obasan my seat in a cramped LA light rail / the strength of New Year's mochi worn proudly on her Issei wrinkles / she declined instead / my soft thumbs stuck three-quarters of the way through a copy of Joy Kogawa / attempting to fold a metal crane below my tongue / *have you seen the headlines lately*, I asked / we passed Westwood and Palms and Farmdale before she answered / *hai*, her face resolute / elderly feet stubbornly planted to the slick floor / the razor edge of the crane's wings chopped my throat into saltwater gills / I wanted to say: *your satchel must be getting heavy or how long have you been standing or Pershing isn't for a few more stops* /

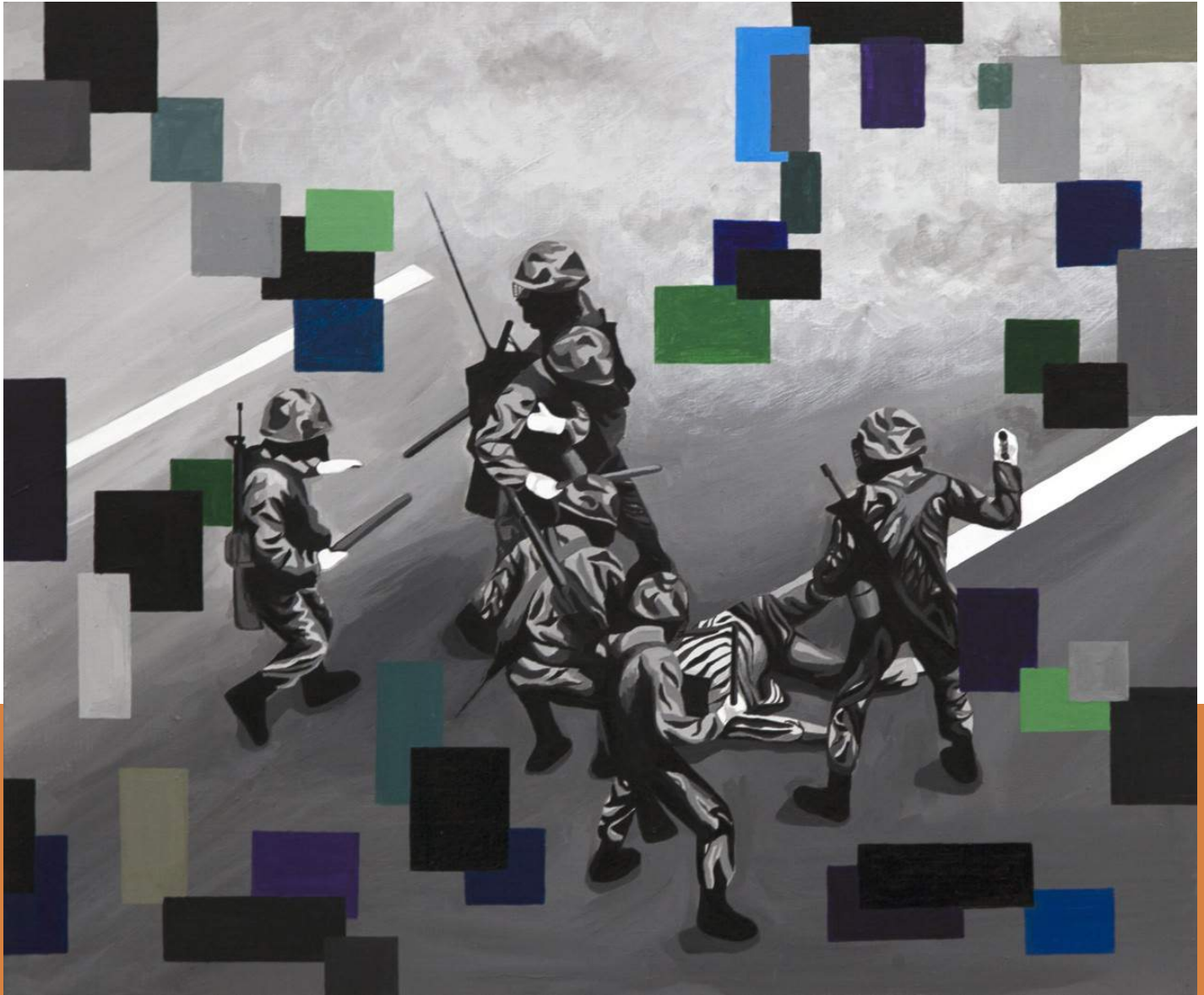
*/ or they are afraid of us Japs; surely, you must know they see us as threats; I don't want the newspaper printed with your name; or my name; please, this seat is safe* /

/ rather, I swallowed the crumpled metal / and noticed the familiar lock of tetanus / the iron lingering on my tongue as I stepped onto the platform / unable to call out to her in the train's blur.

## About the Author:

Maxwell Suzuki is a Japanese American writer who recently graduated from USC and lives in Los Angeles. Maxwell's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Kissing Dynamite Poetry*, *The Woven Tale Press*, *Giving Room Mag*, and his personal website, [www.lindenandbucks.com](http://www.lindenandbucks.com)





Ethan Choi  
1980 Gwangju  
72.5 x 60.5 cm  
Acrylic on canvas

**Artist's Statement:** For this artwork, I wanted to reveal the implications of dictatorship: how violence gets censored. This piece was inspired by the Gwangju Massacre that happened in South Korea in 5/18/1980, which could be called the older brother of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and the 2021 Myanmar Crackdowns. Even though this event should have made headlines around the world like the latter two, it was covered up by the authoritarian regime and people who grew up in South Korea in the 1980s, even my own mother and father, would not learn the full truth until the late 1980s when the authoritarian regime was finally toppled. One noticeable feature that incorporated into this artwork would be the number of squares occupying certain areas. I purposely used solid colored squares over my graphic art since I wanted to portray the message that such an event was "covered" up by the dictatorship.

# reverence

By: Rachel Xu

my earliest memory—walking down the  
linoleum aisle at St. Mary’s chapel

mother on one side, father on the other  
their dewy-eyed toddler in between

a worn, blistered palm in each hand  
i clung to them like sickly tobacco on the lips

of some rancorous addict, persistent and biting;  
viscid smog that weaves through the breath of heretics

at the podium of empty grace  
the wealthy priest stood with his weighted leather bible

desirous of nothing, scrupulous yet unseeing,  
opaque spectacles buried in prayer after praise.

there, we knelt at the altar of His deceptive seraph,  
murmuring whispered hymns of faux conviction,

“oh, father art thou in great heaven  
relieve us from our sin and this endless bereavement.”

but God stays silent, choosing to keep His ethereal form  
sheltered; a spectral pillar held by wisps of transient desperation

to us, faith was a promise—it was sisyphus ascending the steps  
with the weight of the world on his shoulders

only to be spurned at the pearly gates and sent tumbling  
back down into caustic mortality

impatient as any young child would be, the itch to rouse  
smoldered in fervor and finally tore me from my worship



i took a peek from the corner of my eye,  
watched as my father basked in the fading daylight

weeping, as if struck by a poison arrow to his nape  
myself only regarding in dither as perdition's curare set in.

he clung to his prayer like a newborn fawn to its mother;  
blindly mewling for solace as the lightning stokes flames

and felt those tears cascade as palatial breakers,  
requiems of the living in murky depths below.

### **About the Author:**

Rachel Xu is a high school student who enjoys reading, writing, sketching, and playing badminton in her free time. She has been published in various anthologies such as *Hysteria*, *Live Poets Society of NJ*, *Poetic Power*, etc.



# Snakeskin

By: Mike Keller-Wilson

Normally, it wasn't a difficult walk home. Boredom and heat and dust. That's what Charlotte had been telling her mom since she was nine. Back then, it had been home. Not Mom's house or Dad's on weekends. Back then, she'd bike home, listen to the click-clacking rain of plastic beads sliding down the spokes when she slowed. Back then, Jason might've walked with her instead of sweating it out at practice, hoping for a scholarship. Back then, she'd be home already.

This time, Charlotte was only a few blocks away from Mom's house when a battered white truck, a Tacoma or something, slowed, grinding dirt and rocks into the asphalt, and turned off Adobe and onto White Sands Road.

Charlotte's bike was in Dad's garage, leaning next to his company van. So she could "enjoy" it on weekends, like all the nice stuff he took with him, just not her or Jason. Mom had been promising to buy her a Razor scooter all summer.

Mom would've recognized the white Tacoma as an early 2000s model, known the exact year by the daytime running lights. She used to be a mechanic before she started teaching auto-tech at Copper Mountain community college. She met Dad when he took one of his HVAC trucks into the shop.

Charlotte hated asking about the scooter, about anything. She could wait until she turned twelve in November. Anyway, Jason still needed new baseball cleats and his glove was starting to wear. His coach kept saying that San Diego State had expressed some interest. A scout was supposed to stop by practice sometime. Dad said his coach was an idiot for not getting somebody out there sooner. She could tell that Jason didn't think his coach was an idiot, but that's how it was with Dad. Like he said, "You're either an idiot, or you're not. Most people are." Mom said that was an idiot thing to say.

Charlotte wasn't thinking about any of that on her walk home. She was thinking about putting an engine in one of those recycling bins so she could ride it the rest of the way. It'd be like those motorized coolers the mascots rode during halftime at Jason's games. She toed a rock out of the dust and side-armed it into a bin that was tipped up on a prickly pear.

Charlotte was pretty sure her motorized recycling bin idea fell into Dad's

“idiot” category, so she picked up another rock and winged it at a trash can. She wiped her hand on the leg of her shorts, her favorites, dull red outside, a little baggy at each leg. She liked how they set her apart from the other girls in her class. Secretly, she liked the swish of their silver-colored lining against her legs, the backs of her thighs.

Maybe that's what caught the driver's eye, a flash of silver and leg in the California sun.

“Hey! You, girl! Your dad home?”

She didn't answer. She hadn't really thought he was talking to her at first. It wasn't until she heard the, “You, girl!” that she felt her spine yank tight. Her guts twisted and thrashed as though they'd suddenly become unhinged, violent like the baby gopher snake her dad brought home from a jobsite one Christmas. He told Mom that he'd gotten her a fresh pair of boots, tilting the Tupperware container so we could all hear the scratch and slide of scales inside. Mom told him to keep the damn thing out of the house. Jason just settled back to the couch and the TV, but Dad held the snake still for Charlotte, gripping the tail and pinching its head while she rubbed a finger along its back, feeling the ridges, the rough and smooth of it.

They'd let the snake go, driven it a few miles out of town that night and tipped it out in the scrub brush off the side of the road. A few months later, she'd found a dry skin wrapped around some small rocks in their yard. Jason said there was no way it could be from the same snake. He said it wasn't even the right size. Still, she'd torn off a piece and shuffled it in with all the old movie tickets she kept in a little wooden box in her nightstand, a memory to rub between her fingers when she was supposed to be cleaning her room in the middle of a Sunday afternoon.

The driver had flecks of silver hair along his jawline, one greased strand fell from behind his ear to curl under his right eye when he leaned across the console toward the open window. There was a car seat behind him, just like the one her mom used to put her in when they drove to see Grampa in the city. She and Jason would try to spot different car models from the backseat: Altima, Camry, Jetta. Mom weighed in as the judge if there was a dispute. She glanced back up into the man's face, his pupils dark black and open wide. She looked back at her feet, pretended she hadn't heard.

Her dad wasn't home. He certainly wasn't at her mom's house. No one was home there, not even her. Before he moved out, Dad would sometimes pick Charlotte up or they'd hang around the bleachers watching Jason practice and listening to the ring of aluminum. Jason got home from practice a few hours after she did, but everyone had been fine with the idea of her walking the half-mile home from school. Mom had been more concerned about the fact that Charlotte would have to cross a busy road like Adobe than she was about the walk itself. Twentynine Palms wasn't that busy, especially before the tourists came streaming back into Joshua Tree.

"I'm a friend of his. Your dad's. He home?" The truck crept along, slowing even further once it pulled up right next to her. The man swiveled his head up the road and scratched at the side of his face before turning back to her. She followed his eyes up the empty street, the only movement, a garden pinwheel turning in the sluggish breeze.

Between A/C repair and coaching tee ball, her dad knew almost everyone in town. At least, that's how it seemed to her. Even when it was just them and Jason at Arturo's, there was always somebody knocking a fist on the top of the booth and stopping to talk. How's business? How's the little baseball star? And your little princess here? Still causing trouble? Takes after her mother? No, no, I don't want to interrupt your meal, just saying, "Hi."

Had this guy stopped by their booth before? Is that how he recognized her? Was it her shorts, rolled up along the waist because they were a little too long? Is that why he stopped? Like everything she owned, they were a hand-me-down from Jason.

She sped up, still half-pretending she hadn't heard though she'd looked straight at him. She was looking straight down at her toes so the truck was just barely visible from the corner of one eye.

"C'mon, Princess, don't be rude. I asked you somethin'!"

At that, she pulled up short, feeling like a giant hand had pinched behind her neck and held her there, twitching. She looked over, looked fully at him as if she didn't have a choice in it. He had one arm curled through the top of the steering wheel. There was a crumpled McDonald's bag crammed into the corner between the window and the dash. She thought about how her dad smiled whenever she introduced herself to one of his friends, how he'd taught her to make a firm grip around their calloused hands and say, "I'm Charlotte. Can I interest you in any air conditioning products today?"

Dad would wink. "Not a princess, a born saleswoman, this one. Better watch out."

He never taught Jason to do that. They would spend hours doing hitting drills and lifting weights, but he never had Jason introduce himself like that, just her.

"There ya go. Your dad'll be mad if I can't meet up with him." The man in the truck smiled at her, recognizing that her attention was finally on him.

"Sorry," she said, "my dad's not home." She strangled the foam of the backpack straps against her palms, hating that she sounded nothing like herself. She felt a dry itch at her shoulder blades, the feeling of skin pulled tight to cracking across her back. Feeling that tightening, that swell of herself beneath her skin, she begged inside her head. Please. Please.

"Yeah?" He flicked the curl of hair away from his eye with one thumb, but didn't look particularly disappointed at the news that her father wasn't around.

"My older brother's waiting for me though, so I better get going. He's

uh...he's in the Marines, but he's back for now." She shoved the lie out in a rush. His gaze was flat and black, digging at her and making that itch between her shoulders go sharp.

"Yeah, 'course. Can't leave him waiting."

Rather than releasing her, his agreement left her feeling more pinned, less sure. Did he really just need to talk to her dad?

"Well, here. You're a responsible girl, right?" He paused and looked over the inside of the cab, dug around and grabbed an envelope from under the McDonald's bag, seemingly at random. He jabbed it toward the open window and waited.

Idiot, she mentally hissed, but she'd already taken a step toward the truck. You, Charlotte, are an idiot. She heard it just the way Dad would say it, but it was Jason's voice this time, not Dad's, so real that she looked behind her, thinking he'd left practice early.

It was her momentum that carried her close to the truck window. There was a viper-quick movement out of the corner of her eye and then the man had her hand in both of his, worn palm stuck to the back of her hand with sweat. He squeezed her knuckles to grinding, crinkling the envelope against her fingers. She was a thing, trapped and thrashing. She thought of that snake her dad brought home, the way it had curled and hissed while she held the Tupperware tight in her lap, the lights of town fading to black desert as he drove.

The man yanked her arm and her ribs banged against the passenger door, the handle digging into them. The guy was laughing. With her other arm, she shoved against the side of the window, jerking and trying to pull herself away. *Scream*, she thought, *you should be screaming*, but she kept on grunting and tugging at her trapped fingers, her eyes rolling up and down the empty street. She felt the man kiss the back of her hand, a dry press of lips and stubble that scratched and ripped her open. It didn't seem in her nature to scream. Would Jason scream? Would Dad? The panicked itch spread from between her shoulder blades and burned across her whole body and into the tips of her fingers.

She flew back, loose and free with a shock of a world defined by before and after, a world of what-ifs. The envelope flew free with her, launched into the air with her hand, and tumbled back into the dirt next to the road.

"Easy. Easy. Just a joke." The man was still laughing, low hacking chuckles from the back of his throat. He rubbed the fingers of his hand together like he was remembering the touch. "As firm a grip as ever. Definitely a born saleswoman. Make sure you give that check to your dad."

She didn't say anything. Whatever he was saying didn't make sense. Charlotte couldn't process it. She was shaking. It was as if she'd kept thrashing, only now the thrashing was deep within her. She found herself backing away from the truck. She stepped on the envelope then picked it up

as the man nodded, encouraging.

Gripping the envelope in a fist, she took one step, two, started to run. The truck stayed put, even when she turned the corner. She didn't look back long enough to see any more than that, but she imagined the man sitting there, groping the steering wheel and smiling to himself.

She swiveled her head up and down the street in front of their house before walking up the concrete path, climbing the stairs, and flinging the screen door open so she could unlock the front door and slip inside. She locked it behind her and leaned back against the wood, waited for its sturdiness to seep into her, hold her up.

Instead, she again felt that dry itch at her shoulder blades. It swept through her, all of her, and she fell to her knees, unable to even make it to her bedroom. She hugged herself, trying to scratch at her back. This itch, this one last thing, after the walk home and the truck and the man, was too much to bear. Still on her knees, she folded forward, mounding herself on the mat next to her brother's flip flops and her mom's nice boots.

She felt it then, a crack and pop of relief, like the pressure of a button finally snapping. She felt a slice of cold air on fresh skin travel along her spine. She tugged at one sleeve of her shirt, then the other, carefully slipping out of her clothes before hugging herself again and feeling the papered edge of skin that had pulled loose along her spine, still not perfectly dry, a pliable husk. Like pulling off a backwards jacket, she held one edge of skin and pressed herself up through the crack, pulling back a shoulder, yanking free an arm, ducking her head and feeling the split travel along the back of her neck. Charlotte felt the skin beneath pull taut, the sharp release of the top layer coming loose. She hissed at the moments it stuck and drew blood. She felt it peel and tug at the curve of her hair as the mask of her face pulled loose from her eyes, her cheeks. The skin from her right hand was already gone and she thought back to the man in the truck rubbing something between his fingers as she backed away. Her new skin wasn't bright and shining and pink, but marked and bleeding in the spots where she'd pulled too hard, as if the new layer was tender, already scratched by the nail-grip of the world's desire.

When she was done, she crunched the drying husk of herself into a pile, still mostly in one piece except for one leg and the shells of her fingers on her left hand.

She grabbed her clothes and her backpack and tossed them into her room before getting a broom and a garbage bag from the kitchen closet. She thought about the lines of the man's face, the dust coating his truck, what she should've said. She stuffed the shed skin into the garbage bag then swept up the flaked-off pieces.

When Jason got home, she was sprawled on the couch, a Dodgers game on in the background while she worked on geometry homework.



“What’d I miss?” he asked, dropping his practice bag onto the floor with the sound of aluminum bats ringing against one another.

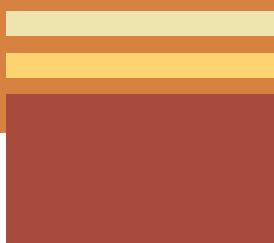
“A few ground outs, weak pitching on both sides. Nothing spectacular.” She felt like she should have to fake the normal tone, but it came naturally to her, to this other self that she was now. Back at the truck, it had felt like her heart was punching at her breastbone, like there was acid in her throat.

“You alright?” he asked. “You’re bleeding.” He pointed to a spot halfway down the swell of his bicep. Looking at her own arm, Charlotte saw a sharp line of blood a quarter inch long.

“Yeah. Fine.” She grabbed a takeout napkin from the end table and held it to her arm.

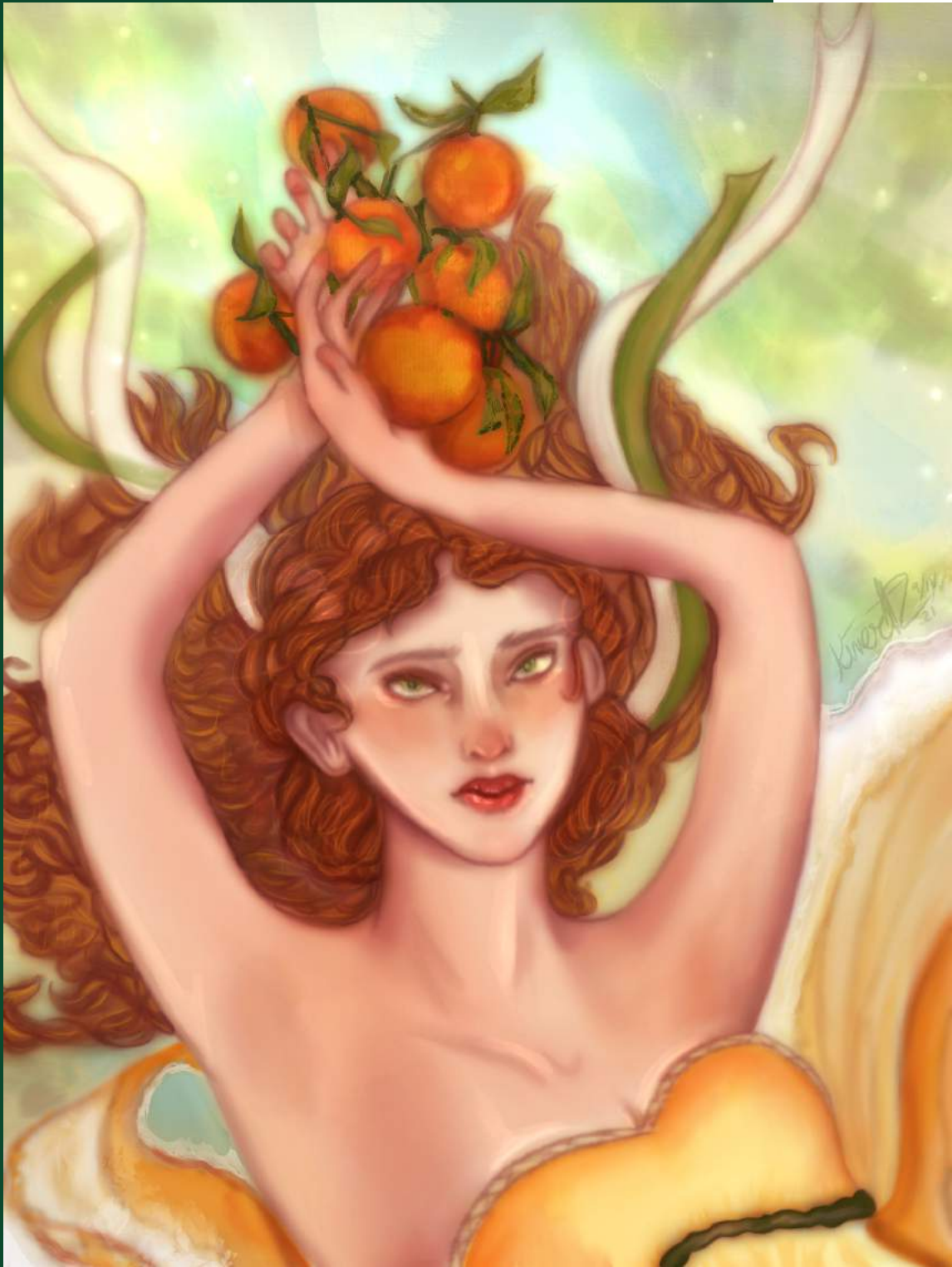
Jason sat down and they watched a few more innings before Mom came home and set some water to boil while they washed up and set the table.

That weekend, while her dad was playing catch with Jason, Charlotte left the check and the envelope on the kitchen table, like someone had brought it in with the mail. Afterward, she went into her room and laid on her bed, staring at her palms. Something itched behind one ear. Scratching, she felt a papery crunch against her nail and went still. After a breath, she traced a finger along the curve of her ear, found the edge and pinched. Pulling the bit of skin free from its tangle of stray hairs, she saw it was a small thing: a scab—shaped almost like an outstretched wing. Charlotte held it, let it glow red, pierced by the evening sun. With one hand, she pulled open the drawer of her nightstand and, flipping up the lid on the wooden box, dug through the movie tickets until she felt the rough crackle of the old snakeskin. When Dad sent Jason to ask if she was getting up for dinner, she just rolled over and kept rubbing the two scraps of skin between her fingers, feeling the ridges, the rough and the smooth.



### **About the Author:**

Mike Keller-Wilson lives, writes, and teaches in Iowa City, Iowa. He received his MFA in creative writing from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and has been published or has work forthcoming in *Arcturus Magazine*, *The Wondrous Real Mag*, and *Anti-Heroic Chic*. In his day job, he teaches writing and dad jokes to a captive audience of 7th graders. You can find him on Twitter @Mike3Stars or online at [mikekellerwilson.com](http://mikekellerwilson.com).



Kinnereth Din  
Orchard in Hindsight  
2160 x 1620 px  
Digital

# Seasons

By: Charlie Bowden

Seasons change yet somehow you're still here  
in that same lemon sundress I bought you yesteryear.  
The buzz of cicadas follows you, a vision in boundless hazel  
like a porcelain angel, forever wild in the soundless winter.  
Birthdays—ivory bows trained on the velvet of my mother  
as her belly tears open and a pink thing falls out, ungrateful.  
I hope that never happens to you; well, I know it won't.  
The crisp decay of fate dawns on us, and you have to go.

Tomorrow I see the same blue sky, and when it's night,  
the same milky moonlight glistens in selfish hope;  
to hear your heart of rose gold beating in tandem  
with the weight of my footsteps on the forest floor.  
I still feel echoes of your tenderness, but they're like  
nails scratching on vinyl, leaving unpleasant grooves.  
We were always the red runaways, blitzing impossibly  
through the fields of Asphodel; love is just a storm  
in a teacup.

I yearn for my mother.

## About the Author:

Charlie Bowden is a 17-year-old student from Hampshire, England, who discovered a love for writing poetry in lockdown after spending years studying it at school, focusing his poems around the historical, the political and the mythological. His poetry has been highly commended by Amnesty International and included in anthologies by Young Writers and the Stratford Literary Festival.





Yamini Bharadwaj  
In Paradise  
8.5 x 11.5 in.  
Mixed media

# Paradoxical Prayers

By: Tabassum Hashmi

History is full of people like me. Waiting. Wanting. Failing. Writing poems in somebody's name. I think. I keep oscillating between the moments of absolute clarity and the times of uncertainty when I don't even want to face myself. I go wavering between good days where I sleep soundly and bad days where I indulge in everything caffeine just to get through each minute. This back-and-forth movement never stops. I know it should, but it won't because there's so much of yesterday stuck in my throat waiting to flow into a river of poetry.

Everything about my poetry is unhealthy—the despair, the pessimism, the frantic loyalty. I can't help but write about everything that has left me against my will and everything that I have let go of willingly. I try to align the bygones into some sort of symmetry, but they refuse. I wish I had the endurance of loving you in a way that isn't grueling or humiliating. The thought of you leaving and the moment you actually left drilled a void so deep within me that no amount of sedation could help lessen the pain, let alone ease it.

All because I am in love with you.

I am tired of vandalizing myself just to receive a fragment of affection from you. I am fully aware that there will come a time when no measure of selflessness will help me. You won't find my clumsy dancing or my bad singing or even my shirt stuck halfway on my chin amusing anymore. I can write about everything else so that I don't have to write about you, think about the existence of black holes so that I don't have to think about you. But then I end up doing what I do best and find my heart sobbing its way into perpetual doom.

I am upset with myself more than I am with the world. I am upset with my mind, my heart, and my hands for carrying the weight of this love. I don't know how to put it down in words. Do you know the ironic thing about these words? They do absolutely nothing for the one writing them. Yet, I tirelessly write my poems like prayers in a hope that the afterlife is merciful, and that some holy resurrection will pull me through.



I know, there's no instruction manual for getting over a love that runs so deep within my veins. So, I just let the verses flow, like an intravenous tragedy because there has been a lot of losing lately. I do realize that writing prayers isn't the answer anymore because there is a high probability of everything happening all over again. I can't afford to be stuck between commas forever. So here it is—a much needed full stop. A well-deserved ending for a faithless being, for she finally found something she could believe in.

And ever since, I have been untwining leftover love from my incoherent ramblings.

---

### **About the Author:**

From a very young age, Tabassum Hashmi was inclined to write stories and poems, most of which were tucked away in her personal diary. Thanks to her English literature professor in school, one of her poems made it to the school magazine in the 7th grade, giving her much-needed encouragement and teaching her not to shy away from showcasing her words. After pursuing a Master's in Microbiology, she took a straight left to write professionally instead of rightfully ending up in a research laboratory. A little over 4 years young in the field of healthcare advertising, she writes for a living and writes a little more to get a good night's sleep. She strikes a perfect balance when it comes to creativity and scientific acumen. Her bandwidth of thought oscillates from crafting midnight musings to daytime (cringe-worthy) puns. She is a proud Potterhead who loves hoarding books. When not reading, she makes good use of parchments and black-lead to scribble her mighty fables.





Yamini Bharadwaj  
Incongruent  
14.5 x 11 in.  
Mixed media

# Ephemeron

By: Claire Fox

7

Warren and Tasin's friendship doesn't make much sense. Initially, people don't say, "Oh, there's Warren, I'm sure Tasin's around here somewhere."

In fact, the two do completely different things at recess. It's just that Tasin likes to play basketball with the older boys, and Warren likes to play make-believe games with other friends. Warren couldn't say for sure what Tasin's favorite color is, and Tasin would have to guesstimate if someone ever asked him what music Warren likes.

But any kid on that playground would tell you that they are best friends. Warren and Tasin.

9

They have decided they need nicknames. Their given names are too stuffy, and they're cool now, which means they shouldn't say two syllables when they could say one.

Warren is henceforth Ren. This new name has many meanings, including a cool bird (excuse the homophone), a Confucian value of goodness (the irony is not lost), the kid from *Footloose* (if you please), and either the soul in Egyptian mythology or a single kidney (according to Dictionary.com).

Tasin is henceforth Tas. This means nothing, since it's so obscure. But as an acronym, it can refer to a Tool-assisted Speedrun (perfect video game playthrough), the Taxpayer Advocate Service (not cool), and some others that are also not remotely cool. They decide that Tas is only functional as an abbreviation of Tasmanian Devil, which is much better, although it gives an entirely backwards impression.

10

"Hey, dude."

"Tas. Wake up."

It is 11:34 p.m. Both boys are sprawled on a blowup mattress heaped with blankets in the study at Tasin's house. The room is lit by the TV, still playing the movie that Warren can't believe Tasin fell asleep in the middle of. Except he can, because Tasin is just like that.



“What?”

“The TV’s still on.”

“And?”

“If we’re going to sleep, we should turn it off.”

“Okay?”

“It’s not my TV. I don’t know how to turn it off.”

“Press the off button.”

“It’s dark, I can’t tell which one it is.”

Warren seems to think Tasin will be able to flawlessly locate the off button in the dark, simply because this is his TV remote, and therefore he must know everything about it.

Tasin grabs the remote and presses the off button. (It’s in the top right corner—it’s uniquely square and set apart from the others—and it lights up when pressed.) Then he goes back to sleep. Sitting awake, Warren realizes he was right, which feels good but unfamiliar because he isn’t right very often.

## 11

Their moms know each other, but they aren’t friends. They drop their sons off at each other’s houses without coming inside. They’ll greet each other politely whenever necessary, make small talk when the only other option is silence, and smile in sync when their sons do something cute. No more, no less.

Once, Mrs. Teramoto found herself in the unfortunate position of having to continue a dying conversation for propriety’s sake. She glanced at Warren’s mom, adjusted her purse, and hoped it didn’t come off so transparent.

“I read an interesting article the other day—about the subconscious mind. Scientists used to think that most important decisions were made with the conscious mind, but now they found evidence that it might be the subconscious.” Warren’s mom blinked. “You know, I find that very interesting, because the conscious mind is where we use rational thinking, but it can only support that rational thinking with the memories and knowledge it has immediate access to. The subconscious mind isn’t limited; it has access to all our memories, knowledge, and experience because it’s deeper. So they say the subconscious mind is always working on something even when your conscious mind has forgotten about it, and it’ll give you a better decision because of it.”

She adjusted her purse again and looked right at Warren’s mom. “I just thought it was interesting, you know, how the deeper part of you doesn’t forget. It’s always thinking.”

## 12

“Wait, wait. So you’re telling me someone found scientific proof that deadlines are bullshit?”



Tasin flinches a little. “My mom said I shouldn’t say that word.”

“Tas, you’re twelve, and she’s not here. You can say bullshit.” Warren smiles then, pretty wickedly. “But if the subconscious thing is true, that means whatever decisions you make are better if you take longer, because your subconscious is working on it, right?”

He waits patiently for Tasin’s reluctant nod and looks so excited about how mature this makes him that he might actually steeple his fingers. He plows on when he receives the proper amount of enthusiasm in response.

“*And* they’re not really rational, so you can’t explain them! So now I can tell Mr. Simmons that’s why I don’t turn in homework on time!”

### 13

Tasin notices that Warren draws a lot. It’s usually sketches of things Tasin can’t really follow, things only Warren knows about as he’s thinking of them.

He’s clearly talented, but always shrugs it off when anyone comments. He’s practiced at shrugging things off—like when people ask unanswerable questions about his father or make fun of him for having a poor single mother. He feels more like just Warren in those moments than half of Warren and Tasin.

Sometimes he wishes Tasin were his brother, so that he wouldn’t be alone.

Warren notices that Tasin thinks a lot. He’s always planning or writing or talking about something. He applies himself to everything and usually succeeds—if not by particular skill, then mostly by conversation, because he’s good at saying the right thing. And he somehow always ends up with the last word.

When he goes home and tells his parents, they say nothing, and the silence sounds like: *be better, try harder, win more*. Sometimes he wishes Warren were his brother, so that he wouldn’t be alone.

### 14

Warren has to do summer school because of his dyslexia. He’s on a modified academic track because of it, but his teachers say he just isn’t engaging. That accusation isn’t entirely untrue.

He spends all his time drawing, and he has a no-joke epiphany, right in the middle of class. He feels like drawing solves his problems, if only for a second. Putting a creative representation of them *out there*, on a page or a patch of skin, is his short-lived solution. Even if no one else actually sees it.

He doesn’t tell anyone this. Teenagers aren’t supposed to have philosophical thoughts.

### 15

No one can tell that the boys are the same height (to the inch!) because

Warren slouches.

Tasin runs for class president and wins. Warren graduates from doodling in his notebook to sketching right on his skin with a marker he keeps on his person at all times. Teachers know Tasin's name; he does everything, he smiles at everyone, and he talks like an attorney. Teachers know Warren's name; he cracks jokes, slacks off, and sketches a lot.

According to them, being a teenager is simultaneously the most glorious and agonizing experience ever, and it gives them the right to be dramatic about it. Obviously.

Doors are slammed. Anger gets the better of both at times. There isn't recess any more, but they still have opportunities to prove that they don't need to be around each other at every moment.

Tasin gets his first girlfriend and, shortly after, his first breakup. Warren draws something obscene on his hand and flashes it at Tasin in the middle of class to make him laugh. He has to hide his hand in his shirtsleeve when he goes home so his mom doesn't see it before he gets a chance to wash it off.

17

The perfect parents have a truly nasty divorce. Warren's cramped apartment looks good compared to the warzone Tasin's house has become, so that's where they run.

Expensive things get broken. Yelling replaces talking. Warren's mother, typically warm and welcoming, is also upset for unknown reasons. Warren and Tasin mold together out of instinct. They make more sense than ever before.

One day, the boys' mothers are tired of the screaming and lying, and they finally tell their sons the truth. Warren and Tasin have their wish. Halfway.

17

"What did you do, Tasin?"

"Nothing, Mom."

"Not nothing! Your father lost his job!"

"He had it coming."

"I don't understand how you could do that to him."

"I didn't do anything to him. I called to inform his boss that he's been overbilling clients for years, which I happen to know because he's *my father* and he likes to brag. It's not my fault that's illegal and got him fired."

"But you knew what you were doing!"

"Yes."

"You knew it was wrong!"

"What's wrong is him cheating on you, having a kid with someone else, and

then ditching that kid and smothering me for seventeen years. And lying to everyone. You know what, I wish he'd been arrested."

"Is this really the child I raised?"

"This is the child the two of you raised. Are you really surprised?"

"Unbelievable. Oh, wait until Ren finds out—"

"Don't talk to me about Ren."

17

"Ren."

Warren considers not responding. He considers getting up, leaving, and letting whatever's left of Warren and Tasin erode into dust. He looks at Tasin across from him and tries to hate him. He tries to turn the jealousy he's always felt for his friend into something worse, but realizes that this is wrong—and more than that, it's gone.

"What?" Warren says.

"Are you mad?"

"Yeah."

"But not at you."

It's difficult for Warren to say that, it really is, but they're both better for it.

Tasin wants to tell him that he's angry at his father, too, both for himself and Warren. He wants to tell him that half the reason he made that phone call was the look on Warren's face when they found out.

Instead, he says something simpler but no less true: "You know you were always my brother, no matter what he did, right? I don't care. You already were."

Warren nods.

17

Tasin says:

"Hey, dude."

"What."

"Ephemeron. It's this thing in computer science. If you Google it, literally the same definition shows up on every website—same sentence."

"What."

"It solves two related problems."

They burst out laughing.



### **About the Author:**

Claire Fox is a 16-year-old writer from California's Central Valley. She is a book addict, an obsessive proofreader of everything from essays to public signs to text messages, and an editor for *Polyphony Lit Magazine*. Having ideas is her most favorite hobby, but she thinks superlatives are always used incorrectly.





Ethan Choi  
The Silenced  
72.5 x 60.5 cm  
Acrylic on canvas

**Artist's Statement:** The motive behind my painting was to portray the true horrors and oppression the Korean people faced in the 1980s when the country was run by an authoritarian regime, which is similar to the oppression conflict in Myanmar today. Even though Korea had prevailed and became a fully democratic nation, I wanted to make an impact with my drawing by showing the difficulty and struggle in order to achieve this freedom. For this specific painting, I incorporated a half black and white effect to the colored picture in order to portray the message that these were gloomy times when the future of the country was bleak and uncertain. The medium of this artwork would be acrylic paint, in which I constantly mixed a bit of grey with the original colors to portray this ½ black and white mood.

# Homecoming

By: Noah Jacob

(I)

I'm 21, bottom fish lip snagged upwards,  
wind clapping through the open car door.  
Upwards—rotting peach melting in the sky,  
dribbling so close  
I can taste it.

I'm 21, I left the oranges out back home,  
10,000 miles away, shriveled and stone.  
From the airplane, we saw ants on eggshells,  
here, the bone-plates are left out to dry.

And you,  
shoulder weighing on my shoulder,  
eyes a maze of mountains,  
veil shimmering like ant skin.  
We could make fruit salad tonight.  
I could bubble fishlipped  
through Arabic.  
You could sing these tower blocks down.

(II)

It was Abraham who learnt that sacrifice was done on a mountainside,  
Ishmael didn't die that day,  
but King James still bleached them both white.  
Embalmed in leather and wrapped tight with  
silk between the pages.  
A prophet's knife became a guillotine  
a thousand miles high,  
for a preacher-bird on his podium.

It was Solomon who learnt that death could outrun the wind,  
and here it comes.  
Unhooks your lips from one end to another  
Hands me your smile like  
red and white strips of peppermint.

So sweet, these American giants  
will eat good tonight.  
Wade ankle deep in brown tower blocks  
until they're muddy with red rivers.  
Everyone I know has heard of

*Salmon Fishing in the Yemen.*

So, we could be fish or ants.  
Crushed for food or fun or  
just because they couldn't hear  
us from so far high.  
Couldn't feel how a war can turn a country mute.  
No playgrounds, no chorus of chatter,  
just handfuls of earth passed under desks,  
until they slip

between sticky fingers.

### **About the Author:**

Noah Jacob is an Arab-British poet. She has performed both internationally, was a SLAMBassador National Youth Slam Champion, performed in Roundhouse Poetry Slam, and has been featured at the Poetry Café. She has performed alongside many renowned poets, such as Joelle Taylor, Adam Kammerling and Rachel Long.



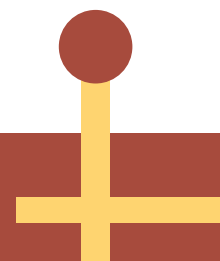


Austina Xu  
Monumental  
8 x 10 in.  
Watercolor



# Attacus Atlas (F)

By: Shaira Adila



*thud-bounce-strike*  
*thud-bounce-strike*

The duct-taped tennis ball has served me well, skipping from my mangowood bat to the vomit-yellow walls of the narrow hall and back again. It is now time for the ball to go. The muddied silver tape has not even started to peel away. But *baba* will return home soon and buy me anything I need. Anything I need only, because *baba* always says, “Men will get their wants and girls their needs.”

*Baba* used to call *maa* his *Jaan*—his *soul*. He lavished her with presents—Sudanese trinkets, Turkish lanterns, and on their fourth anniversary, a rare moth in a display case. *Baba* would look at *maa* as if she was *Nour*—*light*—before kissing the inside of her wrist.

That is, until he found another *Jaan*, who played a minor role in a major telefilm. Since then, *maa* became his *Beshya*—his *whore*; no longer the center of his life. *Baba* started investing most of his time in his business and his new *Jaan*, and we became the defective products kept at home for his formal pleasures.

*thud-bounce-strike*  
*thud-bounce-strike*

May has cut through the winter gloom again, showering blessings aplenty. With it, it brings the drought of the sun and the lack of ice in our fridge. The stagnant air, already heavy with characteristic humidity, falls to lap at our sweat. Wafts of sick-sweet mango pulp rotting in the ditches and the bananaesque odor of jackfruit flowers make *maa* throw up every other morning. At least, that is what grandma tells *baba* and the neighbors.

The ball oscillates back and forth. Opposite to me, the encased moth catches stray light.

*thud-bounce-strike*  
*thud-bounce-strike*

My red frock lies on the floor, the waist of the pajama bottoms pulled up to cover my exposed belly, the long cloth roughly folded up to my knees. The air that was once scorching now feels sticky without the dress. Grandma would have won the Olympics had complaining been a sport. What a feat she displayed—propelling lozenge-coated curses. Her javelin being, “Girls your age play with a different kind of balls.” Her discus being, “Like mother, like child.”

Grandma, however, never resented *maa* for her state of half-dress when Ahmed *kaka*, our local constable, took her to the garage and had her white saree wipe the floor.

Though *maa* is the legal mistress of the household, domesticity never suited her. Jamila *bu*a, our maid, takes care of that part—nurturing the house and its somehow-surviving occupants. The only item that has earned *maa*’s love is the framed *Attacus atlas* moth *Baba* gave her the year I was born. The only item she cleans and kisses five times a day. All others, including me, are either ghosts of blunders or objects of scorn. On some lucky days, both.

*thud-bounce-strike*  
*thud-bounce-bowled out!*

The tennis ball skids the wrong way.

Sound registers before sight.

The clatter following the collision grates on my nerves. Didn’t grandma’s skull cracking open on the dirty bathroom mosaic make the same sound? “The tiles played cricket with grandma’s head,” Jamila *bu*a had joked after the burial, “as you do.”

At the end of the hallway, the clatter leaves glass shards strewn over the floor. The wooden edges of the frame have their dislocated blades raised. Trapped inside, the fossilized moth lies unmoving. The prettiest female, most precious of its kind. Two pairs of eyes painted on one pair of wings.

Faux eyes, faux dreams.

*Maa*’s only love. *Baba*’s fourth anniversary gift.

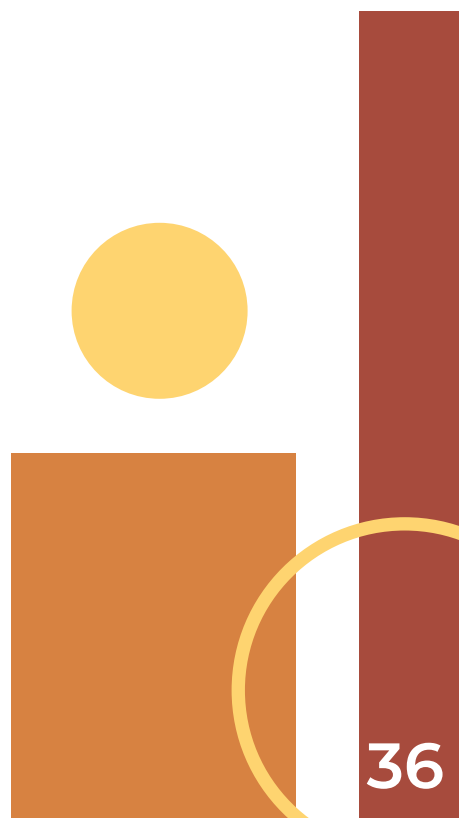
The staccato clicks of *maa*’s heels on the floor prick my feet. I feel my head droop to my shoulders, sweaty fingers clench around the threadbare pajama, the left leg rolls down to my ankle. I wait for the inevitable. For *maa*’s swears to fill the hollow walls. For the impending hurls to caress my skin. For us to execute our routined “Everything is an Inarticulate Expression of Love.”

Today is not a lucky day, it seems. When she speaks, I realize *maa* has not even approached me. Her massacred fossil-love lies near my feet.

“You should’ve broken the case sooner. She could’ve lived.”

### About the Author:

Adila is a student from Bangladesh with unbounded love and appreciation for literature. When not writing, she can be found meditating or contemplating sojourns in faraway lands. She can be reached on Twitter @ShairaAdila and on Tumblr @tangerineruby.



# erosion

By: Zoe Cunniffe

it's something about the creases around her mouth,  
like cracks in granite,  
porcelain fracturing—  
too young to have smiled wide enough for all these  
fissures. from far off, she glints like shattered glass—  
a sugar rush, a sun-smear, a smoldering.  
heart-shaped sunglasses and quick, gagless swallows;  
this quiet ravaging, these chipped white teeth.  
her smile, leering, too young to have been punched  
by so many stone-clenched fists. a mouthful of blood,  
a swish without a swallow, staining the teeth  
that once shone white in the dark. she used to be the  
shared heartbeat in a crowd, the same pulse sprinkled  
from mouth  
to mouth  
to mouth,  
but now, she swings back her head, bashes her face  
into the steering wheel, car alarm howling,  
arms flailing, salt dripping, all this flush-hot love.  
all these touches unreturned, sweat-soaked mattresses,  
growling breath. love in these shadowed halls,  
in the patter of footsteps, fingers run along drywall.  
love in these silences, love before the back door  
and the scamper across a stanger's garden, dirt-caked  
stilettos, tears snaked dewy along morning skin.  
no one else knows her holler—  
the twist of lips, the chattering of teeth,  
the hunger left caught in her mouth.  
fists beaten on glass, this spider's web splintering,  
silver shards speckling her bare legs.  
dead silence, a half-beating heart.  
someone else should be here, after all this.  
she should be touched like in her drugged-up dreams,  
benadryl dissolving on her tongue,  
but no one sees except the streetlights—hot and hovering and  
rolling their eyes.

## About the Author:

Zoe Cunniffe is a poet and singer-songwriter from Washington, DC. She has previously been published in literary journals such as *Blue Marble Review*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Doghouse Press*, and *Velvet Fields Magazine*. Zoe can be found on Instagram @there.are.stillbeautifulthings.



# The Tree With No Name

By: Charlotte Reynolds

There is a tree growing over your grave  
that has no Latin name.

I have trawled the web,  
read textbooks of botany and dendrology,  
consulted field guides,  
described to dumbfounded arborists  
its leaves, neither pinnate or palmate  
and shown them its crown,  
a soft, trembling mushroom cloud—  
but was only given a knife  
to cut it down.

The bark is skin-soft  
against the whorl of my ear  
as I sit cross-legged in shade,  
carving questions into the trunk  
until an errant wind  
sends a handful of blossoms into my lap,  
white and delicate like crumpled tissues,  
and I smell antiseptic, porridge  
and your lipstick.

My hands are stained with your sap,  
but I wrap the flowers carefully  
between your birth and death certificates,  
wind waxed linen around the wounds I made  
and promise to water you,  
*Elizabeth,*  
until you are the tallest gravestone in the cemetery.

## About the Author:

Charlotte Reynolds is an analyst and amateur genealogist based in London. She has work featured in or is forthcoming in *Briefly Zine*, *Otoroshi Journal* and *Tattie Zine*. You can find her on Twitter @violetvicinity.





Kinnereth Din  
Lucent  
2160 x 1620 px  
Digital

# Museum of Forgotten Love



By: Sujana Vangala

They told me Paris was a nightmare: all crowded streets and whispers of smoke. Everyone here sucks their cigarettes down like air; the city is starving for the anti-smoking campaigns that plague our screen at home. My French is elementary at best (offensive at worst), but I try anyway.

*Je veux*, I start, but you correct me, accent impeccable.

*Je voudrais*, you say. *It's the polite way*. Your words are soaked in honey, so I can't help but swallow them. Your English is dipped in French, but where it makes my attempts at ordering crude, it makes you charming.

The streets of Paris snake together, and I stop at every boutique and cafe. Rich fabrics flow beneath my fingers, sweet silks and breezy cottons begging for a place in my wardrobe. I turn wine I am too young to have at home over my tongue before passing the glass back to you. But it isn't the wine that makes me drunk—rather, it's the crisp pastries that spill crumbs across my dress and the lights of the Eiffel Tower.

My hotel is too expensive, the sheets too luxurious, the carpet too clean. But the view is nearly worth the hole in my bank account. Paris spills across the horizon like the strands of your golden hair over our pillows. Stars here are barely visible, faded by the puddles of light that pour from every window. My phone buzzes with missed calls and texts from worried parents and frantic friends asking me if I've landed safely, if I'm having fun, but my thoughts are on you. The warmth of a body beside me, richer than any silk.

I've gotten used to the smoke now, though I still don't partake as tendrils of it come out of your nose. Paris is only for a few days, a single chord in my symphony, but it is one of the sweetest. Each day passes in a blur, my feet aching by the time I kick off my heels.

*Tonight, we'll dance*, you tell me. The words are quick, each running into the next like watercolors.

*All this walking and now you're going to have me dance?* I reply, already crawling into the covers. You pry me from my hovel, arms wrapped around my waist as you weave through the clothes I've thrown around the room. You sit me on the bathroom counter, kicking my stilettos out of the way and handing me a hairbrush.

*Brush*, you say, a command but the laughter twinkles like stars in your brown eyes. *I have a surprise*. You say surprise like the French, the way I can only mimic like a shattered echo. Years I have taken the language, scrawling frantically in an uncomfortable high school desk, but I could never match you.

*I'm done!* I yell, though the comb has not even touched my hair. You return laughing with a white dress folded over your arm.

*Liar*, you exclaim, taking the mess into your own hands. *Americans cannot even brush their own hair*. Gentle fingers on my scalp, parting and carefully

black web. I can brush my hair, but I prefer when you do.

It's cool outside now, the raging sun giving way to a gentle night. You hum as we walk through the streets, fingers intertwined, heads tilted towards each other as if we are planets caught in each other's orbit. I don't think of the end, of when we will be cast to opposite sides of the solar system. I don't think, because tonight we have the stars and exorbitantly priced drinks and honey laced words.

The speakers pound in time with my head, words I can't quite pronounce, but a melody I scream nonetheless. My voice is sandpaper by the time I come off the dance floor. And there you are, holding my drink in the corner, eyes reflecting the flashing lights that dye my skin blue. I take the cup from you, downing the bitter drink in just one sip. It burns my throat, a fire licking at the hoarseness, yet I can't help but love it.

*Thank you for holding my drink*, I say, but it's too loud for you to hear. You bend your head to my mouth and I repeat myself, drunk off the alcohol and the music and the perfume of your cigarettes. You smile and nod, though I don't think you even heard my words.

*Let's go?* I ask, jerking my head to the exit. I could fly above the city tonight, back across the ocean and home with you in tow. You nod and take my hand. For once, the streets are empty. Everyone piles into clubs and restaurants, only the occasional cafe open to welcome any drunkards looking to sober up. But I don't want to sober up, because then my soaring soul will return to my body. I will fly over my city of love for as long as possible, until the dawn touches her finger to the horizon. *I haven't seen any of the tourist sites*. I tug on your arm, leading you through the stone streets. I'm thankful for my sneakers, for being able to run through Paris past midnight with you by my side.

*Where are we going?* You ask, laughter bubbling under every word, though you know this city better than I do. We're going to the home of the greatest art, where our love will be immortalized, even if it is memory rather than paint.

I only slow when I catch sight of the illuminated pyramid, a glowing obelisk in a city already crowded with lights. You crash into me and for a second I cannot tell where you end and I begin. Your shoes nearly crush my feet, but you manage to right yourself just in time.

*The Louvre*, you say. *Good choice*. Your fingers wrap ribbons around mine, soft hands brushing over my callouses.

It's so very late, or possibly early, but we sit with our backs against the cool glass of one of the smaller structures and face west. As if by ignoring the sunrise, we can prevent dawn. My head rests in the shadow of yours, two pieces clicking together so effortlessly it seems impossible that we were ever apart. Around us fountains bubble steadily, and the occasional lone couple passes us by wordlessly, entranced in their own spells. But tonight, the Louvre, and all its masterpieces, are ours. If I tilt my head, I can make out the shadow of the spiral staircase inside I will never set foot on, at least not any time soon, considering my mid-morning flight. *The Mona Lisa* is closer than it's ever been, but it will have to wait.

You don't speak, don't dare to utter the words that will end our night. Maybe someday we'll meet again, but probably not. Soon enough, you'll find another girl and brush her hair and teach her the correct way to order a croissant. Our paths will diverge, and I will once again be a moon absent of a planet, rejoining a solar system

diverge, and I will once again be a moon absent of a planet, rejoining a solar system I'm not sure I was ever quite part of.

Too soon, dawn cracks the sky. Slivers of golden light part the dark and the end is all too near. I hear your breath hitch every so slightly in your chest, but you'll be alright. Silently, we trade numbers, the city coming awake around us as I type in my digits with shaky hands. I'll never use yours, I know. I don't have international calling, but it's more than that. You are a chord in my symphony, a beautiful resonant moment that not a soul will forget, but you are not the whole song. This is where we leave each other a piece of our hearts, framed together and hung in a corner of the Louvre that no one will ever see. But it is here. That much I know and will never forget.

In a few hours, you will drop me off at the airport and kiss me goodbye. I will clutch my suitcase and watch you drive away, carrying my newfound treasures home. My parents will inform me of their concern and my friends will beg for stories. Perhaps yours will do the same. But for a moment, before the sun woke from her slumber and the city joined in her anarchy, Paris was ours for the taking.

---

### **About the Author:**

Sujana Vangala is a 16-year-old high school student from Atlanta, Georgia. She draws her inspiration from the squirrel that throws acorns at her window while she tries to focus on math homework. Her work can be found in orphaned Google Docs and her school literary magazine.





Arielle Kim  
Rhythm of the Rain  
18 x 24 in.  
Acrylic

# Reacting to Our Present

By: Maeve Ryan



The lights in room 138 were more blinding and obnoxious than the lights in any other room. Something about their greenish fluorescence at 8 a.m. irritated me more than it should have. The teacher at the front—a thin, tall man, whose nervous eyes and awkward presence made it evident he'd done nothing but study for the past thirty-five years—seemed just as uninterested in his own lesson as the entire class was. The boy next to me had drawn about thirty frogs of various shapes and sizes in the margin of his illegible notes. The girl on my other side was copying chemistry formulas onto her leg, hidden by her skirt for the test next period. A boy across the room sat slouched way down in his chair, his pile of dark curly hair covering his disengaged expression. He raised his hand and made some comment—“hadn't the Romans already invaded there?”—or something along those lines; truthfully, I wasn't sure what century we were in. The teacher droned on in the same monotonous tone, pulling the energy of the room closer and closer to sleep. As I watched the industrial lighting reflect off the ancient flooring, my eyelids inevitably began to droop.

Just as I began to consider taking notes, or attempting to follow whatever story this man was trying to tell, a deafening *boom* echoed through the hall. The class went silent. The slouching boy bolted upward, staring with wide eyes at the door not two feet away from him. The sounds of panicked breathing and pounding hearts slowly filled the room. No one dared to move; to break the suspense; to end what was possibly our blissful ignorance to whatever terror awaited outside that door. With tears coming to my eyes and an unsteady breath that I struggled to silence, I pressed the heels of my hands into my eyes, hoping I'd disappear. I felt the gazes of others shoot across the room, desperate to make eye contact, to convey their fear to one another.

Moments passed, but they dragged on like hours. After an eternity, the speaker bolted to the corner of the ceiling crackled to life and a voice filled the room, the stress in it palpable. “Attention please, a pipe has burst in the girls bathroom in the 100s wing... uh, students and faculty in that wing, please move to the gymnasium, and uh, all students avoid that area when switching classes. Thank you.”



The silence returned. Several moments passed before the room filled with the sounds of chairs squeaking away from their desks and students shuffling into the hall. My hands slowly unclenched and moved from my eyes to grip either side of my head. I inhaled deeply, as if I hadn't for hours, sucking the stale air into my lungs and reminding myself I was still there. The lights in the room were off now, framing the scene of the hallway in a dreamlike darkness. I watched as a hundred students shuffled past, all silent. Everyone had the same thought, said the same prayer, imagined the same alternate reality.

**About the Author:**

Maeve Ryan is a senior at Bishop Guertin High School in New Hampshire. She enjoys reading, writing, and involving herself in her school and community.



# Anatomy of the Starry Night

By: Bidisha P. Kashyap



1. emerald green: i had my favorite song on loop that morning when i first laid eyes on her / she was scribbling her heart out in that empty bench of our colony, under the laburnum / my eyes immediately fell upon her green painted nails and the silver ring she wore on her thumb / “do you think that i need someone to watch over me?” she asks, looking at me / “well feel free to say hi” i grin back at her / i never said her name aloud to anyone but i swear it tasted like popsicle-kissed smiles on my tongue.

2. prussian blue: my name in her mouth melts like a dead poet’s metaphor / comforting in its own way / i remember her tiptoeing across the hardwood floors of bookstore, casting a soft smile upon the verses that caught her eyes / i shove my hands deep inside my pockets and look down at my shoes trying hard not to melt in the moment / the sunless august afternoon called for showers / i can still picture the moment when she leaned against my shoulder as we watched the downpour outside / our fingers intertwined a few moments later and there i was memorizing every moment that followed, falling harder than the raindrops on the windowpane.

3. zinc yellow: the summer songs rarely go unnoticed / i run my fingers by the edge of the ceramic mug, slipping deeper into the silence / happiness blooms in her voice as she says about the letter she received from her beloved this morning / i breathe every moment in; memorizing every bit of her / her fingers trace down the alphabets and her lips curl up to a little smile / the pink in her cheeks carried his name / she holds his letter close to her chest and whispers something silently, ending with a smile / my heart pleaded for summer but i was drowning in my set of winters again.

4. yellow ochre: it has been seven summers, twenty-eight poems and a handful of breakdowns ever since this town has felt her heartbeat / i often find myself in places she blessed me with, trying to relieve every bit of her (or us) / i smile at the same old bench at my old colony where i first met her, find myself tracing down raindrops from other side of the windowpane / i unknowingly tilt my head now—in every hello and goodbye / there is a pink tint in the sunset today and my mind here crawls back to the day she received that letter / “so this is how nostalgia is

supposed to feel” a familiar voice speaks up / i turn back and there storms my most eagerly awaited hurricane—inside me.

5. burnt umber: the air carries a hint of agony today / she tucks another stray strand of hair behind her ear / pale, slender fingers running along the edge of her silver jhumka, making their way back to the soft fabric of her beige dupatta / the sound of the ganga echoes in my ears as the sun leaves a crimson hue upon the river / my gaze shifts to her wrists / that old set of rusted bangles still hold the same promise / she clasps her hands closer to her chest, heaving a painful sigh, or maybe a silent sob / i follow her eyes and tell her we should go home / she closes her eyes, refusing to stand, and says, “i have spent 38 years of sunsets with him but today, this sunset feels like a thousand silent deaths—”

“—i don’t think i can make it home tonight.”

6. cobalt blue: i am a patchwork of grey skies / upon another heartbeat, i am just a soft drizzle / but when i hear the sound of her heart, a hurricane storms inside me / and i happily embrace it / i have memorized every bit of her and have crafted them as poems upon my skin / metaphors reside in my bones, sighing about the way she tucks her hair behind her ear, the way the sun melts in her deep brown eyes / the way she concentrates on raindrops running down the windowpanes, the way she tilts her head while waving a goodbye / unknowingly, she started to reside in my breaths and i, i started to look for the hurricanes she blessed me with.



### About the Author:

Bidisha P. Kashyap is a nineteen-year-old history major and a literature enthusiast from India. Being introduced to the world of literature, she has been published in a couple of anthologies, local dailies, literary websites, magazines, poetry pages and so on. She also runs a WordPress blog and an Instagram page showcasing her works. She is a firm believer in the saying “a pen is mightier than the sword” and often takes help of her words to express her emotions. Her poetry centers around love, heartbreak, longing, and old-school romances.



# blind faith in a flightless bird



By: Svea Anderson

Thinking about you has become my worst fear. It's an unsettling feeling that burns through the lining of my stomach. I hate it. I hate it so much that I bring my head to my knees and wait for it to pass like a storm outside my window. I let the acid settle and wait for my lungs to fill again. I always feel sorry after. I don't want to erase you. But you uproot parts of me I buried long ago, and thought decayed before we met.

Truthfully, you're the one thing that lets me know that there is more outside of my crowded dopey head. I can't let those words get past the base of my brain. If I were to, I would have to open my palms up to the sky and admit to the world I trust you. If you turn a blind eye, I won't be able to keep the pain at bay anymore. It will wear me away like the rocks on the shore of the beach we walk on. I kick the ocean-worn rocks as you lecture me with philosophy written by some balding, saggy-skinned man centuries ago. You speak so enthusiastically and I laugh underneath my breath and tell you that just because one person says so doesn't mean it's true. You say I'm right, but you don't believe me.

I can't help but think you look at me the same way: blind faith in a bird with a broken wing. Just because I once flew doesn't mean I ever will again. You insist I will and smile so full I'm sure your face will crack open.

I don't understand why you care so much, why you're so sure of what you believe, or why every time you see me you look like you just found an old favorite shirt between the crack of your bed and the wall. I don't understand why my name from your mouth sounds different from the one my mother gave me. The way you say it makes me believe it's much more.

Maybe I'm being selfish. Maybe I'm imagining something that isn't truly there. Maybe that's something we both have in common.

I wish you could plant yourself in the space between my ribcage and grow until your petals reach the corners of my brain. Then I'll cough up daisies. The grass on my lawn will turn green from my buried hatchets and I'll finally understand why you have so much faith in people you don't know. We'll laugh at the same jokes. Knowing you will be as easy as skipping rocks on water. But I can't push daisies through my skin, so, please, tell me you'll wait until I can.

## About the Author:

Svea Anderson is an emerging writer and poet based in Greensboro, NC and currently attending Kenyon College. In her writing, she's drawn to exploring the emotional weight miniscule moments hold. When she's not writing, she enjoys dancing, curating playlists, and watching the same two TV shows over and over again.



Austina Xu  
Sea of Clouds  
9 x 12 in.  
Soft pastel

**Artist's Statement:** I wanted to capture the oriental features of traditional Chinese brush paintings but with a fantastical, ethereal twist. So, I turned to one of the most recurring (and in my opinion the most magical) elements I noticed in Chinese landscape paintings: clouds.

# [wholeness isn't really health]

By: Darren C. Demaree

wholeness isn't really health  
i was born with two hands  
with five fingers on each

but each one wanted something  
more than i was holding  
they were greed dedication

& my garden suffered  
for it i lost four fingers  
now wholeness isn't really

# [a raspberry cannot lie in my]

By: Darren C. Demaree

a raspberry cannot lie in my  
mouth without the slight  
fuzz seducing my tongue

into a violent spin into my  
teeth i feel no shame i  
never feel shame

the world is red enough  
that i see the real problem  
is only ever my mouth

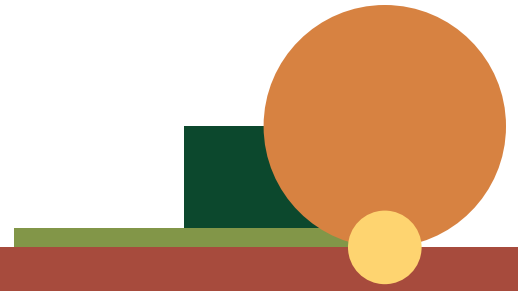
## About the Author:

Darren C. Demaree is the author of sixteen poetry collections, most recently "a child walks in the dark," (Harbor Editions, November 2021). He is the recipient of a 2018 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from Emrys Journal. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the Best of the Net Anthology and the Managing Editor of *Ovenbird Poetry*. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.



# Second Skin

By: Michael Stewart



## Part One

### Shedding

The end couldn't be described as them "splitting." The word implied a single, decisive and finite action. "Unravelling" was the more accurate term. It implied a slower, less linear and more complex process. A gradual, corrosive deterioration of an ongoing but now unwanted and unresolved relationship. However, when applying an appropriate sobriquet to her ex-husband, Carol found little ambiguity in the phrase, "lying, cheating, manipulative bastard," its descriptive qualities perfect in both their accuracy and simplicity.

Her ex, now referred to as "the bastard" or simply "bastard" within the family circle, had shed Carol, their children, and the extended family as easily as a snake sloughs its skin.

Where he had been present, he was now absent. No explanation, no protracted goodbyes, no slamming of doors or dramatic exits.

He took nothing. He left everything. And at a stroke, Carol's world had emptied through a hole in her soul as large as a catastrophic and fatal wound.

### Raw

Their home became her house. Their history, her prison. It was mapped across every wall in prints, pictures, and photographs. The years spent together were now caged like rare animals who sensed their own extinction. Restless and resentful, doomed to pace endlessly in wardrobes and cupboards, the seasons captured in every short-sleeved shirt, month appropriate jersey, and down-filled jacket that retained his shape, his smell, his memory.

Each and every room bore the abrasions, nicks, and scratches of their time in this place. He was etched into the very fabric of their former home. His indentation on his chair, in his spot, in his lounge. Their family height chart recorded year upon year on the kitchen wall. Carol could feel the holes left by the panel pins where they had hung their children's advent calendars, the ghosts of many a Christmas past. What was theirs is now hers. What was his is now baggage.





## Cleansing

Compartmentalize. Carol had seen the concept described on a daytime television program. Four women united in a coven of self-proclaimed but highly judgmental non-experts. They passed judgment on this novel hypothesis on behalf of their equally ill-informed audience. The piece was sandwiched between items about fashion-conscious politicians' wives and coping with the death of a beloved pet, Carol recalled.

In truth, the compartmentalization model being proposed was abstract; it centered upon creating mental boxes within your head and placing all concerns, worries, and any major issues in an appropriate "box" and closing the lid. "Containment is contentment", was the strapline.

Carol took the concept literally.

She Googled "storage boxes," then remembered the whole point of the exercise was containment and added, "with lids." Heavy-duty 145 liter capacity storage boxes (with lids) came in at number three. Perfect. She ordered 25. One for each year of their marriage.

Carol would excise the bastard. Like a surgeon tackling a particularly virulent form of cancer, Carol would cut every trace of his malignancy from her life. Carol would fill these boxes with the dead tissue from their cadaver of a marriage. She would slice and hack until every last putrid and rotting and rancid trace of him was exorcised. And each box Carol filled would become the coffin within which each year of their lives together would be interred. Each lid she closed would be slammed shut with the finality of a sarcophagus, sealing its contents behind opaque plastic; a specimen preserved for the future amusement of the debauched, the degenerate, and the decedent of another time.

Carol's plan was to stack the boxes up and along one of the walls in the garage. The boxes were designed to interlock, like a particularly bulky set of Lego.

While waiting for the boxes to be delivered, Carol would tackle the clearing of the garage. She couldn't remember the last time she'd actually entered the place. This had been another of his exclusive territories. She unlocked the door and peered inside, surprised by her sudden nervousness. Carol's cardigan provided a comforting hug. Flicking the switch, she watched as the fluorescent lights came on in sequence, bringing light to the darkness one step at a time. The air smelt dank and musty. The concrete floor evinced every minor paint job and major oil change, a spotted and clotted Jackson Pollock masterpiece. The bastard's tools lay where he had last left them, redundant. Dormant DIY projects lounged on tables, pieces and parts lay like broken stones long tumbled from a crumbled ruin, and several coffee cups continued their game of hide and seek, lurking in shadows on shelves, skulking on sills. Carol's breath caught in her chest as she saw his orange boiler suit slumped in a chair against the back wall; a sentinel posing an aggressive challenge, a potent, palpable threat. His work boots standing incongruously to attention beneath.



A paint-splattered radio/CD player offered distraction and Carol pressed “Play.” Frank Sinatra addressed the room. He told no one in particular he was bewitched, bothered, and bewildered. It had been his favorite song.

And Carol’s nerve cracked as suddenly as thinly frosted ice on an October pond. She plunged downwards into the turbulent, cross-flowing waters of insecurity, uncertainty, and indecision, floundering to breathe, flailing for the door and finding her feet, Carol crash-closed the garage door on the specters in this mausoleum of memories.

Her screaming caused concerned neighbors to alert the police who found her in the garden, hands battered and bloodied from sustained slamming against the garage door. The appropriate agencies were summoned, and Carol was stretchered past those self-same neighbors to be medicated, counseled, then sectioned.

Two months passed before Carol was able to return to her house. The boxes had been delivered.

## Purging

Carol had been collected by her older sister, a pinched-faced woman with broad hips and a narrow mind, much given to offering unsolicited advice. “I warned you at the time” snapped Janice. “That man was no good. Two-faced and trouble from the start.” Each word was delivered in a staccato rhythm and synchronized to Janice’s bad driving. “Wandering eye and wandering hands, that one. Was never going to stick around for long. Better for you he’s gone if you ask me.” Carol wasn’t requesting commentary of any description from Janice. She simply needed a responsible adult to collect her from the hospital. Self-righteous criticism was merely the price to be paid. As they pulled into the drive, Carol saw the boxes. Janice noticed and took this as her cue. “Yeah, those! Well, they were delivered last week by a ... let me tell you, a horrible little man with a really bad attitude. “You... eh, Mrs. Johnstone?”, he says. “No”. I said, “I’m her sister”. So, he says, “Ah, Need Mrs. Johnstone to sign for these.” So, I say, “Can’t I sign on her behalf?” And he says to me, “How do I know you aren’t some random woman, signing for stuff?” “Can you believe that?” Carol zones out.

“... so, I’ve aired the place out, cleaned the kitchen and bathrooms, and made a first sweep of the garage. Cleared that back wall you wanted. I’m not moving those boxes though. Left them where that awful man dumped them. Good mind to complain to his boss.”

Carol is back. “Thanks, Janice. Thanks for the lift and ... well, everything. The cleaning and stuff.”

A wearied Janice, exhausted from the doing of good deeds responds, “Oh forget it. But you need to get yourself together, Carol. Really. It’s just a man. Forget the ... bastard.” Carol has never heard Janice swear. Not once. “Anyway...” Janice continues, “The house is in as good a state as I could manage in the time I had. Couldn’t do



anything about that ... smell though. Tried everything. But that's your problem now. Right, that's your home. I'll leave you to it. Keep in touch, tell me if I can ... well, you know."

"I will. And thanks, Janice."

In that instant, they remembered that despite their differences they were still sisters, that there were things left unsaid, things that didn't need to be articulated.

Janice stalled her car twice. Crunched through the gears, over-revved the engine, and bumped up the drive. She waved to Carol without looking and still managed to hit the gate.

A sobbing Carol cursed herself for being caught off guard. She resolved that her return to his former kingdom would be on her terms, and the agenda would be hers.

Approaching his wardrobes was akin to entering a lion's den brimming with sharp-toothed memories; the recollections evoked, intolerable. Janice had been right, there was the smell. At first a faint mixture of scents and sensations. Aftershave. Deodorant. Sweat. The odor of stagnant, worn once but since unwashed clothing. It had lain in wait, using its laundered and fragrant fellow travelers as a shield. Intent on ambush, it anticipated the arrival of the next, unsuspecting visitor.

Carol looked at the wardrobes as if seeing them for the first time.

He had built these unnecessarily cavernous structures himself. Spent many months surveying, measuring, and sourcing his supplies. Many hundreds of pounds buying and storing his materials. Many thousands of hours hacking and hammering out his vision. Finally, there they stood. To him, voluminous testaments to his ability as a carpenter; no, as a Man. To her, mocking reminders of his many failures as a human being.

She knew he had installed a supposedly secret panel and false wall during the construction. There was something hidden in the eaves of their roof. He had tried to cover his duplicity with boards of 3-millimeter plywood and equally thin excuses. Because he had a hobby.

Carol wasn't certain about the specific nature of her husband's pastime, but she was pretty sure it was connected to what she knew was called "The Dark Web". All the clues had been there; hidden in plain sight. As his interest in her began to wane, his secretiveness, his need to be alone and distant increased incrementally. Doors, once open, were closed and locked.

On completion of the wardrobes, he had said, "Just like the Pharaohs," they had the same thing, in their tombs. The pyramids. In Egypt. Kept all their valuable stuff inside. Showed people who they were by what they'd built, what they owned. Me, I've got my wardrobes. Here. Exactly the same thing."

Carol can remember saying nothing.



A resolute Carol slid back the wardrobe doors and uncorked the unhygienic genie.

Wave upon wave of repulsive but irrepressible aromas intent on invasion and occupation swept across Carol's senses like decomposing fish.

This was proof of prior corruption on a grand scale. The reek of him slithered across carpets and oozed into every cranny, every corner. It wormed its way into blankets and bedding and massed pungent and heavy across the ceiling. His ripe and rotting aura clung like cigarette smoke to her clothing as panic rose in her chest, and an all-enveloping terror forced her from back this space, back into the room.

Like a parasite, his squalor snaked downstairs to conquer and colonize what remained of Carol's house.

The bastard was back.

## Part Two

### Purification

Thirty-six hours later, Carol had rationalized her situation. She had spent a sleepless night at her younger sister's home. On the couch, the all-too-short blanket and all too long hours had provided the opportunity to think things through. The task was merely bigger and more complex than she had anticipated. Nothing that can't be solved with a broom, bleach and rubber gloves Carol thought.

She had started by opening all the windows throughout the house. The noise of passing cars and the chill of winter air had brought a welcome sobriety to her situation; the sheer ordinariness of life beyond these walls was comforting.

Of course, the visit to Doctor Thompson had helped. And the pills. The boxes were still in the back garden, where they lay like tipped and tumbled gravestones, spread along the gravel path.

Carol carried the first of the boxes into the house and upstairs. "Maybe this time. Maybe it's third time lucky," she prayed.

### Regeneration

Her face mask expanding and contracting like an accordion, Carol crawled towards the back of the wardrobe. The smell still clawed at her throat, coated her tongue. This was the last of her senses to be assailed. She could taste him. The smell was strongest here, lodged deep within this wooden cave. She began to tunnel, pulling the bags of folded clothing to her, then pushing them behind. Gradually, she formed her own bubble, her own tiny world, lit solely by her head torch. A cocoon of life.





Carol levered the last of the bundles out of the wardrobe as she inched herself towards the back wall.

Gripping the screwdriver that she had found in the garage, Carol prepared to remove the four screws from the secret panel. They were missing. Placing the tip of the tool underneath, she prized it free. There was a small passageway beyond, a crawl space, one-meter square. It led off to her right, then her left. It took her up then down through a series of blind alleys and false walls. Still following the putrid smell, Carol saw a light ahead, then a hatch in the floor, a dim glow defining its edges. A single handle had been recessed on one side, the other was hinged.

As she lifted her head to look down into the space beneath, the beam of her torch caught his face staring back at her. Head tilted to one side. A length of nylon material had been tied to a beam at one end and around his neck at the other. As Carol watched, she became aware that he was turning slowly away from her, twisting the noose clockwise. As the cord completed its lazy circuit, it tightened and sent him back towards her, anticlockwise. It was as if he'd had a sudden thought, half-remembered some amusing anecdote.

As he returned in yet another languid arc, Carol became aware that the nylon cord around his neck was a woman's stocking. Its partner lay like a discarded snakeskin beneath the corpse clad in a black evening dress.

This time there was no panic. No hysteria. Shock took control and coordinated Carol's body. It slowed her breathing, reduced her heart rate, and brought her mind to a place of delightful abstraction. One by one her senses started to shut down. The all-pervading odor had been the smell of death; now it too was gone.

As her eyes adjusted to the lack of light, the vague bundles strewn across the floor of the chamber swam into focus. Clothes. Women's clothes, arranged in neat piles, stacked against the walls, hanging on rails. Waiting to accompany their owner on his final journey to another life.

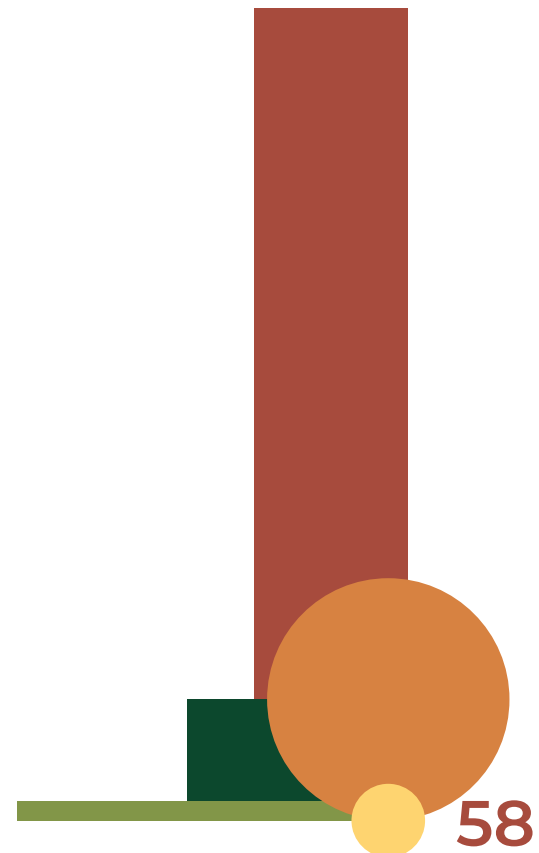
Carol thought, "A Pharaoh in his tomb, surrounded by his possessions. The stuff that defined who he was. And how he would be remembered. Forever."

Carol was calm, clear-headed, and decisive. She would need another, bigger box.



## About the Author:

Michael Stewart was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and now lives in Pattaya, Thailand. After a career in traditional teaching, Michael was founding director of an online education company. While in the post, Michael was a regular contributor to EPAL; an initiative of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, with articles translated into six European languages. He also contributed to The Writers' Academy at Penguin Random House, where he published seven eBooks on creative writing. In addition, Michael wrote about contemporary business practice for the University of Aberdeen Online MBA (Global) blog. Michael has been writing fiction and poetry since 2019.






Eva Chen  
Shelter in Fear  
4000 x 6000 px  
Photography

**Artist's Statement:** I shot this at the height of the pandemic, when the air surrounding Covid-19 was one that was packed with fear, uncertainty, and skepticism. “Shelter in Fear” tries to capture this period of Covid — by framing an ominous photo featuring hands caged behind a window, this piece showcases the feelings shared by many during the pandemic.

# Again

By: Tony Abbott



Tossing babies from walls isn't "just a thing everyone does." It isn't the "natural consequence of a brutal era." Break it down. Something must have impelled your fingers to wrench my son from his mother's arms, to dangle him like a sack over the windy rampart. Did no single muscle rebel? Did the whole thing just feel right? But look, no one else swung him by the ankle, only you, Neoptolemos. No god forced your hand, not this time. You controlled the episode. You chased my wife along our wall, you kicked her down, you plucked away our child. Your body acted by your will alone. But let us say it was the chaos of the moment. The moment itself drove you mad to tear the boy from his mother and shake him with fury: "I have him! Hector's son!" Fine, but even then. The damnable choice came when you didn't return him to his mother's breast but chose—yes, chose, like men who rape—to hurl the boy into the air beyond the rampart. Knowing his death would be hideous. Knowing you would cut his mother and me deeper than any wound. And did you have the stomach to watch his tender flailing body strike and splatter the bloody dust of our plain? Did you? Ha, no. Coward, coward, coward, protect yourself, for when you die, you'll die again at my hands, for I will find the highest wall in this hell of walls and throw you off again again again again.



# Alive

By: Tony Abbott

*Richard.*

*Richard.*

*Richard.*

The catbirds sang your name this morning.

Who had noticed this before, how they must have heard our mother calling you and remembered your name ten years after she left, fifteen after you? But that's nature—a world of omens and signs and blossoming magic, snapping the senses to attention.

Did you leave all that to them when you died, the innumerable armies on earth's payroll, those angels humming over our heads? Do you join them in the air of my backyard? Are you saying *Brother, I'm here?*

Or, as *Richard, Richard* crows out again and again, is this some private conversation between the two of you? Are you all angels now, and are we excluded, being earthbound and only alive?

## About the Author:

After beginning his career in poetry, for the last three decades Tony Abbott wrote for younger readers, his latest being the young adult novel-in-verse, *Junk Boy* (2020). He has taught graduate-level creating writing and has returned to writing poetry for adults. Recent pieces appear in *Madrigal Magazine*, *Dreich Magazine*, *The New Ulster*, and *The Galway Review*. [www.tonyabbottbooks.com](http://www.tonyabbottbooks.com).

# Recipes from Ama

By: Matt Hsu

Behind the cold marble counter, Ama shuffles around the kitchen in her firm wool slippers. The rusted burners on the stove are never vacant; there is always a boiling black pot or a large pan of food sizzling away. She tosses thick noodles and vegetables sticky with sauce in a porcelain bowl, stirs green onions into the soy sauce dish with a slick pair of chopsticks, uses glass lids cloaked with moisture to silence the hissings on the stove. After she finishes, I pour myself a glass of bubbling ginger ale and feast, proclaiming “很好吃!”<sup>1</sup> in between bites.

Ama always wears soft, thin clothing that strokes my skin when she pulls me in for a hug—which are far longer than anyone else’s. She lives in Campbell, just north of San Jose, so I see her every week or so. Whenever I visit, she pushes my head down, as if to shrink me below her five-foot-nothing frame (five-foot-three if you count her wild gray hair).

Her kitchen is constantly crowded, by a parent groping in the drawers for a soup spoon, by a dog scurrying to lick up a grain of rice, by Ama herself, adding a cheesecake baked to a majestic brown to the buffet. The refrigerator is a constellation of plastic magnets and foam-framed photographs. A gallery of cards, decorated with stickers and reading, “生日快乐”<sup>2</sup> in fat marker, has recently sprouted on the glass cabinets.

Sometimes, when I am lounging on the leather couch during family gatherings, watching whatever bubbly television program my younger cousins have decided to put on, Ama calls, “许茂哲!”<sup>3</sup>—my Chinese name—and I hurry over to the kitchen. I watch as she folds dried cranberries into the dough of 猪肉<sup>4</sup> to add a kick of sweetness, or lays strips of 猪肉 into a golden yolk mixture, before rolling them around in a carpet of crackling breadcrumbs.

As I am watching her deft preparations, I notice a magic, an ethereal, yet commanding magic, a magic that both flutters and punches, rolling off her fingers and into the food. It is a magic that my father emulates when he drops chocolate chips into thick pancake batter to fry for my brother and I, that I emulate when I use bamboo tools to eagerly craft a long roll of sushi for the family.

1. Delicious  
2. Happy Birthday

3. Steamed buns  
4. Pork

We always leave Ama's house clutching brown paper bags stuffed with goodies: mesh bags of tangerines, packaged pineapple cakes, rice cookies snowed with trails of white frosting, and multitudes of Tupperware containers that hold the leftover food, because Ama always makes extra. The wild smells of her kitchen tuck themselves into the bag and set themselves free in the warmth of our car as we drive home after dark. Whenever she calls the home line and I dash to pick up the phone, I tell her about my day in cluttered Chinglish. After that, she does most of the talking, and I perk up my ears. She instructs me to play more basketball because it will stretch me out, therefore making me taller. She reminds me to sleep more so I am not tired, and I wonder whether I will ever have all the answers as she does. She provides a report on the family of hummingbirds that have taken refuge in her small backyard, sometimes sending a picture of speckled eggs or beating wings on Line. She talks about how next time she'll show me how to make 葱油饼.<sup>5</sup> She says, “我很想你,”<sup>6</sup> and I think I taste her food on the words before we say goodbye.

- 
- 5. Green onion pancakes
  - 6. I'm thinking of you

### **About the Author:**

Matt Hsu is a high school senior from San Francisco, California. He works as a poetry/prose editor at *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine* and *The Formula*. Currently he's querying his first novel, a new adult thriller-mystery hybrid. In his spare time, he enjoys playing tennis and eating dark chocolate.



Eva Chen  
Six Feet Apart  
3620 x 5355 px  
Photography

**Artist's Statement:** I took this photo of my sister, Angela, on a balcony during quarantine. It's a portrait that has a forward message to it: six feet apart. There's no hidden meaning behind the photo, rather, it captures the main idea of the pandemic: six feet apart, masks on. It's shot in black and grey in an effort to promote this message: the focus isn't the surroundings, but my sister herself, and the mask.



# Opalescence

By: Savannah Voth

I  
Birdsong suspended  
    caught in amber  
as globs of

luminous bronze  
    drip through foliage  
sunlight spills

distills in champagne  
    crystal. Whiff of  
sweet pea perfume

stirs memory,  
    silt of childhood dream—  
*the clam and I*

*had no eyes,  
    empty sockets  
gaped in the night*

*awoke*  
    —rises, glittering plume  
settles to stratum

II  
Sun dips chubby fingers  
    in gold  
    deposits  
gleaming on wood siding

oozing  
    fingerprints, streaks  
    echo touch of  
*light on yellow house*

*reached through  
redwood boughs  
to stroke  
the wooden frames  
of coral-print chairs  
since sold.*

*All the pepper seeds  
I never planted  
in the front yard—  
buried sediment*

III  
I am algae  
and protozoans  
accumulated  
on ocean floor

compacted,  
partly recrystallized  
diatomite  
in hindsight

opal replaces  
the cells in wood  
and the shells  
of clams,  
fills fractures,  
cavities

internal play of color  
depends upon light,  
sun refracted in eye  
bursts into  
opalescence

**About the Author:**

Savannah Voth is a senior in high school who loves reading, writing, songwriting, and creating visual art.



Elwing Gao  
nomad  
7 x 8.5 in.  
Mixed media

# Gifts

By: Zusana Storrier

They were miserable-seeming men, dressed as I still imagine thieves often are, in black clothes and gloves and rigid faces. Gloves! The house was cold, as bitter as outside, but I knew visitors should take their gloves off. They dropped the two plastic bags beside the Christmas tree and left as if our home might taint them.

“Do we have to wait till Christmas morning?” I asked my mother.

“No,” she said. “It will be rubbish they’ve brought us. People only give rubbish.”

She was right. There were board games with counters and dice missing, grubby soft-toys that smelled of bin bags, a paint set with the black used up, a plastic xylophone with no sign of the beater.

“They dig out trash for Bernardos,” my mother repeated, swallowing more of her coffee. She hadn’t got up from the sofa when the men had knocked on the door.

But at the bottom of the second bag was something astounding. Two bars of chocolate, twelve rows long. I counted the rows, and re-counted them, three-and-six-and-nine-and-twelve. The pound bars were whole and perfect; there wasn’t a tear in the wrappers, not a peek at the corners.

“Can I?” I pleaded.

My mother nodded. I knew her shame would soon coagulate into a rage so I crammed a diagonally broken piece into my mouth. Perhaps another child would have known by the way it fractured, but I’d never before had a bar, of any size, to myself. After some seconds of my mouth hurting with the sharp edges, the chocolate yielded and my tongue curved into the taste. Immediately I was back watching my brother put purple cellophane over the lightshade in the corridor. I’d run in and out of the chilling and rousing violet hall, with the same shudder and fascination I was soon to find in disused mine shafts or quarry



ponds or leeches latched onto legs. It would be the tang of unsafe lovers and April gravesides, a sour-milk horror plied with dark sweetness, the flavor of years-out-of-date chocolate.

---

**About the Author:**

Zusana Storrier lives in Scotland, next to mountains that aren't very mountainy. She's not really married and has a cat that's more of a marmoset. She loves writing stories about people who are overlooked but see everything.

# Winter in Glasnevin

By: Jennifer Gray

The plague in January and I walk in Glasnevin. Untimely mistletoe grows high in branches, a dark ulcer—a hard knot against the sky. Up there capillaries of geese fly, their wings clipped by the gloom of the darkening hour.

I stay within my five kilometers and pass by the monuments and celtic crosses that keep the dead locked in their places. Guards stop the living from going much further; under the shadow of a closed pub, they flag down cars on the main road. Inside, a hundred pint glasses gather dust like forgotten trophies, or souvenirs from a time when travel seemed incidental.

In some dank corner of the cemetery, Saint Brigid is waiting in the wings for tomorrow. An emblem of spring, early, too early perhaps, before the wilting snowdrops have melted into the hard ground. Brigid is a life giver, but she dwells too, crying for the dead while the world is reborn yet again. For those of us here to see it, it can't come soon enough. Until then, we drink cans by the canal and window shop as if it's going out of fashion. Masked, we keep our distance, but catch the uncertainty in our own eyes reflected back in the dark glass.

At home, we succumb to lust or lie lackluster on the unmade bed. Our company is the only solace and yet sometimes it feels like another trap. His body, sleep-filled, wrapping round me in the darkness. *Can you give me some space?* I whisper, but he only grips me tighter, lost in slumber.

A trip to the cemetery buys me an hour on my own. I notice the pairs of magpies, monochrome in the dusk light. Passing by the couples buried there together, locked in the frozen ground, I wonder how it would feel to be truly, completely alone. Then, chided by the closing bell, and draped in the last of the light, I turn for home and leave January and the dead behind me. Saint Brigid can keep her loss for them tomorrow.

## About the Author:

Originally from rural Aberdeenshire, Jennifer Gray studied English with Creative Writing at the University of Chester. Her first novel was shortlisted for the Mslexia Women's Novel Competition and she has also been shortlisted for the Cheshire Prize for Literature. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in publications such as *Neon*, *Flash*, and *Glasgow Women Poets*. Jennifer holds an MSc in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh and currently lives in Dublin.

# fireworks

By: Lily Wang

last january. you were chrysanthemum strings  
i was damp gunpowder—together  
we were light year fishlines  
waiting for moths to the light  
the way high school girls  
take a metaphor as fairytale & forget  
their lives are shorter  
than a snowstorm. recall  
the promise broken in november  
when slush fell onto the campus, slipping down  
our cheeks, blushing, your red backpack  
fluttering in the wind.  
yet both of us believed if we waited  
for one more year, there'd be fireworks.  
& we could ignore what hunted our names

you were fern fiddleheads, i was flower crowns.  
together we yearned for a winter  
we could not survive, only to revive  
late april, empty sun. you were clip-on earrings,  
i was morning still asleep.  
i was chalk face, you were expo drawings  
hallways where we passed & passed  
& never stopped passing until someone  
was supposed to wave & someone  
was supposed to look away, even in a century  
the sun keeps walking out. & we wait  
in our own ways

but today.  
it's first snow & rewinding another january  
this time you are fireworks by the sun  
i am bullet holes in the night  
& we realize. it's all the same



## About the Author:

Lily Wang is a senior at High Technology High School. She enjoys creative writing and her poetry has been recognized by Scholastic Art and Writing. She's grateful for her loved ones, rollerblades, cats, and particularly great quotes.



Arielle Kim  
Gift  
20 x 26 in.  
Charcoal



# About the Artists:

**Eva Chen:** Eva Chen is a junior attending high school in the Bay Area. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards for her works in poetry, fiction, and photography. In her free time, she enjoys chasing her dog and playing with her kalimba.

Pieces: Shelter in Fear (pg. 59) ; Six Feet Apart (pg. 64)

**Arielle Kim:** Arielle Kim is a seventeen-year-old artist from Virginia who is heavily interested in the arts and sciences.

Pieces: Rhythm of the Rain (pg. 44) ; Gift (pg. 72)

**Austina Xu:** Austina Xu is a high school junior from California. When she's not writing or drawing, she can be found procrastinating, singing, chasing/ being chased by her cat, or all three at once. Austina has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers in both writing and art and was also named a California Arts Scholar.

Pieces: Sea of Clouds (pg. 50) ; Monumental (pg. 33)

**Yamini Bharadwaj:** Yamini Bharadwaj is an Indian teenager fond of literature and the fine arts. She likes to explore various styles and compositions but has a penchant for portraiture. Catch her on instagram @\_incongruency\_

Pieces: In Paradise (pg. 20) ; Incongruent (pg. 23)

**Summer Sekula:** Summer is an 18-year-old artist and history student from Las Vegas, Nevada. She loves drawing nature scenes, particularly ones of the desert close to her home. Her work is recognized in the "Celebrate the West" art competition and has received a high merit publication in the "Celebrating Art" national anthology.

Piece: Cooper's Crest (pg. 38)

**Ethan Choi:** Ethan Choi is a rising junior in Yongsan International School of Seoul and an emerging artist. Ethan is interested in communicating the voice of the oppressed, the silenced, and the marginalized. He wants to use art to cast light on those who are systematically dismissed and neglected. Ethan's work has been published in many journals and exhibited in galleries.

Pieces: 1980 Gwangju (pg. 9) ; The Silenced (pg. 30)



## Staff Artist Biographies:

### **Kinnereth Din:**

Kinnereth S. Din is a seventeen-year-old artist and illustrator from North Texas, who loves thunderstorms, fuzzy socks, and lazy mornings. She has received a handful of local art awards and been featured in the Dallas Museum of Art's 2021 Teen Renaissance Exhibition. Her art was also selected for inclusion in Celebrating Art's National Summer Anthology 2020. While she hasn't settled on a favorite medium yet, most of her pieces seek to explore the poignant and beautiful. When she isn't scribbling in her sketchbook, you can usually find her daydreaming with a cup of tea in hand. Find more of her work, and follow her creative endeavors @artofkinn on Instagram.

### **Elwing Gao:**

Elwing is an 18-year-old artist from the Bay Area, currently studying in New York. She works mostly in watercolor and 2D mixed media, and likes exploring mental health and human experiences in her pieces. In her free time, she can be found going on walks and playing guitar. You can find more of her work, and follow her current art studies @waves.and.washes on Instagram.

### **Luana Góes:**

Luana Góes is a 19-year-old artist from Amapá, Brazil. Her artworks are inspired by various mediums and both traditional and digital art, creating mixed media pieces about her culture, mental health, nature and life in general. Góes also likes to edit videos and music, a topic that can be found in her pieces. You can follow her at @luana.g.m on Instagram.

## Art Director Biography:

### **Peter Donley:**

Peter Donley is a high school senior from suburban Seattle. He first joined Kalopsia as an executive editor in June of 2020, and has been working as the layout designer ever since. In his limited free time, Peter is a competitive pianist and aspires to pursue mechanical engineering in college. You can find him on Instagram @p\_eterd.

**Layout and Design by  
Peter Donley**

**Cover Art:  
"Old Friend"  
Elwing Gao  
8.5 x 11 in.  
Watercolor**

