

# Issue

# Historiologic



HOMER'S ODYSSEY MAGAZINE X PROJEKT EM DASH  
COVER BY PUSHKAL MUN



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# DAILY NEWS

ISSUE ONE

ENTERTAINMENT

MAGAZINE

## LETTER FROM THE FOUNDERS

001

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We are deeply grateful to each of you for being a part of our first issue. We thank you from the core of our hearts for contributing your incredible creativity and passion. Your dedication has genuinely shone through, and it has been a privilege to feature your work in this debut edition. We are beyond proud of how the issue has turned out, and it's all thanks to your remarkable contributions. Looking ahead, we are filled with excitement and anticipation for what the future holds and can't wait to continue this journey with all of you!

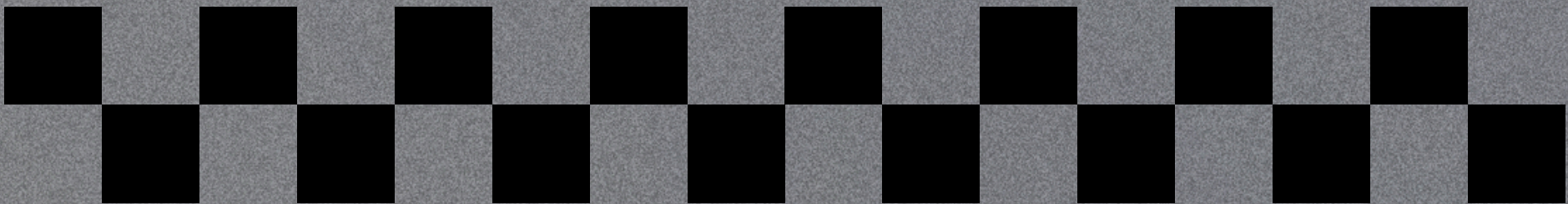
— ARIANNA  
(HOMER'S ODYSSEY MAGAZINE FOUNDER)  
& DIYA  
(PROJECT EM DASH FOUNDER)





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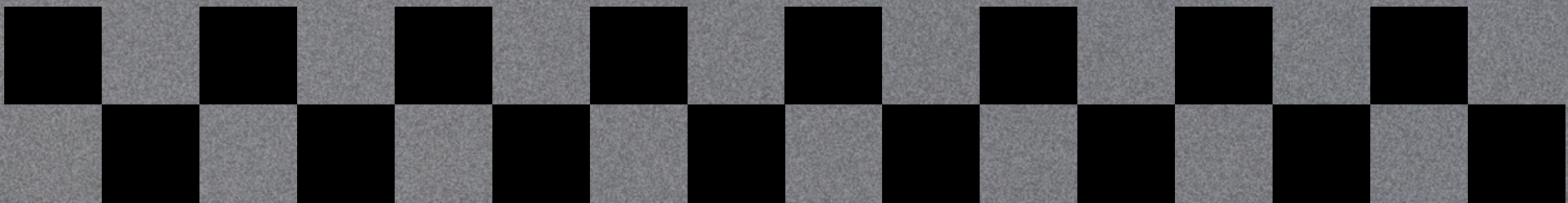
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# LIVING BY KAI

— A poem about yearning for what once was

I seek living -

Solemn, peaceful, quiet peace

That hindered hardships and

Nothing to be missed.

After all the prose and poems I wrote,

Memories of nothing to be seen,

Simply for it to be forgotten,

To be buried deep, rotten.

Nothing survived,

Not even the dream.

And the forget-me-nots,

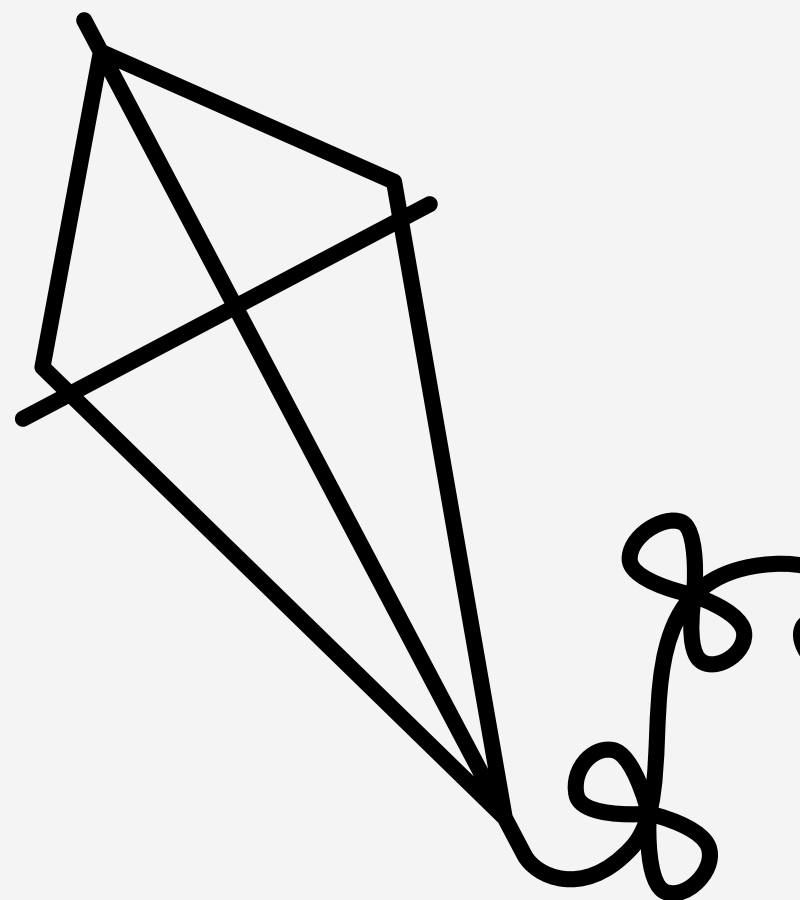
The once-called home,

Now an empty nest,

Longing for the breeze,

The old mist, I miss

The butterfly patterns on the blanket





Morning pancakes and songs  
The kite we once sewed  
Balloons that flew  
Lost in the sunlight and throng  
The ancient oak we once sat,  
Learned how to weep a lot.  
No, it can't sprout again,  
It can't blossom again,  
The living I once knew  
Was the past I can not return in,  
And now I can not even cherish  
Or even replenish,  
Because it scattered,  
It fell,  
It vanished,  
Deep within beneath the earth's surface,  
Just like longing for living -  
Living is dying.





BY AVILASHA

# *The frost in my bones*

1. July, age nine.

Pastel pink clouds scattered across summer skies, as if smeared onto the nightingale's canvas by a child's thumb. At eight, I perch myself upon the back of a dusty car, a half bitten strawberry between my naïve lips; the faded reds caress my innocence, a soft brush of skeletal fingers.

The slow glide of the sweetest essence down my throat, swallowing the bittersweet flickers of the child running down dusty streets with her hair matted to her face, not a care if the clock would rewind back, if she would make it to twenty eight.

Playing badminton was more important, the haunting reality of death perched around the corner could wait.

1. August, age fifteen.

When I first turned upon myself, the anguish, the bitter anguish, wrecked my entire being.

Sanguine dripped down my knuckles as I brutally slaughtered the lamb quivering inside me. Mother, I fear I



ripped away my innocence in hopes that my ashes would burn fierce, the flames would touch the sky, scare away the weakened mortal heart.

Perhaps a murderer, my first kill was the plea that should have escaped my lips. Perhaps then, the bleeding sunsets painting my back porch and the constant cold freezing my brittle bones would be a concept, draped in your old sweater still sweetened by the scent of your perfume.

When I first turned fifteen, dressed in jackets that just didn't feel warm enough, the lightened riverbanks illuminated by the ghosts of a distant past gathered me close. The forsaken called to the forsaken.

Amongst the faltering lights, the Ocean's call issued closer, a warning from the depths whose origin lies within my frosted being.

“Child of mud, does your God love you back?”

And I tell him, I tell him but he never answers back.

“My God loves me. Just not enough for me to love myself.”



3.October, age sixteen.

My creator birthed me and moulded me to their liking, the cracks and fissures on my sculpted body speak of a distant war, what right do I have to feel beautiful, when the reds lining my pale arms weigh down this body,

the ache in my soul, ever so persistent?

I called you my person and then turned you into a memory. All fathers from my origin, knee deep in the sorrows of their own failures, their tongue of steel that forges liquid iron in the blood of first born daughters,

The father is the breadwinner, the ghost that doesn't know his own way out.

All fathers have this loud terrible silence that makes you wonder if love was offered through the narrow spaces, the cracked hinges from broken doors or if those lithe fingers of yours had to pry those doors apart,

soaking in every measly form of affection,

even violence, turned into love.





4. November, age seventeen.

Metamorphosis. The transcendental nature of my soul, I flew too close to the frosted beings. When the ice starts thawing, slithering through your nerves and crawling inside your marrow, your face shining with the flickers of a mourning child, remember.

When the gods praised of your metamorphosis, it was not because the wounds had stopped bleeding,

but because you finally learnt how to slap a hand over it, uncaring of the pain.

November casts tempting hues of the sun, I wished for the skies to turn into liquid night, my brittle bones and the galaxy swarming through my veins ache to be devoured by this draping expanse of rich velvet sky. I wish to be consumed by something so fulfilling that my very crevices never dare to feel hollow again.

I wish to be consumed by something so fulfilling that my very crevices never dare to feel hollow again.





I. December, age nineteen. (no memory found)

When I crossed the age of eighteen, a constant, acute pain goes through the tips of my fingers down to my ribs to my very marrow. A blade is stuck in my throat that follows its sting and the blood sliding down my velvet is a constant reminder of how people are ghosts that never visit your uncanny grave.

The sting of the blade strikes on nostalgic winter days when your lover walks off without a smile at your direction and you feel like when you were eight begging for your parents to listen to your story of how the world could wait but you needed to smear yourself in colours because you loved how art never once left you waiting when the world called you selfish.

I'm not feral,

nor volatile, Father.

I don't know why I bite.



# Lilies at the altar

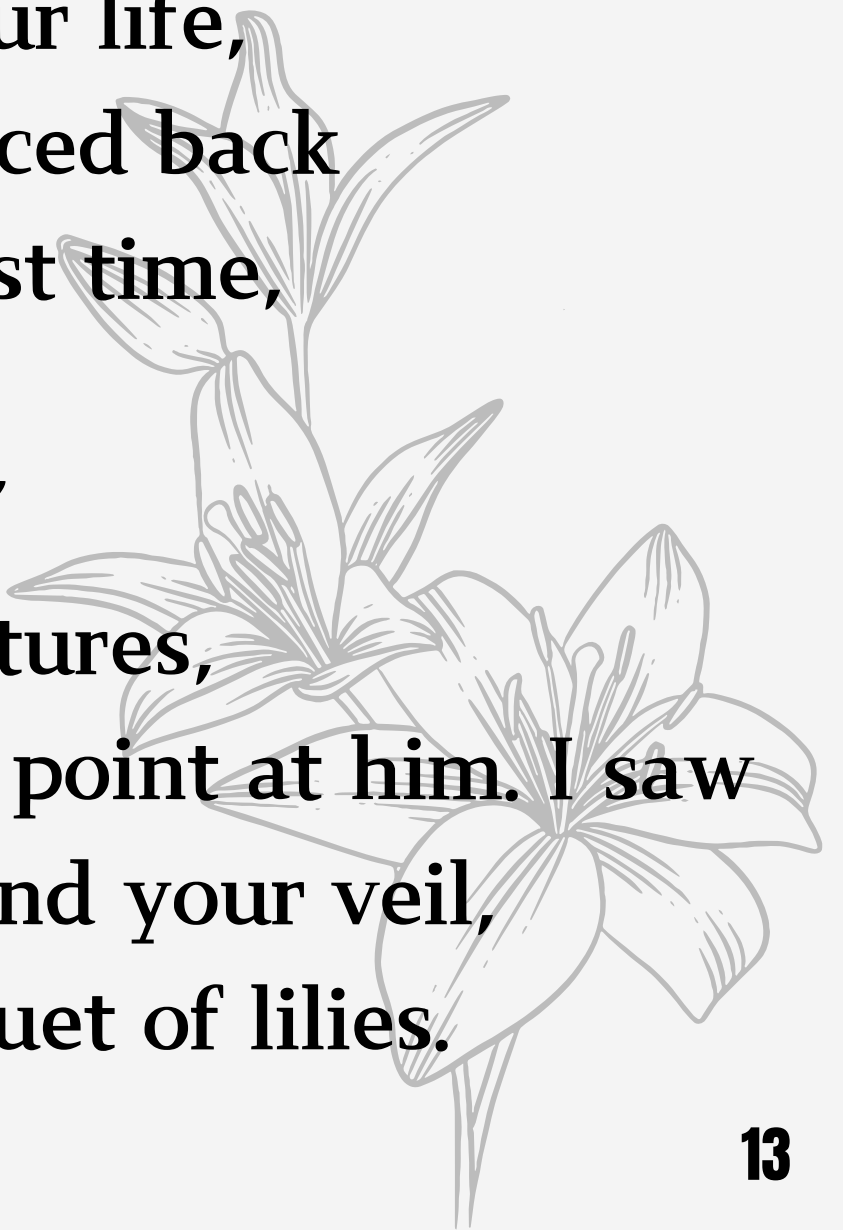
BY DEA SWASTI

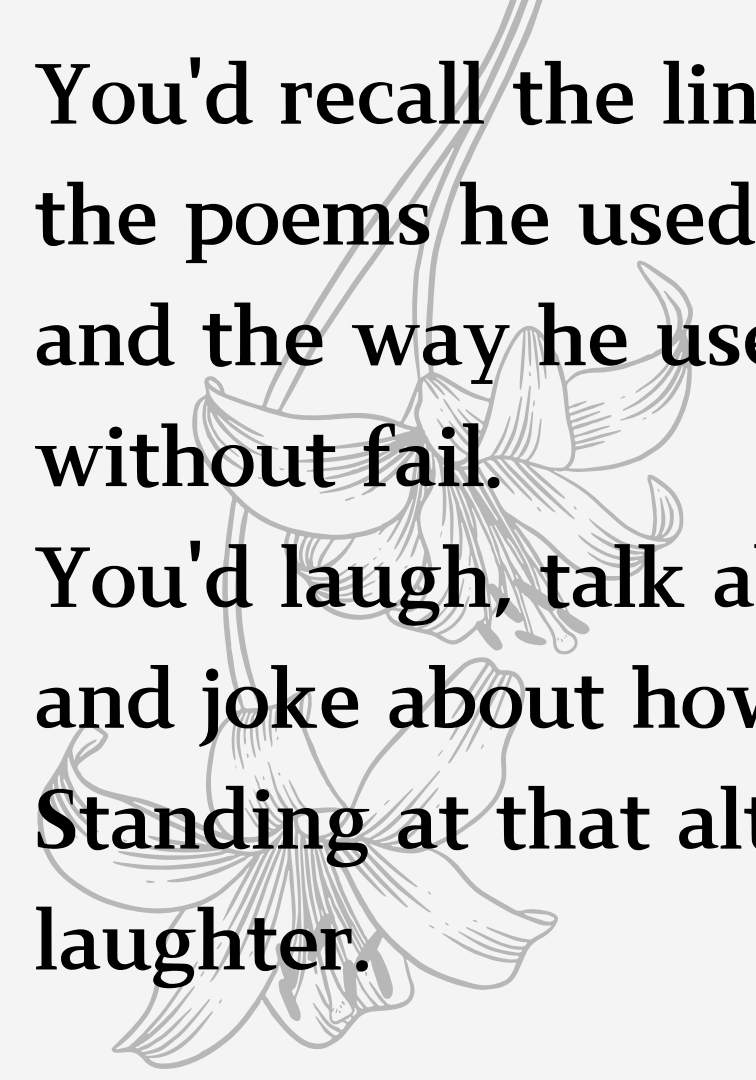
I cradle faded photographs of her in my hands,  
careful fingertips that caress her picture perfect  
frozen face.

I sit in the quiet glow of twilight,  
by the nightstand I had sat a cardboard box  
that was full of memories I keep visiting.

“I was only 20!” you’d say,  
you used to tell me tales of your life,  
how you failed, how you bounced back  
how you fell in love for the first time,  
And for all time with grandpa.

“Look, look at his smug face!”  
We’d laugh together at the pictures,  
as you’d hold them gently and point at him. I saw  
your blushing face hiding behind your veil,  
the way you gripped the bouquet of lilies.





You'd recall the lines of grandpa's face,  
the poems he used to write you,  
and the way he used to get you flowers every Friday,  
without fail.

You'd laugh, talk about the past  
and joke about how his jokes have become your past.  
Standing at that altar was your past, mine is your  
laughter.

Now, as I even out the edges of these photographs,  
I recognise how the sky has remained the same,  
how the grass has only grown longer.

Friday's dawn creeps up closer,  
I was too lost in moments deeply loved, but forever lost  
I set down your veil that I will wear  
with my wedding dress embroidered with little lilies,  
tomorrow at that same altar

Writing this poem I recall you both,  
Grandpa and Grandma,

Hoping that she forevermore can now laugh at his  
jokes,

And he can forever more recite to her, his poems. 14



BY BEN RAMAKRISHNAN

# My Mother's Perfume

my mother's perfume is the most beautiful smell  
in the world it fills my senses with spices,  
infatuates my world with herbs and incense, the  
world that my ancestors walked upon its  
saccharine aroma filling our home with chai and  
conversation

and so arrives the first day of school where i am  
still the bachcha i have always been and wish to  
remain forever yet older now - mature, stronger,  
perhaps wiser  
trusted with my mother's perfume

i spritz it with the love she gives it every morning  
with pride to walk in the air of her essence  
a smile on my face that i, too, can now uphold  
the saffron red crown of my mother

yet i have never been welcome in these linoleum  
hallways always the dirt beneath somebody's  
designer heel listlessly lethargic and superficially  
staring turns to laughs and jeers and ridicule - and  
even getting scared

for i am no maharaja if my hair is not golden blonde  
in the blue eyes of my classmates i am either a  
gangster or a terrorist - dealing drugs or dropping  
bombs i cannot tell if they are more scared of me or if  
i am more scared of them

so i return home to my masala chai and moong dal  
and scrub every trace of scent off of my monstrous  
body and to this day, my mother's perfume lies in her  
nightstand drawer, never to be touched by me again

Translations of Hindi words in this piece:

Bachcha: child

Maharaja: monarchical term in India (literal  
translation: great king)

Moong dal: yellow lentil dish



BY CASSANDRA CHAMBLESS

# I LIKE WINDOW SHOPPING WHEN THE WINDOWS ARE EMPTY

I like window shopping when the windows are  
empty

I walk around the town and look around only to see  
bear streets, broken glass panes and dust

However, the streets aren't totally bear

I still see the memories of what used to be

When we would walk around during the day and  
prowl at night

Even when light pollution clouded the dark skies we  
brightened them up

For it wasn't just a single effort but both of ours and  
our love for each other and the world

Now I walk these streets alone looking at what could  
have been

A family

New friends

A better life

I like window shopping when the windows are empty because much like your average window shopper when the shelves are full I yearn for what I can't have.

I pushed away I one I loved because my world felt on fire

But in the most amazing way possible

But I was scared, because the fire was spreading

It broke everything

My heart

And so I had to destroy the place I once loved

The person I once loved

Dust piled over the ashes of the burnt

The dark and decryped

And now I walk the streets reminiscing

Regret in full

Dreaming of what could have been



# THE REALM OF YOURS

BY AFRYNA

I prayed for this,  
and it was answered.

To become a better person, I lost the soul I've  
cherished.

I was put in front of the door.

Each time I take a step forward,  
I always glance back and ask,

“Why are you not accompanying me?”

And you replied,

“I can't. I am not destined to be on your next  
journey.”

I always pose the same question each time,  
ensuring that in the next journey,  
you will be there.

Yet with each step, the distance between us is  
getting longer.

Even if I have to shout,

I would.

I couldn't bear to lose you back then,

and now I can't bear to erase you from my  
memory.

I yearn to talk with you daily, as we once did.

Losing you shatters me,

but losing myself,

I fear, would be the ultimate defeat.

Your absence leaves a void that nothing else  
can fill.

The thought of forgetting you feels like a  
betrayal to the love we had.

And yet, I know I must find a way to live  
without you,

even if it means carrying this pain forever.



# Pomegranate Seeds

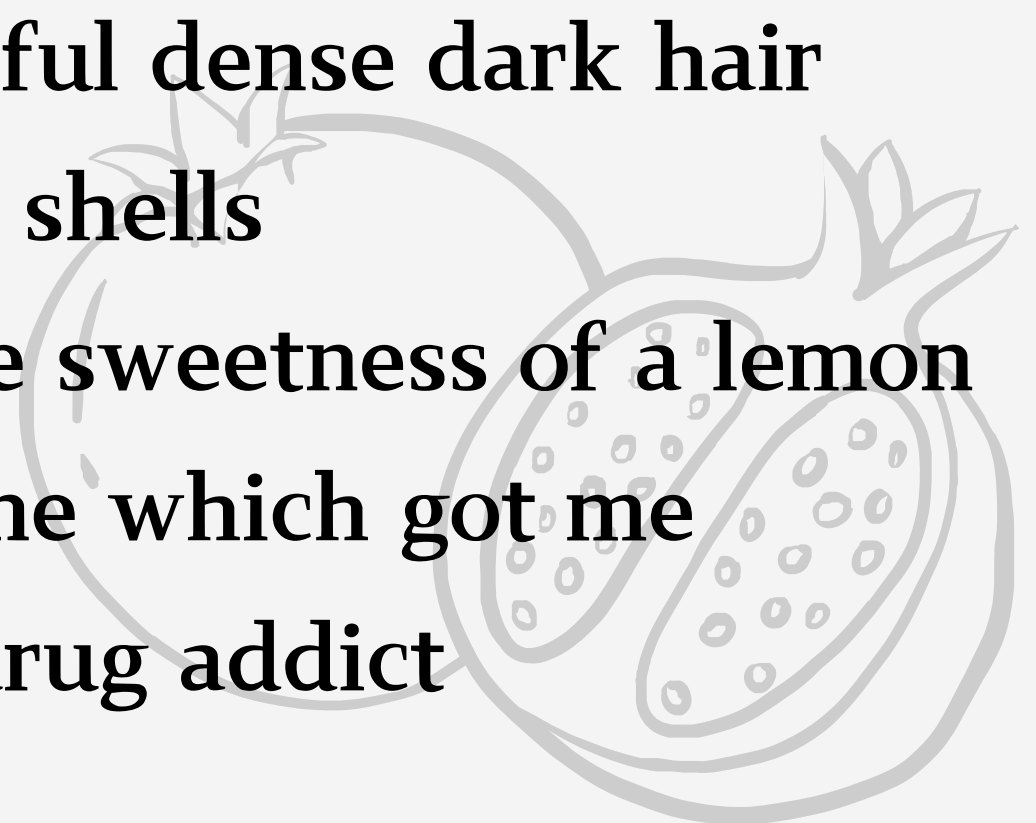
BY ARYA

He had an unusual mist of comfort  
all over his body  
where his rough hands felt like  
the Atlantis map I wanted to understand  
deeply.

The big sad eyes which gestured the purity  
within his core I wanted to look at it forever  
till I felt myself longing that day I wanted to  
have them engulfed within me

I felt his hair the beautiful dense dark hair  
curled up like them the shells

His rim felt like the rare sweetness of a lemon  
with a hint of grape wine which got me  
hooked up like an old drug addict



# *Glass Family,* BY VIDMAHI TANTRY *Glass's Child*

My family is a family made of glass,  
They shatter at the tiniest criticisms,  
of their prime minister, their culture, their  
god

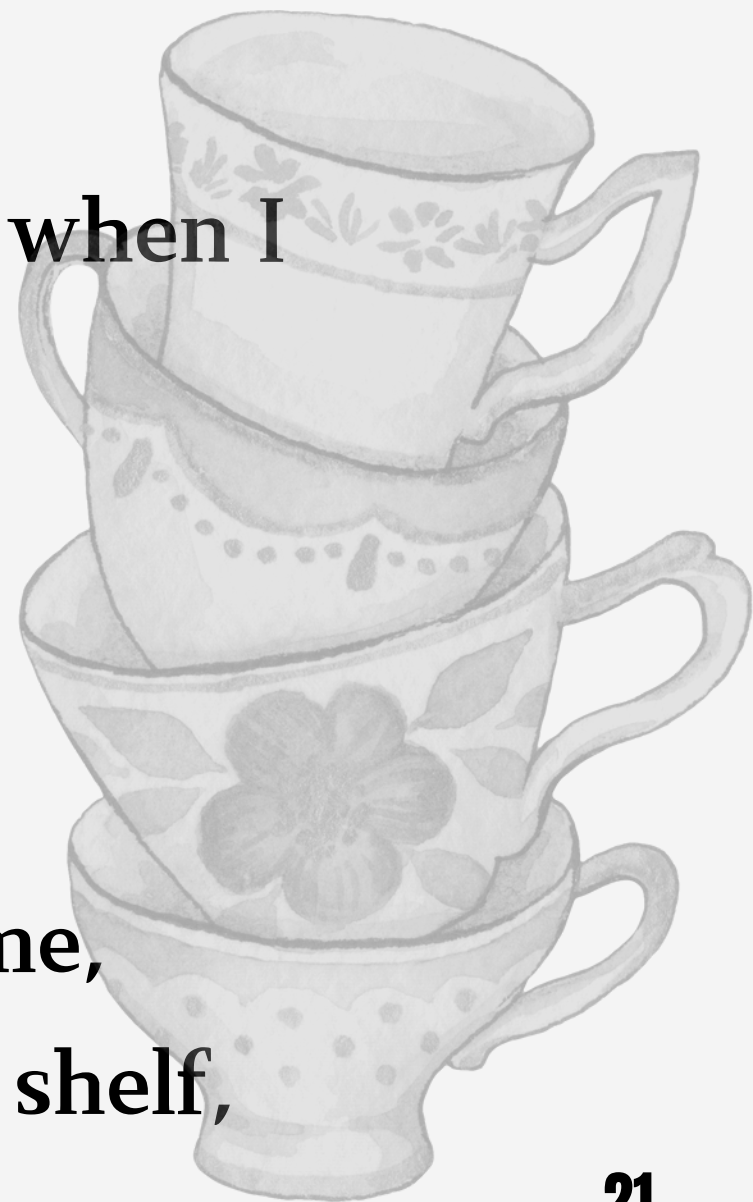
Thus, I was raised a glass child,  
I shatter at the tiniest criticisms,  
of my face, my decisions, my actions

I  
I stopped being my father's child when I  
turned thirteen,

I became his daughter.

I am no longer a glass child,

I am now a porcelain daughter,  
getting an education to fill my time,  
until I am dolled up and put on a shelf,





waiting for a man just like my father to come  
pick me

to be his lucky childbearer,  
until I shatter his daughter

Now, my father only ever talks to me  
to warn me about the perils  
of love, of other religions, of no religions.

He no longer appreciates my curiosity  
he just pressures me into religion,  
does he not realize that forcing it on me,  
will make me resent it more.

II

My mother hasn't aged past twenty-three,  
when she got married,

she always has mood swings,  
like a petulant teen

and I have to tip-toe around her because

anything can set her off.

My mother told me to have at least one kid,  
someone I can't vent to, like she does with me.

I told her I would get a therapist and she  
laughed

of course she doesn't believe in things like  
that

when I acted up,

they made me sit through five hours long  
pujas

until I hated all of it five times more

III

So,

I tip-toe around my glass family,

trying not to shatter them,

not now, at least.

because they will shatter when I escape,



and they will call me all sorts of names  
but hopefully, maybe, I will be building  
a life of my own,  
chipping away at the bad parts of all of it,  
and passing on the good.

There will be no more children burnt and  
cooled.

There will be no more glass children



# ANGEL IN THE MUSUEM



This picture was taken on film, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. during a school field trip. It is one of the many "pleasant memories from the past" that I still hold with me. I hold many memories from my past, my childhood. Some I wished last longer, some I wish were still alive. It hurts to look back sometimes. But the angel reassures me where they are and that I need to continue to hold my past with me. This angel is here to give you a message. Remember your past, no matter what. Even if you have lost someone you love, remember them. Even if it hurts. It will hurt more if you forget.

**BY VIRGINIA FONTANA**

# TURBULENCE **BY GLYDEL** **GAO**

during turbulence, we grip the handlebars of airplane seats as if they were the arms of our loved ones. in my instance, this ritual prepares for a nimble three weeks because ten years ago,

the same amount of time flew by, too.

the islands: clouds losing their shape.

is it even a home if i've rarely been?

born a stranger, my destiny is being  
a fraud who plunges into moments  
with an English tongue.

i speak the language of colonizers,  
only to forget who we were  
and who we are.

the art of being a skydiver  
is to trust your dive into nothing.

and you need to let yourself down  
easy or the sand between your toes  
will harden into sea glass,  
and it isn't the polished kind.

we make meteors out of empty promises.

i shiver too much to be a skydiver.

i fear the end of time too much  
i relieve the agony of waiting by wishing it's over.  
it means automatic time traveling.

clock hands whirl forward as i look backwards-

i can only believe time is a concept  
because we're trying to explain the unattainable.



still, i am stubborn,

and i can't help but look backwards.

the heart sinks faster when it's full

so when i look, everything drops,

and the parachute isn't working

and on the floor there's a younger me waiting, ignorant to  
the plummet of passing time,

and nostalgia hits me like a hurricane

so that the people on the other side

feel more like visions than actuality.

the wind calls me innocent and mortal.

in these moments,

i adapt to skydiving not as sport

but rather survival,

so when i hit terracotta,

i don't understand

the moment is no longer a "yet."

i am crushed under

the weight that time isn't forever

and in the split second

of meeting her eyes, i crush

her with me too.

one day i'll forget this.

one day i'll forget this.

one day i'll forget this.

one day we'll

forget everything.

My head bumped the seatbelt once my father braked the car. We've arrived home, the light of the front still on- That we didn't forget.

But my mother admits to a terrible beginning: Of fever dreams of her feet in the sand.

Our airplane rides are faraway treacheries.

We have all plunged deep below  
Into the abyss of our memories.





These photos are inspired by South Asian culture. Jewelry plays an important part in it. Every piece has its own significance and meaning, which I tried to portray.

**BY  
THARANYA**

# **GOLDEN LIFE**



# HOME

BY ARI KANJI

my grandma's curry holds itself on my tongue. it burns. aches. it twists itself down the pathways littered with toothbrush-sores and cracked teeth, slipping through the crevices molded by its twin flames. the smell of chili clutches the aging walls of a beehive working since birth and until death, a coffin of sorts where my long-gone ancestors will soon lay. i cough, an insult to the old woman sitting across the table, and i almost want her to pinch my rosy cheeks and accuse my skin of whitening as we speak, to the colors of the lipstick bottles perched on the vanity in a childhood bedroom down the hall. a. no, hers. but she hasn't haunted that room in years.

the samosas are warming in a microwave that's seen countless explosions, meat dripping from its curves like the remains of a ravenous beast's dinner after midnight has slipped past. they were chilled to the bone when we handed off the packages, and now they rise to warmth, steam buckling off hills with hooves for feet. as children with spice baked into sugary hands from years of sprinkling paprika on kebabs and sliding chicken off of sticks, our fingers are bent with age our minds do not possess. for today, we run until the clock strikes seven, and then we curl our fists against a steel bowl and scoop hills into our stomachs until they burn.

the aged digits twist around each other and press until semi-circles dig into palms, tracing leftover bits of beef on the small of each other's hands. the yellowing sphere holds flecks of fire. the grinning children hold bits of flames. they'll crinkle away to ash eventually, but for now, the matches are well lit. words pass from mouth to mouth in a hushed but communal whisper, a command. the yellow beats. a small quiver. Amen. the rise and fall of the syllables is different. warm. rising. her voice is slightly raised, slightly louder, rustic and wobbly. a path crossed thousands of times until feet bend and twist. ankles raw. her skin stretches into a slow smile and the golden sphere freezes.

light burns through the edges of my vision. ankles crack against aging wood, against semi-circles dug into half-open palms. a coffin of other sorts, smooth wood splitting paper cuts into open wounds. the samosas vanish first, scooped by little hands unbroken and fluorescent. the kabobs are chewed in violent heat, teeth pointed by elementary school sharpeners. the plates vanish. the cutlery clatters against the rim of the sink. i start to wonder who else will be haunting this house. i start preparing the flowers. i start packing away the spice jars and cleaning the residue from between my fingertips. the microwave is pulled apart like an abandoned carcass lying ruined on the side of a road, skeletal figure peeking through the raw skin. my grandma's curry dissolves itself on my tongue. the aftertaste is sharp. i wash it out until it burns.

# MAMA

BY ELIZABETH

MML

1

The Honda's doors slam shut. Out comes our family of four. A summer haze mercilessly burns us. Groggy huffs escape my cheeks while we trek to refuge ahead: a brown, concrete restaurant with a working AC. The restaurant's name hadn't dawned on me yet. Familiar, red, Chinese characters were written on a dim-lit, cheap sign, but what mattered was the cool air inside.

The nostalgia hit me when the smell did. Picante smoke and Chinese five spice lure me through the restaurant's glass doors. A steel bell rings a greeting. Beaming workers stop sweeping to wave with wrinkly digits. My family's high-pitched squeals greet them in return. In thrilled utters, the workers usher my family and me to the deli cases. I narrowly twist around a potted plant before stopping by the register.

"How long has it been?" I murmured breathlessly. "Three years, maybe?"



So much can happen in such little time. I changed. Evolved (and not in a good way), but the fragrant restaurant was the same as I remembered. As if the place was frozen in time.

Behind the cases were smokey grills aligning the walls. Steam billowed from the oily woks sitting on pillows of roaring flames. Adjacent to them were boiling pots of umami broth whistling through their lids. Licorice-like, earthy smoke tickled my nostrils, almost lifting me over the counter.

My heels rise then stop before lowering back down shamefully. Toes tap together rhythmically. Fingers fiddle while I suck in my lower lip, guilty that the intoxicating scent tempted me.

Both sides of my family love cooking, especially for me. Their kitchens smelled delicious until one day, it turned poisonous. The freshly baked dishes tasted spoiled as if they molded after leaving the stove. Formerly mouthwatering scents tasted bitter on my parched tongue-

I shake my head. Now's not the time for bad memories. It isn't like that now, but remnants of my former programming lingered. Like the bitter aftertaste of espresso. Caffeine shooting adrenaline and regret into my veins.

A baggy, floral blouse shields my pointy rib cages. I cup them to mute the grumbling underneath. It's deafened when the room explodes into foreign conversation. It's broken, word puzzles; ones I failed to connect fluently. Embarrassment puffs my flushed cheeks. My mom can't understand either, but she has an excuse. She originates from another culture and avoids expectations unlike me.

But me? I'm a failure. My cousins can piece together the puzzles except for me; however, I've accepted that realization. Mostly.

Haphazardly, the word pieces mismatched enough to understand some greasy delights: suckling, mouth-watering, crunchy pork with curry-dipped fish balls, and my favorite marinated duck swimming in bubbling, sweet, soy ponds. I didn't relish the achievement. Instead, I grumble and frown. A tug of war raged in my head between repulsive hunger and satisfying gluttony.

“People used to say I'd eat like a cow,” I scowled. “Or how my stomach is a black hole.”

I started denying food. Why? To blindly sculpt my skeleton into the image I've constructed in brain fog. Chisel those hips. Too fat. Remove my rib cages. Too thin. Doing anything else was too in-between, and not to mention, my freckles were ugly, too. Asians are clear, fair, pale, but not me. Asians are blossomed, graceful, unblemished, like fine china, in contrast to my rectangular build. Worrying over meaningless comments seemed petty in the grand scheme of terrible circumstances; however, like water seeping into a sponge, criticism slipped through. It's how I began dissociating, distancing, distracting myself with nonsensical mechanisms.

My catlike eyes play hopscotch with the Maneki Nekos and Budai statues facing the walls colored viridescent marble. The distraction pulls me from the gluttony, but a whiney voice calls my name through the fog.

My father's mom, who we call Mama, tugs my arm. Arthritis locked her cracking joints, but an iron grip shackles my wrist and twists me to the deli cases. Her minuscule figure casts a shadow.



over me like a tree shielding me from the sun. I've outgrown her, but I still feel like a bright-eyed toddler.

Suddenly, I'm six, and she's almost eighty again. I'm waddling like a penguin beside her, just tall enough to reach her belly button, and shyly point at the menu. My thick, puffy palms grasped open air, pretending to grab the plates. Sickeningly innocent, happy squeals and bumbles beg for food. The workers remarked how chubby my cheeks were which turned them pink.

“What a fat, happy baby,” they cooed and giggled. Fat. Happy. Those words don't mix.

My gaunt fingers trace cadaverous cheekbones, dipping into the caverns, slowing down at the dimples, and stopping at my jawline's sharp curvature. It could slice through paper. Hot chagrin painted my flesh pink as Mama's frown deepened. I wanted to drown in my fabrics and hide beneath the waves. Did the workers see how thin I've gotten, too? They wouldn't recognize the fat, happy baby I was long ago.

I didn't even recognize myself.

This wasn't supposed to happen. A lovely, family outing isn't the right time for an existential crisis, but my body doesn't listen. The room blurred into color splotches. A lump lodged in my throat as a drum pounded in my chest. My eyes stopped playing hopscotch with the Buddha statues. Instead, they dance across my family members. One by one, the workers gasp in realization and exclaim how it's been so long. (All I heard is how they haven't seen me, haven't seen me this thin). Their brief glimpses drill into my skull. I must've imagined it, but I swore their pupils judgmentally glistened. I wouldn't blame them if they did.

“Ling,” Mama calls me by my Cantonese name. She asks, “You okay?”

4

Her English is worse than my Cantonese, always missing contractions and skipping over conjunctions, but the message rings clear and proud. She doesn't hold back her struggle like I do.

“Ling, bao (bread)?” She eyes me up and down, rubbing my bony arms. “Too skinny...”

Frustration. Guilt. Shame, and I am to blame. A bullseye right on my insecurities. Muscles formally wrapped around the bones. I was strong alone. My skeleton boasted armor; now, the calcite crumbles as she reads me like a book.

Mama and I communicate in broken speech. A hodgepodge of syllables that sounded alien to untrained ears. So, how do I tell her? How do I tell my grandma my pain when my parents can't even understand it in English?

I bite back my lip. I wanted to say, “You're right, Mama. I have grown thin. I lost my appetite years ago.”

Instead, my lips purse thinner than the width of a chopstick. My head shakes. Her droopy eyelids crease worriedly.

“Ngo hou (I'm fine),” I say repeatedly. She reluctantly surrenders but keeps an arm around mine, almost like I'd float away like a balloon if she didn't hold on.

Jade jewelry dangles around Mama's wrinkly wrists, matching her silky, oversized shirt that she brought from Guangzhou. She smooths her silvery, chin-length hair and scrutinizes each dish with midnight orbs. Like a pearl, a glistening aura surrounds her, aged fine like wine. Could I be as breathtaking as her when I'm old?



Mama finishes ordering and turns to me with a smile. Her bony digits grip my cheeks and squish them to my dismay. I awkwardly let her and pout in retaliation.

5

“Ahh, so pretty. Come, come.” She drags me to the wall, away from my parents who are still ordering, and slips something smooth into my palm.

“Big girl now,” she explained and removed her hand, revealing the red, glistening envelope decorated in gold. “Ahh, sap gau sei (nineteen years old). So big, so big.”

I awkwardly chuckle and try to return the envelope. I wanted to say, “Give it to a cousin more deserving of me. Someone fatty who can speak our language. Someone who fits the culture I've failed to carry.”

But she shoves it back in my palm and insists. My lips fumble with gratitude. Stubborn woman. I can never fight her.

We wait on an oak bench for our takeout. I haven't processed the envelope tucked in my pocket. If I start, I'll break down again. I nearly play another game of dissociation until I notice Mama.

Mama cradles her black purse close like it's a baby, a habit she developed while in poverty. Hong Kong was relentless, but Honolulu wasn't much better. Every time she was mugged, Dad said she held onto her purse so tight that the muggers had to swing her into a tree till she let go. They were likely twice her size and picked on someone half their strength. I lower my head defeatedly, eyeing the money in my pocket. The change my Mama fought so hard to protect.

I'm so ungrateful.

Mama had no choice but to starve. She sacrificed everything to get a sample of the meals I enjoy today.

I wasn't fat. I was full. Full of joy and laughter. Like the workers said, I was a fat, happy baby. Losing weight meant losing all of the blubber that kept me warm. Every day began feeling like winter.

6

Why? Why did I throw my happiness away?

To be beautiful? To be thin? To be accepted?

The restaurant explodes into laughter. They're pointing, judging, without looking my way, but the only pair of eyes on me were Mama's.

I sacrificed my weight to have control over my life. Because I couldn't change the color of my skin. I couldn't change people's perceptions. I couldn't change my family's backgrounds.

Perhaps I could've learned three languages, but it was hard. It was hard holding three accents, three languages, three lives. But starving myself; that was easy. Succumbing to hunger. Watching the numbers drop. Those were easy.

Tears fought to release. I glimpse at Mama and hold her hand without a word. She understands.

I was—am, a failure. I couldn't learn either of my languages. I couldn't mold with either community. Too dark to be Chinese. Too white to be Filipino. I never fit in with either of my cultures. Never grew into my multiracial skin. Instead, I dragged the flesh around like a deflated suit.

In the middle of self-pity, I went to a school where Asians were few and stereotyping was plenty. A lovely, well-educated school that I'd choose in a heartbeat, but my town was different before more immigrants entered. People were ignorant. People undermined my accomplishments as a byproduct of my ethnicity. People assumed my parents glimmered in gold and success when we drowned in negative numbers.

People stared at my lunch, questioning the sticky rice with luncheon meat and seaweed, and that stung the most. Food was the one connection between my culture. The one way I could communicate with my grandma, and my insecurities ruined it.

I starved to achieve the perfect hourglass figure but lost all of my muscle. All of my strength and energy to drag myself out of bed. If I could redo it all, I'd wish for more time. I'd make the best of



my teenagehood that my Mama lost. I'd never starve myself, so I could avoid this painful recovery

Mama cups my hand with hers. I never told her, but she doesn't need me to. She always understood despite our different tongues. In fact, we had our own language. If I was happy, I'd finish my food. If I wasn't, there would be leftovers, and for the past three years, my plates were never empty.

“Mama?” I mutter. She hums. “Ngo oi nei (I love you).”

The accent's imperfect, yet Mama chortled and returned the affection. I relish the achievement. A nostalgic, accepting smile slowly forms. Suddenly, I turn to my parents waiting feet away, giggling quietly to each other. They compromised their cultural differences while raising me despite what everyone said. While our life doesn't glimmer with gold, it's rich with happiness.

I wasn't—am never, a failure. Rather, I succeeded in conquering the scale and slowly, but surely, regaining my appetite. I succeeded in bridging the cultural gaps between my family. I succeeded in teaching ignorant people, becoming someone my younger self would be proud of.

I realize people weren't solely ignorant. Just curious. People hesitated but tried and loved my lunches. People praised my dedication without remarking on my skin color. People complimented my accent and gasped in awe at my unique heritage. And most importantly, people loved me, especially the old woman holding my hand now.

Like me, Mama wonders about time. She doesn't have much time left, so the rest of her days are spent cooking and nagging us. My cousins understand her pestering perfectly and grow annoyed and bitter, but my ignorance is bliss. I receive the soft end of her prickly nature, like the mushy insides of a cactus. Whenever she quietly extends an arm around mine, I never worry about getting pricked. With how sharp my ribcages are, I might as well be a cactus, too.

Mama cuddles against my side and sighs. She holds onto me like I'd fly away because one day, it'll be her turn, and we can't pull her back down. However, Mama doesn't worry about that. She worries if I've eaten.

“You ate breakfast? Lunch?” She inquired. I laughed and nodded to her relief. Mama murmured faintly about cooking for me this weekend. I wish I loved myself as much as she loved me.

My entire life is a fraction of hers, but I know her life fully started when I was born. Despite her tribulations, I couldn't find a sliver of regret in Mama's eyes. She's happy with where she is now.

I hold my ribcages. Perhaps I can learn a couple of things from that?

“Food’s ready!” My dad exclaims, holding up a plastic bag filled with styrofoam goodies: suckling, mouth-watering, crunchy pork with curry-dipped fish balls, and my favorite marinated duck swimming in bubbling, sweet, soy ponds. I didn't try to hide my rumbles.

Mama and I stand up, fingers intertwined, while my parents walk us to the door. In thrilled utters, the workers wave farewell, delighted to see how we've grown. How I've grown. Not a judgmental curve was spotted in their grins.

The door dings farewell. My parents, hand-in-hand, stroll ahead while Mama and I dawdle behind, elbows interlocked. As the restaurant’s fragrance fades in the distance, I swing the crunching, styrofoam containers back and forth. I look both ways before helping Mama cross the road; she isn't as fast as she used to be. However, she's strong, and I am, too.


She grins appreciatively and pulls me tight. Black spaces separated her teeth, but her smile never felt incomplete. I return the gesture and rub my ribcages, eyeing the food swinging beside my hips. I'd tell Mama how hungry I am, but I don't have to.

She already understands.



# A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

BY OCEAN P.C. BOUDREAU




Tomatoes ripe and bursting with flavor,  
Carrots pulled from the earth, their colors to savor,  
Peas popped in my mouth, so sweet and green,  
Each bite, a taste of pure, simple cuisine.


The air was filled with the hum of bees,  
Amongst the flowers and the buzzing trees,  
I felt a sense of peace and content,  
In that garden where time seemed to relent.

I remember the garden of my grandparents,  
A sanctuary of green abundance,  
Where the sun danced on the leaves

And the air was sweet with the promise of ripe vegetables



The taste of summer on my lips,  
A memory etched in my heart,  
Those lazy days of endless exploration  
In the garden of my grandparents.



Time stood still in that verdant oasis  
A sanctuary of simplicity and joy,  
Where the only soundtrack was the rustle of leaves



And the distant hum of bees.

The scent of earth and summer air,  
Wrapped me in a cozy, familiar flair,

Melodies of birds and bees,

Serenade me under shady trees.

I close my eyes and I am there again,

A child in a garden of plenty,

Where the worries of the world melted away,

And all that mattered was the taste of summer.



# BUILDING HOPE

BY BIANCA

In the eastern land of Europe, in a country silenced by some  
Troubadours chant about Romania, a tale of mist and lore  
Where the Carpathians rise and barely scratch the lovely night sky,  
Revealing the Black Sea, a spotless mirror opening to the eye of God;  
Along the shaky paths, we forge our bridges, grand and wide,  
A symbol of our nation's unshaken determination and infinite pride.

From the misty peaks of Transylvania

To the splendid hills and plains in the far border of Moldavia...

Behold!

The magic of the chanting forest breathing from now on

Accompanied by the waters of our past, running deep and fast,

The relief connects the future to the past, telling a breathing story of power  
and might.

From a rich mosaic of gorgeous sights, heritage presents itself

Our Dacian roots addressing the legend-a battalion of strong men,

That traced back centuries ago, in every arch and stone,

The story of our people's courage and trust, laying the path with hope;

To set the stage for a world made out of fruitful light,

One must raise a bridge so indestructible

That keeps away even the darkness of a monstrous fight...

In the whispers that bend the sacred height of the fierce mountain of time  
And the corners where the Danube sprints, chasing faith and dreams,  
We regain our stolen strength, our unshaken unity,  
As in every stoic bridge appears the young mind adorned with serenity;

So, through the ages tarnished by war and grief  
We've built a palace of incandescent beliefs and pledged our loyalty  
To value freedom and protect what the unknown yields...

Oh, sweet home, land of fallen leaves,  
We cherish thee with all we've got, taking part in your fiery start  
To build bridges, when hope is finally allied.  
Connecting the gaps between time and space,  
Uniting together every man, little or grand,  
Forging an alliance-just and strong.

From Rome's vibrant history and battles fought by mighty deities  
Along with its prosperous identity,  
We create unique tapestries soaked in blood and wishes of steel;  
In every forgotten village, in every crowded town  
We've built with hands both rough and skilled,  
A testament to dreams fulfilled, a prayer for the world to hear...

Through winters embracing the cold and summers drenched in the warmth,  
We prepared a renewed land of stone  
Where nature's boundless beauty meets the roaring Black Sea,  
Demanding mankind to create a true destiny.



So let us cherish every dream that takes flight, Romanian people!  
For as we build the bridge of time, presenting a possibility so bright,  
With only one fearful step our spirits grow so high,  
Reaching with pure bliss the endless sky;

In the end, the hopes and dreams of all men collide  
Giving birth to a love, forever deep and wide,  
But we, humans, have gone a long way to comprehend the importance of life  
In a static war of bridges that vie with the greatest rival, time...

# A MESSAGE & FINDING YOU

BY SEA

a message - 18.03.23

once again I try to tell her,  
'what do you want from me?',  
with candied lips  
and a sunshine whip of her smile,  
she hands me a plastic phone:  
'i don't know how to play this anymore',  
she's wearing a blue carpet moustache  
blocking a glorious sunset  
talking in crisp packets,  
splashing me with sea froth;  
a seagull poops on my head  
and i fall between the gaps of her  
hand games,  
sound, her pet, betrays me:  
this already a memory?  
she wants me to worship her,  
to come out dancing with no shoes on,  
well i've a trick up my sleeve:  
'and what of the glass? don't tell me you  
forgot?', i shout,  
'besides, you look like no one i've ever  
known'

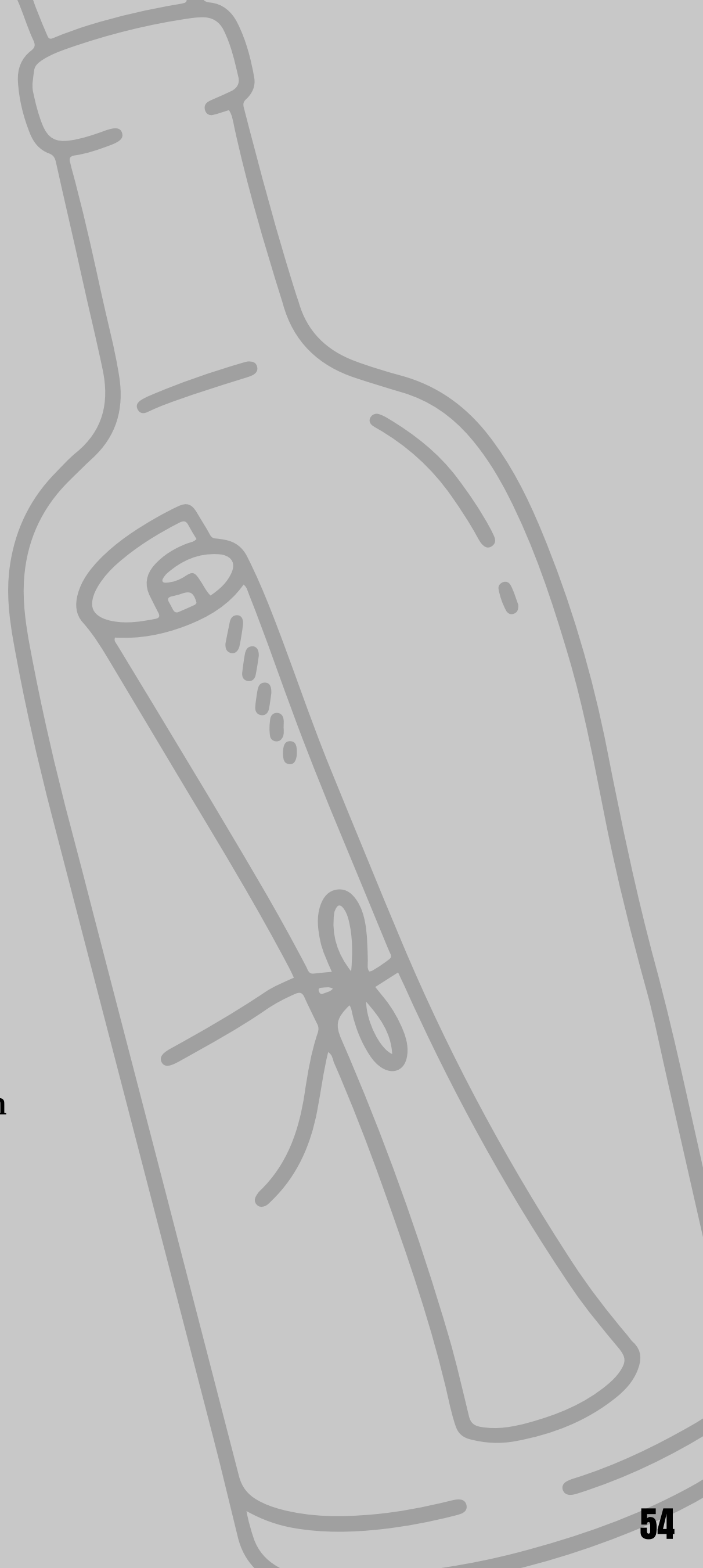
but she gets me again with the grass  
and the auburn brick  
splashed in day's orange secrets,  
stories whipping past my ear  
on a gust of homely wind,  
and i can taste the lemon ice cream,  
the chippy's saveloy;  
japan reminds me that it's happening  
now  
and what have i to show for it?

for a second, she's gone  
i wait a little longer  
and feel a hint of her breath on my ear  
still no conclusion  
just a message on a plastic answer  
phone;  
the past was calling.

finding\_you - 23.03.23

kindness was calling  
she wanted me to find you  
to hold your hand, little one  
we're so close now,  
our friends never turned their backs  
not even when we couldn't work  
together  
to bite off a piece of the earth,

they were here  
they are here  
they hear us  
and we hear them  
understood their sound  
while we fell  
into the laps of their cat's cradle  
because i feel you now,  
your mysterious existence,  
felt you from a gust of your  
dark hair touched auburn  
by sun's orange spectacle  
feel her age in your wise tan  
i touched the tip of your finger  
and for a second, our two worlds  
became one;  
an eruption, a collision; energy  
finding itself between rocks  
on strings, i listen  
and i pull their matter, i bite them  
round with pleasure  
her sunshine smile was kind,  
and i'm putting on those  
dancing shoes and finding you  
in glass.



# THE VOID YOU LEFT BEHIND

BY RIDDHIMA DAS

Shadows lengthen where you once stood,  
a silence deafens where your laughter rang.  
In this twilight of grief, I've misunderstood  
how deeply your absence would pang.  
Compass needle spins without true north,  
your guiding light extinguished too soon.

Adrift on life's sea, I venture forth,  
but find myself howling at the moon.

Memories flicker like dying embers,  
warmth fading with each passing day.

My heart desperately clings and remembers  
the words we'll never again say.

In crowded rooms, I've never felt so alone,  
a ghost among the living, I roam.

Without you, this world's not my home,  
lost in a life that's no longer our poem.

Yet in this void, your essence lingers still,  
a whisper of hope in the darkness I feel.

Though gone, your spirit helps fulfill  
the promise of a heart that will heal.



# MAYBE IN ANOTHER UNIVERSE? BY AVANTHIKA

I saw you waiting for me around the corner,  
with your head in your phone,  
your legs bouncing on the ground,  
and your little excitement when you noticed me.

It was our first date,  
unsure of where to go,  
you took me walking through all the streets you knew,  
telling me stories about you.

Talking about mostly nothing,  
the conversations never actually ended,  
nothing new, nothing old, nothing miserable,  
just two teenagers,  
who figured they liked each other,  
wanting to spend a little more time together.

And somehow, the best day I had with you,  
turned out to be the last day we had together.

# SMOKE AND MIRRORS

BY ELLE P. HUGHES

At high heat, olive oil smokes and burns,  
not like the smell of bread harding to scrape soft paths across your mouth  
like the tracks in our garden,  
But like the summer heat in Greek mountains,  
where mulberry trees are the only things surviving, and struggling bees are  
the only things feeding  
on fallen fruit.

My Baba's yiayia said once to him: Pour the oil until it looks right,  
so his arm, hesitant, stayed pouring liquid gold - like her olive skin - into  
the pot, until the dandelion greens,  
Picked from empty new country countryside,  
are submerged entirely in a golden window.  
Proyiayia always made the best greens.  
When we make them they are always too tough  
She would say: Alexi, you picked them too late, tall greens make beautiful  
flowers,  
but not beautiful meals.

When I pour the oil I stop when the leaves are lightly coated in gold,  
because they, like me,  
are only an American iteration,  
of old Greek flavor.

I turn on the heat too high, and watch the gold bubble and froth, spitting  
like embers on my arms, soon to leave little white constellations.  
From the study, I hear my Baba begin his rumble, like a bear from  
hibernation- to the kitchen.

Kouklitsamou! Is something burning?

I hurriedly turn down the heat, but the pot still smokes, my own SOS as the cross breeze in the kitchen blows grey dancing plumes toward a photograph on the wall,

Of a distant old Thea, from when the village was not just bees and mulberries but people, goats, and homemade feta and olives,

She shakes her pan of grain, smiling softly at the scalded greens.

My Baba wraps one of his arms, soft and dwarfing around my shoulders.

Koukla, where is the oil?

I try to explain to him that I put enough to coat the leaves- he tisks.

Όχι, he shakes his head, you must pour the oil until

It looks

right:

I lift our bottle, and he removes the lid

I pour. I pour and pour until the oil must be as deep as my little finger across the entire pan,

I pour and pour until our faces are reflected in the soft golden mirror,

His darker face next to my ambiguous one.

Perfect kouklitzamou, now try it on low heat.

And I do, the pan does not burn me white this time,

it bubbles into an undulating mirror,

Casting my face into golden olive tones.

At low heat,

The kitchen fills with the soft scent of uncured olive,

And I am back in Greece,

Family olive orchards, barefooted, and my own yiayia is saying to me,

Look, Ella,

You have the feet of a real greek, even with your foreign nose.

I smile at her and wiggle my toes in the dust.

Crinkling my lighter eyes and smiling wide beneath my foreign nose,  
In front of us is an outdoor stove, and from it wafts the soft scent of olive  
oil,  
Soft olive mirror,  
Simmering in comfortably low, rolling heat.

# A BURNT CHILD LOVES THE FIRE

BY ISHITA SHUKLA

Light peeps through the window... I'm not sure what to make of it. The little gleam it brings with itself... Or the darkness it is yet to discover... Which just makes the gleam not good enough...

Curse it as you would to your not-so-good enough child...

They'll probably do their best to prove themselves but boy who cares..

You wonder what has changed.

You think you know them thoroughly. Do you still think the same when

You know you weren't there to wipe their tears...

Do you regret leaving them alone when All the things they had to silently bear? They cried for help, didn't they?

You heard that didn't you...

Why did you choose to do it?

Why did you decide to leave it?

Now it's too late for regret.

Because burnt child loves the fire, they said... Each home was in ashes as she stepped...

Her dreams made her want to kill herself.

Despite you knowing all this she was left alone..

Maybe that's what made her heart and soul  
turn told.

After all, the ashes were indeed  
unbearable..

She demanded unconditional love and complete freedom  
maybe that's why she's terrible.



# JESSICA

BY MADELINE ROSALES

One of the first books I remember was 1000 Fun and Unbelievable Facts—an oversized affair whose letters lurched off its cover, primed to spill into my doughy palms. Jessica and I spent afternoons tracing the headings with sea-foam-soft fingers, sounding out the impossible four-syllable words. Moths lack stomachs, and thus mostly drink liquids like nectar. An African elephant only has four teeth. Goldfish may eat each other when under stress.

\*\*\*

Now, my mother and I bury Jessica on the riverbank. We should have done it on Sunday, right after we killed her, but it was 10 p.m. and neither of us trusted the dark. So instead, we covered her with a towel, left our clothes to soak in cold water and went to sleep.

My mother had first suggested floating her down the river bend for the fish to eat, but I thought that was disrespectful as fuck, and we were family. Jesus Christ. She was your child.

So now we haul her body into the mist-drenched morning and shovel the bank until we can roll her in.

When we killed her, my mother said that she had stopped being Jessica long ago, and it's not murder if the victim isn't technically "alive." And I told her that morality shouldn't skirt around technicalities.

I drag Jessica by her clammy hands, legs streaking through the mud. Her mouth is frozen open in a gash, and I imagine her hunger accumulating against her tongue, exploding between her lips and leaving her behind. The back of my throat burns.

I lay her in the hole and pick up the shovel with my raw icicle fingers. Jessica stares up at me, eyes blank, blood a black crust on her shirt. We were always identical. The same widow's peak and gently sloping nose, twin sets of braids brushing our backs. Jessica-and-Jennifer.

We were the other's reflection. When we were little, we dressed the same to confuse our mother. In the end, she stopped calling us by name and directed her words to whoever was in the room. You, help me wash the dishes. You, take your shoes off before entering the house.

I pour dirt over Jessica's face, our face, first.

\* \* \*

People online say it's a rot from the inside, decaying you until you crave flesh to fill the emptiness left behind. I say it doesn't matter anyway. This is what matters: Jessica's body buckled into itself as she wasted away organs-first, emaciated throat swallowing her pulse, mouth opening and closing like a fish's gills out of water. Jessica ate half our goldfish and spit their bones outside my bedroom door so I saw them when I woke. Jessica reached for my arm across the dinner table and tried to take a bite.

She was not the first like this. The disease originated in the countryside, spread to the city, and exploded from there. Children ate their parents. Parents ate their children. Businesses shut down, and people quarantined inside their homes, leaving only to steal from whatever stores had more stock than bloodstains on the floor.

This was my mother's job now— leaving three times a week to trawl the abandoned shopping centers, running her fingers down the empty shelves, tiles echoing below her feet. Two weeks ago, I wouldn't have let her go alone. Before Jessica shriveled into a shell. Before I wrestled her down as our mother slit her throat with a kitchen knife, blood seeping tar-thick out of the wound— long-stagnant in its veins. This was because in April, after a trip to Costco, I had found our mother hiding a pack of ham in a floorboard under her bed. I shoved her aside and shook her shoulders until they drained bloodless in my fists, yelling that you can't just hoard all the food, goddammit. What about me? What about us? Just stay home next time. I'll split the portions. My God.

From then, until Jessica got sick, she and I made grocery runs. We had one bike, so each trip we traded pedaling and sitting on the back, knees cramped, bony arms around the other's waist. Whoever was on the back brought the backpack for carrying food. In the earlier weeks, it bulged with soup cans and crushed bags of chips, zippers straining over the Double Stuffed Oreos Jessica loved. By June, it hung around our shoulders like a husk of skin.

On one of our last trips, we lingered in the Walmart aisle, bag on the floor, a single can of sardines in Jessica's hands. She turned it back and forth, reading the label: WILD CAUGHT & SUSTAINABLE; 170 calories per serving; 1 serving per container.

Two weeks expired, but we were long past caring.

Jessica weighed the can in her palm. "Mom never liked fish."

"No, she didn't."

Jessica ran her fingernail along the can's tab. "Eighty-five calories if we split it evenly. Eleven grams of protein each."

I kicked the bag down the aisle.

The can peeled open, fish and brine permeating salt-thick through the air.

“I think murder does something to you.” I say this to my mother as we wait inside the laundromat, our bloodied clothes spinning themselves pure. She stands against the wall, arms crossed. The blue-green fluorescents highlight the wrinkles in her face, and she looks like someone else, older and paler and thinner, her cheekbones stark against skin.

“I already told you. ‘S not murder.”

The washing machine—somehow still in service—clatters.

“You know what I mean.”

She walks to it and peers inside.

“I feel like she’s still watching us. Like I’ll turn a corner and she’ll be there, blood all the way down her chest.”

My mother checks the digital clock on the wall, the display frozen at 2:33 p.m.

“Guess that’s guilt.”

“Do you think she still recognized us?”

My mother doesn’t look away from the clock.

\* \* \*

Growing up, our mother left Jessica and me at home while she rushed to whatever job she was trying to keep. We had no television, and we weren’t allowed to go outside, so we spent the long afternoons roaming around the house.

Our favorite game was hide and seek, even though the cramped apartment had few places to crawl into— few holes to fill. Still, we took turns being “It,” facing a corner and counting up to ten. Back then, danger had a countdown. A warning. Jessica always hid behind the curtains in our mother’s bedroom, but I made a show of searching each corner, turning over pans in the kitchen, cushions in the living room. The goal was never finding each other. We only delighted in the search— the rambling turns, the promise of something at the end. After picking through each corner, I’d wander into our mother’s room to see Jessica, silhouetted against white, shadow languid on the floor. I never mentioned how the light revealed her body, crouched against the wall. But she was always too vulnerable.

Once, I tried to surprise her, sneaking to the window and grabbing her through the curtain. My fists clenched around her neck as cloth closed around her head. Her mouth gasped wet against white. Her limbs pummeled blindly. I flinched back, and she tumbled out of the curtain, coughing into the floor. She pushed me in the chest.

“Sorry!” I shielded myself with my arms. “It was an accident! Promise I didn’t mean to.” She cuffed my shoulder, and I stumbled to the side, feet tangling in the rug. “You can get me back, okay? Okay?”

Jessica, smiling now, shoved me into the curtain. I thudded against the wall, breath punching out from my lungs. I turned my head, and there was the ring of Jessica’s spit, translucent in the sun.

\* \* \*

Noon beats down on us in a blast of dry heat, and I sit in front of our fish tank, watching the lone goldfish drift. Most of the ones left by Jessica had died when we ran out of fish food, and I dumped their limp bodies in the yard. Buried them like a trove of gold coins, earth swallowing the price of her decay.



The radiator wheezes in tepid gusts, and the television buzzes with static. None of the channels broadcast anymore, and even the static is spotty at best, but I like the white noise when it works. A constant background thrum. Something to focus on other than starving.

My mother leans against the wall, dangling a cigarette out the open window. I fan the air in front of me. “That shit is gonna kill you.”

She lifts the cigarette to her lips and inhales deeply. “Better than being eaten alive.” The cherry glows like a drop of blood on skin.

I stand and fold my arms behind my back. “Did you know goldfish can cannibalize each other?

When water temperatures rise too high, or when there isn’t enough food?” Maybe I should have left the fish corpses. The survivors might have lasted.

My mother exhales out the window, and smoke curls around her upper lip like a ghost of breath. “Brutal.”

The television static fizzes out.

\* \* \*

In the evening, I lie in the bathtub and wrap my arms around my chest. Our stock of stolen ramen ran out two days ago, and the hunger gnaws at me, corroding my ribs. I hold my breath and slide deeper into the tub. The water closes around me like a womb. I pretend I am Jessica, rotting in that riverbed, pulse gone long before my death.

I remember our mother telling us a story like that decades ago— fairies who'd snatch infants and swap them for a changeling, a copy not quite right. She had said this as she washed our hair in this bathtub, drawing pictures in the shampoo sliding down our spines.

“You would've known if we were taken, right?” Jessica asked, eyes wide. Our mother smiled. “You wouldn't have been taken in the first place. I sat in that nursery and watched you every night.”

She'd never answered the question.

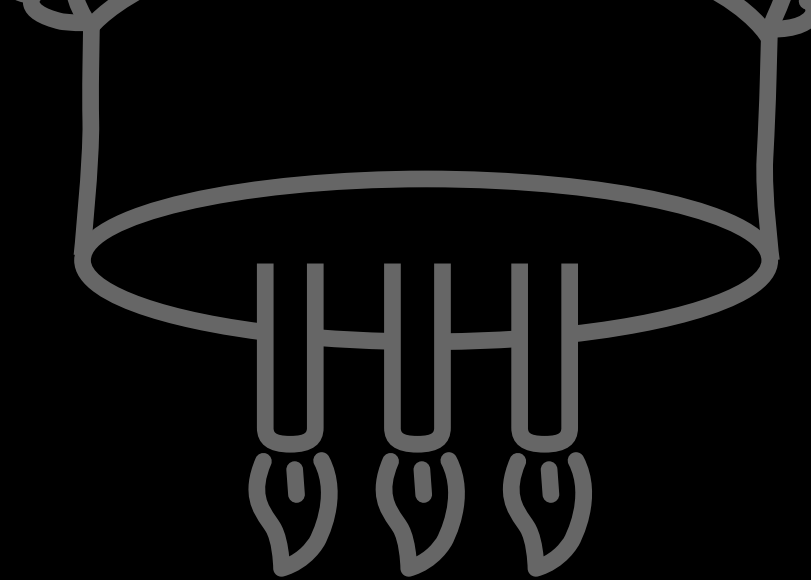
Soap stings my eyes, but I watch my hands distort in the water. What if I caught the disease? If Jessica's deterioration mirrored itself in me, our bodies hurtling to the same end? My mother would kill me. I know this, true enough to type in block letters and tuck between passages about elephants and moths. She might have to call a neighbor to help, but she would.

\* \* \*

As my mother bathes, I kneel in front of the goldfish again. It bobs up and down, barely visible in the dark—a smudge of orange against blue. I press my fingers against the glass, and it swims up to me, mouth gaping into space. I open in response.

# WHEN I WISH I WAS EIGHTEEN

BY BERHA IRFAN



i. late spring of 2009

a family shrouded in grief, and a woman sobbing in a corner. fireflies danced in the driveway as four men carried a white-clothed body to the graveyard. the sobs grew louder, and then quietened. she held me to her chest, for consolation, i would assume. it was unneeded to ask whose consolation.

ii. summer of 2010

the airport bustled with people; the crowd was practically a tripping hazard. abandoned suitcases and luggages were piled towards the reception desk. a lady asked the woman at the desk for information on the flight from karachi. it hadn't landed yet. it never would.

iii. early winter of 2014

there were a thousand students in that school, a seventh of them never returned home. blood speckled notebooks and body-littered halls. green uniforms, cold december day, gunsmoke turned to grief. the walls smelled of death for years; even now, you can scratch the peeling whitewash and press your ears to the bare concrete and wonder if you're hearing their screams or your own.

iv. spring of 2016

the building shook, the trembles visible from where i stood. the grass beneath my socked feet was soft and crushed easily into the dirt. ah, even grass is a doormat. i can hardly hear the worried coos of my mother over the unfounded burning rage. anger seeps into my blood like the tremors take place in the pillars of my home.

v. winter of 2019

we're celebrating. i don't know what for. my mother smiles knowingly as she passes a cup of tea to my dad. he grins brightly; i wonder if my mouth can do that. unsurely, i run my tongue over the top row of my teeth. there's a tooth missing. i wonder when that happened.

vi. early summer of 2023

it's brutal. bloody. a little gory. not everyone can stomach the sight. the uniform surprises me; i thought they didn't do their job. it only takes me a few minutes to realize that they're still not doing their job—they're doing somebody else's. whatever gets the money in the bank, right? i grin like my dad, i've learned to do that now, when they pull me aside. someone's recording me. i should smile, in case i go viral, right?

vii. summer of 2006

it's calm in the ward, eerily so. don't newborn babies cry all the time? or is that a misconception? i wouldn't know, i've never had one. a baby, that is. i've had plenty of misconceptions. curled up to my mother's chest, i wonder if my mother knows i will be the source of her grief. only seventeen. never eighteen.

from sec ii to sec vi, i've referenced a major event in pakistani history.

sec ii - the airblue plane crash in 2010 and everybody onboard died.

sec iii - in dec, 2014, there was a terrorist attack involving a school where under 150 people were killed, including students and faculty.

sec iv - the afghanistan earthquake in 2016 led to earthquakes in pakistan where 6 people died.

sec v - pakistani military forces shot down an indian fighter pilot who was trespassing. he was held captive for a few days before he was returned to india. this was celebrated in pakistan.

sec vi - the may 9 riots in 2023 occurred across the country after the previous government was forcibly dissolved. police brutality was at its extreme, with hundreds arrested without trial and at least 4 to 5 people dead in every major city.

# IT FINDS A WAY TO LIVE IN YOU

By riza

Guilt gnaws raw into my skin, an attempt of pelting the broken bones that hold my body together. The light inside me is frail, similar to the garden from across the block, it has withered. Only a few have left; only a few have remained. Yet we all share the tragic tale of knowing what could've happened. Torn between the pieces of possibilities that weaves its full-fledged existence towards our own attempt at crafting a reality.

All these images are distorted – shattered. The lines are blurry, but its harsh revelations come knocking at the bane of my existence, and I wish I wasn't so indifferent.

I carry its weight wherever I go, a burden of choosing to be who I am. There is a reflection in my mirror every morning and I cannot bear the thought of simply looking at it. I cannot believe that this is what's happened to me. I am slowly dying. And inside me is guilt. Inside me is despair. Inside me is everything I have wished to become. Who was I supposed to tell this to? To the heavens? To the Gods above who have sculpted and spat me out? To my mother who looks at me as if I could've been better? As I could've been her best creation yet? But how am I supposed to do that if she always came home with that long look on her face and all she could see is how she used to be? Damaged beyond repair. Nothing but a fragile reminder of what disappointment looks like. A hint of melancholia that comes rushing because she could've had the life she wanted, if not for me.

I swallow. I try to consume the regret inside my stomach yet much to everything, it persists. It's a rigid force invading what has been left of my cartilage and eats it until all I'm left is that hollow feeling of nothing.



My mother holds my hand, kisses me gently on my forehead, and sings me to sleep. But deep down, underneath the scarcity of her love, lies her vision of me where I am her own liability.

I feel everything deeply for I am born with guilt. I was born with this pain. I was born in this vast universe to witness the crushing cruelty of everyone I have ever loved, and I'll touch the ground, heart clutching my chest, similar to a whimpering dog. And see how no one would lend a hand, stay a minute or two, but if they'd ask for me, I'm already at their door.

I let guilt consume me as a whole because I'd let everyone do that, too.

# LIVE IN SPARKS

by El Trinity

At a merry festival, among them are big crowds  
Homesick I may have been, but never ungrateful  
A cheerful night with a sky avoided by clouds  
This is a fateful night of the fireworks festival  
Others' footsteps are all around me  
But I am silent and still  
Sometimes patience is not my will  
But the sight of her is enough to make me free  
'You waited.'  
The world feels like just the two of us  
'That is all I can do.'  
Even when I know this loud city only fuss  
Grab my hand, drag me to heaven you created  
The highest mountain to see everything we longed  
Seal my lips with yours as an oath  
Our sparks will last forever  
Aim high, don't shy  
Like the fireworks you set  
Then the biggest is for mine  
I'll never let it go, I'll never let you go  
Life varies with love and wrath  
Journeys always lead to more paths  
Wherever I am, I know that you still set the biggest fireworks  
One day it will reach so high for me to see it again, live in that moment  
again

# **SOFIYA'S PLACE ON MEMORY LANE**

by Ireena  
Chase

Among the glasses of blue lemonade,  
Peach beer, apple juice, and hot chocolate,  
There will always be one mismatched glass,  
Filled to the brim with fresh orange juice,  
Not watered down by a single ice cube.  
It sits right by her empty seat at my table,  
Where she will always be welcomed back.  
I choose to let her take up space in my life,  
I love her in the most intentional way I know.

The old friend that moved so far away,  
This may not be her home anymore,  
But I wouldn't mind being a stop on her way;  
On that rocky path down memory lane,  
She deserves a place to stop and rest,  
And as long as she needs, I'll be here.

# LIFE THROUGH A PLANE WINDOW by Ireena Chase

I feel like people were supposed to be in the air,  
Despite what I've been told my whole life,  
"People don't have wings, the skies weren't made for us"  
I mean after all planes aren't supposed to fly,  
But they do just to ease our sense of exploration,  
How else would we know that the top side of clouds is  
prettiest?

From the air, sunlight sprints along distant rivers,  
Glittering gold like ichor in the earth's open veins,  
Mountains should be seen from a Bird's Eye view,  
Snow-capped peaks reflecting up at you,  
Flying over a storm is the best way to see one,  
It's something special to fly alongside lightning,  
The world isn't meant to be experienced through a plane  
window,  
But you are meant to experience the world,  
And why wouldn't a plane window should be part of that?

# THE GOLDEN AGE OF TRAVEL

by Vicente Camelo da Fonseca  
Aires de Souza

The 50's, the dawn of the jet engines, which allowed for faster and cheaper air travel to distant places. For the time, it required multiple legs for a flight that today should see us inside a plane for some hours, which in the past took up about multiple days to reach their destination. With the first plane to ever use jet engines commercially, the 707, planes could finally make the Atlantic crossing with some varying sort of success because, even though the jet engine was the fastest way from point A to point B, many companies like Douglas and Lockheed went to continue producing piston engines, which are now considered noisy and gas-guzzlers, as they needed lots and lots of fuel to operate.

However, this text isn't about engines and planes, but about plane interiors. In the 50's they were beautifully adorned with lush interiors (for planes) and had onboard smoking rooms, which yes, it was really common for long flights, because of the "sheer size" of airplanes, and the rapidly increasing demand for air travel instead of, humid, hot and dark ocean liners which used to dominate this route.

How did this change from noisy and primitive airplane designs to the glitz and glamour of the 1950's? Firstly, such a demand just happened to increase for cheaper and faster ways to cross far out places, which relied on ocean liners like the Queen Elizabeth, but we already know what happens when sailing through the North Atlantic. Many, many times, just like the famous Titanic disaster, the most popular (and only) way of crossing the Atlantic was on the ocean.



Secondly, we have the invention of the spinning tube of death, the jet engine, which, of course, some pioneers made, but it was mostly new technology. Well, that's until Boeing came through and innovated the entire market by making the first commercial success using the jet engine, the 707. This made things quieter, and faster, better to those who relied on ships because of work or simply trips to visit many places in Europe or America.

Finally, we have the simple answer, the interiors, as though they are not as lush as the interiors on ships, the airplane interiors were comfortable and brought a sensation of safety as of entering the plane with its galleys. This was much different than what we have today, as they used to be much bigger for the sole purpose of cooking food for passengers. They wanted you to actually have the best experience, similar to those in ships, which by the time were already becoming obsolete, targeting an older and more conservative audience.

Now that we already know what made planes look like this, let's talk about what made them look like what they are today. First of all, airlines don't care about your experience anymore. Well... not as much as they did, but still, it's much worse than what you would find in the glory days of aviation as airlines try to cram as many seats as possible. One thing about ships and planes back then was that their meaning was to make every part of the trip enjoyable so as to not feel bored in the crossing, but today we have faster and more fuel-efficient planes, which can get you there faster and more cheaply than conventional 50's planes.

Summarizing, we see that even though we have more fuel-efficient and faster planes, the journey isn't as interesting as with in-flight entertainment. Nothing will make us that "bored" when crossing through that big blue ocean. While 50's planes would be part of the journey for most people, airlines such as Emirates have first and Business Class bars in flight nowadays. It's just not the same as when you could literally smoke in-flight, because our current planes aren't a part of the journey, they are just there to make you get from point A to point B.